

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030

Progress Report: July 2013 - September 2014

Department of Education and Skills

In the last year, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) continued to adhere to the commitments set out in its implementation plan under the Strategy. The following summarises the progress made during the year under a number of headings:

1. Gaeltacht Education

- DES has commenced a review of education in the Gaeltacht with a view to identifying options for educational provision in primary and post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas of varying linguistic profiles as well as clarifying the Department's policy with regard to teaching through Irish in such schools. The review will also look at the impact of pre-school provision on primary education in Gaeltacht areas. Furthermore, the review will identify support measures for teachers' practice that would be required to improve teaching through Irish in Gaeltacht schools. This review will complement the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act 2012.
- The review will be carried out on a consultative basis including the involvement of the High Level Group established under the 20-Year Strategy - this group includes DES, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG), Foras na Gaeilge, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and Údarás na Gaeltachta. DES is collaborating with DAHG and Údarás na Gaeltachta during this review.
- The review involves multiple strands including an analysis of supply and demand for pre-school, primary and post-primary education in Gaeltacht areas, a review of national research, a review of research and policy in other jurisdictions, case studies in a sample of schools and surveys of stakeholders.

Progress to date is as follows:

- ***Analysis of supply and demand:*** Work is ongoing between DES and DAHG and other parties such as Údarás na Gaeltachta in relation to the collection and mapping of data from relevant databases onto the new language planning areas identified under the Gaeltacht Act. The recording and analysis of the data will be completed once DES receives all relevant data.

- **Review of national research:** This analysis is being carried out within DES and a first draft report has been prepared. Work will continue to finalise the report in the coming months.
- **Review of research, policy and practice in other jurisdictions:** The focus of this research has been on relevant literature, national policies and practice in other jurisdictions that are comparable socio-linguistically to the Gaeltacht areas e.g. Catalonia, Wales, Welsh in Wales; Basque and Catalan in Spain; Frisian in the Netherlands, Scottish Gaelic; Maori in New Zealand. COGG has commissioned the research on behalf of DES. The research has been carried out by a group of researchers from St Patrick's College. A draft of the report has been prepared. The report when finalised will be considered by the Minister and the Department and will then be published.
- **Surveys of the main stakeholders:** The online surveys of stakeholders will focus on possible policy measures and solutions to address the challenges that relate to pre-school, primary and post-primary educational provision in the Gaeltacht.

Arrangements for the implementation of a survey of stakeholders in relation to primary and post-primary educational provision are currently being considered.

- **Case studies:** Case studies on Irish medium practice have been carried out by the inspectorate in a sample of primary (8) and post-primary schools (5) during May and June. A pilot of the instruments to be used in the case studies was carried out in a primary and post-primary school in March.
- **Final report:** A report will be provided on each of the strands which will inform the final report. It is expected that the report of the review will be available for consideration by the Minister by the end of 2014.

2. Curriculum development - primary

2.1 New language curriculum

- The focus of curricular activity at primary level is the development of an integrated language curriculum which is informed by a number of research papers commissioned by the NCCA. This curriculum will clearly outline the learning outcomes that pupils will achieve at different stages of their primary schooling. Learning outcomes for Irish and English for both English and Irish medium schools will be differentiated. A draft of the learning outcomes for infants to second class is currently available for consultation until 11 July 2014. The NCCA

advises that the language curriculum for these classes will be published in early 2015.

- The Department had initially indicated that the new language curriculum would be introduced to infant classes only in 2015. With the approval of the Minister, it has now been decided that the introduction of the language curriculum will be deferred until September 2016 when the curriculum will be implemented for all classes from infants to second class. This should allow for the delivery of the curriculum in a more efficient manner and allow for a whole school approach to language curriculum implementation. The new language programme for Irish in English medium schools that is being co-developed by COGG and NCCA is also likely to be available by September 2016. Delaying the introduction of the new curriculum until 2016 will allow more time for teachers to engage with the supports and CPD activity necessary to become familiar with the curriculum.

2.2 Partial immersion/CLIL

- The 20-Year Strategy for Irish emphasises the implementation of partial immersion in all primary schools. The current primary curriculum advocates the teaching of some subjects or aspects of subjects through Irish but this practice is rare in schools. The NCCA has been asked to advise on partial immersion (or Content and Language Integrated Learning) as part of its work on the development of a language curriculum at primary level. In collaboration with the NCCA, the Professional Development Service for Teachers is currently implementing a CLIL initiative with seven schools teaching visual arts through Irish. The aims of the initiative are:
 - To provide teachers with a suite of lessons to enable them to implement CLIL in their class rooms
 - To have continued support for teachers involved in CLIL
 - To promote improvement in the communicative language of the children and to develop teachers' confidence in using the language during classroom instruction

This will inform the considerations of how CLIL might be employed to support the teaching and learning of Irish in primary schools in the context of the new curriculum.

2.3 Irish language programme for English medium schools

- The NCCA and COGG have been invited to make a joint submission to DES on the development of an Irish language programme that will support the implementation of the new curriculum for Irish in English-medium schools.

COGG and NCCA have agreed that COGG will review the programmes already on the market and that the joint proposal will be prepared in light of that review. A plan of work for the implementation of the proposal is expected from COGG by September 2014.

2.4 Digitisation of Séideán Sí

- Plans are in train to digitise the reading materials currently available in hard copy for Séideán Sí, the integrated Irish language programme that has been especially designed to support the teaching of Irish in Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht primary schools. A dedicated website will be provided which will give teachers and learners access to the digitised materials. This initiative is a collaborative partnership involving Foras na Gaeilge and CCEA in Northern Ireland as key partners and assisted by DES, COGG and others.

2.5 Prescription of the Primary Curriculum

- DES is taking steps to clarify its policy on immersion education in primary schools. It plans to prescribe the primary curriculum as soon as possible and to make arrangements that will allow for a period of immersion education in Irish to be implemented in Irish-medium primary schools. These arrangements will provide for a delay in the teaching of English in Irish-medium schools up to the end of the first term of senior infants, subject to the approval of the school's board of management and following consultation with the patron, teachers and parents' association. This arrangement will give sufficient flexibility to schools to engage in the practice of total immersion while remaining cognisant of school context factors and the needs of the pupils.

Work has commenced on the drafting of the regulatory instrument to prescribe the primary curriculum. It is expected that the instrument will be passed through the relevant legislative processes during the school year 2014/15.

3. Curriculum development- post-primary

3.1 New Junior Cycle - full specification

- The key curricular development at post-primary level is the development of a new specification for Irish as part of Junior Cycle reform. A background paper, which will inform the development of the new specification, was published for the purposes of consultation (November 2013 - January 2014). The new specification will be finalised for consultation by the end of 2014. The new specification will make provision for an oral language assessment- this is reflective of the

Department's commitment to the development of learners' oral language competence in particular.

3.2 New Junior Cycle - short course

- On the request of DES, the NCCA will also during 2014 carry out initial work on the development of a short course which will meet the specific needs of students in Irish medium schools. The new short course in Irish will allow students to engage with particular aspects of Irish language learning from a different perspective, such as those related to literature

4. Assessment

4.1 Standardised testing

- Standardised tests in Irish reading are now available from the Educational Research Centre for administration by all primary schools at 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. 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 to the school board of management. Each school is also required to report the results of the assessments to DES using an online facility.
- The administration of standardised testing in Irish as part of the new Junior Cycle will be introduced in spring 2018. Decisions in relation to the development of such standardised tests need to be made.

4.2 Oral Irish – current Junior Certificate

- From 2010, there have been changes in the distribution of the marks in the various components in Junior Certificate examinations for Irish. These changes resulted in an increase in the proportion of marks awarded to the optional oral component from 20% to 40%. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of candidates and schools who participated in the optional oral Irish test at Junior Certificate Level in 2010 and this increased significantly further in 2013 with over 10,000 taking the examination in 2013. Students are assessed by their own teachers.

In 2013, a total of 10,486 candidates took the optional oral test compared to 7,388 candidates in 2012 (an increase of 3,098 candidates). 24 schools offered the

optional oral in 2009, 54 schools in 2010, 94 schools in 2011, 155 schools in 2012 and 194 schools in 2013.

4.3 Oral Irish – Senior Cycle

- In 2012, changed assessment arrangements at Leaving Certificate increased the weighting of marks allocated to the oral assessment from 25% to 40%. The NCCA is carrying out a review of the impact of these changed assessment arrangements in light of the experiences of students who sat the Leaving Certificate in 2014 relative to those of students in 2011. A draft report of that review is expected by the end of 2014.
- The NCCA review will take account of the findings of a review commissioned by COGG and published in 2013 on the impact of the assessment arrangements at Leaving Certificate.

5. School Provision - Irish medium

5.1 New schools

- In accordance with the Minister's announcement in 2011, four of some 20 new primary schools to be established up to 2015 are to be designated as Irish medium schools. Three of the 17 post-primary schools to be established up to 2014 will be Irish medium schools.

One new Irish medium primary school out of seven new schools was established in 2012; three new Irish medium schools out of seven new schools were established in 2013.

Two new Gaelcholáistí at post-primary level were established in 2014 - Balbriggan and Ballinteer/Dundrum.

One new Gaelcholáiste at post-primary level is to be established in 2015 - Carrigaline.

5.2 Primary provision

- At primary level, the need for a gaelscoil in areas of demographic growth will be decided on the basis of demographic factors and parental demand and applications for patronage from potential patrons. In areas of stable demographic numbers, DES will facilitate the divesting of existing English language schools to new patrons including those who will operate them as gaelscoileanna. Another option

that DES intends exploring is the concept of a satellite school where the Irish-medium unit shares a building with an English-medium school but is managed by a parent Irish-medium school located elsewhere.

5.3 Post-primary provision

- DES is committed to making Irish medium education available at post-primary taking account of the demand for such provision in an area and the availability of resources. DES will continue to identify areas where there is need for a new stand-alone Irish medium school in accordance with a threshold of demand (i.e. 400 pupils) that is considerably lower than the equivalent for English-medium schools (i.e. between 800 and 1,000 pupils). Other options such as Irish language units and Irish language 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 such as support from 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.

6. Teacher Education

- The Professional Development Service for Teachers continues to support teachers in the delivery of Irish curricula at both primary and post-primary levels with a particular emphasis on in-school support and provision of materials online. A range of relevant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events (seminars and workshops) are offered based on national education priorities. These include school self-evaluation and Link Teacher (for literacy and numeracy) seminars for Irish-medium schools and a range of workshops covering areas such as accuracy, understanding and reading. In addition to this, the Tionól Teagaisc event was held for post-primary teachers. At primary level, a North/South project involving Gaelscoileanna is on-going. Attendance at CPD events in 2013/14 was as follows:
 - **CPD Primary:** Gaeilge CPD - 79 teachers; School Self Evaluation through Irish – 146 teachers
 - **CPD Post-primary:** Gaeilge CPD - 334 teachers; Tionól Teagaisc – 223 teachers; School Self Evaluation as Gaeilge – 49 teachers
 - **Workshops:** 160 primary teachers; 184 post-primary teachers
 - **In-school support:** 1,437 primary teachers and 1064 post-primary teachers

- CPD in the context of the new junior cycle specification for Irish is expected to begin in 2015/16, a year in advance of the introduction of the specification in schools. CPD content will be differentiated for Irish-medium and English-medium schools, as appropriate.
- The Teaching Council commissioned an online survey on a number of aspects of entry criteria for programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in February 2013. Included was a proposal to raise the entry requirement in Irish from C3 Higher to a B Higher. The overall results of that 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 Maths, English and Gaeilge. The Council felt that this did not offer a sound basis on which to develop advice for the Minister. Accordingly, it commissioned research with the ESRI on the matter. This research is ongoing and a report is due to be considered by Council before the end of this year. It is the Council's intention that advice should follow in Q1 2015.
- At least one College of Education has expressed interest regarding the provision of ITE courses fully through Irish at primary level. The discussions are at an early stage. At post-primary level, NUIG wants to expand the numbers (currently 40) on its ITE programme which is delivered through Irish. The Department is supportive in principle of such proposals; however, in exploring the feasibility for same, account must be taken for any consequent impacts such as on resources and teacher supply.
- There has been a lengthening of initial teacher education. This includes an extended Gaeltacht Placement experience (from one 3-week period to two 2-week periods). As well as the changes to the Gaeltacht placement, as part of the overall reconfiguration of primary initial teacher education programmes, provision for Irish has been strengthened across the board.
- During 2013, DES engaged with DAHG and the Teaching Council to ensure that a more cohesive 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. The Teaching Council is also open to course providers making differentiated provision available to student teachers with a strong competence in Irish, including students who reside in Gaeltacht areas.

7. COGG

- Since July 2013, COGG has been co-located with the NCCA. This has enabled NCCA and COGG to collaborate so that Irish language curricula and materials are developed in tandem with each other. An example of this is the joint submission that DES has invited the NCCA and COGG to make on the development of an Irish language programme for English-medium schools.
- COGG is supporting DES in the implementation of a number of strands relating to the DES review of Gaeltacht Education. It has commissioned a review of research, national policies and practice in other jurisdictions that are comparable to Gaeltacht areas. It has also started preparations for the development of an online survey of stakeholders at primary and post-primary level.
- In accordance with its remit, COGG also continues:
 - to plan for and co-ordinate the provision of textbooks and resources in support of the teaching and learning of Irish. COGG published a range of resources in 2013 and will fund 30 applications for the development of resources in 2014.
 - to provide support service to schools that teach through Irish. For example, COGG has provided bursaries to students enrolled on the M.Ed. in Irish Medium Education - the first cohort of students are due to complete this course.
 - to fund and publish a range of research papers.

8. Other

8.1 Exemptions from Irish

- The Department has commenced a review of exemptions from Irish. The research will:
 - Establish data regarding the number and the trends in the provision of exemptions and the basis on which the exemptions have been sought, granted and refused at school level.
 - Examine the pattern of appeals, including numbers sought, numbers granted and numbers refused.
 - Examine the curricular choices (including other language choices) and examination outcomes of students to which exemptions had been granted to establish the impact, if any, that exemptions have had on the students involved.
- The review will involve a number of strands, namely the analysis of data held by the Department, consideration of the findings of relevant external research, and case studies in a small sample of schools. Information from these strands will

inform the provision of a report on current exemption arrangements and recommendations on future arrangements. Arising from the report, a new draft circular will be prepared and the guidelines for parents updated. These will be issued for consultation with a meeting of the key partners to determine the best way forward.

- The analysis of the data held within the Department has commenced and will be completed by November 2014. The case studies will be carried out at the end of Sept/beginning of October based on the learning from piloting of instruments in two schools. The pilot has been completed. A report will be provided for consideration by the Minister early in 2015.

9. Measures for Irish in the Public Service

- The Department's 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, statements of strategy, and matters considered to be of major public importance, are communicated by Government Departments in both Irish and English and this is current practice. 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 an Irish language first point of contact for Irish language speakers. The Department's Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) provides appropriate Irish language training for all staff to meet priority business needs.
- The Department recognises the importance of having a number of staff fluent in and capable of providing a service in Irish. In that context, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has indicated that they would have a requirement for bilingual Educational Psychologists in certain regional locations and have provided training for their psychologists this summer. In line with Government policy, future language schemes of the Department under the Official Languages Act will specify the posts that have an Irish language competency requirement.
- The Inspectorate continues to enhance its existing provision of a bilingual inspection service and its capacity to deliver a service through Irish. During 2013, the Inspectorate provided school self-evaluation support visits through Irish in approximately four fifths of Gaeltacht or all-Irish schools at primary and post-primary level. The Inspectorate carried out inspections in approximately one fifth of Gaeltacht or all Irish primary schools and in approximately two thirds of Gaeltacht or all-Irish post-primary schools. The Inspectorate continues to appoint inspectors at recruitment grade level with a view to continuing and enhancing the delivery of 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

through Irish. Immersion courses are provided annually in a Gaeltacht area as well as centrally located language courses which focus on the development of accuracy and effective communication in Irish. Each year between 2011 and 2014, up to one third of inspectors have attended Irish language courses designed to support the development of their competence to communicate in Irish and to carry out inspections through Irish.