

FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION

on a

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

in

EDUCATION STRATEGY

For IRELAND

August 2014

Background

As part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs 2014, the Department of Education and Skills has committed itself to develop and publish a foreign languages strategy mindful, not only of the Language Education Policy Profile (2008), but of other circumstances that have evolved, particularly in the last decade, and of our need to "support Ireland's "winning abroad" agenda".¹

The intention is to develop a foreign languages strategy which covers post-primary, further and higher education. This document does not consider the role of Irish and English, nor will the strategy. Significant work is currently being undertaken separately in relation to the Irish language by the Department of Education and Skills. Instead it is intended to concentrate on the additional foreign languages that our students may learn in post-primary education and thereafter. The Strategy will not address the needs of students who come to Ireland to attend language schools. Their needs are being addressed in other contexts.

Consultation

All stakeholders are invited to comment on this consultation document. The consultation is open from August 2014 to the end of October 2014.

When the consultation closes, a forum will be held to discuss outcomes from the consultation and to seek further clarifications towards the finalisation of a foreign languages in education strategy for Ireland.

Structure of this consultation document

Part 1 of this consultation document sets out the background and national context in relation to foreign languages in Irish society.

Part 2 asks a series of consultation questions, the responses to which will inform consideration and development of the strategy. The questions are designed to stimulate debate and to promote reflection, so as to generate material which will inform the development and thereafter implementation of the strategy.

Stakeholders are invited to submit written responses to as many questions as are relevant to their areas of interest and expertise and may do so from a sectoral perspective, if they so wish.

Next Steps

When the results of this consultative process have been analysed, a forum will be organised to discuss the findings from the submissions that have been received. Following the forum, a foreign languages in education strategy will be finalised for consideration by the Minister in spring 2015.

¹ Action Plan for Jobs 2014, p26

PART 1: CONTEXT

1. Introduction - Why a foreign languages strategy?

Language is one of the means by which we think, organise our knowledge, express our thoughts and feelings, and communicate with others. We live in a world which is rich in languages, and Ireland, too, has its own linguistic heritage. English and Irish and other minority languages such as Cant/Shelta, sign language and immigrant languages (particularly now that immigrants account for over 10% of our population) are part of our unique, ever evolving, cultural and linguistic identity. As citizens of Europe and the world, we are also exposed to many other languages and cultures. Knowledge of those languages opens doors for us to understand other peoples and to engage with our neighbours in Europe and beyond.

Knowledge of languages, other than English and Irish, is essential for Ireland's cultural, social and economic well-being. English may be a significant lingua franca of international communications, but our knowledge of English does not exempt us from learning other languages. In a changing, multicultural and multilingual Ireland, knowing and being aware of other languages is also important for social cohesion. Competence in a number of languages is a key skill that our citizens should be encouraged to achieve, particularly since Ireland has not only a national and European context, but also a global one. Our enhanced language diversity, predominantly due to the arrival of migrants from over 200 countries since 2000, is a social, cultural and national resource that should be nurtured and welcomed.

The Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland, published jointly by the Department of Education and Skills and the Council of Europe in 2008, highlighted the special place of Irish, the central role of English, and the importance of other languages. It recommended that such a plurilingual approach to languages would be acknowledged as part of the country's cultural and economic resources and assets, as well as linked to individual identities and collective loyalties.²

2. European citizenship

Ireland's membership of the European Union carries with it important implications for foreign language policy and practice. Respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union, which is founded on 'unity in diversity': diversity of cultures, customs and beliefs, and languages. Communication in foreign languages is one of the eight key competencies for lifelong learning as outlined in the Education and Training contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. In 2002, European Heads of State or Government, meeting in Barcelona, called for at least two foreign languages to be taught from an early age — 'Mother Tongue Plus Two'. Member States were invited to establish national plans to give structure, coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism. In its conclusions on May 20, 2014, the Council of the European Union called for Member States to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language

² Council of Europe, Language Policy Division and Department of Education and Science, *Language Education Policy Profile, Ireland* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe; Dublin: Department of Education and Science, 2008. www.coe.int), p. 34.

learning and teaching, including by teaching at least two languages in addition to the main language(s) of instruction from an early age, and by exploring the potential of innovative approaches to the development of language competences³. A number of European programmes promote exchanges and links which allow students to learn about and experience the languages and cultures of other countries.

In 2008, the Council of the European Union invited member States to promote multilingualism in support of competitiveness, mobility and employability, and as a means of strengthening intercultural dialogue. In February 2014, the Council of the European Union brought forward a proposal to assess language competencies by means of an EU-wide survey.

The Council of Europe, of which Ireland became a founder member in 1949, actively promotes multilingualism and plurilingualism⁴. Since 2002, Ireland has been a member of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), a Council of Europe institution based in Graz, Austria. The Centre promotes best practice in language teaching and learning.⁵ Ireland also worked closely with the Council's Language Policy Division in Strasbourg towards developing a language education policy profile in 2008.

3. Globalisation

Ireland in the twenty-first century finds itself in a global setting, where some of our citizens have emigrated around the world. For others, our economy is dependent on gaining markets abroad, whether, for example, in South America or the Far East. Achieving successful trade links in such markets requires that our citizens involved in trade have knowledge of the cultures, economies and languages of those countries. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has identified, as a priority area, the skills needed to “trade internationally, including foreign languages and selling”.

4. The linguistic landscape

It is estimated that about 200 languages are used every day in Ireland. These include the indigenous languages of Irish, English, Irish and British Sign Language, Cant/Shelta, and Ulster Scots.

Recent migration to Ireland has brought with it a wealth of new community languages. The 2011 census found that over half a million people spoke a language other than Irish or English at home.⁶ Polish, followed by Lithuanian were the most common European languages, with Filipino and Mandarin Chinese the most common languages spoken by Asians now living in Ireland. Other data show that, for example, in our post-primary schools approximately 12% of students were born outside of

³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf

⁴ According to the Council of Europe, ‘multilingualism’ refers to the presence of more than one language in a given geographical area, while ‘plurilingualism’ refers to the language repertoire of an individual; it is the opposite of ‘monolingual’.

⁵ www.ecml.at.

⁶ Census 2011, CSO Profile 6: Migration and Diversity in Ireland – A profile of diversity in Ireland. October 2012

Ireland⁷. Our immigrants are providing us with a rich and diverse source of languages. These communities need to be supported in maintaining their own languages, which constitute a new national resource, as yet largely untapped, for Ireland.

5. The limitations of a lingua franca

As an island nation, dependent on service industries and overseas markets, Ireland now extends its horizons globally and well beyond the English-speaking world. Recent decades have seen the rise of English as the language of business, science, technology and international communication generally. This has led many in English-speaking countries to adopt the mistaken belief that proficiency in English is enough, and to assume an attitude of complacency regarding the learning of other languages. English is the most widely known second language in the EU. However, recent surveys show that, even now, fewer than half the EU population knows it well enough to be able to communicate.⁸

A lingua franca has its limitations. It is widely recognised that those who wish to buy can always do so in their own language, but those who wish to sell must do so in the language of the buyer. In the world of international business, where competence in English is increasingly taken for granted, it is companies with additional language capabilities and an understanding of local cultures that will enjoy competitive advantage.⁹ Apart from these commercial considerations, competence in foreign languages facilitates greater mobility and enables Irish people to access and be enriched by the social and cultural life of other countries.

At least two thirds of the world's population is bilingual and there is a significant body of research which demonstrates the many benefits associated with bilingualism and plurilingualism.¹⁰ These benefits are cognitive, social, cultural, communicative and economic. People who are bilingual or plurilingual tend to be more flexible, more creative, and more fluent in their mother tongue. They communicate more clearly and accurately to diverse audiences and are much sought after by employers. More and more parents now realise that their children can benefit from the various forms of bilingual and immersion-type education.

6. Foreign language competence and capacity—current concerns

⁷ At post-primary, the top ten countries are: UK, Poland, Nigeria, Lithuania, USA, Philippines, Spain, Latvia, Romania and Germany (note that it is likely that many of the Spanish and German students are exchange students).

⁸ Frequently asked questions on languages in Europe http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-825_en.htm

⁹ See the recommendations from the Business Forum for Multilingualism, *Languages Mean Business: Companies work better with languages* (Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2008). See also, David Graddol, *English Next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language'*, British Council, 2006.

¹⁰ See O. Garcia, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 93-108; A. King (ed.), *Languages and the Transfer of Skills: The Relevance of Language Learning for 21st Century Graduates in the World of Work* (London: CILT, 2000); C. Baker and S. Prys Jones (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998).

Irish citizens lag behind most of their European counterparts as regards foreign language competence. In 2012, Ireland was found to have one of the lowest percentages in Europe of citizens who were able to hold a conversation in at least one foreign language—40%, compared with an average of 54%.¹¹ Only the UK, Portugal, Italy and Hungary scored lower. In the same study, however, Ireland was noted as having among the most “notable increases” in the proportion of people being able to have a conversation in one or two foreign languages.

Feedback from employers in industry suggests that there are significant shortcomings in the language competence of many graduates, and even among graduates with very good degrees. There is also a shortage of graduates in some foreign languages, such as Chinese, Spanish and German. Employers are depending on the availability of mother-tongue speakers and immigrants to fill positions requiring foreign language competence.¹²

In 2012, the Forfás/EGFSN report, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*, made recommendations aimed at ensuring that education and training provision would be aligned to the international trade skills requirements of enterprise.¹³ One of the report’s recommendations was to boost the supply (quantity and proficiency) of foreign language skills and cultural awareness being taught at third level for German, French, Spanish, Italian and the emerging BRIC markets. Also in 2012, IBEC surveyed employers on Irish higher education outcomes.¹⁴ One of the occupation gaps most frequently cited was graduates with an international language, along with a discipline such as engineering. The majority of respondents required that potential employees had a high degree of fluency in written and spoken language, often beyond that acquired from completion of a degree course at NFQ level 8.

A recent report by the British Council (2013) found that the UK had “fallen behind by not devoting sufficient time, resources and effort to language learning” and that the resulting language deficit, if not tackled, would be a threat to Britain’s competitiveness, influence and standing in the world. The report concluded that the UK needed “to build on its existing language learning profile to include a wider range of languages and to enable far greater numbers of people to learn languages”.¹⁵ The same could be said for Ireland: successive reports have highlighted the shortfall in foreign language skills among Irish school leavers and graduates.

7. Employers’ needs

Given the nature of Ireland’s open and globally-focused economy, foreign language skills are clearly of relevance to a range of businesses in Ireland, as outlined in the 2012 Forfás/EGFSN report, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*.

¹¹ European Commission, *Europeans and Their Languages – Special Eurobarometer 386*, 2012, p. 15. (<http://ec.europa.eu>).

¹² It is accepted that Irish students study English and Irish as well as foreign languages

¹³ Forfás, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*, accessible on www.skillsireland.ie.

¹⁴ IBEC, *National Survey of Employers’ Views of Irish Higher Education Outcomes*, 2012. Accessible on www.heai.ie.

¹⁵ The British Council, *Languages for the Future: Which languages the UK needs most and why*, 2013, p. 19. www.britishcouncil.org.

However, it can be more difficult to establish the precise expectations and views of employers in respect of the foreign language competence of Irish graduates.

The pilot national survey of employers carried out by IBEC and the Higher Education Authority in 2012 included a special module asking employers “how important it was for them to recruit graduates who had foreign language skills”. However, as the report notes, “only a small number of respondents answered this question making meaningful analysis difficult”.

Of the small number who responded, around 20% “considered having foreign language skills upon recruitment important or very important among graduates”. Around 50% were satisfied with the language skills of their graduates, compared to an overall figure of 75% employer satisfaction with graduate skills.

IDA Ireland noted in 2012¹⁶ that “most companies seeking people with language skills are looking for native speakers or the equivalent.” This means that they seek to employ “foreign nationals who are already living in Ireland, Irish people living abroad, Irish people who have studied linguistics abroad, newcomers or a combination thereof”.

The nature of employer demand for foreign language skills has important implications for the education system, for graduates and employers.

The education system clearly has a key role to play in providing a formal structure to develop language competence. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), is a guideline, with 6 benchmarks/standards, used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages, particularly across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. It was developed by the Council of Europe. Its main aim is to provide guidelines for learning, teaching and assessing languages. However, education can only go so far in meeting the need for functional mastery of a language, a level of proficiency which requires significant immersion and experience far beyond what could be provided in an education setting, even with study abroad elements.

Graduates who wish to obtain vacancies which require high-level language skills, will likely need to enhance their competence through immersion, for example by living, working or studying overseas. There could be particular opportunities for Irish citizens currently living overseas in areas whose language and culture are in demand in Ireland, for example parts of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This is particularly the case where such graduates also have other in-demand disciplines such as engineering or ICT qualifications.

Employers may need to look at their own graduate recruitment and up-skilling policies to give opportunities for graduates with strong language skills the opportunity to further develop them to a higher standard.

8. Pre-school education

¹⁶ Evidence by Mr Barry O’Leary, CEO IDA Ireland to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 17 July 2012.

The early years (0 to 6 years) are a crucial time in a child's language formation. This is the time when children are first learning about languages and how and when to use them.

Opening children's minds to multilingualism and different cultures from an early age can be an enriching experience for children and result in a number of benefits. These include the enhancement of competences such as comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving, thereby enabling children to interact successfully with peers and adults.¹⁷

9. Primary education

At primary level, in line with the provisions of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)¹⁸, the focus is on the development of learners' competence in English and Irish as either first or second languages. The feasibility of introducing a modern European language was explored through the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative (MLPSI), established in 1998. A decision was made to end the MLPSI in 2012 in light of concerns about curriculum overload at primary level and capacity to extend the MLPSI language-competence model of provision. Primary schools may offer an additional modern language outside of the normal school day if they so wish.

10. Post-primary education

While Irish and English are taught to almost all students throughout the period of primary and post-primary education, the learning of other foreign languages are, at present, optional (except in the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme). In this, Ireland is almost unique in Europe.

About 70% of students study another language up to Leaving Certificate level; this may be due to the National University of Ireland's third language requirement.¹⁹ However, the number studying a third language is declining year on year. An additional concern is that fewer students than in the past are now choosing to study two foreign languages, and in some schools it is not possible to do so. There is also a worrying tendency for some students not to take any foreign language at all. There is a need to raise the awareness of parents, guidance counsellors, school principals and students themselves of the importance of languages, including foreign languages, as a life skill for all, and not just for those with a particular aptitude for languages.

¹⁷ Eurydice, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities*, 2009, <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>. Referred to in Council of the European Union (2011), *European strategic framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) - Language learning at pre-primary school level : making it efficient and sustainable - A policy handbook*, p.7

¹⁸ Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020

¹⁹ Irish, English and a third language (foreign or Classical) are normally required for matriculation in the Universities which constitute the NUI.

The implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle will open up new opportunities for teaching and learning other foreign languages. One of the twenty-four statements of learning states that a student will be able to “listen, speak, read and write in L2 and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to his or her ability”. For students whose mother-tongue is English, this will mean proficiency in Irish and another foreign language. The new Junior Cycle will also provide for short courses, some of which may be in foreign languages. These short courses offer opportunities not only for our migrant communities, but also their Irish peers to study languages such as Polish and Mandarin Chinese.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a short course in Chinese Language and Culture, and the Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI) has developed a template for short courses in other, non-curricular languages based on the work of the NCCA on the short course template. Using this template, the PPLI is currently working on ‘off-the-shelf’ courses in Irish Sign Language (ISL), Japanese and Russian. It is also developing a short course in Polish as a heritage language in collaboration with the Polish embassy. Schools could also use these templates to develop their own short courses in other foreign languages, for example the heritage languages of children present in the school population.

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.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI), established in 2000 by the Department of Education and Skills to diversify the range of languages at second level, has highlighted significant challenges associated with the introduction of new languages to the education system.²⁰ The main challenges in introducing a new language are: creating/maintaining a pool of suitably qualified teachers; generating levels of demand from schools which will sustain viable employment of teachers with the new language skills in the context of the overall pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) and competition from other subjects; persuading students to study the language as a Leaving Certificate subject; and attracting students and graduates with foreign language skills into teacher training. The experience of the PPLI has shown that schools and teachers, students and their parents respond positively to initiatives which provide external support for the teaching of new or lesser taught foreign languages.

A challenge to the education system is how to assist young people who already speak a language other than English in the home to acquire full proficiency and competency in that language.

At present, the State Examinations Commission offers Leaving Certificate written examinations for mother-tongue speakers of EU languages which are not included on the post-primary senior cycle curriculum.

²⁰ www.languagesinitiative.ie. The Initiative’s target languages were initially Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. The initiative now supports the teaching and learning of all foreign languages in post-primary schools.

11. Further education and training

This has been a period of considerable change, consolidation and reform in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector with the enactment of the Further Education and Training Act in 2013. Under the Act, SOLAS is required to propose a five year strategy for the provision of Further Education and Training. The Strategy, published in 2014²¹, sets out the future direction for FET to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes and services to learners, employees and employers.

The FET sector to date has, in general, developed without co-ordinated overall strategic direction across the education and training sectors. The new FET strategy should allow for much more effective co-ordinated action across sectors. The challenge for the delivery of foreign language learning opportunities is to ensure that provision is co-ordinated effectively across the sectors and that opportunities are available for learners within FET to access foreign language learning and accreditation, through the National Framework of Qualifications, in a way which is appropriate to their needs.

12. Higher education

Background

The higher education system plays a crucial role in the development of foreign language skills within Ireland and, more widely, in enhancing and developing understanding of language, literature and culture through teaching and research.

It is one of the core missions of the higher education system to meet the human capital and skills needs of the Irish economy. Given that Ireland is a highly globalised economy, the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016* includes an indicator regarding alignment of international activities of higher education institutions with the national Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy, including the number of graduates who have competence in the foreign languages of Ireland's 27 priority trade, tourism and investment markets.

The higher education system also plays an important role in the education and training of graduates who go on to become foreign language teachers in the school system. 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.

Foreign language options offered by higher education institutions

Prospective students have access to a wide range of foreign language courses at higher education that can be taken as core subjects or in combination with a range of other disciplines across business, the arts, the humanities and the sciences. A number

²¹ Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, SOLAS (2014)

of higher education institutions also offer part-time or evening courses in a range of languages.

Nevertheless, it has been commented that “programmes [in the higher education system] which provide knowledge about other parts of the world are limited ... [and] in addition to the relatively low take-up in foreign languages the number of languages that can be studied is limited”²².

Level 8 programmes offered in higher education institutions include those with significant modules in: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Japanese, Korean and Mandarin Chinese. Language programmes are also provided by higher education institutions in extra-mural settings to students, and in part-time or in evening classes to the wider population, including; these include languages not currently provided in the mainstream system including Arabic, Hebrew, Persian and Dutch.

In line with identified skills needs, foreign language programmes have also been selected for funding through the Springboard skills initiative.

Take-up of foreign language programmes

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs’ 2012 report on *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally* noted that some 3,400 students were registered on language programmes or other programmes with a significant language component – around 2-3% of the total cohort.

The Group noted that not all courses were identifiable in the data used for this report, particularly where languages were elective modules. Taking these other components into account, initial research undertaken by the Higher Education Authority suggested that up to 9,000 higher education students in total were studying a foreign language either as a single core subject or as an accredited part of a wide range of other undergraduate disciplines in 2012/13.

In terms of demand, it is worth noting that a number of Springboard language programmes proposed since 2011 have not been able to proceed due to low demand from potential participants.

Study abroad and immersion opportunities

Immersion is recognised as important means of enhancing language competence, and students in higher education have an opportunity to further deepen their language competence through overseas study, most significantly as part of the European Union’s Erasmus + programme. Around 4.2% of Irish graduates have participated in an Erasmus higher education exchange, very close to the European average of 4.3%²³.

²² Higher Education Authority/Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (2013), *Playing to Our Strengths: The Role of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Implications for Public Policy*, p.56.

²³ European Commission (2013) On the Way to Erasmus+: A statistical overview of the ERASMUS programme in 2010-2011.

Over 2,700 Irish participants study overseas on Erasmus each year and over 30,000 Irish people have benefited since the programme began in 1987. The majority of Irish participants (approximately 60%) have pursued their studies abroad through the medium of a foreign language. The most popular non-Anglophone destinations are France, Spain and Germany. Outward mobility also takes place outside the Erasmus+ framework, for example with partner institutions in Asia.

International students

A key national objective of the higher education system, set out in the higher education performance framework, is to have institutions which are “internationally oriented and globally competitive”. This includes a significant focus in some institutions on recruiting international students which, among other things, add significantly to the “linguistic base” of Irish higher education students and graduates. Over 8,000 international students in universities and institutes of technology are from non-native English speaking countries²⁴

²⁴ Higher Education Authority (2014): *Domiciliary Origin of Full-Time Students*, 2012-2013

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: John McGrath

Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented:

Research Manager,
SOLAS

Email address:

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?

The most important contribution which SOLAS can make is to show the contribution which a proficiency in a second language can make to acquiring an interesting and lucrative career. This information needs to be packaged in an easy to understand format and widely distributed.

Currently, SOLAS does provide data on the relative employability associated with different occupations on its on-line skills portal but the specific contribution of language is not sufficiently highlighted and this will be the subject of discussions in early 2015.

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?

I doubt that there is a widespread problem in this area. In general, non-English speakers are very motivated to learn English as it is acknowledged as the 'international business language' and developing a proficiency in that language is considered de-rigour.

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.

Firstly, there has to be a political consensus that learning a second language is a core requirement of the education system in the same way that learning mathematics is a core requirement.

This is how continental Europeans approach the teaching of English. It is mandatory from primary level onwards and it is given the same priority as the core disciplines. They do this because they recognise that a proficiency in English among the population as a whole is essential for the development of their economy and society.

We appear to be ambivalent regarding the importance of acquiring proficiency in a second language. Languages are taught at second level; they are not in general a mandatory subject and students may switch languages throughout their education.

If language continues to be offered to potential students in volunteerist and fragmented formats, it will remain very difficult to construct systematic and coherent nationwide supports system because it may be difficult to offer such supports in an economically viable manner.

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?

This is very much a chicken and egg situation. Students who wish to follow a career as a teacher/trainer will be attracted to those disciplines which are associated with attractive employment prospects. Thus, the introduction of any legislation or regulation which raises the career prospects of these occupations will result in more qualified candidates seeking to enter these professions.

The example of the doubling of university points for ‘graduates’ of applied mathematics shows that the right incentives can significantly alter student choice.

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 teaching of foreign languages in Further Education should be linked to the National Framework of Qualifications. This will provide a career and education path for the courses in both vertical and horizontal directions.

It is less certain if there is a viable rationale for teaching foreign languages in the further training as opposed to further education system.

Courses in further training are generally of relatively short duration; they are designed to provide employment in specific occupations, and while some of those occupations, such as those involved in working in a call-centre or logistics hub, may require a foreign language, it is difficult to envisage how a training course could provide the level of fluency required.

In such situations, it may be more beneficial to provide training in the required technical skills to those who already have a sufficient proficiency in the required languages.

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?

On-going research into the incidence and nature of employment opportunities which require proficiency in a second language and the dissemination of this information to career guidance officers and students is one of the steps which must be taken to increase the provision and quality of language training.

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?

Consideration could be given to providing some financial subsidies to SME's in respect of the provision of foreign language training for key staff.

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

I think that the question should be what role would employers be willing to play and I think we have to be realistic on this issue. If the acquisition of a foreign language is financially beneficial to the employer – and it often is – the employer can play a major role in enhancing the attractiveness of learning a second language. This can be done through promoting and profiling the type of attractive careers which are available to job-seekers who are proficient in a second language.

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8. Other Comments

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

<p>The acquisition of proficiency in a foreign language can become an important competitive tool for an export orientated country such as Ireland and therefore a systematic and coherent rather than ad-hoc approach should be taken to the teaching of foreign languages.</p>

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