

TEACHING COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON FOREIGN LANGUAGES STRATEGY

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Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented: The Teaching Council

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We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation process, and wish to thank the Department for same.

The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession. Its offices are located in Maynooth Business Campus, Co. Kildare, where it employs a number of executive and administrative staff.

In broad terms, its functions are as follows:

- To regulate the teaching profession
- To establish and maintain a register of teachers
- To establish, publish, review and maintain Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers which include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence
- To maintain and improve standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence
- To promote teaching as a profession
- To promote the continuing professional development of teachers.

Further information is available on www.teachingcouncil.ie.

The following are the observations we would make, and we would be happy to engage further on any or all of them as the Strategy is developed.

We note in Paragraph 2 on page 2 that “The intention is to develop a foreign languages strategy which covers post-primary, further and higher education. We question why the

strategy would not be developed in the context of the continuum of education, to include the primary and early years sectors? In raising this issue, we note that much work was done in this area in the primary sector through the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, which was concluded in 2012. This is only very briefly mentioned on page 8 of the consultation document and we suggest greater emphasis on this initiative may be merited in the Strategy which ultimately emerges.

We also note in the same paragraph the fact that the consultation document “does not consider the role of Irish and English, nor will the strategy”. We question why this is the case, and suggest that this approach runs the risk of missing valuable opportunities for a more integrated approach to language learning. We suggest that the framework should have regard to the new Draft Primary Language Curriculum (Junior Infants to second class), an integrated curriculum which was published for consultation this year.

We fully support the statement on page 3 that “Knowledge of languages, other than English and Irish, is essential for Ireland’s cultural, social and economic well-being” and that “In a changing, multicultural and multilingual Ireland, knowing and being aware of other languages is also important for social cohesion.”. We would suggest that perhaps the emphasis in the document is more on the economic competitiveness benefits, rather than the social cohesion benefits, and suggest greater balance may be needed in the Strategy, having regard to national policies on inclusion and the ways in which ethnic and cultural diversity in Ireland have greatly enriched our society.

In the third paragraph on this page, we note the reference to the special place of Irish, and assume this will also be reflected in the Strategy. We suggest relevant sections in the strategy should be aligned with the 20 Year Strategy for Irish.

On page 4, under the heading “The Linguistic Landscape”, we note the reference to the fact that in our post-primary schools approximately 12% of students were born outside of Ireland and that these students “need to be supported in maintaining their own languages”. We would point out that this, along with other factors such as the inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools, changing family structures, and the

emergence of new societal and economic problems, contributes to the complexity of teaching in 21st century Ireland. It is largely because of this evolving and dynamic context that the Council is developing new policies in relation to teacher education at all stages of the teaching career (initial teacher education, induction and Continuing professional development), to ensure that it continues to be fit-for-purpose.

In that regard, we suggest that reference might be made to the following key documents:

1. [Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education](#), Teaching Council, 2011
2. [Teaching Council Registration: Curricular Subject Requirements 2013 \(Post-primary\)](#).
This sets out the Curricular Subject Requirements for persons wishing to be registered to teach a wide range of languages including Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Italian, German, French, Latin and Arabic.
3. [Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers](#), Teaching Council, 2011 (Primary and Post-Primary)
4. [Further Education: General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications](#), Teaching Council, 2011
5. *Droichead - Teaching Council policy on a new model of induction and probation for newly qualified teachers*, Teaching Council 2013

The above documents are very relevant in the context of your question: “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 also noteworthy that the Council is currently engaged in a consultation on the development of a National Framework for teachers’ continuing professional development. It is expected that the framework will be in place by March 2016.

On page 7 of the consultation paper, we endorse the reference to the key role of the education system in providing a formal structure to develop language competence. We suggest that this might be elaborated further upon in the Strategy to reference the key role of teachers, and the importance of quality teaching. We note the reference in the same paragraph to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and

would highlight the fact that the Council’s recently revised [Curricular Subject Requirements](#) for all languages include a requirement that persons wishing to be registered to teach those languages must have achieved a competence level equivalent to Level B2.2 on the CEFR. We also note the reference to the need for “significant immersion and experience far beyond what could be provided in an education setting”. In that context, we would point out that the Council’s Curricular Subject Requirements include a residency requirement whereby applicants must provide evidence of having studied, worked or resided in the relevant country for a period of at least two months.

On page 8, we note the reference to the early years (0 to 6 years) and the fact that they are a crucial time in a child’s language formation. We suggest that the Strategy might benefit from reference to *Aistear*, the early childhood curriculum, which has two related themes: *Identity & Belonging* and *Communication*.

On page 9, we note the following extract:

“One of the features of language provision and uptake at post-primary level is the predominance of French, mainly due to historical factors. Greater diversification of foreign language provision in post-primary schools is essential in order to meet the present and future needs of individuals and of society as a whole.”

This will clearly have implications from a teacher supply point of view and this is referenced in the paper. In that context, you may wish to note that there are more teachers registered on the basis of qualifications in French than those in German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese combined. We would also point out that the Council has recently commenced a process aimed at developing a teacher supply model. This will be a complex piece of work, involving a diverse range of stakeholders, which will ultimately result in advice being submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills in 2016.

On a related point, we note the reference to the need to attract “students and graduates with foreign language skills into teacher training”. We would ask that the term “teacher training” not be used in the Strategy. Instead, it should be replaced with “teacher

education”, as we do not consider that the term “teacher training” appropriately reflects the depth or breadth of learning in a Level 8 or Level 9 professional programme, which may be up to five years in duration (or a consecutive route combining Level 8 and Level 9 qualifications, which will require at least six years of study). Furthermore, if you are referring to teachers’ qualifications, as opposed to their ongoing learning throughout their careers, we suggest it is best to refer to this phase as “*initial* teacher education”, as this would reflect the Council’s vision of teacher education as a career-long continuum, of which initial teacher education is just one phase.

On page 10, we note the reference to the developments in the Further Education sector in recent years. By way of information, we would point out that satisfactory completion of a programme of initial teacher education has been a requirement in this sector since 1 April 2013, for those wishing to register with the Teaching Council.

On page 12, under the heading “Higher Education”, we note the reference to role of the Higher Education system in the education and training of graduates who go on to become foreign language teachers in the school system. As above, we would request that any reference to teacher training be removed in the Strategy document. The more appropriate term is “initial teacher education”. We further suggest that the implication here, as currently worded, is that all post-primary language teachers follow a consecutive route in their teacher education, i.e., complete an undergraduate degree followed by a post-graduate teacher education qualification. While this is a recognised route to registration, we would also point out that some teachers of languages follow a concurrent route, whereby they engage in a four year undergraduate programme of initial teacher education, which incorporates study of the relevant language.

We fully endorse and support the following statement on page 10:

“To guarantee the quality of language teaching, Ireland continues to need teachers who are linguistically and pedagogically competent, who are highly motivated and who can communicate their enthusiasm for languages to young learners so that they in turn are motivated to become lifelong learners of languages”.

We note the reference to international students on page 12. In that regard, we draw your attention to *The Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland*, Sahlberg et al, 2012, in relation to Internationalisation (p.23 & 24) in teacher education.

As a general observation, we note the absence of any reference to IILT (Integrate Ireland Language and Training). This was established to meet the language and training needs of children and adults from very diverse cultural and educational backgrounds who need language skills and information to live and work in their adopted country. Prior to its closure in 2008 the organisation published a range of documents to help Language Support Teachers in both Primary and Post-primary schools. These documents are currently hosted by the NCCA and can be accessed through the NCCA website. [Please click here for reference.](#)

We suggest that any languages strategy for languages in education should consider what has existed within the system already and build on the learning gained.