

FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION

on a

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

in

EDUCATION STRATEGY

For IRELAND

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PART 2: QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

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1. Raising Awareness

What measures should be undertaken to promote awareness, at national, community, enterprise and individual level, of the importance of language learning and to increase interest in and motivation for foreign language learning?

Ireland is one of the countries in the EU where the population has a better view of the project of the European Union and the economic and political integration of Europe. In a 2013 poll carried out by the not-for-profit agency European Movement Ireland, 85% of Irish respondents wanted Ireland to remain part of the EU and 83% considered that membership of the EU has been beneficial for Ireland. It should be possible to tap on this pro-European sentiment and present the fact that further European integration will provide Ireland with new exchange opportunities with countries where languages other than English is spoken. To take full advantage of these opportunities, knowledge of other languages will be crucial.

In particular, the general public as well as the economic agents must be made aware that the ability of the population to speak languages other than English means a significant addition to the competitiveness of the Irish economy.

2. Supporting migrant languages in educational settings

How can we encourage our migrant children to become proficient in the language of their adopted community, while at the same time maintaining oral, written and cognitive academic language proficiency in their own mother tongue?

It is crucial for migrant students to learn the English language. They and their families will make every effort to do so. Ireland's present efforts to offer supplemental English language classes seem to be giving good results. According to the OCDE review of migrant education in Ireland, published in 2009, "Unlike most other OECD countries, first generation immigrant students in Ireland, on average, achieve education outcomes similar to their Irish born peers". The same OCDE report mentions that one of the factors to consider when working with non-English speaking children is "the place of the first language as the basis for the second language development".

We believe it is important to help students learn English while remaining fluent and literate in their own languages. We think it is important for the students as individuals but we also strongly believe that the multilingual skills of these citizens will be extremely beneficial for Ireland in the future. A very significant percentage of these migrant students will remain in Ireland for their adult life and will bring with them their much needed linguistic expertise when they join the workforce, making Irish based companies more competitive and, as a result, strengthening Irish economy.

Supporting language learning in the many languages that are spoken by families that have recently arrived to Ireland is not easy from a financial or organisational point of view. As a first step we suggest working with the families to emphasize that, while

they must support every effort to help their children learn English, at the same time they must ensure that they are still strong speakers of their native language as this proficiency will not only be the basis for a successful learning of English, but it will likely become an important personal and professional asset in the future.

Currently, there are efforts sponsored by families and institutions of the different linguistic communities in Ireland to maintain the original language(s) of their children. We believe these efforts should be valued, encouraged and recognised.

3. Learning and Teaching

How can foreign language learning be supported for students from post-primary educational settings and thereafter? You may wish to concentrate on one educational sector.

Students of secondary schools need competent and professional classroom teachers, which are already supplied by the Irish Education System.

We believe it is extremely beneficial to complement their work with the benefits of using a language assistant that is a native of the language. Currently the [Foreign Language Assistants Scheme](#) allows for this interaction. However, at the moment the number of assistants included in the number each year allows the program to serve a very limited number of schools and students. Only 12 Spanish speaking language assistants are assigned to Irish schools every year, while there are 315 schools that teach Spanish at the secondary level.

We consider that, with a very small investment, this program offers huge benefits for the students at the same time that it allows Irish teachers to be more effective. We believe it's crucial to maintain these programs and, whenever possible, to increase the number of assistants according to the demand for the different languages.

Language school projects are another very effective way of creating opportunities for a meaningful use of the language that the students are learning. Programs like Erasmus+ offer the opportunity to put schools, educators and students in contact for a variety of different projects. We are willing to collaborate with Léargas to foster contacts and exchanges between Irish schools and schools in Spain and other Spanish speaking countries.

4. Teacher Education

How can we ensure an adequate and ongoing supply of highly-skilled, professional teachers/trainers of foreign language at all educational levels to meet ongoing and emerging needs?

It is crucial for pre-service teachers to spend an extended period of time in a country where the language they are going to teach is spoken. At the same time, students from Spanish speaking countries are eager to come to Ireland to study. Agreements between universities are crucial to allow the mobility of students in both directions. As representatives and agents of the educational systems of our countries we are committed to supporting existing agreements and working to foster the creation of new ones.

Another avenue that facilitates an international experience for Irish students is the [English Language Assistants Scheme](#), that sends Irish students to work in schools in other countries. There are currently 44 Irish students in Spain that are staying for one year. Their salaries are paid by the Spanish authorities. We are willing to continue working in order to find ways of increasing those numbers.

Teacher exchange programs are also extremely beneficial for the individuals involved and for the education systems of their respective countries. Currently Ireland has a French-Irish Teacher Professional Visit Scheme and a German Teacher Exchange Scheme. We would be very happy to collaborate to organize similar exchange programs with Spain and other Spanish speaking countries.

5. Assessment and Qualifications

How can enhanced flexibility, choice and continuity in foreign language learning programmes, their assessment and accreditation be provided, particularly at Further and Higher Education?

Notwithstanding the Irish education processes and assessment criteria to certify students' progress it would be beneficial, particularly at Further and Higher Education levels that students had ease of access to take up official language proficiency exams of the languages they are studying.

The functional approach to learning and the language use promoted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages underlying the educational and methodological approaches in foreign and second language teaching in the past few years must also be present in the assessment. In this regard, in addition to the learning and progress assessment processes integrated in the curriculum of state education it seems advisable to promote language certification via exams recognised at international level amongst education institutions and in the workplace.

There is no doubt that official language proficiency certificates issued by education authorities and institutions are recommended and, in some instances, compulsory to access third education studies abroad as well as the labour market and work promotion in the country of origin, other countries in Europe or the rest of the world. The assumption that official language proficiency certificates issued by foreign institutions are only aimed at vocational studies is incorrect. On the contrary, it seems advisable that educational authorities promote and integrate them into state education within the remit of their competences. In Spanish, for instance, the DELE Diplomas (Diplomas de español como lengua extranjera) are official certificates issued by

Instituto Cervantes on behalf of the Spanish Education Department (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte de España). These certificates have been integrated by state education centres and education authorities into their evaluation programmes.

6. Assuring Quality

What measures should be in place to support quality assurance measures, evaluation processes and research projects and to provide a knowledge and evidence base for policy making in the area of foreign languages?

Institutional education policies must have an active role in the development of research projects and training schemes aimed at educators in order to promote the student's self-regulation in relation to the learning process and its evaluation. At present no one questions the benefits of students' active participation in the learning process via the negotiation of their learning needs coupled with the implementation of classroom dynamics that promote collaborative work.

However, there seems to be room to reflect, both on the educator and the student, within the learning assessment context. This exercise will help appreciate the benefits of a relevant learning assessment with an active participation, not only in the assessment process but also in the drafting of procedures to assess the learning process.

Possible institutional measures that can be implemented in this area span from supporting the integration of continuous assessment mechanisms and tools into state education, from preschool education, aimed to promote students self-learning and regulation.

In addition to participation and education initiatives into research projects on the development and use of tools in the classroom, the firm adoption of portfolio models for learning assessment by institutions seems to yield very positive results not only in this area but also in the development of students' intercultural competences.

7. Supporting Multilingualism in Business and Society

How can we promote a multilingual society and support service providers, both public and private, in meeting emerging needs?

a) *What role can the education system play?*

The [English Language Assistants Scheme](#) is offered not only to future teachers, but to students in any other disciplines such as engineering, ICT or any other fields.

It is to be expected that when these students return to Ireland with excellent Spanish skills, they will help their companies to strengthen ties with Spain and Latin-America which will be beneficial for all the parties involved.

We suggest that students from all disciplines are encouraged to participate in study abroad schemes and, more specifically, in the ELA scheme. The Office of Education of the Embassy of Spain has collaborated in the past with Irish Higher Education Institutions to promote and facilitate the participation of Irish students in this scheme. We are willing to continue with this collaboration.

b) What role can employers play in enhancing the linguistic skills of their employees, particularly their Irish employees?

Employers can and should offer their workforce language training in the form of language courses specifically designed for their employers. They can also encourage their employees to find the language learning opportunities that best fit their needs. There are institutions in Ireland, such as the Instituto Cervantes in the case of Spanish, which have the experience and expertise to offer such training.

8. Other Comments

Please add any other comments you may have below that you believe are relevant to the development of the Strategy.

We are aware that at this point the re-instatement of language learning in primary education may not be possible. We hope that in the future it will be considered.

In the meantime, the efforts of schools and parents to offer other languages outside of the normal school day in primary schools must be encouraged and maintained.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this template. Your feedback will help to inform the development of the Foreign Languages in Education Strategy

Please email this template to foreignlanguages@education.gov.ie , or post it to: Tim O’Keeffe, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1