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AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA AND SCIENCE

LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY PROFILE

COUNTRY REPORT

IRELAND

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, IRELAND
2005 – 2006

In the context of preparing a Language Education Policy Profile in cooperation with the Council of Europe (Language Policy Division), this Country Report has been prepared by

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1 THE CONTEXT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN IRELAND

1.1 Population

The Republic of Ireland has a population of about 4 million (3,917,203 according to the 2002 census, conducted by the Central Statistics Office Ireland).

Following decades when a high level of emigration was the norm, the 1970s was the first period since the foundation of the State in which immigrants outnumbered emigrants. Net outward migration resumed in the 1980s, but this was reversed again in the 1990s when Ireland enjoyed a period of plentiful employment and prosperity. Population has been affected both by immigration of non-Irish nationals and by returning Irish-born migrants.

A question on nationality was included for the first time in the 2002 census and respondents were asked to indicate "Irish" or "other nationality". According to the census findings, Irish nationals accounted for 91.6 % of the usually resident population. Those with dual Irish/Other nationalities accounted for a further 1.3 %. Of the remaining 5.8 % of the population for whom a non-Irish nationality was indicated, almost half (2.7 %) were UK nationals. Other EU nationals and the nationals of other European countries were the next most numerous categories, followed by Asian, African and US nationals.

1.2 Languages spoken in Ireland

The languages spoken and learned in Ireland are influenced by aspects of both distant and recent history: the effects of hundreds of years of British rule; decisions taken in the wake of Ireland gaining its independence in the early years of the twentieth century; most recently, the immigration of speakers of other languages in the last few decades.

According to Article 8 of the Irish Constitution, the Irish language as the national language is the first official language. The English language, which is the mother tongue of the great majority of people in Ireland, is recognised as a second official language. Irish—also known as Gaelic or Gaeilge—is a Celtic language closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx. Although it is the mother tongue of a minority of Irish people, the language is highly significant for reasons of heritage and national identity and it plays an important role in educational and cultural life.

Figures from the 2002 census found that just over 1.57 million people aged 3 years and over were able to speak Irish (approximately 40% of the population),[1] with the ability to speak Irish highest among the school-going population. Nearly a quarter of those who indicated that they could speak Irish were reported as speaking it on a daily basis, and most of these (76.8%) were of school-going age. Over two thirds of those recorded as being able to speak Irish either never spoke it or spoke it less frequently than weekly.

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[1] See www.cso.ie for census data.

The majority of people who speak Irish on a daily basis live in what are known as Gaeltacht areas, that is, regions of Ireland where Irish is the main language of communication (see Figure 1). The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has particular responsibility for the Gaeltacht. According to the 2002 census, the total population of the Gaeltacht is 90,000. According to same source, three out of four Gaeltacht residents spoke Irish. 83% of private households in the Gaeltacht contained at least one Irish speaker (while the corresponding figure for Ireland overall was 55%). Over 55% of Irish speakers located in the Gaeltacht areas spoke Irish on a daily basis in 2002, down from 60% six years earlier. About a quarter of the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht population spoke Irish less frequently than weekly in 2002, while 7.4% were recorded as never speaking the language.[2]
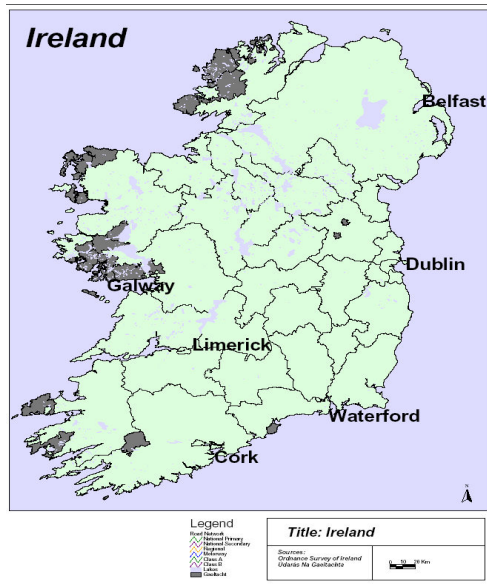
Figure 1: Map of the Gaeltacht

Other languages, which are used by relatively small numbers, are Irish Sign Language and Cant (a language used by members of the Irish Traveller community). Irish has had an influence on the particular variety of English spoken in Ireland, which is known as Hiberno-English.

In recent years, the arrival in Ireland of foreign nationals—whether coming here to work, or as asylum seekers or refugees—has vastly increased the number of languages spoken in Ireland. This tendency has greatly increased since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. The languages being spoken on a significant scale in Ireland now include, for example, Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian, Vietnamese, Yoruba, Albanian, Moldovan, Arabic and Russian.

One consequence of this changing society is that there are increasing numbers of students in Irish schools whose mother tongue is neither English nor Irish. There is also an increasing awareness of other cultures, as indicated in the recent work by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on developing two sets of *Teacher Guidelines on Interculturalism* at primary and post-primary level.

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[2] There is evidence to suggest that children from a small number of homes in Gaeltacht areas are unable to speak English when they first come to school.

1.3   The Official Languages Act

The Official Languages Act was signed into law on 14 July 2003. Its primary objective is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish, which is to be achieved by placing a statutory obligation on Departments of State and public bodies to make specific provision for delivery of such services. The ability to provide services through Irish had been declining since 1974, when the Irish language requirement for applicants for positions in the public service was weakened.

The Act makes some basic general provisions, for example that correspondence be replied to in the language in which it was written, that information be provided to the public in the Irish language (or in both Irish and English), that certain key documents be published in both official languages, and that provision be made for use of Irish in the courts.

Under the Act, public bodies have a duty to prepare a statutory scheme detailing the services that they will provide through the medium of Irish, English or both languages. They also have a duty to ensure that adequate numbers of staff are competent in the Irish language, that particular Irish language requirements associated with the provision of services in Gaeltacht areas are met, and that within a certain timeframe the Irish language shall become the working language of public offices situated in the Gaeltacht areas.

Under the Act, the office of An Coimisinéir Teanga (The Language Commissioner) was set up. The principal responsibility of the Coimisinéir Teanga is to monitor the compliance of public bodies with the requirements of the Act.[3]

The Act provides for the extension of its provisions to include sectors other than the public sector.

1.4   National language education policy

Ireland does not have an explicit national language education policy. However, both Irish and English are compulsory subjects for all pupils in primary school. Irish and English are also compulsory in Junior Cycle in post-primary schools, while only Irish in compulsory in Senior Cycle. There is no obligation to study a foreign language, although in practice the majority of students in second-level schools do study a foreign language to Leaving Certificate level.

The Education Act, 1998 provides official support for Irish in a number of ways. It lists among its objectives those of contributing to the extension of bilingualism in Irish society, the achievement of a greater use of the Irish language at school and in the community, and the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas. It also states that it is a function of the Minister to provide support services through Irish to recognised schools teaching through Irish and to any other recognised school requesting such provision.

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[3] For further information on the Official Languages Act and the office of the Coimisinéir Teanga, see http://www.coimisineir.ie/.

1.5 Teaching of languages in schools

The Classics (Latin and Greek) were the mainstay of language curricula in schools in Ireland up to the 19th century. A key factor in the development of modern language teaching was the role played by religious schools established in the 19th century. Many of the religious orders running the expanding network of Catholic schools came from overseas. Inevitably, they retained links with their founding houses on the continent and with the Irish Colleges in France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere, where many of their members had been trained. Not surprisingly, the curricula of the schools were greatly influenced by continental models, with the result that modern languages were emphasised. The current pattern of predominance of French has its roots in the 19th century, when the overwhelming majority of students took French.

French, German and Italian were included alongside the Classical languages in the public examinations introduced under the Intermediate Education Act of 1878.

In the early part of the 20th century, political developments—in particular the establishment of the Irish Free State—brought about changes in Irish education. An important feature of the educational policy of the new independent State was an increased emphasis on the study of Irish. In June 1924, the Intermediate Education (Amendment) Act, which established the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates, was passed. Irish was made an obligatory subject for the Intermediate Certificate from 1928 onwards and for the Leaving Certificate from 1934.

The position of modern languages varied little between the late 1930s and the 1950s. French was the main continental language studied, although numbers taking it showed some fluctuations. The number of entries in the other foreign languages was so small as to be insignificant, although the study of Latin was particularly strong.

In general, the curricular lines laid down in the 1920s remained the same up until the 1960s when the study of modern languages again began to increase. The 1960s introduced a period of intense change in Irish education. Landmarks from this period include: the publication of the *Investment in Education Report* in 1966; the announcement of the common Intermediate course (also in 1966); the introduction of Free Education in 1967/68; and the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen in 1972. In this period, the number of schools increased dramatically, the curriculum expanded, and pupil participation rates soared. Against this background of general expansion in education, growth in the study of foreign languages was inevitable.

The majority of schools teaching German, Italian and Spanish introduced these languages in the post-1958 period, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. Overall, a very small number of schools offered these languages in the pre-1957 era.

1.6 Irish-medium schools

Immersion education through Irish at both primary and second level has been a feature of education in Ireland since the early years of the State. The aim of immersion education through Irish relates to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas and the extension of bilingualism in Irish

society outside these areas. In the 1960s, a largely parent-initiated voluntary movement led to the setting up of Irish-medium playgroups (naíonraí[4]), primary schools (Gaelscoileanna) and post-primary schools (Gaelcholáistí). The majority of Irish-medium schools are in English-speaking areas where the parents may not be not Irish speakers themselves, but are convinced of the value of education through the medium of Irish. In addition to these schools, there are other forms of Irish-medium education, such as Irish-medium streams in English-medium schools and schools in which particular curricular areas or class groups or streams are taught through Irish.

	English-medium schools	Irish-medium Gaeltacht schools	Irish-medium schools outside Gaeltacht	Total
Primary	2922	106	129	3157
Post-Primary	701	20	20	741

Table 1: Schools by medium of instruction, 2004/05

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[4] There is a network of Irish medium playgroups which comes under the aegis of the voluntary organisation An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. These playgroups are outside the formal education system.

2   ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1   Department of Education and Science

The Minister for Education and Science has specific responsibility for education policy issues in Ireland across all levels—primary, post-primary (also referred to as second-level) and third level. The Minister is a member of the Government and responsible to Dáil Éireann, one of the two houses of the Oireachtas (national parliament).

The Minister's administrative agency is the Department of Education and Science. The mission of the Department of Education and Science is to provide for high-quality education which will: enable individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society; and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development

The Education Act, 1998 legislates for the education "of every person in the State, including any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs". It governs "primary, post-primary, adult and continuing education and vocational education and training" and sets out the functions and responsibilities of the key partners in the schooling system.

The role of the Minister includes prescribing curricula and establishing regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools. There is an Inspectorate within the Department, whose functions include evaluating the quality and effectiveness of educational provision, supporting and advising schools, conducting research for policy purposes, and advising the Minister.

The Department of Education and Science works closely with the European Union and the Council of Europe on education issues and in implementing Socrates, the European Union education programme that supports co-operation on a range of educational projects. The Department also co-ordinates Ireland's involvement with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), and works with the OECD and UNESCO.

2.2   Bodies under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science

A number of agencies operate under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science. The function of a number of these agencies which have a particular role to play in the area of language learning and/or teaching is outlined below.

2.2.1   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body whose role is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to the "curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum". The NCCA prepares the national curricula (including

syllabuses and guidelines for teachers) in all subject areas and submits them to the Minister for approval.[5]

2.2.2   State Examinations Commission

Prior to 2003, responsibility for the setting, administration and marking of all State examinations lay within the Department of Education and Science. In 2003, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) was established as a statutory body to take over these functions.[6]

2.2.3   An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG, the Council for Gaeltacht and Irish-Medium Education) was established in 2002 under Section 31 of the Education Act 1998, to cater for the educational needs of Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht. It also has certain functions relating to the teaching of Irish in the country's other schools. The Comhairle's role relates to both primary and post-primary education and its three main areas of work are: the planning and co-ordination of provision of teaching resources; the provision of support services; research.[7] In 2005 The Comhairle published the results of a major study of Gaeltacht schools, *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004*.

2.2.4   Education Centre network

The Education Centre network comprises 21 full-time and 9 part-time Education Centres throughout Ireland. The Education Centres are the central element of the Department of Education and Science's in-service delivery infrastructure. The role and functions of centres have expanded greatly in recent years and now include: providing professional development and support for teachers and the wider education community, through meeting locally researched and identified teacher and school community needs; hosting or assisting in the delivery of national in-service programmes; acting as a resource and meeting centre for the local school community, etc.

2.2.5   The Second Level Support Service

The Second Level Support Service (SLSS) is a national support service funded by the Department of Education and Science and organised regionally in collaboration with the Education Centres. It provides support for continuous professional development of teachers who are involved in delivering certain programmes and areas of the curriculum.[8]

2.2.6   Integrate Ireland Language and Training

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) was originally established by the Department of Education and Science as the Refugee Language Support Unit (RLSU)

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[5] The NCCA website address is www.ncca.ie.
[6] The SEC website address is www.examinations.ie.
[7] COGG's website address is www.cogg.ie.
[8] The SLSS website address is www.slss.ie.

in March 1999. Its core activities are providing English courses for adults (including literacy and language classes, courses in general English, and academic and professional languages courses), materials development and in-service seminars for primary and post-primary teachers who are engaged in teaching English as an additional language.[9]

2.2.7   Léargas – The Exchange Bureau

Léargas is Ireland's national agency for the management of national, European and international co-operation programmes involving Education and Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Youth and Community Work, and Guidance in Education. The agency manages transnational programmes in the areas of primary and second level education and provides information and guidance on these programmes. Léargas provides a valuable service to language teachers by, for example, facilitating access to programmes such as Comenius, Gruntvig and Lingua.[10]

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[9]The IILT website address is www.iilt.ie.
[10]The Léargas website address is www.leargas.ie.

3   THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN IRELAND

3.1   Introduction

Education in Ireland is compulsory from age six to sixteen or until students have completed three years of post-primary education, whichever is later.

3.2   Early childhood and primary education

3.2.1   Early childhood education

Irish children usually begin primary school at four years of age. Since most four and five year olds are enrolled in the junior and senior infant classes of primary schools, these classes are equivalent to what is considered pre-school education in other countries. Pre-school education up to the age of four is provided mainly by privately funded childcare facilities. However, the Department of Education and Science funds a number of pre-school initiatives which focus on children at risk of educational disadvantage.

3.2.2   Primary School Curriculum

Primary education in Ireland consists of an eight year cycle, from junior infants to sixth class. In the school year 2004/05 there was a total of 3157 primary schools. A revised Primary School Curriculum was launched in 1999.[11] The curriculum is divided into seven areas:

- ➢ Language: Irish and English
- ➢ Mathematics
- ➢ Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE, History, Geography, Science)
- ➢ Arts Education (Visual Arts, Music and Drama)
- ➢ Physical Education
- ➢ Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- ➢ Religious Education (which is the responsibility of the different church authorities)

3.3   Post-primary education

Students generally begin post-primary education at age twelve. Second-level education consists of a three year Junior Cycle followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle. There is an optional Transition Year programme, which may constitute the first year of the Senior Cycle.

3.3.1   School types

There are three types of post-primary school, all of which deliver the same curriculum and benefit from significant State funding. Their differences relate mainly to their origins and current management structures.

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[11] See www.ncca.ie for details of the curriculum.

Voluntary Secondary Schools: These schools owe their origins to private and charitable foundations in the nineteenth century, and although the majority of these schools now rely almost exclusively on State funding they remain private institutions. The trustees of the majority of these schools are religious communities or boards of governors that have connections with church authorities. In the past, voluntary secondary schools offered a traditional, academically-oriented education.

Vocational Schools and Community Colleges: These schools are State owned and are administered by local Vocational Educational Committees (VECs). These schools were first established in the 1930s and were originally intended to provide vocational and technical education.

Community and Comprehensive Schools: These schools were introduced from the 1960s onwards to provide a balance of academic and practical subjects.

Notwithstanding the different origins of the three school types, the trend has been for both voluntary secondary and vocational schools to extend the range of subjects they teach, so that in practice all school types now offer broadly the same balanced, comprehensive-style curriculum.

Type of school	Number
Voluntary secondary	403
Vocational Schools/Community Colleges	246
Community and Comprehensive	92
TOTAL	741

Table 2: Number of second-level schools by type, 2004/05

3.3.2   Junior Cycle Curriculum

The three-year Junior Cycle programme concludes with the Junior Certificate examination. This is a State examination, normally taken at age fifteen. The following broad range of subjects may be offered by schools in Junior Cycle. All subjects may be taken at either Ordinary or Higher level except Irish, English and Mathematics, which may be taken at Foundation, Ordinary or Higher level, and CSPE which is available at one level only.

1. Irish
2. English
3. Mathematics
4. History & Geography
5. Latin
6. Ancient Greek
7. Classical Studies
8. Hebrew Studies
9. French
10. German
11. Spanish
12. Italian
13. Science
14. Technology
15. Home Economics
16. Music
17. Art, Craft & Design
18. Materials Technology (Wood)
19. Metalwork

20. Technical Graphics	24. Civic, Social and
21. Business Studies	Political Education
22. Typewriting	(CSPE)
23. Environmental and	25. Religious Education
Social Studies	

Students taking Junior Certificate in secondary schools are required to take at least nine subjects, as follows:

- Irish
- English
- Mathematics
- History
- Geography
- Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE)
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE – non-examinable)
- Two further subjects from the list of approved subjects.

In practice, students usually take more than 10 subjects in the Junior Certificate examination.

3.3.3   Transition Year Option

Transition Year is an optional one-year programme, offered by over 70% of schools. It comes immediately after Junior Cycle, and each school develops its own programme for the year in accordance with guidelines. The aim of the programme is to educate students for maturity with an emphasis on personal development, social awareness and skills for life. It gives students the opportunity to sample subjects they may not have formerly studied and to undertake work experience.

3.3.4   Senior Cycle Curriculum

In Senior Cycle, students take one of three programmes:

- Leaving Certificate
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

As well as being a school-leaving examination, the Leaving Certificate provides the basis for a national competition for places in universities and other third level institutions which are allocated solely on the basis of candidates' performance in the examination. (See Section 5.1 for more on entry to third level.)

An approved examination syllabus for Leaving Certificate is available in each of the following subjects. All subjects may be taken at either Ordinary or Higher level except Irish and Mathematics, which may be taken at Foundation, Ordinary or Higher level.

1. Irish
2. English
3. Latin
4. Ancient Greek
5. Classical Studies
6. Hebrew Studies
7. French
8. German
9. Italian
10. Spanish
11. History
12. Geography
13. Mathematics
14. Applied Mathematics
15. Physics
16. Chemistry
17. Physics and Chemistry
18. Agricultural Science
19. Biology
20. Agricultural Economics
21. Engineering
22. Technical Drawing
23. Construction Studies
24. Home Economics
25. Accounting
26. Business
27. Economics
28. Economic History
29. Art
30. Music
31. Russian
32. Arabic
33. Japanese
34. Religious Education

Students following a Leaving Certificate programme are required to take at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish.

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, which was introduced in 1989, is an enhanced version of the traditional Leaving Certificate programme in that students take at least five Leaving Certificate subjects, but the choice must satisfy certain criteria to ensure a vocational dimension. Students undertake work experience and must take two Link Modules. They must also study a modern foreign language.

The Leaving Certificate Applied, which was introduced in 1995, is a self-contained two year course which has a cross-curricular approach, rather than a subject-based structure. It includes the study of a modern foreign language. This programme is intended to meet the needs of students who are not catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes and who intend to enter the world of work or engage in further education or training after school. However, it is not accepted for direct entry to higher education.

4   LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN IRISH SCHOOLS

4.1   Language education in primary school

Language education in primary schools comprises Irish and English. The Primary School Curriculum states that "an appropriate experience of both languages has an important contribution to make to the development of the child's cultural awareness and sense of cultural identity. Psychologically, historically and linguistically, an experience of both languages is the right of every Irish child." When considering language learning, there are three different types of school context:

  ➢ schools where English is the children's mother tongue and the principal medium of instruction of the school;
  ➢ schools where Irish is typically the language of the home and also the medium of instruction of the school;
  ➢ schools where Irish is the medium of instruction but may not be the language of the home.

Modern foreign languages do not form part of the primary school curriculum. However, approximately 10% of primary schools are participating in an initiative under which they offer one of four languages in fifth and sixth classes (see Section 6.1 of this report).

4.1.1   Irish in the Primary School Curriculum

The Primary School Curriculum states that "It is a particular feature of Irish primary education that children, from the beginning of schooling, have an experience of language learning in two languages. An engagement with the Irish language throughout the period of primary education extends the child's linguistic experience and deepens cultural awareness. The curriculum recognises that an experience and knowledge of Irish are important in enabling the child to begin to define and express his or her sense of national and cultural identity."[12]

The Irish curriculum is intended for schools where English is the medium of instruction, and it contains additional content for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools.

The Irish curriculum is based on a communicative, task-based approach to language learning. According to the Primary School Curriculum, "the child learns to use the language as an effective means of communication. Topics are based on the children's own interests, concerns, and needs, and children are encouraged to speak the language in real contexts and situations. The emphasis is on enjoyment and on using the language in activities such as games, tasks, conversations, role-playing, sketches, and drama.[…] In schools where English is the medium of instruction, it is important also that children see Irish used as a natural means of communication in the daily life of

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[12] Students in certain categories may be exempted from Irish classes, for example, non-English-speaking children or children with learning difficulties.

the class and the school. This is accomplished through the regular use of Irish as an informal means of communication." [13]

A number of national surveys conducted in the 1970s and 1980s examined the extent to which curriculum objectives in Irish Listening and Irish Speaking were being achieved. [14] A major report of a recent national survey entitled *Irish in Primary Schools: Long-Term National Trends in Achievement* is due to be published shortly.[15]

4.1.2   English in the Primary School Curriculum

The NCCA *Teacher Guidelines on English Language in the Primary School Curriculum* state that "English has a unique position and function in the curriculum because it is the first language of the majority of children in Ireland." The five principles underlying the English curriculum are:

 > the integration of oral language, reading and writing
 > language learning and learning through language
 > the central place of oral language
 > the development of reading skills through a range of approaches
 > the importance of the process of writing as well as the product.

The curriculum content is presented in four strands:

 > receptiveness to language
 > competence and confidence in using language
 > developing cognitive abilities through language
 > emotional and imaginative development through language.

The first two of these strands are aimed primarily at language learning, while the other two contribute more to general aspects of the child's development. Within each strand, the detailed elements of the content of the curriculum are divided into three units which describe aspects of oral language, reading and writing.

4.1.3   Teaching time for Irish and English in Primary School

The Primary School Curriculum recommends that a minimum of three hours per week should be spent on the first language and two and a half on the second language in Junior and Senior Infant classes. In other classes, the recommendation is that a

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[13] The Primary School Curriculum, which was introduced in 1999, is being reviewed on an ongoing basis. English was reviewed in the school year 2003/04. A review of Irish in the Primary School Curriculum, similar to the review of English which has already taken place, is due to be conducted in due course.

[14] Harris, J. (1984). *Spoken Irish in primary schools*. Dublin: Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.
Harris, J., & Murtagh, L. (1987). "Irish and English in Gaeltacht primary schools". In G. Mac Eoin, A. Ahlqvist, & D. Ó hAodha (Eds.), *Third International Conference on Minority Languages: Celtic papers. Multilingual Matters, 32,* 104-124. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
Harris, J., & Murtagh L. (1988). "National assessment of Irish-language speaking and listening skills in primary-school children: Research issues in the evaluation of school-based heritage-language programmes". *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 1(2*), 85-130.
[15] Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile and O'Gorman, 2006.

minimum of four hours per week should be spent on the first language and three and a half hours on the second language.

4.2 Language education at post-primary level

4.2.1 Irish at post-primary level

The Irish language, which is seen as a significant element of Irish heritage and identity, is part of the core curriculum and is compulsory for all post-primary school students in both Junior and Senior Cycle.[16] The syllabus is the same for students in both English-medium and Irish-medium post-primary schools. In addition to studying Irish at school, many second level students attend subsidised courses at Summer Colleges in the Gaeltacht during school holidays.

At **Junior Certificate** level, there are different levels of competence specified in the overall aims and objectives.

The Foundation Level course is aimed at students with limited competence in the language. The aim here is to develop basic communicative skills—receptive skills in particular—and to enable students to adopt a secondary role when participating in simple conversations. Basic functional reading and writing skills are emphasised.

The Ordinary Level course is aimed at students whose ability in the language is such that it does not allow them to study Irish at Higher Level, with the stated objectives of developing comprehension skills. Emphasis is placed on written texts and some literature. A wider variety of communicative functions and topics are listed than in Foundation Level.

The Higher Level course is aimed at learners in English-medium schools who are competent speakers and users, as well as at native speaker-learners in the speech communities and neo-speakers in immersion programmes. Here productive skills and accuracy are emphasised and literary texts are to be studied in some detail. The Junior Certificate syllabus specifies fourteen topics for Higher Level students, including pastimes in Ireland, the music industry, traditional songs, local organisations, the social system, social history, economic life in the past and present.

Assessment of Irish in the Junior Certificate examination is in the form of a written terminal examination, an aural test and an optional oral examination, which is availed of by a tiny minority of schools.

As with Junior Certificate, there are different levels of competence specified in the overall aims and objectives at **Leaving Certificate** level. The general aims of the Leaving Certificate programme are almost identical to those at Junior Certificate:

> ➤ to guarantee opportunities for each learner according to her ability to play an active role in a bilingual society

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[16] The children of foreigners who are diplomatic or consular representatives in Ireland may substitute another subject from a list of approved subjects for Irish and certain other exemptions from Irish are allowed.

- ➤ to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing in an integrated way
- ➤ to ensure an understanding of and insight in to Irish culture
- ➤ to promote a positive attitude to and interest in Irish
- ➤ to promote a positive attitude to and interest in language learning in general
- ➤ to provide enjoyment, intellectual and affective inspiration for learners.

In general, there is a wider range of communication functions and topics to be covered as one moves from Foundation to Ordinary to Higher level. At each of the three levels, assessment comprises a written terminal examination, plus an aural and oral.

Leaving Certificate Applied students accumulate credits toward their final result through satisfactory completion of modules, performance of student tasks, and performance in the final examinations. Oral as well as written/aural examinations are held in the case of all languages studied in LCA, including Irish. The oral test for Irish consists of a short interview (approximately 7 minutes) with an external examiner.

4.2.2   English at post-primary level

English is part of the core curriculum and is compulsory for all post-primary school students at Junior Cycle, though not at Senior Cycle. In practice, the majority of students do take English in Senior Cycle. The syllabus is the same for students in both English-medium and Irish-medium schools.

The essential aim of teaching **English at Junior Cycle** is to reinforce and continue the work of the primary school in nurturing the intellectual, imaginative and emotional growth of each student by developing his or her personal proficiency in the arts and skills of language.

This personal proficiency involves three dynamically interrelated elements:

- ➤ **personal literacy**, which involves, for example, fostering the confidence of the student to think, respond and communicate in the English classroom and giving the student frequent opportunities to speak and write about his or her experience in a variety of forms;
- ➤ **social literacy**, which stresses that it is mainly through language that the individual person is equipped to participate fully in society in a variety of roles; involves fostering the student's knowledge of spellings, punctuation procedures, sentence structures and paragraph organization; involves developing the skills of reading and listening with understanding and discrimination;
- ➤ **cultural literacy**, through which students are introduced to the skills of reading, viewing and listening to a range of literary and media genre for aesthetic pleasure

The syllabus makes no mention of grammar, but it does mention language awareness skills, specifically the student's awareness of the selectivity of all language use in establishing specific meaning, and the ability to use the conventions of paragraphing, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. No links are made with either the Irish or the foreign language syllabuses.

Assessment of Junior Certificate English is by terminal written examination at three levels, Foundation, Ordinary and Higher. The examination papers present a range of unseen material to which pupils are invited to respond in various ways. Opportunities are also provided for the students to display their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of texts and materials encountered in their own English programme. At Higher Level, students are required to demonstrate a greater degree of proficiency in skills such as understanding, analysing and presenting facts, ideas and opinions and to show deeper insights into, and more understanding of, a wider variety of materials, texts, concepts and issues. The syllabus states that oral/aural components may be introduced, but to date this has not been done.

The **Leaving Certificate English** syllabus builds on the aims of the Junior Certificate English syllabus, which emphasise the development of a range of literacy and oral skills in a variety of domains, personal, social, and cultural. In the Leaving Certificate course, students are encouraged to develop a more sophisticated range of skills and concepts. The course is intended to be wide-ranging enough to accommodate not only vocational needs and further education, but also the life long needs of students and the language demands, both oral and written, that are placed on them by the wider community.

The syllabus states that: "Language is not a neutral medium of expression and communication. It is embedded in history, culture, society, and ultimately personal subjectivity. In the contemporary world the cultural relativity of a person's own use of language needs to be highlighted. To achieve this end, a range of resources will be selected from different periods and cultures and students will be encouraged to approach them in a comparative manner. In encountering this diversity, students should develop an understanding of how the language a person uses shapes the way that person views the world."

The Leaving Certificate aims to develop in students:

> - a mature and critical literacy to prepare them for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life in all contexts
> - a respect and appreciation for language used accurately and appropriately and a competence in a wide range of language skills both oral and written
> - an awareness of the value of literature in its diverse forms for enriching their perceptions, for enhancing their sense of cultural identity, and for creating experiences of aesthetic pleasure.

The syllabus states that "the development of oracy is a significant aspiration of the syllabus" and methodological approaches which emphasise dialogue, group-discussion, oral presentations and performances are strongly recommended.

Students encounter a wide range of texts of many types (from journalism to documentary film to literature), including a range of prescribed literary texts. The syllabus also envisages that some of the texts designated for study in the aesthetic context can be usefully employed for developing language expertise and awareness.

Assessment of Leaving Certificate English is by terminal written examination at two levels, Ordinary and Higher. Different levels of attainment are expected from students

doing the Higher and Ordinary Level courses. At both Higher Level and Ordinary Level there are two papers. The first paper is specifically aimed at testing the comprehending and composing abilities of students. The second paper tests students' knowledge of, and response to, a range of texts, including prescribed literature. The syllabus states that the feasibility of oral and aural assessment will be researched, but to date no oral or aural component has been introduced to the Leaving Certificate English examination.

One of the compulsory courses taken by students following the **Leaving Certificate Applied** programme is English and Communications. The course is designed on the premise that improving communication involves raising students' awareness about their own use of language and the language of others. This is achieved through the study of language in use in real communicative contexts.

The LCA English and Communications course consists of four modules:

> ➢ Communications and the Working World
> ➢ Communications and Enterprise
> ➢ The Communications Media
> ➢ Critical Literacy and Composition.

Each module consists of a number of units which include a list of desired learning outcomes and guidelines for the teacher. A list of Key Assignments which students should complete is also given. Oral as well as written/aural examinations are held in the case of all languages studied in LCA, including English and Communications. The oral test for English and Communications consists of a 15 minute interview with an external examiner.

4.2.3   Modern foreign languages at post-primary level

There is no compulsion on any post-primary school in Ireland to offer foreign languages or on any student to study them, except in the case of the LCA and LCVP programmes. In practice, however, school managements have demonstrated a commitment to the provision of languages in the curriculum and languages occupy a central place in most schools, with a majority of students studying at least one modern foreign language. The foreign language most commonly offered and studied is French. In some cases, circumstances may arise where a student is not given the option of studying a foreign language. For example, it sometimes happens that students with literacy difficulties, or those in the lower general ability range, may not be offered a foreign language.

Individual schools have considerable autonomy and flexibility with regard to curriculum options and each school's management authority decides on the range of languages to be offered, taking into account the resources available and the needs of the students. Availability of qualified teaching staff is often the determining factor in the range of language choices which schools offer their students.

The modern foreign languages available at Junior Certificate level are French, German, Spanish and Italian. Until quite recently, these were the only languages available at Leaving Certificate also. In recent years, however, new *ab initio* Leaving

Certificate syllabuses for Russian and Japanese have introduced. There is also a syllabus in Arabic which is aimed primarily at native speakers of the language.[17] The following table indicates the numbers of candidates who took the various languages in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations in 2005. It is a useful indicator of the relative strength of the languages in the system.

	Junior Certificate		Leaving Certificate[18]	
	Candidates	% of all candidates	Candidates	% of all candidates
French	36,194	67.73	30,592	56.57
German	10,351	18.22	7,924	14.65
Spanish	3,357	5.91	1,972	3.6
Italian	301	0.53	284	0.52
Russian	n.a.	n.a.	111	0.21
Japanese	n.a.	n.a.	46	0.09
Arabic	n.a.	n.a.	126	0.23

Table 3: Modern foreign languages in Junior and Leaving Certificate, 2005

There is no statutory time allocation for the teaching of various subjects in Irish post-primary schools. Typically, three or (less frequently) four class periods of 40 or 45 minutes per week are devoted to foreign language teaching in Junior Cycle, giving a typical allocation of about 60 hours per year. In Senior Cycle, the allocation is usually four or five class period per week, which amounts to about 90 hours per year. This is in line with the syllabus recommendation of 180 hours over two years.

The general communicative aims of the **Junior Certificate** programme in modern foreign languages are:

> ➢ to enable pupils to cope with the normal classroom use of the target language
> ➢ to equip pupils with a competence in the target language which would enable them to provide themselves with basic necessities, to avoid misdemeanours and/or serious embarrassment, and to engage in some degree of social interaction in a country/situation where only the target language was in use
> ➢ to furnish pupils with linguistic skills which will make it possible for them to pursue at least some aspects of their general interests through the medium of the target language
> ➢ to ensure that pupils' competence in the target language is such as to be conducive to the fulfilment of the general educational aims specified above

Assessment is at two levels, Ordinary and Higher. The examination consists of a written paper and an aural (listening comprehension) test. The syllabus states that there may be an oral test, but to date few schools have taken up this option. [19]

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[17] Leaving Certificate Arabic was offered in Ireland for the first time in 1997 and a new interim Leaving Certificate Arabic syllabus was examined for the first time in 2004, replacing the syllabus which had existed since 1997. For the time being, the majority of students taking this exam are expected to be first language Arabic speakers, as has been the case up to now.

[18] Including LCVP but not LCA.

[19] In 2004, only 11 schools nationwide held Junior Certificate orals, involving 301 students. The oral is administered by the students' teacher and the low uptake is due to the fact that the teacher unions are opposed to this.

Transition Year, which is a year free from formal examinations, does not have a prescribed national curriculum. Each school designs its own programme according to a recommended framework laid down by the Department of Education and Science. This framework involves the study of certain core subjects, including English and Irish. Many schools offer students the opportunity to sample new subjects in Transition Year, which may include the study of a new language. In some cases, a language has been tried out at Transition Year by a school and then later, in response to demand, continued to Leaving Certificate. This is the pattern followed by a number of schools now offering Japanese at Leaving Certificate.

In most schools, the study of a language is optional after Junior Certificate (except in the case of LCA and LCVP), but in practice the majority of students continue with at least one foreign modern language to **Leaving Certificate**, due in great part no doubt to the fact that the National University of Ireland requires a foreign language for matriculation. The wider range of subjects (typically seven) taken at Leaving Certificate compared with, say, the smaller number taken by A Level students in the UK, who specialise at an earlier age, also gives more students the opportunity to continue their study of language for longer.

French, German, Spanish and Italian share a common syllabus framework, and the more recent Russian and Japanese syllabuses are based on that same framework.[20] The syllabus is described as being "communicative", in the sense that it is based on the purposes to which learners are likely to want, need or expect to put the knowledge and skills they acquire in class, and in the sense that the objectives detailed in the syllabus are expressed in terms of language use. The general aims proposed by the syllabus for the teaching and learning of modern languages in the Senior Cycle are:

- ➢ to foster in learners such communicative skills in the target language as will enable them to: take a full part in classroom activities conducted in the target language; participate in normal everyday transactions and interactions, both spoken and written, at home and abroad; extract information and derive enjoyment from the mass media and the more accessible literature of the target language community; consider as a realistic option the possibility of pursuing leisure activities, further study and/or career opportunities through the medium of the target language
- ➢ to give pupils a critical awareness of how meaning is organised and conveyed by the structures and vocabulary of the target language, and thus to contribute to their understanding of the workings of human language in general
- ➢ to help learners develop strategies for effective language learning
- ➢ to equip learners with a broad acquaintance with the cultural, social and political complexion of countries in which the target language is a normal medium of communication and thus to help raise their awareness of cultural, social and political diversity generally.

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[20] The Japanese syllabus points out that learning to read and write Japanese presents an added challenge. As well as learning to read and write the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries, learners are expected to be able to read and write 100 basic *kanji*.

The syllabus aims to lead every pupil towards four basic outcomes as a result of the experience of modern language learning in the classroom:

> ➤ a communicative competence in the target language
> ➤ awareness about language and communication
> ➤ an understanding of how to go about learning a foreign language
> ➤ a level of cultural awareness.

Assessment of modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level has three components: a written examination, a listening comprehension test and an oral examination. Unlike the case of the Junior Certificate examination, the oral component is obligatory, and is conducted by an external examiner. Leaving Certificate Arabic is assessed by written examination only.[21]

Students opting for the **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme** must take a recognised course in a modern European language other than Irish or English. The learning of a modern language is a requirement for accreditation in LCVP and forms an integral component of the programme. Some schools offer the Leaving Certificate programme in a modern foreign language, but there are also other options, such as a special *ab initio* course or a Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) module.

For students following the **Leaving Certificate Applied** programme, the learning of a modern language is a requirement for accreditation and forms an integral component of the programme. In many cases, the language may be studied *ab initio*. The modern languages syllabus of the LCA programme specifies that the two modules will require a minimum total of 60 hours of tuition. One of the courses available under the General Education section of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme is Sign Language. The course introduces students to Irish Sign Language (ISL) and aims to develop their expressive and receptive communication skills. The course also develops awareness and appreciation of the Irish Deaf community and its culture.

In 2004 the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science published a composite report, *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues*, based on an analysis of forty-five subject inspection reports on the teaching and learning of French, German, Italian and Spanish in post-primary schools.

4.2.4 Classical languages and Hebrew Studies at post-primary level

The two classical languages Latin and Ancient Greek are available for study in the Junior Cycle.

The general aims of **Junior Certificate Latin** are to enable pupils

> ➤ to read, understand and enjoy Latin

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[21] In recent years small numbers of students have sat Leaving Certificate examinations in languages such as Dutch, Finnish, Danish, Swedish, Portuguese and Modern Greek. There are no syllabuses for these languages, but the State Examinations Commission will, on request, endeavour to provide an examination in the first language of a candidate from a European Union member State.

➢ to acquire a knowledge and appreciation of Roman history and civilisation
➢ to become aware of a common European heritage in language and civilisation which derives from Latin.

Similarly, the general aims of **Junior Certificate Ancient Greek** are to enable pupils

➢ to read, understand and enjoy Greek
➢ to acquire a knowledge and understanding of Greek history, civilisation, myth and legend
➢ to become aware of the immense and abiding influence of Greek language and civilisation on the modern world
➢ to appreciate its role in the formation of a common European heritage and outlook.

Each syllabus lists a certain number of concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes which pupils are expected to master or acquire. For example, in the case of both Latin and Greek students are expected to develop an understanding of the concept of a "classical" language and the concept of the coming into being and the passing away of high civilisation. It is also expected that pupils should develop naturally certain attitudes, such as an appreciation of the unique role of language in transmitting a picture of a people and civilisation, an appreciation of the uniqueness of each age and civilization, and an understanding and appreciation of how much we have in common with civilizations of the past.

Grammar forms an important part of the study of Latin. Grammar also forms an important part of the study of Greek, and the syllabus notes that students should gain "an appreciation of the special affinities in language structure existing between the Irish language and Greek".

Both Latin and Greek can be taken at either Ordinary or Higher Level in the Junior Certificate. In the Latin examination, the paper includes questions involving the translation of texts from Latin, composition/translation into Latin (optional), questions on comprehension, grammar and background knowledge, questions on Roman history and Roman social life and civilization. In the Greek examination, the paper includes questions involving the translation of texts from Greek, composition/translation into Greek, questions on comprehension, grammar and etymology, questions on Greek history and Greek civilization, myth and legend.

The **Latin Leaving Certificate** course involves the study of composition (sentences in the case of Ordinary Level and continuous prose at Higher Level), formal grammar (including scansion), prescribed and unprescribed text, and history (including art and literature). The **Ancient Greek Leaving Certificate** course involves the study of scansion, prescribed and unprescribed texts, history (including art and literature), and translation into Greek (Higher Level only). The Latin Leaving Certificate is assessed by written examination which involves translation into Latin, translation of, and questions on, prescribed text, and questions on grammar, scansion, history, art and literature. The Ancient Greek Leaving Certificate is assessed by written examination which involves translation into Greek (Higher Level only), translation of, and questions on, prescribed text, and questions on grammar, scansion, history, art and literature.

The number of students taking Latin at Junior and Leaving Certificate is modest—511 and 102 respectively in 2005. The number of students taking Ancient Greek at Junior and Leaving Certificate are much lower than those for Latin—20 and 8 respectively in 2005.

In 2005, the NCCA published a discussion paper, *The Classical Subjects in the Post-Primary Curriculum*. In its concluding section, the discussion paper identified a number of factors favourable to Latin and Classical Studies:[22]

  ➢ Close cooperation between the Classics departments of universities and the schools
  ➢ Large numbers of students studying Greek and Roman civilisation at third level
  ➢ Strong public interest in things classical
  ➢ A perhaps surprising level of support for Latin among parents and teachers.

On the other hand, it identified a greater number of factors impeding the growth of Classical subjects, such as:

  ➢ The small number of teachers available and willing to devote time and energy to the work of development
  ➢ The lack of awareness in schools of the vital contribution the subjects can make to the general education of students. It is worth noting how well the Classical subjects fit in with the aims and outcomes for junior cycle education, where the importance of literacy, language skills as well as knowledge and appreciation of cultural heritage are highlighted
  ➢ Difficulty of accessing resource material
  ➢ Curriculum overload, particularly in the Junior Cycle
  ➢ Weak linkage between primary and post-primary education.

In concluding, the discussion paper recommends that an enabling structure should be convened to consider the issues raised in the paper and to propose a course of action in relation to Latin and Classical studies at both junior and senior cycle.

A programme in **Hebrew Studies** is available at both Junior and Leaving Certificate, but is taken by a very small number of students—in 2005, one student took Junior Certificate and one took Leaving Certificate. The aims of the **Junior Certificate** course in Hebrew Studies are to enable students to read and understand Classical and early post-Biblical Hebrew, and to enable them to acquire a general understanding of the history, religion and civilization of the Hebrew people. These aims are pursued primarily through the study of prescribed Hebrew texts. The first part of the examination paper involves answering questions on prescribed Hebrew texts. The second part of the examination paper involves answering general essay questions.

The **Leaving Certificate** course in Hebrew Studies aims to enable students to deepen their understanding of the history, religion and civilization of the Hebrew people by

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[22] Classical Studies is a subject separate from Latin and Ancient Greek, offered at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. It involves the study of Classical civilisation and literature through the medium of Irish or English.

focusing in greater depth on major themes regarding institutions, religious ideas and roles as they were expressed and developed during the course of Israelite history. These aims are pursued through the study of prescribed Hebrew texts and of the wider background to these texts and topics in the vernacular. The examination paper involves answering questions on prescribed Hebrew texts.

4.2.5   English as an additional language

It is only in recent years, with the growth in immigration and in the number of asylum seekers, that support for non-English-speaking children has become an issue in Irish schools. There are now foreign nationals from at least 120 countries coming to Ireland and there are speakers of at least 60 different languages in Irish schools. In response to the need of such pupils for language support, the Department of Education and Science funds additional teachers or teaching hours for both primary and post-primary schools. This teaching caters for children with a foreign mother tongue, providing intensive English language training in addition to the support and teaching which they receive in their mainstream classes. Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) provides support and materials for these children and their teachers on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. In 2004, IILT had a database of over 500 primary and over 200 post-primary schools in which full-time or part-time language support teachers were employed, and their in-service seminars were attended by approximately 800 teachers, the majority of whom were working at primary level.

IILT has developed two sets of English Language Proficiency Benchmarks which reflect the linguistic demands of the primary and post-primary curricula. These Benchmarks are being widely used by language support teachers in the primary sector in particular to guide the delivery of their courses. IILT has also developed versions of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) for primary and post-primary learners of English as an additional language which were validated by the Council of Europe in May 2004. IILT is currently engaged in developing a range of language proficiency tests which will provide a means of assessing pupils' language skills on entry to school (either primary or post-primary) and monitoring their progress in English as language support proceeds.[23]

In addition to their work in supporting the learning of English by newcomers, IILT also monitors, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science, the delivery of mother-tongue classes which are organised by immigrant communities and funded by the Department.

4.3   Language education for children with special needs

The *Primary School Curriculum* states the following with regard to children with special needs:

"All children have a right of access to the highest-quality education appropriate to their needs. This includes children whose disabilities or circumstances inhibit their effective participation in the education that is normally provided for children of their age."

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23 The NCCA is producing a set of *Teacher Guidelines on English as an Additional Language.*

It is of note that a number of contributors to the *Progress Report* of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative specifically mentioned the benefit of teaching modern foreign languages to children with special needs.[24] The NCCA's *Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* stress the central role which language plays in learning for these students at primary level and states that, "this pivotal role of language in learning necessitates a special focus on encouraging and supporting the students to become competent and confident language users". For all students, both primary and post-primary, it is noted that the learning experiences need to be characterised by special attention to language and communication in all areas of the curriculum.

The NCCA has also produced a set of *Draft Guidelines on Irish Language and Culture for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities.* While acknowledging that many of these students have exemption from Irish from the Department of Education and Science, the guidelines recognise that there are teachers who would like to give their students an opportunity to acquire certain language skills, both listening and speaking, and an awareness of Irish culture. It is recognised that the student's level of communicative competence in speaking Irish at primary level will depend on his or her facility in language learning in general, and that the student will be doing little reading or writing in Irish.

At post-primary level, the modern foreign language inspectors of the Department of Education and Science observed in their publication *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues* that, "Of particular concern is the fact that in some schools students with special educational needs are denied the opportunity to study any language at all. This may be because it is assumed that these students are unable to learn languages, or that additional learning support in English is more useful to them than learning a new language."[25] The report goes on to say that "students who are excluded from the study of languages on these grounds are denied access to an important curricular area, and their future range of academic and career choices may be restricted as a result".

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[24] Department of Education and Science, *Progress Report of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative 1998-2004*, p. 15.
[25] Department of Education and Science, Inspectorate*, Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues* (2004), p. 7.

5 LANGUAGES AT THIRD LEVEL AND TEACHER EDUCATION

It is beyond the scope of this Country Report to deal in detail with language education at third level in Ireland, other than in relation to teacher education. However, it is inevitable that language learning at third level has an impact on language learning at post-primary level and vice versa, so this chapter briefly outlines the situation at third level and touches on some of the issues involved.

Over the last twenty-five years, the number of students at third level in Ireland—including those studying languages—has greatly increased, with overall numbers of students more than tripling between 1979/80 and 2002/03 from over 37,000 to over 129,000. The system of third level education in Ireland comprises the following sectors, all of which are substantially funded by the State:

The Universities. There are seven universities in the State and they are autonomous, self-governing institutions. The National University of Ireland is Ireland's largest university. It is a federal university with four Constituent Universities. These are University College Dublin, University College Cork, National University of Ireland, Galway and National University of Ireland, Maynooth. The other universities are The University of Dublin (Trinity College Dublin), Dublin City University and the University of Limerick.

The Institutes of Technology. There are 16 Institutes of Technology. Institutions in the technological sector provide programmes of education and training in areas such as Business, Science, Engineering, Linguistics and Music to higher certificate, ordinary and honours degree levels. The Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility for the technological sector of third level education.

The Colleges of Education. There are five Colleges of Education which specialise in the training of primary school teachers. They are: St Patrick's College, Dublin; Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill, Co. Dublin; Coláiste Mhuire Marino, Dublin; Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin. In 2003, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) granted recognition to a new online primary teacher training course for graduates, offered by Hibernia College.

5.1.1 Language requirements for entry to third level institutions

Entry to third level institutions in Ireland is based on a points system related to grades received by students in the Leaving Certificate examinations. This points system is regulated and administered by the Central Admissions Office (CAO). Students wishing to apply for entry to the universities which constitute the National University of Ireland (NUI) require a pass grade in Leaving Certificate Irish for Matriculation. The Institutes of Technology do not have a similar Irish requirement for entry, but some courses do require students to have competence in Irish. Irish is a basic requirement for entry to all the Colleges of Education and students intending to train as primary teachers must achieve an honours grade in Higher Level Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination. Study of Irish forms an essential part of primary teacher training. A modern foreign language is not required, however.

A pass grade in a foreign or classical language as well as in Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination is a requirement for Matriculation in the National University of Ireland. Given that the study of foreign languages is optional in post-primary schools, this matriculation requirement is almost certainly an important factor in maintaining the high level of uptake of these languages at second level. Concern is often expressed that the position of modern languages in Ireland would be vulnerable if this requirement were to be dropped. In recent years, there has been at least one unsuccessful attempt by an NUI university to win support for the abolition of the "modern language plus Irish" requirement. University departments experiencing difficulties recruiting students, such as science and engineering, were largely supportive of the move, and the foreign language requirement has been relaxed for some courses.

The Institutes of Technology do not have a general requirement for a foreign language for entry, but, again, some courses require competence in a language.

5.1.2   The position of languages in third level institutions

The languages most commonly offered at third level are those available at second level: Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

The years 1997–2005 have been particularly difficult for university language departments. There has been a decline in the percentage of students taking languages at university. Although the numbers of students studying French in the universities have fallen, it is still the most popular choice, due perhaps to its strong position at second level. As in other European countries, there has been a drop in the numbers taking German, but a substantial increase in the numbers studying Spanish. Numbers of students taking Irish appear to be increasing slightly.

Partly as a result of the decline in uptake, university language departments have had to contend with a variety of difficulties:

- declining numbers
- mergers/amalgamations of language departments, with a consequent decline in status
- pressure to move away from the traditional literature degree courses
- pressure to lecture through English in order to attract more students, including students from other disciplines
- reluctance on the part of students to spend prolonged periods in the country of the target language because of the lifestyle change involved, e.g. giving up lucrative part-time employment
- reluctance of many students to engage with the study of literature in the target language.

5.2   Language teacher education

Primary teachers normally take a three year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree in one of the colleges of education. To qualify as a teacher of languages at post primary

level, a graduate normally completes a one year Higher Diploma in Education (H. Dip.), offered by the education departments of universities. [26]

5.2.1   Primary teacher education

While the Bachelor of Education courses of all the Colleges of Education include the study of Irish and English, which are central components of the primary curriculum, only two of the colleges offer courses in modern foreign languages. These languages are offered mainly as academic courses rather than as practical courses in language teaching methodology.

5.2.2   Post-primary teacher education

The main languages catered for in the Higher Diploma in Education courses are Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian. The National University of Ireland Galway also offers a higher diploma in education entirely through Irish. Student teachers study methodology and do at least 100 hours of supervised teaching practice in a second level school. The Irish Association for Applied Linguistics (IRAAL) has expressed reservations about the training of modern language teachers in its submission in response to the discussion paper on *Languages in the Post-primary Curriculum*: "Any review of languages at post-primary level should go hand in hand with a review of language teacher training. We are not convinced that the traditional qualification of a B.A. degree plus Higher Diploma in Education is adequate. It would be useful to consider successful models from other countries, possibly with input from university language departments. Regular in-service training should also be provided." Such concerns, which are by no means confined to IRAAL, arise in part from the inadequacy of the time allocation to language teaching methodology in the H.Dip. courses (as little as an hour or two a week) and in part from the language competence level of some graduates, many of whom will have spent very little time in the countries where their target languages are spoken.

5.2.3   In-service teacher education

In-service training for post-primary teachers is available from a range of sources, including the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), the Education Centres, teacher training colleges, the educational and cultural sections of the various embassies and the subject teacher associations. There is no obligation on teachers to engage in continuous professional development, except where courses are organised by the Department of Education and Science during school hours, normally in the context of curricular reform. The last major programme of in-service training for language teachers took place in the mid-nineties, in the context of syllabus revision. In the intervening period, courses for teachers have been organised in the main by the relevant subject teacher associations with support from the Teacher Education Section (formerly the In-Career Development Unit) of the Department of Education and Science. These courses are attended by teachers on a voluntary basis. The cultural services of the embassies and Léargas in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science provide funding for teachers to attend summer courses in the

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[26] In recent years, the University of Limerick has introduced a one-year Graduate Diploma in Education (Languages), which qualifies graduates to teach two of the following languages: English as a Second Language, French, German, Japanese, Spanish.

countries of the target language in order to improve their language skills and learn about new developments in methodology. A teacher exchange scheme is also available for teachers of French and German which allows Irish teachers to spend a term or a school year in their exchange partner's school in France or Germany. Léargas also supports the professional development of teachers by facilitating exchange programmes. The Japan Foundation has also provided funding for Irish teachers to attending training courses in the UK and in Japan.

There have been some opportunities for language teachers to participate in ICT training. During 2001 and 2002 a two-phase project named OILTE (Organising In-service Training for Languages and Technology in Education) was organised by Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (ITÉ, the Linguistics Institute of Ireland),[27] supported by the National Centre for Technology in Education and the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee.

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[27] The Institute went into voluntary liquidation in 2004.

6   INITIATIVES, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

6.1   Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

Until the late nineties, modern foreign languages were available only on an *ad hoc* basis in primary schools, most often after school hours.[28] However, the Primary School Curriculum, introduced in 1999, refers to the possible introduction of foreign languages at some point in the future: "In seeking to enable children to realise and express their individual and national identity, the curriculum takes account of our historic links with European culture and our modern membership of the European Union. It recognises that children's linguistic and cultural awareness is enhanced by an experience of foreign language learning and that future curriculum development will take account of this in the context of the current pilot project in the teaching of modern languages." The "pilot project" referred to here is the national Pilot Project on Teaching Modern Languages in Primary Schools in Ireland, which had been launched in 1998 for an initial period of two years. At the end of its first two years, which were funded by the European Social Fund, the Project was extended for a third year, funded under the National Development Plan. In June 2001 the Pilot Project became known as the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, and it continues under this name to date.

6.1.1   Aims of the Initiative

Under the Initiative, all 5th and 6th class pupils in participating schools received one and a half hours of tuition per week in French, German, Spanish or Italian. This time allocation is based on the fact that the Primary Curriculum allows one and a half hours of discretionary time. The four key aims of the Initiative are:

> ➢   to foster positive attitudes to language learning
> ➢   to establish co-ordination between language teaching at first and second level
> ➢   to encourage diversification in the range of languages taught
> ➢   to enable a greater number of children in a wider range of school types to study modern languages in primary schools.

6.1.2   Organisation and support for schools

In the school year 2004/05, there were 394 participating schools, broken down by language as follows: French 213; German 95; Spanish 66; Italian 20. This accounts for about 12% of all primary schools.[29]

The language teaching in primary schools is done either by a staff member (either the class teacher or another member of staff) or by a visiting non-staff member (either a second level teacher or a native speaker who may or may not have a teaching qualification). The work of the teachers is supported by six full-time Project Leaders

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[28] A small number of schools also participated in two Socrates schemes: Lingua C, which placed language assistants on work experience in Irish primary schools, and Comenius, which enabled schools to carry out a European Education Project.
[29] A waiting list system has been in operation since 2002 when the Department of Education and Science capped the number of participating schools.

who source and develop teaching materials, and design and deliver in-career development. The National Co-ordinator of the Initiative and the Project Leaders, who are based in Kildare Education Centre, provide linguistic and pedagogic support in the four languages to the participating schools and teachers.[30] Following the introduction of the Pilot Project, the language departments of a number of the Institutes of Technology offered special courses for teachers, leading to the award of certificates and diplomas. These courses were funded entirely by the Department of Education and Science and were open to all primary teachers, not just those participating in the Initiative.[31]

A set of *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* was developed by the NCCA. These guidelines take into account the experience of modern language teaching in other countries and were developed according to the underlying principles of the Primary School Curriculum. More recently, the Project Leaders have developed a special version of the European Language Portfolio, which was validated by the Council of Europe in September, 2005. The portfolio is presented in Irish and English, and allows for recording pupils' progress in Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

6.1.3   Evaluation and future of the Initiative

In 2002, a report written by John Harris and Mary Conway, *Modern Languages in Irish Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the National Pilot Project*, was published by ITÉ. This independent evaluation of the first phase of the Project was based on a variety of quantitative data obtained from teachers and pupils, as well as a broad range of other information about its progress and evolution. The results of the evaluation were generally positive and very encouraging. A second evaluation report, by John Harris and Denise O'Leary, based in part on the analysis of a Principals' questionnaire and on a survey of class teachers not involved in language teaching, is due for publication.

In 2005, the NCCA published a *Report on the Feasibility of Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum*. The report was carried out against the background of the phased implementation of the revised Primary School Curriculum, which is due to be fully implemented in 2006/07. The report explored a number of possible options for modern languages in primary schools. The advice provided to the Department of Education and Science was that a decision on the place of modern languages in the primary school curriculum should not be made until the implementation of the revised curriculum has been completed. This would enable schools to introduce all of the subjects in the Primary School Curriculum before making a commitment to introducing an additional subject, and would allow time to consider the findings of ongoing and future research regarding modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The Department of Education and Science accepted this advice and requested that the NCCA should conduct school-based research into language awareness, CLIL and networking of teachers at local level. This work is currently under way.

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[30] See www.eckildare.ie.

[31] These courses are no longer funded by the Department of Education and Science, but two of the Institute of Technology offered similar (fee-paying) courses again in 2004/05 in response to demand.

**6.2	Post-Primary Languages Initiative**

In 1999 the Department of Education and Science undertook a feasibility study into the teaching of Italian, Japanese and Spanish in post-primary schools in Ireland. On the basis of its findings, the Post-Primary Language Initiative (PPLI) was established by the Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan, 2000-2006.

### 6.2.1	Aim of the Initiative

The aim of the PPLI is to diversify, enhance and expand the teaching of languages in post-primary schools. Initially, the Initiative concentrated on the promotion of Spanish and Italian and on the introduction of Japanese. Support for the introduction of Russian was added to the activities of the Initiative at a later stage.

### 6.2.2	Organisation and support for schools

The work of the PPLI is led by a National Coordinator. Schools taking part in the Initiative receive grants to help build up language teaching resources. A further support has been the funding of a limited number of additional teaching hours to facilitate the introduction or expansion of the target language/s. The Initiative has also produced promotional materials and maintains a website.[32]

In the academic year 2005/06 the numbers of schools participating in the PPLI are as follows: Spanish 86, Japanese 58, Italian 24 and Russian 5. The impact of the Initiative has been most dramatic in the case of Japanese, which was initially offered to a small number of schools in and around Dublin as a Transition Year module, and is now available in almost 60 schools nationwide. In 2002, the Initiative established a pilot group comprising about 20 students from six schools in the Dublin area who attended Saturday classes with a view to taking the new Leaving Certificate Japanese examination. In the academic year 2005/06, there are eleven schools with a Leaving Certificate class and there are also three Saturday classes for students whose own schools do not offer Japanese at Leaving Certificate level.

The Initiative has had a significant impact on the number of schools in Ireland offering Spanish, Italian and Japanese and on the number of students studying theses languages. The interim report of the Initiative, published in 2003, noted that by the third year of the Initiative the number of schools offering Spanish, Italian and Japanese had increased by 38% (from 302 to 416). Over the same period, the number of students studying these languages increased by 40% (from 17,153 to 24,011).

The Initiative actively promoted teacher education for Italian and Spanish by setting-up two-year Postgraduate Diploma courses in language and teaching methodologies, delivered by the Dublin Institute of Technology. The courses were fully funded by the Initiative. Similar courses were later organised in Cork for teachers of Italian and Spanish (delivered by UCC), and in Sligo for teachers of Italian (delivered by NUI Galway). In the case of Japanese, given that so few trained teachers of Japanese were available, the Initiative recruited and trained a panel of Japanese Development

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[32] www.languagesinitiative.ie.

Officers (JDOs). In the academic year 2005/06 there are nine JDOs teaching the language in about sixty Irish schools.

The Initiative has been active in producing teaching materials specifically designed to suit the language curriculum and examination system in Ireland. For Italian, the following materials have been produced: *L'italiano in classe*, a booklet and cassette for teachers to support and encourage the use of the target language in the classroom; a Transition Year pack; and *Giro d'Italia,* a two-volume Junior Certificate textbook with accompanying CD and teacher's notes. For Spanish: *Usando el español en clase,* a booklet and cassette for teachers to support and encourage the use of the target language in the classroom; and *Meta,* a new Leaving Certificate textbook, with accompanying CD/cassette, teacher's book and internet support. For Japanese: two workbooks, *Katakana Kantan* and *Hiragana Kantan*; and a Transition Year pack. There are two further publications in development: *Nihongo Kantan,* a new Leaving Certificate Japanese textbook, with accompanying CD and teachers' notes, which is due for publication in 2006; and a Russian Transition Year pack, which is being developed in Trinity College Dublin.

6.2.3   Follow-on from the Initiative

In its final phase the Initiative has concentrated its efforts on consolidating the gains made over its lifetime so that those gains will not be lost when the Initiative comes to an end in 2007. The teaching materials produced will continue to be of value for years to come, and both Spanish and Italian are in a stronger position than they were before the Initiative. In the case of Japanese, the challenge is to put in place a mechanism whereby the teaching of the language will be managed when the Initiative has come to an end. The National Co-ordinator and the Steering Committee are currently in discussion with the relevant sections of the Department of Education and Science with a view to finding a solution.

6.3   NCCA Review of Languages in the Post-primary Curriculum

In 2003 the NCCA initiated a review of languages in the post-primary curriculum by publishing a discussion paper, written by Professor David Little, Director of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies of Trinity College Dublin.[33] The scope of the paper was wide: it reviewed the current provision for languages in the post-primary curriculum and went on to identify issues which require discussion. It also considered the challenges that the post-primary curriculum faces from four different sources: the changing language situation in Ireland; internationalisation and Ireland's membership of Europe; the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio; and current trends in language teaching.

6.3.1   Criticisms of the current curriculum

The discussion paper criticises the current curriculum on four interrelated grounds:

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[33] Little, D. (2003) *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: A discussion paper.* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

- ➢ "There is no overarching language policy that provides for the inclusion of languages other than Irish in the post-primary curriculum."
- ➢ "We do not have an integrated language curriculum, but a series of language curricula that are largely independent of one another."
- ➢ "The same Irish curricula are taken by the minority of students who are native speakers of Irish and/or attending Irish-medium schools and the English-medium majority for whom Irish is a second language."[34]
- ➢ "Because we have neither a language policy nor an integrated language curriculum we have no criteria by which to manage diversification, whether that involves introducing new foreign languages or accommodating the mother tongues of newcomer students."

The discussion paper also raises questions about the sustainability of foreign languages in the absence of a language policy, about the levels of communicative proficiency achieved by school-leavers, and about current language teaching methods and forms of assessment. The paper recommends, among other things, that consideration should be given to the formulation of a language policy based on a thorough investigation of Ireland's language needs.

6.3.2   Consultation on the discussion paper

Following the publication of the discussion paper, the NCCA undertook a process of consultation which involved holding two invitational seminars, carrying out an online survey, inviting submissions and holding a seminar for the NCCA's language course committees. This consultation process provided all those with an interest in the teaching and learning of languages in post-primary schools with an opportunity to respond to the discussion paper. A report on the first phase of the review was published in April 2005. The report synthesised the views and observations which emerged during the consultation process and made recommendations for a second phase of the review. The main recommendations were in the areas of

- ➢ the need for an explicit policy on languages in education
- ➢ developments in assessment of current language syllabuses
- ➢ developing a syllabus for native speakers of Irish
- ➢ pilot studies in the areas of integration, language awareness and attainment of proficiency in languages
- ➢ ICT in the teaching and learning of languages
- ➢ Alignment of developments in languages in Ireland with similar developments at the European level.

Arising out of this first phase of the review, it was decided to draft a discussion paper regarding the development of a separate syllabus for native speakers of Irish.

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[34] In 1987 the *Report of the Board of Studies for Languages* recognised that, "The tradition of using the same Irish syllabus for native speakers of Irish and native speakers of English, in Irish-medium schools and in English-medium schools, has worked to the detriment of English speakers and Irish speakers alike. Syllabuses have made over-ambitious demands on English speakers while they have failed to stretch Irish speakers as much as they should. A separate syllabus for Irish in Irish-medium schools must be a priority."

6.4   ELP for language learners at post-primary level

A European Language Portfolio has been developed for use in Irish post-primary schools, based on the syllabi of the Department of Education and Science and the levels set out by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It was developed in the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) of Trinity College Dublin and published by Authentik. The ELP is presented in Irish and English, and allows for recording progress in Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian. Since its launch three years ago approximately 3000 copies of the portfolio have been distributed in Ireland.

The ELP was introduced into a small number of second-level schools by individual teachers for their own subjects on a trial basis. A network of teachers using the ELP was established and met regularly in TCD between 2001 and 2004. A dedicated website was launched as a resource for teachers and a showcase for students' work,[35] and empirical research was carried out by CLCS, which also provided support to the teachers. While the experience of students and teachers who have used the ELP has been very positive, the level of take-up of the second-level portfolio to date has been somewhat disappointing. This is probably because it is not widely known, and most language teachers and school principals have yet to be convinced of its value. If the ELP is to be more widely used, it is essential that its potential for use on a whole-school basis be investigated. The Report on the first phase of the NCCA's Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education suggests that a pilot study in the use of the portfolio could be initiated in the second phase of the review of languages, and this idea is being advanced.

6.5   Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

On the subject of CLIL, the discussion paper *Languages in the Post-primary Curriculum* noted that, "We have Irish-medium schools, of course, but our system has remained almost entirely untouched by the upsurge of international interest in CLIL […]. As a result, we have been largely excluded from a growing European movement that offers a number of benefits calculated to support the implementation of European policy in language education, especially teacher and student exchange of various kinds".[36] These statements accurately reflect the situation regarding CLIL in Ireland where the term itself is little known or used other than among specialists in language education.

6.5.1   Education through foreign languages

There is a very small number of private schools in Ireland where subjects are taught through a language other than English. Examples are: the Lycée Français d'Irlande, where both French and Irish students are taught through French; Elian's Dublin, a private Spanish school which follows the Spanish Bachillerato system, but which

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[35] See www.tcd.ie/CLCS/portfolio/ See also Ema Ushioda and Jennifer Ridley, *Working with the European Language Portfolio in Irish post-primary schools: report on an evaluation project* (CLCS Occasional Paper No. 61, TCD, Autumn 2002).
[36] Little, p. 39.

gives part of the course through English; St Kilian's German School, where at primary level some subjects are offered through English, some through German, and some through both languages. From September 2006, St Kilian's will offer a bilingual Leaving Certificate which will be accepted for university entrance in both Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany. The bilingual Leaving Certificate, to be examined for the first time in 2008, will involve two subjects, German Language and Literature and History. The German course will be an enhanced version of the current Higher Level Leaving Certificate syllabus for German. It will focus on more advanced learning outcomes and on a higher literature component. Specially devised written and oral examinations will be provided, both of which will include strong emphasis on texts. For History, there will be no change to the Leaving Certificate History syllabus, but the section of the examination on Europe and the Wider World in German will be set and answered in German. Students will also complete the research topic in German, thus resulting in three-fifths of the examination being set and answered in German.

6.5.2 Bilingual French pilot project

The only example of CLIL in a foreign language in a public-sector school in Ireland is the French bilingual pilot project which has been ongoing in Newpark Comprehensive School in Dublin since 1995. The original aim of the project, which was jointly supported by the Department of Education and Science and the Service Culturel of the French Embassy, was to produce students with a level of competence in French which would enable them to pursue university studies in France should they wish to do so. The pilot project was launched without any expectation that this type of provision would be extended to other schools. At present, students in this pilot project study a special module in French history, geography and culture in Junior Cycle and Transition Year which is taught through French. This module does not correspond to any recognised subject in the Irish curriculum. For this reason, it is not, strictly speaking, an example of CLIL, but rather an example of students being offered extra exposure to French and a French cultural programme taught through the medium of French.

6.5.3 Extension of CLIL in Ireland

The NCCA discussion paper recommends that consideration be given to establishing a CLIL pilot project involving a small number of volunteer schools and linked to CLIL projects elsewhere. However, in the open consultation process which followed on from the publication of the discussion paper, respondents accorded a low priority to the idea of establishing a pilot study in CLIL. This response is possibly a reflection of the generally low level of awareness of CLIL among the main stakeholders in Irish education. The recent Report on the Feasibility of Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum proposes the setting up of a CLIL pilot project at primary level, and work is now under way on this project. At post-primary level, there is scope to further develop the practice of teaching subjects through the medium of Irish, and to investigate how the experience of teaching through Irish could be used to the advantage of teaching other languages.

7   LANGUAGE IN IRISH SOCIETY

7.1   Attitudes in society

Language plays a very important role in community communicative and identity functions. The relationship between any community and the language(s) it speaks is complex and attitudes to language and to language learning are part of that complexity. Attitudes to language learning in Ireland tend to vary significantly. From time to time, articles appear in the Irish press lamenting the lack of language skills on the part of Irish people and reporting on Ireland's poor performance in surveys. For example, following the publication of a Eurydice survey on teaching languages in schools in Europe, a national daily newspaper reported that Ireland had again performed poorly, concluding that "Ireland is way behind the rest of Europe in the teaching of foreign languages in school." [37]

There is a view commonly held, for example that English is enough and that there is no need to learn other languages since English is a language of international communication. This view, however, ignores or dismisses the importance of language learning as the means by which we gain access to other societies and cultures.

The experience of the Post-primary Languages Initiative and the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative provides evidence that when Irish students get the chance to learn other languages the outcome can be positive, and reports on both initiatives describe the enthusiasm of the students involved.

7.2   Languages for business

In recent years, several reports undertaken by the business sector have mentioned the importance of languages.[38] The most recent of these, an extensive report entitled *Demand and Supply of Modern Language Skills in the Irish Economy* was launched in March 2005 by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, a body appointed by the Irish Government to advise it on aspects of education and training related to the future skills requirement of the enterprise sector of the Irish economy.[39] While the report did not uncover evidence of an acute shortage of language skills in the sector within its remit, it did caution against complacency with regard to the issue and made a number of recommendations, the first of which was that a national languages policy should be formulated by the Department of Education and Science and the NCCA, "to provide an integrated and coherent approach to language education, in all learning contexts." It also recommends that the Modern Languages in Primary Schools programme should be mainstreamed and made available to all schools, that the Post-Primary Languages Initiative should be expanded, and that "the importance of foreign

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[37] *Irish Independent*, 10 February 2005.
[38] Enterprise Strategy Group (2004) *Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy.*
Irish Business and Employers Confederation (2001) *Languages in Business.*
Irish Business and Employers Confederation (2004) *Education for Life – the challenge of the third millennium.*
[39] Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2005) *Languages and Enterprise: The Demand and Supply of Foreign Language Skills in the Enterprise Sector.*

languages as a life-skill, as a promoter of cultural awareness and as a means of enhancing the value of other skills, be they intellectual or vocational, must be reflected in the teaching of languages at all levels of the education system."

The emphasis placed by these various reports and surveys on the importance of languages echoes a statement made in 2000 in the report of the Nuffield Inquiry in the UK: "In a smart and competitive world, exclusive reliance on English leaves the UK vulnerable and dependent on the linguistic competence and goodwill of others". It is a statement with obvious implications for Ireland also.

7.3   Language choice and diversification

In 1999, replies were received from the principals of 485 schools to a questionnaire distributed as part of the *Feasibility Study* into the teaching of Italian, Japanese and Spanish in post-primary schools in Ireland. [40]The questionnaire included the question: "Providing any practical problems can be overcome, what new language(s) are you interested in introducing into your school?" and a wide range of languages was mentioned in the replies. In order of popularity they were: Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic. Asked for the main reason why students chose not to study a particular language, the principals who completed this questionnaire pointed to the influence of parents.

An article published some years ago in the journal *Teangeolas* points out that the view of the public on learning languages is based less on perceived cultural benefits or ideas of personal development than on potential job prospects: "While public attitudes […] are quite supportive of a policy to teach foreign languages in schools, this support rests on a perception that a knowledge of foreign languages is economically beneficial. This vocational element can be seen operating in language subject selection at second and third level. This suggests that language learning will be influenced more by changes in national and international labour markets than by education policy *per se*". [41]

Those involved with the various bodies concerned with language learning in Ireland are already convinced of the value of learning another language: that on a personal level it opens up the mind to new cultures and ways of thinking and equips the learner with transferable language learning skills; that at a professional level speaking a foreign language gives people opportunities they might not otherwise have, including improving the mobility prospects of those who may seek to work or study abroad; that from a national point of view proficiency in languages is vital for maintaining national competitiveness and economic growth in this increasingly globalised society.

However, it cannot be assumed that these beliefs are generally shared by the Irish population and any attempt to strengthen language learning within the educational system may need to be accompanied by a campaign to raise awareness among the general population of the benefits of language learning.

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[40] Cunningham, C., Kelly, J., Millar, A. and Wilson, L. (1999) *Feasibility Study: The Teaching of Italian, Japanese and Spanish in Post-Primary Schools in Ireland.* Marino Institute of Education.

[41] Ó Riagáin, P. and Gorman, T. (1999/2000) "Proficiency of Irish Adults in European Languages, in *Teangeolas, 38/39*, pp. 60-71, p. 66.

8   ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

8.1   National Language Policy and Societal Attitudes

A languages-in-education policy can only operate and be implemented within the wider context of national policy and societal attitudes. The Official Languages Act 2003 is an example of a national language policy which is being actively implemented.

> *Given the growing dominance of English as a lingua franca, what measures should be taken to increase public awareness of the importance of languages other than English?*

8.2   The Irish Language in Society and in Education

The fact that Ireland is a bilingual State is a critical consideration in the construction of a languages-in-education policy. It is clear that the role of the Irish language as an L1 and as an L2 needs to be maintained, supported and extended.

> *How can current concerns regarding the teaching and learning of Irish be actively addressed?*
> *What role can education—including immersion and Gaeltacht education— play in the maintenance and regeneration of Irish and in extending effective bilingualism?*

8.3   Language as a Resource

Attested competence in foreign languages is an essential resource for the State. A languages-in-education policy, therefore, must pay due regard to the cultural, social and economic needs of individual learners and of the State, and should be cognizant of the future requirements of the economy and society.

> *How can the concept of building 'national capacity' in respect of various foreign languages complement the aim of fostering personal plurilingualism?*

8.4   National Policy and European Policy

The European Council (Barcelona March 2002) called on member States "to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age". Ireland has yet to formulate a response to this aspiration of "Mother tongue plus two". At present, most of our school-going students study one foreign language in addition to English and Irish. However, in the absence of a definite languages-in-education policy this situation is unlikely to continue: there are already signs of a falloff in the percentages taking foreign languages in the Leaving Certificate.

> *In the above context, what principles should underpin a languages-in-education policy and what specific objectives as regards Irish, English and other languages should that policy incorporate?*
> *How might that policy foster the notion of developing plurilingual competences?*

> *How could the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio be used in setting goals and measuring progress towards those goals?*

8.5   The Changing Sociolinguistic Map of Ireland

The presence in the education system of large numbers of students whose mother tongue is neither English nor Irish is a new phenomenon, but one which is likely to be with us for the foreseeable future. The NCCA discussion paper on languages in the post-primary curriculum identifies three main issues, equally relevant at primary level, which arise from the fact that Ireland's school-going population is likely to become increasingly multinational, multilingual and multi-ethnic: firstly, the need to integrate newcomers into the education system; secondly, the need to provide the necessary language skills for children whose mother tongue is neither Irish nor English; thirdly, the question of appropriate mother tongue support for the children of newcomers. The Language Education Policy Profile process provides an opportunity to address these issues.

> *How should we be meeting the linguistic needs of newcomers in our schools?*
> *What long-term objectives should we be setting regarding the linguistic needs of newcomers in our schools?*

8.6   An Integrated Approach to Language Teaching

At present, languages tend to be taught in isolation from one another. The potential for making connections between English, Irish and other languages is rarely exploited to any significant extent. There is also a certain discontinuity between primary and post-primary levels, not least in situations where pupils learn a foreign language in primary school.

> *How can we develop an integrated approach to the teaching of languages at both primary and post-primary levels, so that language awareness is fostered and curriculum time is used to the best advantage?*
> *In the context of competing demands for time in an ever more crowded curriculum, how helpful is the idea, proposed in the NCCA discussion paper, of an agreed amount of "curriculum space" for languages?*

8.7   The Future of Modern Foreign Languages in Primary School

It is expected that the revised primary curriculum will have been fully implemented by 2007. Only then can a decision be taken on the future place of modern foreign languages in primary school. In the meantime, the Language Education Policy Profile process provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the future of foreign languages in primary school in the broader policy context and to consider the implications of various long-term options, especially as regards teacher education and supply, and continuity between primary and post-primary levels. The ITÉ evaluation of the pilot project and the NCCA's Feasibility Report provide ample data on which to base reflection and decision-making.

> *What are the key factors that should inform the decision-making process regarding the future of modern languages in primary schools?*

8.8   Assessment for Certification

At post-primary level, languages-in-education policy cannot be considered without reference to assessment and the State examinations. This is especially the case given the high-stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate examination and its dominant role in the system. At present, there are real concerns at the mismatch between syllabus objectives and assessment objectives and methods. The backwash effect of examinations on classroom practice and therefore on language acquisition is incontestable.

➢ *How can a closer match between syllabus objectives, pedagogical practice and student assessment be achieved?*
➢ *In this regard, what use can be made of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR, and the European Language Portfolio?*

8.9   Support for Languages at Post-primary Level

December 2006 will see the end of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative, established under the National Development Plan in 2000 to support the implementation of the policy of the Department of Education and Science of diversifying, enhancing and expanding the teaching of languages in second level schools. Similar support will be needed in the future if other 'new' languages are to be introduced. However, it has become increasingly clear that *all* languages, even those which are well established, are going to need support on an ongoing basis. Without definite intervention, especially in the areas of awareness-raising and teacher in-career development, it is almost inevitable that the situation of languages at second level will continue to decline.

➢ *What form should that intervention take?*
➢ *Should there be a new phase of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative with a broader remit, or should support be provided through some combination of other structures and actions?*

8.10   Exploring the Potential of Immersion Education and CLIL

Ireland has a tradition of immersion education to teach the Irish language. However, *partial* bilingual programmes or CLIL-type models or options—where parts of the curriculum are taught through the L2 (Irish) or a foreign language—have not been adopted to any significant extent.

➢ *What can be done to explore the potential of such programmes?*
➢ *How might our tradition in Irish immersion programmes be used to the advantage of learning other languages?*

8.11   Languages at Third Level

Since language learning at third level impacts on language learning at post-primary level, and vice versa, a cause for concern is the falling numbers of students who opt to study foreign languages at third level. While this area is strictly outside the scope of the Language Education Policy Profile process, the uptake of languages at third level is indicative of a changing perception of the importance of languages for life and

careers. One area where third level has direct impact on primary and post-primary levels is the area of teacher education and supply.

> *Has the time come to consider models of initial teacher education for second-level language teachers other than the traditional one of B.A. plus Higher Diploma in Education?*
> *What can we learn from models of language teacher education in operation in other countries?*
> *What role can third level colleges play in the provision of in-career development for teachers?*

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