

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030

Progress Report: 2010 to 2015

Department of Education and Skills
November 2015

1. Introduction

Over the last five years, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has continued to fulfil the commitments set out in its implementation plan under the 20-Year Strategy for Irish on a phased and systematic basis. This report gives an insight into the progress made during this period under the following headings:

- Interdepartmental High-Level Group
- Gaeltacht education
- Curriculum development
 - Primary level
 - Post-primary level
- Assessment
- COGG - Support services and resources
- Teacher education
- Links with the use of the language outside of school
 - Irish language colleges
- Exemptions from Irish
- Provision for Irish-medium schools
- Policy for Irish in the public service.

2. Interdepartmental High-Level Group

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) co-operate with each other on an ongoing basis to share information and promote best practice with regard to the Irish Language in the education system. The High-Level Group, established under the auspices of the 20-Year Strategy, meets regularly to review the progress being made in relation to the educational policies stated in the 20-Year Strategy and to explore possible changes, including the development of new policies for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools. The high-level group comprises representatives of the relevant stakeholders, including the DES, the DAHG, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

3. Gaeltacht education

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) recognises the significant linguistic and cultural importance of the Gaeltacht. In light of the challenges facing Gaeltacht schools, the DES initiated a review of Gaeltacht education in 2014. The objectives of this review were to identify policy options to provide a quality education in Gaeltacht primary and post-primary schools with different linguistic profiles. Another objective was to clarify the DES policy with regard to teaching through the medium of Irish in Gaeltacht schools. The review also explored the impact of pre-school provision on primary education in Gaeltacht areas. This review supports the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

The review of Gaeltacht education was conducted on a consultation basis and the High-Level Group that was established under the 20-Year Strategy participated in that consultation process.

The review of Gaeltacht education comprised a number of strands, including an analysis of the provision for pre-school, primary school and post-primary school education in Gaeltacht areas and an analysis of the demand for that provision; a review of research in this country; a review of research and policy in other jurisdictions; case-studies in a sample of schools; and stakeholder surveys. A report was published on each of the strands and the outcomes of those reports were used in the final report, *Policy Proposals for Educational Provision in Gaeltacht Areas*, which was published in early May 2015. These Policy Proposals as well as consultation materials and research reports can be accessed at www.education.gov.ie.

A comprehensive consultation process took place between May and October 2015. As part of the consultation process, all interested parties were invited to complete a survey and make written submissions on the policy proposals for Gaeltacht education. In June 2015, three consultation meetings held in the Gaeltacht areas of Killarney, Spiddal and Gweedore were attended by more than 170 people, the majority of whom were primary and post-primary school teachers, representatives of community and language organisations, representatives of local educational institutions, and representatives of language-planning committees. A series of follow-up consultation meetings was subsequently convened in the DES with various sectoral groups and stakeholders. As part of the Civil Service Open Policy Debates, the DES organised a forum on the Policy for Gaeltacht Education on the 19th October 2015 in partnership with the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht (DAHG). The objective of this open policy debate was to reflect on and explore the major themes and issues emerging from the consultation process for Gaeltacht education. Attention was drawn to the following areas which emerged from the consultation process, in particular:

- Structure of schooling in the Gaeltacht at primary level
- Structure of schooling in the Gaeltacht at post-primary level
- Teacher supply and teacher standards
- Early-years educational provision
- Language supports for teachers and language standards in Gaeltacht schools
- Educational material and the curriculum
- Parents supporting Gaeltacht schooling
- Gaeltacht schooling and the language-planning process.

Materials and a video of the forum's events can be accessed at www.education.gov.ie.

The discussion will guide the drafting of the DES policy for Gaeltacht education. It is intended to finalise the policy for Gaeltacht education in light of the outcomes of the consultation process and the open debates and to submit the policy to the Minister for Education and Skills and the Government at the start of 2016. It is intended to publish the policy for Gaeltacht education in 2016.

4. Curriculum development - primary

4.1 Primary level

Primary Language Curriculum

In respect to the primary-level curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has focused on the development of an integrated language curriculum from infants to second class. This curriculum will clearly outline the learning outcomes which students will achieve at various stages of their primary schooling. Learning outcomes for Irish and English for both English-medium schools and Irish-medium schools will be differentiated.

It is intended to publish the curriculum for infants to second class along with a representative sample of support material for teachers online in December 2015. A hardcopy version of the curriculum along with a memory stick containing all of the support material will be sent to each teacher and student teacher early in 2016.

The new language curriculum will be implemented in infant classes to second class over a period of two years, beginning in September 2016. A continuing professional development (CPD) support programme will be provided to schools and teachers to help them become familiar with the content and structure of the curriculum and to plan their teaching according to the new curriculum.

Work will begin in 2016 on the development of the language curriculum for third class to sixth class. It is expected that this part of the curriculum will be published by September 2018.

Immersion period

The DES has taken steps to clarify its policy on immersion education in primary schools. It is stated in the new Primary Language Curriculum that Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools, will be allowed to implement a period of immersion education in Irish. Under these arrangements, the teaching of English in Irish-medium schools may be postponed until the end of senior infants' class, subject to the approval of the school's board of management and after consultation with the patron, teachers and the parents' association. As a result, schools will have flexibility to implement immersion education whilst having due regard to the school's circumstances and the needs of its students.

Partial immersion and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

The 20-Year Strategy for Irish emphasises the implementation of partial immersion in all primary schools. The NCCA has prepared support material to help schools operating through the medium of English to teach some subjects or aspects of subjects through the medium of Irish on a phased basis in the context of the language curriculum.

4.2 Post-primary level

The new Junior Cycle – full specification

The NCCA has prepared a draft specification for Irish in the Junior Cycle which will accommodate students attending English-medium schools. Provision will be made in the new specification for assessment of oral language. This reflects the DES commitment to the development of learners' oral language competence in particular.

The NCCA is also exploring how best to meet the needs of students in Irish-medium post-primary schools, including native Irish speakers, at junior cycle level in order to enable such students to achieve the highest standards of language competence. The NCCA convened a consultative forum at the beginning of October 2015 to discuss this issue. Due to this additional development work, it is now intended to introduce the Irish specification for the Junior Cycle in 2017.

5. Assessment

Standardised testing

Two sets of standardised tests in Irish reading have now been developed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), one for Irish-medium schools and the other for English-medium schools. The use of such tests is optional in English-medium schools, but mandatory at the end of second class, fourth class and sixth class in Irish-medium schools. Each Irish-medium school is required to report the results of these tests to parents and the school's board of management. Each school is also required to report the results of assessments to the Department of Education and Skills (DES) using an online facility.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) also envisages the introduction of full-cohort standardised achievement testing of English, Mathematics and Science in English-medium schools in

second year and of Irish, English, Mathematics and Science in Irish-medium schools. Given the impact that this will have on assessment for second year students, and the need to embed the other changes in assessment at junior cycle, the DES will review time for, and the phasing of, the introduction of such full-cohort testing in schools in the context of the interim review of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Spoken Irish in the current Junior Cycle

Since 2010, changes have been made to the distribution of marks in the different components of Junior Certificate exams in Irish. These changes resulted in an increase in the weighting of marks awarded to the optional spoken component from 20% to 40%. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of candidates and schools taking part in the Optional Irish Oral Test at Junior Certificate level. The optional oral test was available in 16 schools in 2007, in 24 schools in 2009, in 196 schools in 2013 and in 309 schools in 2015. 339 candidates (1%) sat the optional oral test in 2007, compared with 10,640 candidates (20%) in 2013 and 16,529 candidates (32%) in 2015.

Review of the Irish Oral Exam in the Leaving Certificate

In 2012, changed assessment arrangements at Leaving Certificate increased the weighting of marks allocated to the oral exam from 25% to 40%. There has been a large increase in the number of students taking higher level in Leaving Certificate exams, increasing from 33% in 2010 to 42% in 2015.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is reviewing the impact of these changed assessment arrangements in light of feedback from students who sat the Leaving Certificate in 2014 and those who sat the test in 2011. The NCCA will take the outcomes of the review into account in future curricular and assessment developments at senior cycle level. It is expected that the outcomes of the research will be published in 2016.

6. Support services and resources

In accordance with its remit, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) continues:

- to plan for and co-ordinate the provision of textbooks and resources in support of the teaching and learning of Irish. COGG supplies a range of resources on a continuous basis
- to provide support services to Irish-medium schools. For example, COGG is providing bursaries to students enrolled on the M.Ed. in Irish-medium education
- to fund and publish a range of research papers.

Since July 2013, COGG has been co-located with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This has enabled the NCCA and COGG to collaborate so that Irish language curricula and materials are developed in tandem with each other. For example, COGG and the NCCA are preparing a joint submission for the DES regarding the development of an Irish language programme that will support English-medium primary schools and their teachers to deliver the curriculum for Irish.

COGG has supported the DES in the implementation of a certain number of strands relating to the DES review of Gaeltacht Education. For example, COGG commissioned a review of research relating to national policies and practice in other jurisdictions which are comparable to Gaeltacht areas.

COGG has appointed a new board and the term of office of the new members will run until the end of 2018. The twelve new members include representatives from Foras na Gaeilge, Gaelscoileanna Teoranta and Údarás na Gaeltachta. COGG plays a central co-ordinating role in the development of education through the medium of Irish and in the teaching of Irish to ensure that Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools have access to quality teaching resources.

In view of the duties which COGG will have, particularly in providing teaching resources in response to developments for Irish at primary and junior cycle level, and the review of Gaeltacht education, COGG has been given permission to approve two new education officers.

Programme for English-medium schools

COGG has reviewed the Irish-language programmes already available to decide on the best approach to designing an Irish programme for English-medium schools. In partnership with the NCCA, COGG has initiated a process to prepare an Irish programme for English-medium schools. COGG will employ an education officer to undertake this work.

Digitisation of Séideán Sí

Work is ongoing to digitise reading materials for Séideán Sí, which is currently available in hardcopy form only. Séideán Sí is an integrated Irish-language programme specifically designed to support the teaching of Irish in Irish-medium schools and in Gaeltacht primary schools. This initiative is a collaborative partnership involving Foras na Gaeilge and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland as key partners and assisted by DES, COGG and others. Digital resources are available for infant classes on www.seideansi.ie. Schools will have access to the digitised material for first and second classes in late January 2016. Work is now underway on preparing digitised materials for third and fourth classes.

7. Teacher education

Continuing professional development

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) continues to support teachers in the delivery of Irish-language curricula at both primary and post-primary levels. Particular emphasis is placed on in-school support and provision of support materials online. A range of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) events are provided based on national education priorities. These include a wide range of workshops covering relevant themes. In addition to this, the Tionól Teagaisc is organised annually as an event for teachers to share good practice. Both primary school teachers and post-primary school teachers took part in the Tionól in 2015.

The north/south project for Irish-medium schools and Gaeltacht schools that was ongoing from 2010 between the PDST and the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) for the teaching of Irish, school leadership, school self-evaluation and designing mathematical material is concluding in 2015/2016.

CPD in the context of the new junior cycle specification for Irish is expected to begin in 2016/2017, a year in advance of the introduction of the specification to schools. CPD content will be differentiated for Irish-medium and English-medium schools, as appropriate.

Initial Teacher Education

In February 2013, the Teaching Council commissioned an online survey on the criteria relating to entry to programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Included was a proposal to raise the entry requirement in Irish from C3 Higher to a B Higher. The overall results of the survey were inconclusive. In summary, while a majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the entry criteria as a whole, a majority also expressed dissatisfaction with each of the requirements for Mathematics, English and Irish. The Council concluded that this did not offer a sound basis on which to develop advice for the Minister. Accordingly, it commissioned research with the Economic Social and Research Institute (ESRI) on the matter. A report on this research is due to be submitted to the Council soon.

At least one third-level Institute of Education has expressed interest regarding the provision of an ITE course entirely through Irish at primary level. At post-primary level, the Faculty of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway, is seeking to increase its capacity to deliver ITE provision through the medium of Irish. The DES is supportive in principle of such proposals and the possible options

regarding ITE through Irish will be looked at in detail when the DES is finalising its Gaeltacht Education Policy; however, in exploring the feasibility of the possible options, account must be taken of any consequential impacts, such as on resources and teacher supply.

Gaeltacht Learning Placement

There has been a lengthening of initial teacher education. This includes a longer Gaeltacht Placement (extended from one 3-week period to two 2-week periods). As well as the changes to the Gaeltacht placement, provision for Irish has been strengthened in general as part of the overall restructuring of initial teacher education programmes.

During 2013, DES engaged with DAHG and the Teaching Council to ensure that a more integrated framework is in place to support the implementation of the Gaeltacht Placement for student teachers. The ITE providers have developed a common syllabus to be used by all Gaeltacht course providers that run Irish courses for student teachers. As well as this, the Teaching Council is also happy to co-operate with course providers making differentiated provision available to student teachers with a strong competence in Irish, including students who reside in Gaeltacht areas.

A range of proposed policies to improve teacher supply for the Irish-medium education sector are mentioned in the document *Policy Proposals for Gaeltacht Education*. These proposals relate to Initial Teacher Education and to Continuing Professional Development for teachers, and each option will be considered as the DES finalises its Gaeltacht Education Policy.

Report on teacher supply

The Teaching Council is finalising a report on research carried out on teacher supply with a view to developing a teacher supply model. Teacher supply in the Irish-medium sector is included as part of this research. The Teaching Council delivered an initial report at the end of 2014. The final report in relation to supply at primary level is expected to be delivered by the end of 2015. The Council is to further consider the issue of supply at post-primary level.

8. Links with the use of the language outside of school

Irish-language Colleges

The DES Inspectorate supports the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) by evaluating the quality of educational provision in a sample number of Irish-language colleges each year. Usually, inspectors visit a quarter of colleges every year and aspects of provision are reviewed, including management and leadership, teaching and learning, and effectiveness of language and cultural activities. Again in 2015, inspectors visited 32 Irish-language courses that are run by different management committees and are located in various Gaeltacht areas.

The quality and effect of the educational provision is described and areas for improvement are identified in the composite report on Irish language colleges that was published by the DES Inspectorate in 2015. Attention is drawn to the need for the colleges to continuously improve the educational provision that they offer to students. This composite report can be accessed at www.education.gov.ie.

DES inspectors prepare written reports for DAHG and for the management of Irish-language colleges on the quality of educational provision in all Irish-language colleges in which evaluations are carried out. A consultation process with stakeholders was engaged in during 2015 on the Inspectorate's intention to publish evaluation reports on individual Irish-language Colleges on the DES website in 2016.

9. Provision for Irish-medium schools

New schools

In accordance with an announcement from the Minister in 2011 that approximately 20 new primary schools would be established in the period until 2015, four were designated to be Irish-medium schools. Three of the 17 post-primary schools to be established in the period until 2014 were to be Irish-medium schools. These targets have been met.

Seven new primary schools were established in 2012, of which one was an Irish-medium school; seven new schools were established in 2013, of which three were Irish-medium schools. Two new Irish-medium colleges were established at post-primary level in 2014- in Balbriggan and Balinteer/Dundrum. In the same year, two Irish-medium units were established at post-primary level- in Maynooth Community College and in Gaelcholáiste Dáibhís, Mallow. One new Irish-medium college at post-primary level, Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin, was established in 2015.

Primary school provision

At primary level, the need for an Irish-medium school in areas of population growth will be decided based on demographic factors, demand from parents and applications for patronage from potential patrons. In areas in which the population remains steady, DES will facilitate the divestment of existing English-medium schools to new patrons, including those that will establish an Irish-medium school. Another option that the DES intends to explore is the concept of a satellite school where an Irish-medium unit shares a building with an English-medium school but is managed by a parent Irish-medium school located elsewhere.

Post-primary provision

The DES is committed to making Irish-medium education available at post-primary level, taking account of both the demand for such provision in the area and the availability of resources. The DES will continue to identify areas where there is a need for a new stand-alone Irish-medium school in accordance with a threshold of demand (i.e. 400 students) that is considerably lower than the equivalent for English-medium schools (i.e. between 800 and 1,000 students). Other options, such as Irish-medium units and Irish-medium streams attached to an English-medium school are considered in areas where the demand for Irish-medium education does not meet this threshold. The extent to which students are immersed in the Irish language in units and streams will be contingent on a number of interrelated factors, e.g. support from the management of the host school, the level of demand for Irish-medium instruction in the school, whole-school planning, and the arrangements in place for the allocation of teaching resources.

10. Review of Exemptions from Irish

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has carried out a review of exemptions from the study of Irish in primary schools and post-primary schools. The case studies carried out during the review give a comprehensive insight into current practice. As part of this review, details were collected in relation to the basis on which exemptions were requested, granted and rejected at school level. These details will give an insight into the trends in and implications for exemption provision with regard to the curricular choices (including other languages) of those students who were granted exemptions and the results they obtained in their examinations.

On foot of the DES review, analysis is being carried out on the findings and a report is being prepared. Arising from the report, a new draft circular will be prepared and the guidelines for parents updated. These will be issued for consultation and, for that purpose, a meeting of the key partners will be convened to determine the best way forward. This review is expected to be completed in 2016.

11. Policy for Irish in the Public Service

The Department of Education and Skills' (DES) Irish Language Scheme 2013-2016 contains a range of commitments with regard to the provision of an acceptable level of service through Irish. It is a requirement of the Official Languages Act that documents setting out public policy proposals, annual reports, strategy statements, and matters considered to be of major public importance are provided by Government departments in both Irish and English. In addition, a dedicated telephone number for queries in Irish has been put in place on a pilot basis. The purpose of this service is to provide first point of contact in the Irish language for Irish speakers. The DES Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) provides appropriate Irish-language training for all staff to meet priority business needs.

The DES recognises the importance of having a number of staff fluent in and capable of providing a service in Irish. In this context, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has indicated that they would require bilingual educational psychologists in certain regional locations and have provided training for their psychologists. In line with Government policy, future language schemes of the DES under the Official Languages Act will specify the posts/areas that have a requirement for competency in the Irish Language.

The Inspectorate continues to enhance its existing provision of a bilingual inspection service and its capacity to deliver a service through Irish. In the period between 2013 and 2015, the Inspectorate made evaluation visits and/or support visits for self-evaluation through Irish in more than two-thirds of Irish-medium primary schools and in more than three-quarters of Irish-medium post-primary schools outside the Gaeltacht. In the same period, the Inspectorate made evaluation visits and/or support visits for self-evaluation through Irish in up to two-thirds of primary schools and in the vast majority (92%) of post-primary schools located in Gaeltacht areas. More than one visit was made in the case of the majority of Irish-medium schools and Gaeltacht schools visited in this period.

The Inspectorate continues to appoint inspectors at recruitment-grade level with a view to continuing and enhancing the delivery of a service through Irish. As part of its Continuing Professional Development programme, the Inspectorate continues to build the capacity of its staff to provide inspection services in Irish. Immersion courses in the Gaeltacht are provided, as are centrally-located language courses which focus on the development of accurate and effective communication in Irish. Other training courses through Irish are also provided for inspectors to support the development of the Inspectorate team's ability to communicate in Irish and to carry out inspections through Irish.

Currently, the DES can deliver the above services through Irish when necessary. In the event of a difficulty arising in these areas in the future, the DES will consider having a targeted recruitment competition in which a candidate, in addition to satisfying the professional criteria for the position, will have to be proficient in the Irish and English language.

The DES Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) is committed to providing appropriate training and development opportunities, including Irish Language training, for all staff with a view to meeting priority business needs.

12. Conclusion

It is clear that significant progress has been achieved in the last five years on the educational policies mentioned in the 20-Year Strategy for Irish, especially those in relation to curricular and assessment developments in Irish, strengthening of Irish-medium education, including Gaeltacht education, and developments in initial education and continuing professional development for teachers. In the period ahead, the Department of Education and Skills is committed to building on the progress achieved to date, to continuing the policies in progress in the education system and to implementing new policies in due course.