

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Culture, Arts and Leisure

### LÍOFA WEBSITE

*Published at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 18 November 2014*

**Ms Ní Chuilín: (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** On 22 September 2014 a Líofo participant contacted the department to advise that they had seen their name and e-mail address on the Líofo website. Subsequent checks of the site by department officials were unable to authenticate the claim. Officials contacted the website developer to advise and ask them to rectify any potential breach of security on the website. The reported difficulties were identified and DCAL advised that they had been corrected by the developer on 24 September and therefore the website was not taken down.

However, during routine duties on 4 November, departmental officials discovered that the names and contact details of Líofo participants could be accessed via the Líofo website's search facility.

Contrary to some of the recent claims being made in the media DCAL has taken this breach of security very seriously and initiated instructions on 4 November to shut the website down and in addition commence a robust investigation. The department has engaged IT security experts, accredited by the Communications Electronic Security Group (CESG) - the UK's National Technical Authority for Information Assurance - to establish the full extent of the website's vulnerabilities.

The Information Commissioner has also been advised.

I have asked the Departmental Accounting Officer to give specific personal assurance that the website is thoroughly re-checked by CESG accredited consultants through the use of manual and automated penetration testing and that the website undergoes a full IT health check before it is made live again. These individuals are fully qualified and highly experienced in assessing departmental and other public sector bodies IT systems.

The details that participants were asked to provide when they registered with Líofo were name, email address, home address or home town, age range, and whether or not they were attending Irish Language classes. It is this information which may have been accessible. The Líofo website did not hold any other personal or financial information.

The development and delivery of the website was commissioned by Foras na Gaeilge on the department's behalf and is managed and maintained through a contract. The specification for the development of the website included requirements for data protection and the encryption of data stored on the site.

Lead responsibility for management of the website's content transferred to the department in February 2014, and data protection responsibilities transferred on 25 September 2014.

The Departmental Solicitor's Office is being consulted on the matter.

I am deeply sorry about this potential breach and apologise unreservedly for any concerns this may have raised for Líofo participants. My officials have apprised them of the situation and will advise them further when additional information is available. They can be assured that I and the department are doing everything possible to correct this situation and to restore confidence in the Líofo website.

I would stress at this stage that there is no evidence to suggest that any information provided by Líofa participants has been accessed or misused in any way.

The Líofa website provides a valuable resource to all those interested in learning Irish and I have asked my officials to ensure it can be restored as soon as possible to provide access to help Líofa learners on their journey.

As soon as I get a response to these queries I will make a full oral statement to the Assembly.