



## Report of the Interdepartmental Group

# Recommended Guidelines for Public Sector Organisations

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A text only version of this document can be found [here](#)  
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## [1. Introduction](#)

The Group [1](#) was set up to fulfil the commitment given in paragraph 42 of the Government Action Plan [2](#):-

"42. Service-wide guidelines and practices will be adopted regarding content format and presentation etc. for web sites, and an Interdepartmental Group will be established to deal with these issues. Government policy in relation to provision of services in the Irish language will be reflected in this context."

The Internet is going to have a major impact on how Government business is conducted. We need to start planning and providing for this now. In the Internet age, Government websites will become the gateways for people to conduct their business with Government and a central feature of public service delivery.

In order to do this, Public Sector Organisations [3](#) need to maximise the potential and the use of their websites. In addition to providing users with information, public sector websites will soon be used as entry points for the transaction of "on line" business with Government. These websites will be the mechanism for the seamless delivery of diverse public services where customers will not know where the work of one Department ends and the work of another begins.

#### Recommendation # 1.1

**Guiding Principle:- Websites should be designed and operated in accordance with the needs of users. A well designed and easy to operate site is an invaluable communication/ customer service tool for public sector organisations.**

It is recognised that in designing the websites which will be central to the provision of such public services, common standards and guidelines can contribute greatly to provision of a better service.

The guidelines are aimed at webmasters and those involved in or with influence over designing and setting up public sector websites.

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## [2. Content of Government websites](#)

### User-centred website design

The goal should be to maximise the relevance and appeal of your organisation's website's for the users of your services. This is best done when you set out to view your organisation as one of your users or customers would view it (from the outside in), rather than "this is what we do" (from the inside out).

Successful implementation of this approach will send a clear message to your customers that you have considered who they

are and what they want to know. It will also help them to understand the services which are available to them and to take appropriate action to access them.

### **Recommendation # 2.1**

When designing a website the user should be at the centre. The effectiveness of your site will depend on how well s/he can find what they are looking for quickly, understand it and act on it - ideally from within the site. The site, its information content, layout and links should be structured around the customer's likely needs (whether or not they are familiar with the Internet). In cases where there will be different types of users accessing your site your site map and structure should be designed to meet their diverse requirements. An approach which relies on old style thinking - a site structure from the point of view of the organisation is unlikely to maximise the value of the site for the user.

For example, will a single parent with 3 children be able to speedily and directly find out about all his/her entitlements, and apply for these online? Similarly, will a customer who can now download a form to apply for a service soon be able to use the same website to pay for the service in advance and to book his/her own service appointment online?

### **Recommendation # 2.2**

The FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) element of websites can best be based on the type of situations being encountered and the questions being asked daily in public offices and should be updated as required. Focusing on FAQ type information when designing your website will help you to design a customer-centred site.

### **Relevance**

Making public service websites relevant to the users of public services will also make the Internet a more attractive and mainstream resource. The Internet, with increased public adoption offers greater potential for the delivery of more and better services online. Organisations might also usefully incorporate in their sites some information on how they plan to develop the site thus signalling to the users the further potential of the site and its growing relevance and value for them as users of public services.

### **Navigation**

Besides telling your users clearly and simply what your Department or organisation does, you will also want to make it as easy as possible for the site users to navigate your site - from anywhere within it.

### **Publication**

#### **Recommendation # 2.3**

All Departmental/ public sector publications which are publicly available should be published on the organisation's website - either before or at the same time as being published by more traditional means.

### **Printing**

#### **Recommendation # 2.4**

When going to tender for a printing contract, organisations should ensure that the contract includes provision by the printers of a final version of the published document in the electronic format of the organisation's choice. The format chosen should be web friendly and searchable by internet search engines.

### **Freedom of Information ( FoI )**

Public Sector websites should provide users with appropriate information relating to the Freedom of Information Act, 1997. In particular, they should, as a minimum, provide information appropriate to Sections 15 (dealing *inter alia* with the organisations structure, organisation, functions, powers, duties, services, records held etc. ) and, Section 16 (dealing *inter alia* with rules, procedures, practices and guidelines relating to schemes administered etc.).

### **Contact Information**

#### **Recommendation # 2.5**

You might consider including in your site a directory of staff in your organisation, together with their e-mail addresses and possibly phone and fax numbers. Such information might ideally be presented in the form of an organisational diagram with the facility for the user to click on a box/icon

representing a division or a unit and see the staffing structure of that unit. Ideally the organisation might be broken down by Section/ Division and subject/service headings. The customer might then have the facility to click within the relevant area on an individuals name in that structure to access information on his/her responsibilities and, where appropriate, his/her contact details.

## Opportunities

In line with Government policy, public sector organisations should now be identifying opportunities for delivery of "on line" services to customers. Websites will, of course, continue to host the organisations current central documentation, such as all forms, reports, relevant Statutory Instruments etc.

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## 3. Copyright Statement & Disclaimer

*The Copyright Bill is currently going through the Oireachtas. It is hoped to have it enacted by the end of the year. It is proposed that when it is enacted that a Webmasters Group - which it is proposed to set up - would then draft a copyright statement in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The statement would be prominently displayed on each site homepage and ideally would reflect the principle that material on the website(s) would be free to be copied but that the source must be acknowledged.*

*It would be appropriate to provide also for a suitable disclaimer to be drafted.*

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## 4. Presentation of Websites

### Common Look and Feel

It is recognised that Departments and Offices etc. deal with different types of customers who will have different information needs. But there is a lot to be said for ensuring a "common look and feel" for all Government websites.

### Recommendation # 4.1

Departmental websites should have a standard set of navigation buttons on their home pages. The following set is suggested as the standard.

All sites should have a navigation bar which would link to:

- Government Home Page
- Service/Contact Directory
- Contents / Site map
- Search (ideally it should be clear how extensive the search will be - i.e. document, site or web)

The standard set of Navigation buttons on pages other than the home page should include links to:

- Site Home Page
- Contents / Site Map
- Search
- Back

The design of the navigation buttons on the Home Page is a matter for individual Departments who, besides the guidelines and recommendations set out here, should have the flexibility to design their own sites in accordance with current best practice.

## Index

### Recommendation # 4.2

On an organisation's home page a list of the categories of information available on the site should be included. This might include:-

**About** [name of organisation] (which would, inter alia, include an Organisation Chart, Mission & Strategy Statements etc.)

**Publications**

**Forms**

**What's New** (tracking additions, deletions and revisions to specific site pages)

**Feedback/ Contact us**

**Site map**

**Search**

**Press Releases/ Speeches**

**Services in Irish**

**Index** (perhaps with choice of A-Z and Quick Find Index (for most frequently visited pages on your site))

**Links**

**FoI**

**FAQ** (frequently asked questions)

## **New Material**

### **Recommendation # 4.3**

"What's New" should reflect genuinely new information available from the organisation. The cut off period can be decided by each individual organisation but ideally, it should be no longer than one month. It should always be clear from websites/ web pages when they were last updated.

Consideration might also usefully be given to providing a facility for users to set their own timeframes in viewing "Whats new" - as is provided for on the Government Homepage [www.irlgov.ie](http://www.irlgov.ie)

The steps to create a customised link, for your Department/Organisation, to the "What's New" feature on the Government Home Page are set out in the Notes below.<sup>4</sup>

## **Document Formats**

Publishers should consider the potential use when deciding the most suitable format to use. Different formats have advantages in different circumstances. The ideal in some situations is to provide a document in more than one format to take the advantages offered by each format and minimise the disadvantages.

Some of the issues that will dictate the chosen format are:

- the length of the document  
Users are more likely to browse short documents and print long documents. HTML<sup>5</sup> would be the favoured format for the short document. PDF<sup>6</sup> or equivalent formats would be favoured for a document that is likely to be printed but it has some disadvantages such as the need to download a viewer program, typically it is not indexed by search engines and not accessible to the visually impaired.
- are users likely to find the document using a search engine  
If a search engine is likely to be used to find the document then HTML would be preferred as typically search engines do not index document formats such as word processing or PDF. However, metadata tags can be used to ensure PDF and other formats are indexed.
- In summary some formats such as PDF are strong where the user wants to reproduce the document as it was printed and will access it from a known URL. HTML which will not produce the document as reliably in print but will allow for indexing, internal hyperlinks and is more accessible to those with disabilities.

It is also good practice to indicate for the user the size and format of the document or image - this enables assessment of download times.

### **Recommendation # 4.4**

Documents should be produced in HTML as the default. Where a document is particularly long a PDF version or other suitable format should also be provided (with appropriate metadata description).

In cases where non standard formats are used the data in question should also be converted into a standard format to enable downloading and archiving.

If it is not possible to produce a large document in HTML then a summary HTML version should be provided.

It is essential that information provided on websites is user friendly, easy to navigate and search. It is good practice to always give brief descriptions of PDF files.

Where a document, however generated, is not to be indexed by a search engine, the document description should be included in the robots.txt<sup>7</sup>.

Where hypertext is used it should be confined to relevant linkages, any links need to be checked

regularly with Linkbot.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Recommendation # 4.5**

It is essential that website material is always current. Web pages should indicate when the page in question was last updated.

#### **Recommendation # 4.6**

When links bring the user out of the Government site, this should be made clear to the user to avoid the suggestion that the Government Department is vouching for the information in another site.

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### **5. Promotion of user Friendliness**

#### **Do's and Don'ts**

##### **Recommendation # 5.1**

- Avoid large image/graphics files.
- Avoid gratuitous "Bells and Whistles"<sup>9</sup> and Java Applets<sup>10</sup> that do not add functionality.
- Large HTML documents should be split into sections. Guideline size of approx. 24 KB (5 pages) is appropriate.
- Test pages in different browser software and different versions of that software.
- Where a site contains frames it is good practice to provide a non frames version.
- If there is a link to an audio or image file be sure to indicate its format and file size in kilobytes.
- Inform users in plain text that PDF is being used and that they need special software (Adobe Acrobat Reader) to view the documents. Provide a link to download the software free of charge.
- Inform users of the content and purpose of a cookie<sup>11</sup> if one is being loaded to their machine.
- Allow users to reject all cookies without lessening the content or quality of the information provided. The rejection should be a once off operation per visit.
- Don't use HTML constructs (tags) specific to, and only supported by, one Web browser.
- Ensure that the URL will appear on all documentation you publish to facilitate future user reference and access.

##### **Recommendation # 5.2**

##### **Consider the first time or inexperienced user**

You may want to consider providing a "how best to use this site" or "First Visit" icon displayed prominently on your homepage. An example may be found at [www.dcita.gov.au/graphics\\_welcome.html](http://www.dcita.gov.au/graphics_welcome.html) - an Australian Government site. The icon links to a page explaining to new users how best to use the site, including suggested use of its "easyfind function" hypertext, the search facility, links and bookmarking. It also tells the user that a text version - which replaces all graphics with text descriptions is provided.

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### **6. Publicising and Advertising your Site**

#### **Metadata**

There is already a huge volume of documentation on Irish Government websites (currently 20,000 documents approx.). This figure will expand dramatically. It is important that users are able to find and access the documents relevant to them quickly. Metadata is a valuable tool in facilitating this and in helping you to manage your information more easily.

Metadata is data about data i.e. information that describes a page or document on a web site. The metadata is typically contained within the document in the HTML code. This information is not immediately seen by the user through their browser but it can be picked up and used by a search engine that is indexing a site (or viewed by looking at page properties).

Metadata is used because it facilitates better searching. The advantage of including metadata in your document is that the document will be more accurately indexed and described by the various search engines. (e.g. the Metadata description might include names or phrases which the clients use in relation to the scheme or issue even though these do not actually appear in the document itself - thus aiding the location of a document.) Therefore a user, with an interest in your topic, is more likely to find it.

Relevant staff in your organisation should familiarise themselves with the metadata standard.

### **Recommendation # 6.1**

It is recommended that all new documents be described using metadata tags and, in so far as is possible, existing information should also be tagged. Those responsible for publishing documents should, where possible, consult the Department's librarian when deciding on keywords to describe a document. The librarians have expertise in indexing and cataloguing documents and in the use of standardised vocabulary and thesaurii.

### **Metadata Standard: Recommendation # 6.2**

The standard set of metadata elements, recommended by the Group, is set out below, it is based on a widely accepted standard known as the Dublin (Ohio) Core Metadata element set. This contains 15 elements from the standard set, which are reproduced below, plus two additional elements, a service descriptor and a life event descriptor. It is strongly recommended that the first six elements would be used, the remainder are optional.

The advantages of this approach is that there is a common core essential information but with the option for each organisation to use additional tags/ descriptions which it considers to be relevant in its own context - without imposing extra cataloguing work on other organisations for which this data would not add value.

Examples of the mandatory tags in use are given at [Appendix I](#).

The CMOD search engine makes use of metadata in its indexing routines. If a metadata standard is adopted this search engine could be adapted to create a metadata database and allow for searches of particular metadata elements. Coupling a metadata standard and a customised search engine would provide a high quality search facility for government sites.

## **Element Descriptions**

### **Strongly Recommended Elements**

#### 1. Title

Label: TITLE

The name given to the resource by the CREATOR or PUBLISHER.

#### 2. Author or Creator

Label: CREATOR

The person or organisation primarily responsible for creating the intellectual content of the resource. For example, authors in the case of written documents, artists, photographers, illustrators in the case of visual resources.

#### 3. Subject and Keywords

Label: SUBJECT

The topic of the resource. Typically, subject will be expressed as keywords or phrases that describe the subject or content of the resource. The use of controlled vocabularies and formal classification schemes is encouraged.

#### 4. Description

Label: DESCRIPTION

A textual description of the content of the resource, including abstracts in the case of document-like objects or content descriptions in the case of visual resources.

#### 5. Date

Label: DATE

The date the resource was made available in its present form. Recommended best practice is an 8 digit number in the form YYYY-MM-DD as defined in a profile of ISO 8601. In this scheme, the date element 1994-11-05 corresponds to November 5, 1994.

#### 6. Service Descriptor

Label: SERVICE

Where a document refers to a service, the service to which it refers should be indicated. Typically, the service will be expressed as keywords or phrases that describe the service. The use of controlled vocabularies and formal classification schemes is encouraged.

**Optional elements** - an organisation may decide to incorporate in its own tagging/ description process as many of the options below as it considers appropriate in its own circumstances.

#### 7. Publisher

Label: PUBLISHER

The entity responsible for making the resource available in its present form, such as a publishing house, a university department, a corporate entity, Government Department etc..

#### 8. Contributor

Label: CONTRIBUTOR

A person or organisation not specified in a CREATOR element who has made significant intellectual contributions to the resource but whose contribution is secondary to any person or organisation specified in a CREATOR element (for example, editor transcriber, and illustrator).

#### 9. Resource Type

Label: TYPE

The category of the resource, such as home page, novel, poem, working paper, technical report, essay, dictionary.

#### 10. Format

Label: FORMAT

The data format of the resource, used to identify the software and possibly hardware that might be needed to display or operate the resource.

#### 11. Resource Identifier

Label: IDENTIFIER

String or number used to uniquely identify the resource. Examples for networked resources include Uniform Resource Locator (URLs) and Uniform/Universal Resource Names (URNs)<sup>12</sup> (when implemented). Other globally-unique identifiers, such as International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) or other formal names would also be candidates for this element in the case of off-line resources.

#### 12. Source

Label: SOURCE

A string or number used to uniquely identify the work from which this resource was derived, if applicable. For example a PDF version of a novel might have a SOURCE element containing an ISBN number for the physical book from which the PDF version was derived.

#### 13. Language

Label: LANGUAGE

Language(s) of the intellectual content of the resource. Where practical, the content of this field should coincide with RFC 1766.<sup>13</sup>

#### 14. Relation

Label: RELATION

The relationship of this resource to other resources. The intent of this element is to provide a means to express relationships among resources that have formal relationships to others, but exist as discrete resources themselves. For example, images in a document, chapters in a book, or items in a collection.

#### 15. Coverage

Label: COVERAGE

The spatial and/or temporal characteristics of the resource. Formal specification of COVERAGE is currently under development.

#### 16. Rights Management

Label: RIGHTS

A link to a copyright notice, to a rights-management statement, or to a service that would provide information about terms of access to the resource. Formal specification of RIGHTS is currently under development.

#### 17. Life Event Descriptor

Label: LIFE EVENT

The life event to which the document or resource refers. Typically, the life event service will be expressed as keywords or phrases that describe it. The use of controlled vocabularies and formal classification schemes is encouraged.

## Advertising the Site - Search Engines

It is important that each organisation's site can be located easily on the Internet. The two most obvious ways of advertising your site are:

- (a) registering with the best known search engines and
- (b) having links to your site from sites of other well known and related organisations

Many Government Departments use CMOD<sup>14</sup> to host their site. CMOD have registered the [www.irlgov.ie](http://www.irlgov.ie), URL with a number of search engines (listed below). This registration will ensure that these search engines will index all of the sites that are hosted by CMOD.

### Recommendation # 6.3

Departments that are not hosted by CMOD should ensure that their sites are registered with the main search engines.

### Recommendation # 6.4

When a Department/organisation changes its name their website should be promptly reregistered using the new Departmental name and content and layout should be updated accordingly. CMOD should also be informed of such changes so that they can update their systems accordingly.

### Recommendation # 6.5

Checks should be carried out at regular intervals to ensure that the main search engines successfully return your site when appropriate search words are entered. In some cases it may be necessary to renew the registration.

### Recommendation # 6.6

It is therefore suggested that the first 25 words of the site contain a summary of the website, including keywords. Headings should also contain keywords.

Opening paragraphs and headings are very important, particularly as some "search engines" use opening paragraphs as the summary of the site and others use the headings given.

### Recommendation # 6.7

In order to ensure maximisation of reward for users/clients - including relevancy and ease of use - provision should be made for links to other relevant sites wherever it is appropriate to do so. In order to increase awareness of your organisation's site it is good practice to ask other related organisations to include a link to your site on their links page. The same courtesy can be made by you on your links page.

The Search engines that CMOD have registered [www.irlgov.ie](http://www.irlgov.ie) with are:

Altavista, Yahoo, Excite, Hotbot, ieSearch, Infoseek, Lycos, Metacrawler, Webcrawler, Google, NiceOne, Northern Light, UK Plus

## E-mail addresses

### Recommendation # 6.8

When placing advertisements in Newspapers or other media, organisations should ensure that their web address is prominently featured in those advertisements.

### Recommendation # 6.9

All stationary, forms, reports, business cards etc. should contain comprehensive contact details, including website and e-mail addresses.

Each organisation can decide whether to do this by printing or by use of word processing templates or "macros" (to avoid wasting stocks of paper when address details change).

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## **7. Accessibility Guidelines**

### **Recommendation # 7.1**

***The key principle underlining accessibility is that websites should be easy for everyone to use, including people with a disability. Websites should be designed in accordance with universal design principles which makes it easy to locate and access information on the net. Sites which are well designed will meet the needs of all users and therefore, will not have to be especially adapted for the elderly and the those with a disability.***

### **Tips to Improve Accessibility**

- Keep it simple
- Use a consistent style
- Keep information text based (whenever possible).
- Avoid unnecessary use of graphics and sounds. Where they are used always provide a meaningful text alternative
- Do not rely on colour alone to convey information. Some people cannot differentiate between certain colours and users who have devices that have non-colour or non-visual displays will not receive the information.
- Avoid tiled backgrounds as they can obscure text
- High contrast between text and background is desirable
- Use markup (HTML) and style sheets properly. Using markup improperly hinders accessibility e.g. using a Header tag to change the font size makes it difficult for users with specialised software to understand the page.
- Clarify natural language usage. Use markup that facilitates pronunciation or interpretation of abbreviated or foreign text.
- Minimise use of tables. Assistive software tends to read left to right, line by line. Where they are used they should be to used mark up truly tabular information. Avoid using tables to layout pages.
- Ensure that moving, blinking, scrolling or auto-updating objects or pages may be paused or stopped. Screen readers are unable to read moving text.
- Design for device independence. Users should be able to interact with mouse, keyboard, voice, head wand etc.
- Provide context and orientation information to help users understand complex pages or elements.
- Provide clear and consistent navigation mechanisms.
- Give a written description or transcript of any critical information that is contained in audio files included on a Web page.
- If an image map is used, provide a text based menu as an alternative.
- Indicate sources that will assist users with adaptive technologies to access a document in the format published.

### **Checks to Ensure Accessibility**

#### **Recommendation # 7.2**

Have your site put through the "Bobby Test". This is an accessibility test provided on the Web by CAST (Centre for Applied Science and Technology) a non-profit organisation which aims to expand the opportunities of people with disabilities through innovative development and application of technology. The Web address is [www.cast.org/bobby](http://www.cast.org/bobby)

An Irish organisation called AHEAD will carry out an accessibility audit of your site.

Further useful sites dealing with accessibility issues are listed in the Notes.<sup>15</sup>

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## **8. Irish language & bi-lingualism policy for publication on Government websites**

### **Recommendation # 8.1**

**Key Principle : To provide services on a basis which gives equal recognition to both the Irish and English languages.**

The internet has the potential to significantly improve the quality of service delivery the State sector provides to the public. Given the Constitutional position of the Irish language, and Government policy on bilingualism, public service bodies should take advantage of the opportunities which websites offer to improve their delivery of services in the Irish language. When developing public sector websites, the importance and value of a coherent bilingual strategy should be borne in mind. The objective should be to provide services to the public on a basis which gives equal recognition to both the Irish and English languages.

Websites should therefore ideally be navigable in either language. All material should be available bilingually. Recognising that this may not be feasible in all circumstances, the standards set out below are recommended. Insofar as they can, Departments and public service organisations should always aspire to provide the most comprehensive bilingual services possible.

### **Recommendation # 8.2**

All sites should be navigable in both languages. Ideally users should have the option to choose to proceed in either Irish or English and to switch from one language to the other by hypertext/clicking on an icon. Examples of this can be found at the Údarás na Gaeltachta site [www.udaras.ie/english/culture.html](http://www.udaras.ie/english/culture.html) and at the National Assembly for Wales site [www.wales.gov.uk/assembly](http://www.wales.gov.uk/assembly)

Sites should always contain bilingual versions of core material. This would include documents such as

- annual reports
- strategy and mission statements
- information leaflets
- official forms
- introductory texts, forewords, welcome messages from Ministers etc.
- mainstream reference material, such as the history or background of the organisation

### **Recommendation # 8.3**

Wherever Irish language versions of documents or publications are provided they should be to the same standards of design, presentation and production as other language versions. They should also be indexed using metadata tags in Irish.

### **Recommendation # 8.4**

Website users should be able to view and print Irish language texts with fadas.

### **Recommendation # 8.5**

Where Irish language versions of documents are to be provided, they should, wherever possible, be published at the same time as the English language version, or as soon as possible thereafter.

### **Recommendation # 8.6**

Where because of the length of a document, a full Irish language version may not be feasible, or where it cannot be produced at the same time as the publication of the English language version, an executive summary in the Irish language should be provided.

### **Recommendation # 8.7**

In cases where a fully navigable Irish language facility is not provided Departments should consider providing that all Titles, headlines or other "signage" on websites be bilingual - much in the same way as road signs currently

are. For Example, Index - Clár. (This approach means that for a minimal investment a high degree of visibility and impact of the Irish language can be achieved - thus heightening awareness.)

### **Recommendation # 8.8**

Organisations based in Gaeltacht communities or providing services substantially to users in Gaeltacht areas, and Departments such as the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (or bodies under their aegis) should provide a comprehensive fully bilingual service as the norm. These should offer the users the option to use the sites in either language or bilingually.

### **Recommendation # 8.9**

The public should be made aware of the availability of material in the Irish language on websites and encouraged to use services available to them through the Irish language. Organisations may wish to consider unifying on their website all aspects of services which they provide through the Irish language.

### **Recommendation # 8.10**

Organisations may wish to consider the merits of using a convention (perhaps a "G") to indicate in their directory or organisation structure the officials who are willing and able to provide a service as *Gaeilge*.

### **Recommendation # 8.11**

Departments/Offices should consider whether in their own circumstances there may be merit in providing certain information in one or more foreign languages on their sites, and if considered appropriate provide accordingly.

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## **9. Charging policy for material published on Government/ public service websites**

### **Recommendation # 9.1**

**Key Principle:- material contained or published on Government / public service web sites should in the main be provided free.**

Where charges are to be applied, there should be a rational basis for the charge, which should, in general, be based on recovery of costs.

Recognising that public sector organisations also produce commercial information for which charges are levied, it is envisaged that charges will continue to apply for such information when provided on the web.

It is envisaged that circumstances under which charges will/may apply would include:

where there is legislative authority to charge, or

where provision of the information is deemed (by the State or the appropriate Agency/Office/Department/Body) to be commercial

where in the opinion of the Minister, head of the Department, Office or Agency that there is a reasonable basis for applying, or not applying, such a charge.

Where charges are applied, the basis on which they are calculated should be transparent. In determining charges, account may be taken of the use to which the information may be put.

Government wants to maximise service delivery over the Internet, with all of the benefits which this confers. Making Government publications available FREE on the net will promote Internet usage.

### **Advertising Government Publications**

### **Recommendation # 9.2**

Free availability of publications on public service websites should be highlighted. When advertising the availability of such publications people should be directed in the first instance to the relevant website where the document can be viewed/downloaded free and then to the Government Publications Sales Office, where the document can be purchased in hard copy format, or to the Department/organisation where it may be obtained/purchased.

Internet publication should also mean that less material will need to be officially printed, stored and transported - with obvious cost savings.

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## **10. E-mail**

### **Recommendation # 10.1**

All sites should contain contact E-mail addresses which should be updated and maintained so that there is no delay in dealing with correspondence received owing to an official being on leave or moved elsewhere. One method of doing this may be to have a "generic" address for each unit/section (with messages being routed to several/all individuals in that unit) within an organisation in addition to individual e-mail addresses. Another alternative might be to route correspondence to a webmaster who will distribute them as appropriate.

### **Recommendation # 10.2**

All organisations should create a mailbox for "webmaster" to prevent potentially important mail messages being lost.

### **Recommendation # 10.3**

Correspondence received by e-mail should be answered as quickly as possible. Procedures for answering e-mail, including targets, should be set out in Customer Service Statements.

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## **11. Archiving**

It is good practice to archive out of date material as it may still be of interest to some people.

The National Archives, as the agency responsible for preserving and providing access to the records created by Government, considers the preservation of the records contained on websites to be an integral element of electronic records management.

Website documents are dynamic, hypertext and multimedia and Internet and Intranet websites may contain and even create several forms of record, only two of which approximate to the more conventional forms of documentation falling into the categories of:

Documents posted to the website which were prepared using another software package and which may form updates to existing information, and

Communications received via the website, such as e-mail comments, responses or queries.

### **Recommendation # 11.1**

Where the actions of an individual are influenced by the content and presentation of information and where there is no paper equivalent, the website content and all updates will need to be managed as part of a records management programme to identify material of value that may merit permanent preservation. Equally, where the electronic communication via the website are the form of written communication, appropriate action will need to be taken to ensure that such communications are preserved just as more conventional hard copy communications are.

### **Recommendation # 11.2**

In the creation, maintenance and use of Internet and Intranet websites, it is essential that information that should be preserved to meet accountability, FoI or business requirements is identified, managed and preserved as part of an integrated programme for the management of all records.

## **Notes**

1 Membership of/participation in the Group, together with a list of contributors is set out in the Appendix II.

2 Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: An Action Plan (January 1999) accessible on [www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/publication/default.htm](http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/publication/default.htm) as is the progress report on its implementation published in August 1999.

3 "public service organisation", in this report it is to be understood to mean a Government Department, Office or Agency or other providers of public services for central or local government, as appropriate.

4. To set up a "What's New" on your site that links to the current CMOD facility
  1. Insert a "What's New" legend
  2. Hyperlink this to <http://searchengine.irlgov.ie/search?organisation=http://www.irlgov.ie:80/webname&pg=list&range=week> where webname is the name of your web (e.g., csclac, finance, etc.).

Please note that you must enter the filestring in full.

If you have any queries about this, e-mail [Maire\\_Rooney@cmod.finance.irlgov.ie](mailto:Maire_Rooney@cmod.finance.irlgov.ie)

5. HTML (hyper text mark-up language) is currently the preferred format for websites. However, variants of it should also be borne in mind. XML (extensible markup language) is another format being developed. In the future XML will probably become the standard formatting tool. Further info on XML can be obtained at <http://www.ucc.ie/xml/>.
6. Portable Document Format was designed by Adobe Systems Inc., in order to provide a system independent way of delivering page based information. Type, graphics and colour are all reproduced as they are on paper. PDF files can be read using a tool from Adobe called "Acrobat Reader".
7. A file on Robot Exclusion can be found at <http://info.webcrawler.com/mak/projects/robots/norobots.html>.
8. Linkbot - a program that checks the links on your website to ensure that they still exist. It can happen that a web site is removed or changes address. If your site has a link to such a site then it will fail to connect. As many sites contain numerous links it is not possible to check all links manually therefore a facility like linkbot is used.
9. Gimmicks, flashy content, Spinning Graphics .etc.
10. Java is an Object Oriented Programming Language developed at Sun Microsystems. A Java Applet is a Java program that runs inside a Java-enabled Web Browser.
11. A small piece of information that a server sends to a client. In everyday language, when you visit a web site with cookie capabilities, its server sends certain information about you to your browser which is stored on your hard drive as a text file. At some later time (such as returning to the site the next day), the server retrieves the cookie. It's a way for the server to remember things about you. Some common uses of cookies are storing items you've ordered in a web supermarket, tracking your movement across a web site and storing preferences on how you like your information displayed. There is much debate about cookie security. They can't be used to find personal information that your browser doesn't already tell the server.
12. The better known URL is a standardised technique to point to information resources (i.e., applications) on the Internet. This standard pointer format, known as the URL, points to a file on the network, but if the file is moved, access is lost. To solve this problem, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) has developed another convention using URNs. The URN is a standardised naming convention developed by the IETF to symbolically name information resources on the Internet. Servers on the network are required which will tell where applications reside on the Internet.
13. Request for Comments No 1766 which refers to the definition of a standard for language tags.
14. CMOD is the Centre for Management and Organisation Development - it is part of the Department of Finance and can be contacted at [admin@cmod.finance.irlgov.ie](mailto:admin@cmod.finance.irlgov.ie).
15. For more information on many of the above guidelines, consult <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>
  - Include Project - Inclusion of Disabled and Elderly People in Telematics - [www.stakes.fi/include](http://www.stakes.fi/include)
  - Accent Project - Accessibility in ICT Procurement - this web site includes Guidelines for the inclusion of accessibility in ICT strategies [www.statskontoret.se/accnteng.htm](http://www.statskontoret.se/accnteng.htm)
  - Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) - information on writing accessible web pages - [www.ahead.ie](http://www.ahead.ie)
  - Alliance for Technology Access - information on Designing Access to www pages - [www.ataccess.org/design.html](http://www.ataccess.org/design.html)

## **Appendix I**

### **METADATA EXAMPLES:**

The following are a few actual examples of how metadata is used on Irish government and other sites. These examples concentrate on the mandatory elements in the guidelines. For each element there is an example of how it would appear in HTML code.

#### 1. Title

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
Áras an Uachtaráin Home Page	<title>Áras an Uachtaráin Home Page</title>	<a href="http://www.irlgov.ie/aras">http://www.irlgov.ie/aras</a>
Department of the Taoiseach - Government Members	<title>Department of the Taoiseach - Irish Government</title>	<a href="http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/government/frmain.htm">http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/government/frmain.htm</a>
Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: An Action Plan	<title>Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: An Action Plan</title>	<a href="http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/publication/infosocactionplan/infosoc.htm">http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/publication/infosocactionplan/infosoc.htm</a>
An Garda Síochána - Ireland's Police Force - Official Website	<title>An Garda Síochána - Ireland's Police Force - Official Website</title>	<a href="http://www.garda.ie">http://www.garda.ie</a>

#### 2. Author or Creator

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
Garda	<meta http-equiv="AUTHOR" content="Garda">	<a href="http://www.garda.ie">http://www.garda.ie</a>

#### 3. Keywords

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
ireland,irish,independent,newspaper, news,sport,business,property, motors,farming,appointments, national, irish independent, irish news,newspapers in ireland,irish newspapers	<meta name="keywords" content="ireland,irish,independent,newspaper,news, sport,business,property,motors,farming,appointments, national,irish independent, irish news,newspapers in ireland,irish newspapers">	<a href="http://www.independent.ie">http://www.independent.ie</a>
president, ireland, mary mcaleese, robinson, phoenix, dublin, government, residence, election, term, official, head, state"	<meta name="KEYWORDS" content="president, ireland, mary mcaleese, robinson, phoenix, dublin, government, residence, election, term, official, head, state">	<a href="http://www.irlgov.ie/aras/">http://www.irlgov.ie/aras/</a>

#### 4. Description

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
Aras an Uachtarain - the official residence of the President of Ireland including biographies, speeches, history, guided tour and a visitor's book	<meta name="DESCRIPTION" content="Aras an Uachtarain - the official residence of the President of Ireland including biographies, speeches, history, guided tour and a visitor's book">	<a href="http://www.irlgov.ie/aras/">http://www.irlgov.ie/aras/</a>

The official website for the Garda Síochána, Ireland's National police force. The site contains information on crime prevention, tourist information, careers and more	<meta name="DESCRIPTION" content="The official website for the Garda Síochána, Ireland's National police force. The site contains information on crime prevention, tourist information, careers and more">	<a href="http://www.garda.ie">http://www.garda.ie</a>
Ireland's biggest selling national newspaper with complete coverage of today's important Irish news, sport, business and entertainment stories. Also your main information source for appointments and property in the Irish market today	<meta name="description" content="Ireland's biggest selling national newspaper with complete coverage of today's important Irish news, sport, business and entertainment stories. Also your main information source for appointments and property in the Irish market today">	<a href="http://www.independent.ie">http://www.independent.ie</a>

## 5. Date

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
1996-12-17	<metaname="DATE" content = "1996-12-17">	

## 6. Service Descriptor

Examples of this element in use	Example of HTML code	Associated URL
Horse Register	<metaname= "Service" content = "Horse Registration, Irish Draught, Sport Horse, Stud Book">	Not an actual example

## Appendix II

### Web Publication Group

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Margaret Crawley	Department of Education & Science
Edward Donelan	Office of the Attorney General
Brendan Fanning	Kildare County Council
Stephen Fitzpatrick	Department of Agriculture and Food
James Griffin	Revenue Commissioners
Aedan Hall	Information Society Commission
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(S) indicates contribution to one of the ad-hoc sub-groups

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