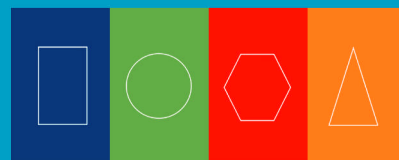


**DJEI and EGFSN response to**

**DES Consultation Paper on a Foreign Language in Education**

**Strategy for Ireland**

October 2014



## Introduction

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI, Strategic Policy Division), and EGFSN are pleased for this opportunity to respond to the Department of Education and Skills consultation paper on Foreign Languages in Education Strategy. The development of a National Foreign Language Education Policy with a 5 -10 year horizon vision, which would provide an integrated and coherent approach to foreign language teaching in all learning contexts is of vital importance both for improving enterprise business performance and the employment prospects of students. Foreign Language proficiency and cultural awareness should be an integral part of an individual's skills profile in order to avail of growing internationally orientated employment opportunities. There is currently however, a relative lack of Irish graduates with foreign language proficiency and practical international market experience.

The EGFSN Report on *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally* (2012) made recommendations aimed at ensuring that education and training provision would be aligned to the international trade skills requirements of enterprise. This is especially important given the nature of Ireland's open and globally-focused economy.

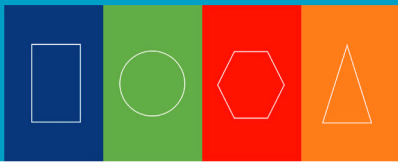
Foreign language capability and cultural awareness are essential for enterprises to compete in an increasingly global market place. An improved supply of domestic foreign languages capability (numbers, range and proficiency) would act as a major boost to enterprise achieving their export potential. This would be particularly important for both multinational companies located here (who export 96% of their total turnover) and for indigenous EI supported enterprises exporting (whose exports have risen from 36% of turnover in 2004 to 53% in 2013). It would help support the realisation of the Government's Trade Tourism and Investment Strategy which includes the aim of increasing and diversifying our exports to a wider range of countries. A workforce possessing foreign language and cultural awareness capabilities would also act to increase Ireland's proposition for inward investment opportunities.

Both the education and training system, as well as companies themselves, (through the continuing professional development of staff) have a main role in building up the domestic supply of foreign language and cultural awareness capability. There are a range of positions within exporting companies requiring foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness including global managers, international marketing and sales, engineering, technical and customer service/support positions<sup>1</sup>. While many of these positions will require a high level of language fluency, it is also the case that conversational level will be valuable. There is also potential for firms to recruit from within the 'new arrival' community that has built up in recent years and from the pool of international students studying and graduating here.

A high proportion of positions within firms that require native language proficiency - such as for Inside sales<sup>2</sup> especially, are being sourced from abroad. These skills provide a valuable

<sup>1</sup> As highlighted for example in report by ICT Ireland/Irish Software Association - The Need for language skills in the high-tech sector (Feb 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Inside Sales is where a sales team is based in-house rather than in the field. Inside sales staff utilise technological platforms to communicate with customers via the web and by telephone and are engaged in providing business solutions to clients.



complementary supply for companies located here who are operating on a European and global market- but there is also a need to build up domestic foreign language proficiency levels to help fill such positions. There are also a significant number of positions which require varying levels of foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness such as in management, marketing, sales, customer service and technical roles.

While a certain level of foreign language proficiency is valuable for introductory meetings with buyers in major European markets, it is essential to have business and technical staff with foreign language fluency in order to grow market share and become a preferred supplier. Even where a Channel Partner/Agent is appointed in the target market it is still necessary for the domestic sales/technical support team that provide the essential backing support to possess foreign language skills proficiency. Foreign language capability is also required to facilitate the importing of goods and services. There is a growing demand from exporting companies for affordable/flexible foreign language and cultural awareness training.

For export markets in Asia and the Middle East, while it is also necessary for the firm to have foreign language capability, this can be met in the short term in different ways including, recruitment, upskilling employees, use of professional translation and interpreter services, and the hiring of native speaking Channel Partners / Agents in the target market. It would however, be really valuable for Ireland in the medium to long term to build up a cadre of Mandarin Chinese Japanese and Arabic speaking business and technical professionals to fully capitalise on growing export market sales opportunities in the region.

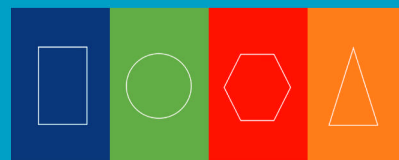
Recent EU research indicates that companies can achieve higher export sales growth through having a workforce foreign language development strategy/ plan in place<sup>3</sup>. This includes companies that invest in the development of foreign languages/cultural awareness - including having (i) thought out their approach to potential languages barriers, (ii) having recruited and/or developed an internal foreign language capability; (iii) employed native speakers to open critical doors; and the use professional translators or interpreters for dealing with contractual issues (iv) and/or producing sales literature or developing website material.

While awareness of the value of foreign language skills proficiency is high among Irish companies currently exporting, it is much lower among those who do not export and those who export mainly to Anglophone countries. The Government's Trade Tourism and Investment policy emphasises the need for Irish enterprise to further diversify its markets from our reliance on the UK and UK.

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Such staff require product knowledge, business acumen and foreign language proficiency. Inside sales staff usually have a bigger client caseload than field sales staff. In both cases (Inside Sales and Field Sales) the sales process remains the same.

<sup>3</sup> EU Commission, Report on Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs - the PIMLICO Report, April 2011.



## Foreign Languages at Primary School

Recent EU research indicates that Irish primary schools have the lowest level of foreign language tuition in Europe - across 27 countries<sup>4</sup>. In 2010, approx. 3% of Irish primary school students were studying a foreign language- compared to an EU average of 79%. This 3% uptake was due to the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative launched in 1998 (as part of Budget 2012, this initiative ceased at the end of 2011-12 school year, with the savings from this measure going towards the cost of implementing the new Literacy and Numeracy Strategy).

## Foreign Languages at second Level

At second level students can now take French, German, Italian and Spanish within an engaging teaching approach at Junior Certificate level and a wider range of modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate - including French, German, Italian, Spanish, as well as Japanese, Arabic and Russian, with other languages being offered on a non-curricular basis<sup>5</sup> - although French (51%), German (14%) and Spanish (7%) are the main modern language subjects taken. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative was initiated in 2000 by the Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and continues under the National Development Plan 2007 - 2013. Its objective is to diversify, enhance and expand language teaching at post-primary schools. The initiative has enhanced access to Spanish and Italian at post-primary level and has produced valuable teaching material such as the Italian Leaving Certificate textbook (2010). It has introduced Japanese at Leaving Certificate in 35 schools. Russian has also been established as a transition year subject in 24 schools with extra - curricular Leaving cert classes being offered on a pilot basis in Dublin<sup>6</sup>. The post - primary language initiative website provides valuable materials, publications and videos resources for teachers and their students. The percentage of students taking one and two modern languages at both Lower and Upper Secondary level is less than the EU average.

## Foreign Languages at Third Level

There is a need to boost the numbers and proficiency level of modern foreign language skills being taught in the 3<sup>rd</sup> level education system. Currently, in the order of 2% to 3% of total enrolments (combined part-time and full-time) in HEA funded third level institutions are reported as studying a modern foreign language subject (this figure includes those taking a modern foreign language only course or one with a modern foreign language as a main subject i.e. for B.A Business and French, where the subjects are Business and French - not the modules therein)<sup>7</sup>. The majority of enrolments taking a foreign language only course are studying in Universities. The IOTs represent a very small percentage of such enrolments<sup>8</sup>. There are only a small number of IOTs where enrolments are taking a modern language as a main subject. The exception is the Dublin Institute of Technology which has ten courses with a main language subject.

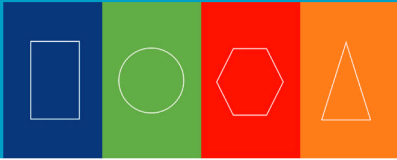
<sup>4</sup> Eurostat Statistics in Focus: 49/2010.

<sup>5</sup> The list of non-curricular languages at Leaving Certificate level being offered for examination (2010) were Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Finnish, Polish, Estonian, Swedish, Czech, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Danish, Dutch.

<sup>6</sup> Royal Irish Academy Committee for Modern Languages, Literary and Cultural Studies - National Languages Strategy, August 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Source: HEA 2011 (Also as reported in HEA / IRCHSS Report 'Playing to our Strengths: The Role of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Implications for Public Policy' (2010).

<sup>8</sup> HEA Analysis of all Full & Part time Enrolments in the Academic year 2010/11 by Field of Study (ISCED).



In addition to third level enrolments taking a foreign language only course and/or a foreign language subject as a main subject of their course, there are also a considerable number of students, particularly on business programmes, who are studying a foreign language as a module within their course where a foreign language is not the main focus. However, survey data is not available relation to this quantum of this provision - either in quantity or proficiency attainment terms. This would be a valuable exercise for third level Institutions to undertake. Such modules are potentially valuable where they include contextualised language learning for specific learning purposes. However, feedback received has been that, in the main, this is currently not the case.

## Study or Work Abroad

Several studies show that a period spent abroad enriches students' lives in the academic and professional fields and improves language learning, intercultural skills, self-reliance and self-awareness. Many employers value such a period abroad, which increases the students' employability and job prospects. ERASMUS is the EU's flagship education and training programme that enabled 2,508 students<sup>9</sup> from Ireland to study and work abroad in 2010/11 - of which 75% were on student study and 25% on student placement. In total 370 students went to the UK. In recent years the number of Irish students availing of ERASMUS has been half the number of students that came to Ireland under the programme.

Relative to the student population, Ireland's participation on ERASMUS has been half that of Italy and Spain. A main explanation for this is that student's low level of foreign language proficiency is acting as a barrier to such enrolment<sup>10</sup>. The most recent Eurostudent survey indicated that while 45% of students surveyed in Malta, Romania and Denmark self - assessed themselves as having very good (good) proficiency in at least two foreign languages, the figure for Ireland was 5 %<sup>11</sup>.

## Conclusions

### Education Focused

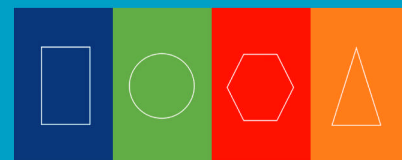
- A National Foreign Language Education Policy should be developed with a 5 -10 year horizon vision, to provide an integrated and coherent approach to foreign language teaching in all learning contexts.
- The domestic supply of modern foreign language skills (number and proficiency level) being taught at third level should be scaled up - including for German, French, Spanish, Italian and emerging market languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic (at relatively lower numbers).
- The assessment of foreign language learning proficiency outcomes should be aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> This figure was 18% increase over the previous year. The projected number for year 2011-12 are that the numbers will top the 3,000 mark for the first time.

<sup>10</sup> Eurostudent: Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Eurostudent: Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe IV 2008 - 2011, 2011.

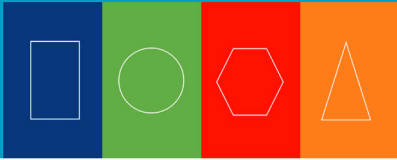
<sup>12</sup> The six reference levels for grading an individual's foreign language proficiency are outlined in Appendix 1. Some Irish institutions currently utilise the CEFR i.e. UCD Applied Language Centre. The CEFR is currently utilised by the main European Language Learning Institutions.



- Use should be made of research undertaken domestically and internationally into the best way of learning foreign languages for students at successive age and qualification levels i.e pedagogy, resource material use of videos, use of ICT and online learning, teaching delivery methods etc.
- The contextualisation of language teaching at third level for students undertaking business and science courses etc. with a foreign language component is important. This approach should include contextual language learning for specific purposes - such as for managers, engineers and sales/marketing personnel. Consideration should be given to providing additional credits for foreign language study within qualifications at third level.
- Foreign language learning programmes at third level should include the learning of contextualised international business case study material.
- Overall, there is a relative lack of Irish graduates with practical market experience in foreign markets. More could be done to increase valuable undergraduate placements and graduate internships within companies operating in overseas markets where English is not the first language. It would be valuable if the EU funded ERASMUS programme were more focussed on in-company placements in non-English speaking markets including Germany, France, Italy and Spain. There is also scope for increasing numbers on student placement programmes into the BRICS countries. Consideration should be given to awarding credits for students participating in such structured overseas placement programmes.
- There should be a strengthened focus on language and intercultural awareness and sensitisation (tasters of different languages to foster linguistic and cultural awareness) at primary level - to motivate students leaning and engagement with languages at 2<sup>nd</sup> level.

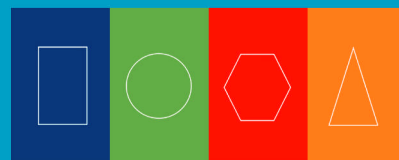
## Enterprise Focused

- Companies can achieve higher export sales growth if they implement a workforce foreign language development strategy aligned to their trade and export business objectives. This may include the building up of foreign language proficiency within management, marketing, selling, technical and sales support/service positions, the hiring of personnel with foreign language proficiency, the hiring of Agents and/or Channel Partners in the target market (who must be supported by the home sales team), the use of professional translators/interpreter's and the utilisation of outside expertise to produce website and promotional material in the target language. It is essential for companies to identify their foreign language capability requirements - both the range and level of proficiency required and to put in place the necessary continuous professional development that will support their trading and export business performance.
- Companies that trade internationally have the primary responsibility for communicating a message to students, parents and teachers that foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness are essential skillsets for rewarding employment opportunities within their companies. They should play the lead role, supported by educational and training institutions, in communicating this message.
- An information campaign needs to be aimed at companies themselves, especially SMEs, highlighting the advantages that foreign language capability can open up for them in global markets in driving their export market goals performance. Case studies material should be utilised based upon examples of SMEs successful building up of foreign languages and cultural



awareness capability and related international marketing sales and design skills - and in what way this has benefited them. These could be utilised within education and training programmes - and also used in the awareness raising campaign aimed at SMEs.

- Enterprise could more fully utilise the available pool of foreign language proficiency in Ireland that has built up in recent years within the 'new arrival' community i.e. Polish and Russian language proficiency for example in relation to business opportunities in Russia and Eastern Europe. This could provide an opportunity for the Further Education system, with the support of Intero, to identify jobseekers with such languages proficiency and upskill them to fill available job opportunities. The considerable numbers of international students that come to Ireland to undertake their undergraduate and/or postgraduate education also comprise a potential valuable supply pool.



## PART 2: QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

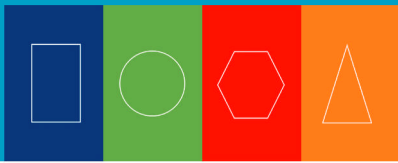
The Department of Education and Skills is drafting a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy. The views of stakeholders are being sought to inform the development of this Strategy. Outlined below are a number of key questions. You are invited to provide your feedback on each question. There is also a space at the end of this template for any other more general comments you may wish to make that are relevant to the issue of foreign languages in education. It would be important to note that the submissions received will be available for general distribution.

*Name of respondent:* Gerard Walker

*Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented:* Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

*Email address:* [gerard.walker@djei.ie](mailto:gerard.walker@djei.ie)





## 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?*

Companies that trade internationally have a primary responsibility for communicating a message to students, parents and teachers that foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness are essential skillsets for rewarding job opportunities within their companies. They should play the lead role, supported by educational and training institutions, in communicating this message.

Career literature for secondary level students should include information on the wide range of available job opportunities roles for which a foreign language would be valuable. At present typical career roles stated are for translators and interpreters etc. There are a range of positions within companies requiring foreign language proficiency including global languages, international marketing and sales engineering technical and customer service/support positions (the latter having been highlighted. While many of these positions require a high level of language fluency, it is also the case that conversation level can be valuable. This is an important message to get across.

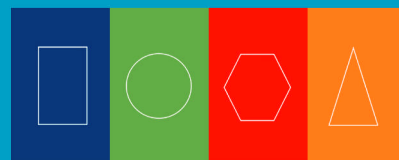
The use of role models with foreign language proficiency that young people could identify with would be valuable.

The use of online language resources should be promoted.

## 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?*

This might be addressed through the new short courses at Junior Cert level, or through extra curricula involvement at weekends. The organisation of cultural event occasions would be valuable - these might also be held at the weekend or during evenings. Relevant written resource material and online learning resource material could be sourced and provided to both migrant parents and children at a nominal cost. The sitting of exams through mother tongue languages could be further developed and promoted.



### 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.*

It is important to make foreign language learning interesting and relevant to students, including through new teaching methods, resource material and the use of videos and ICT in language learning. More attention could be paid to the development of communication skills. A greater use of blended learning approaches (both use of classroom and online) would be valuable.

Use should be made of research undertaken domestically and internationally into the best way of learning foreign languages for students at successive age and qualification levels i.e. pedagogy, teaching delivery methods etc.

The valuable work being undertaken in the post primary language initiative at secondary level including the development of resource material should be sustained and built upon.

It would be important to contextualise the language learning that takes place as a component of a business or STEM courses in terms of its value to students on those courses. Also for foreign language programmes to include learning utilising business related texts and case studies etc. rather than mainly literature texts as is mainly the case at present.

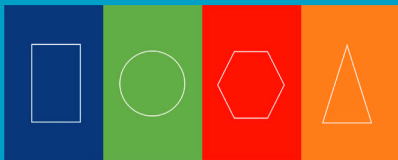
The use of the EIL Intercultural Learning<sup>13</sup> study abroad programme which primarily focuses on language immersion programmes abroad for post-primary students is providing valuable experience for students.

The greater use here of the new Erasmus+ programme aimed at improving the learning ability of students at third level would be valuable especially for placements that included working with companies and foreign language learning immersion. Students would also gain through exposure to the culture and experience of living in other countries.

At third level there is a lack of language learning within Institutes of Technology even though they now comprise half of all third level students. Most of the language learning is taking place within universities.

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<sup>13</sup> EIL Intercultural Learning is an Irish "not for profit" organisation which provides intercultural learning opportunities through study abroad, volunteer abroad, language training, travel awards, group educational programmes, and other cultural immersion activities [www.eilireland.org/](http://www.eilireland.org/)



#### 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?*

Continual professional development opportunities for foreign language secondary and third level teachers, both here and overseas, will be important- especially for language immersion learning. This can be facilitated through the use of EU Leargas programme and Erasmus+ programme (facilitating the learning mobility of teachers and trainers as well as students). The take-up of these opportunities should be strongly encouraged for all language teachers to open up their professional horizons.

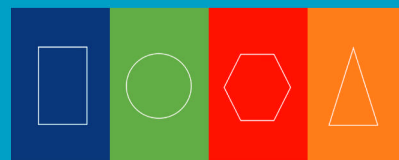
The Teacher Council eligibility entry requirement for entry onto the new secondary level Professional MSC in education, specialising in modern languages needs to be reviewed. At present there is a requirement that the applicant must, as part of their primary degree, have studied “a substantial body of relevant literature through the medium of the foreign language over at least three years of the degree course supported by the related lists of authors and texts”. This excludes potential applicants from other primary degree areas who may have built up their foreign language capability through own time development and/or living and working abroad and who have achieved a satisfactory standard of proficiency in the modern language.

#### 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?*

The assessment of foreign language learning proficiency outcomes at further and higher education levels should be aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). This has six reference levels, from A1 to C2 - from Basic User - to Independent User to Proficient User. Some Irish institutions currently utilise the CEFR i.e. UCD Applied Language Centre. The CEFR is currently utilised by the main European Language Learning Institutions. The six reference levels are becoming widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency. They can be used as a reference level both by education providers as well as employers. The levels on the Framework introduce transparency within the language learning sector as well as providing a reliable benchmarking tool to employers and the recruitment industry. In the vocational and professional context the notion of ‘partial competences’ is particularly relevant.

A proficiency level for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate language learning needs to be agreed using the CEFR framework vis a vis other European countries that use this benchmark for similar exam levels.



## 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?*

To develop assessment capability of the various levels within the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. Then to report on attainment outcomes achieved at various levels and benchmark these outcomes against comparator countries, many of whom already conduct such assessments. To improve the timeliness and coverage of data information on foreign language learning both at major and component level at third level, particularly in relation to reporting by the Institutes of Technology.

## 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?*

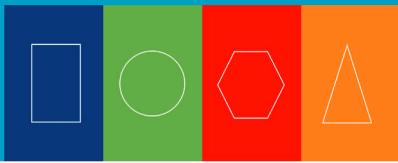
Through the development of foreign language capability and intercultural awareness.

There is an opportunity for the Further Education system, with the support of Intreo, and the Higher Education sector, through Springboard programmes, to identify jobseekers within the ‘new arrival’ community with foreign language proficiency in demand i.e. Polish and Russian and upskill them to fill available job opportunities, including customer service, sales and technical support roles. The engagement of employers in the development and design of such courses and the provision of work placement opportunities will be essential.

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

Companies should implement a foreign language and cultural management strategy aligned to their strategic export business plan and put in place the necessary support elements including through the continuing professional development of their workforce and potential recruitment from the “new arrival” community and the internal pool of students studying here.

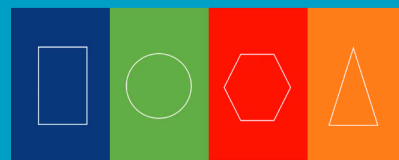
While awareness of the value of foreign language capability and cultural awareness is high among companies that export to non-Anglophone countries, it is much lower among those that do not, or who mainly export to English speaking markets. Employer bodies should take the lead in increasing such awareness.



## 8. Other Comments

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

The earlier a student is introduced to foreign language learning and cultural awareness the better. The focus on language and intercultural awareness and sensitisation at primary level could be strengthened to motivate primary school students learning and engagement with languages at 2<sup>nd</sup> level. Many countries regard primary level as the keystone of language learning. The UK for example has recently introduced language learning for 7 year old upwards.



## Appendix 1: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The six reference levels for grading an individual's language proficiency level.

<b>Proficient User</b>	<b>C2</b>	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	<b>C1</b>	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
<b>Independent User</b>	<b>B2</b>	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	<b>B1</b>	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
<b>Basic User</b>	<b>A2</b>	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	<b>A1</b>	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.