

Post-Primary Languages Initiative Submission to a Framework For Consultation on a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy for Ireland

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. Below is PPLI feedback on each question.

Name of respondent:

Post-Primary Languages Initiative

Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented:

Post-Primary Languages Initiative

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Introduction: Our vision is to be a dedicated centre providing expertise and support for foreign languages education in Ireland. We make the current submission in the context of our experience in the post-primary sector but also in the context of our combined experience related to Modern Foreign Languages Education in other sectors including primary, further education, higher education and industry. Our experience includes learning and teaching foreign languages, curriculum design, Continuing Professional Development and upskilling for teachers, materials design, applied research, promotion of Modern Foreign Languages learning, policy development, and diversification of the languages on offer in our education system.

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?

- **Post-Primary Schools: (additional Category):**
 - Provide information sessions for school managers and guidance counsellors on the importance and relevance of foreign languages for their students
 - Provide information sessions and packages for parents on same
 - Provide briefings and information packages for organisations with involvement in schools such as the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), ASTI and the TUI
 - Introduce Language and Business Champions (BLC) scheme or similar based on the model of a scheme started by CILT Wales and now running in UK and Scotland. BLC is a scheme aimed at promoting awareness of the

importance of foreign languages in business, for a variety of purposes, in a variety of industries and at different levels. Its approach is to facilitate practical links between local businesses and schools with a focus on use of foreign languages. It also reinforces an awareness of the link between foreign languages and STEM. The BLC team identifies local businesses whose staff operate part of their assignments in foreign languages and encourages them to share their experience with students, either through visits to schools or site visits. Assistance is provided both to staff who volunteer to take part and to teachers who prepare students. For further info click [here](#)

- Create a database of companies in Ireland who could provide work experience for students in the languages that students are studying in TY
- Inform language teachers, business teachers, and TY co-ordinators about the possibilities that exist for their TY students to do internships abroad and create a database of partners across Europe who could provide work experience for students in the languages that students are studying in TY
- Increase visibility of and encourage more participation in [e-Twinning programmes](#) which are funded by the European Commission under the Comenius sectoral programme of the Lifelong Learning Programme
- Draw attention again to existing publications which encourage the celebration of diversity and intercultural education e.g. [Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School](#) published by the NCCA
- Introduce award scheme for schools that promote awareness of and celebrate multilingualism e.g. a logo that they could use on their website as a mark of excellence (already too many flags)
- **National:** Support a national campaign to increase the awareness of the importance of a multilingual society and the advantages of developing plurilingual competence. This could include:
 - Enlist the support of embassies and cultural services in promoting awareness
 - make a TV series on Irish people who use foreign languages in their everyday lives including strong arguments for the economic, cultural, and cognitive benefits of having learned various foreign languages
 - disseminate existing videos such as those created by PPLI [More Languages More Options](#), [Careersportal.ie](#), and [German Connects](#)
 - use other local media to highlight role models who can showcase the benefits of having learned a foreign language
 - run an advertising campaign with a series of cool ads on billboards, radio, tv etc. The ads would be different but related and would feature different languages illustrating reasons why having a foreign language is useful.
 - Enlist the support of ‘celebrities’, teenage role models and teenagers from the worlds of sports, entertainment, and business
- **Community:**
 - Map the languages of Ireland. This is important in the context of harnessing a multilingual resource already present in Ireland which would complement language learning and teaching in the education

system. Set up a national online database of language skills and language training providers similar to a combination of the Language Register operated by IDA-FAS in the 1990 and the directory of language training providers published then by the YEB (currently Leargas). This could be used by enterprise and others and encourage a multiplier effect. An education system partner would provide quality assurance in the process.

- Increase promotion of European initiatives such as European Day of Languages (EDL) and International Mother Tongue Day in order to increase visibility of languages
- Following the lead of libraries in developing language exchanges in public libraries (such as Pearse St and Ilac libraries in Dublin), support 'language cafes' where language skills could be developed at an informal level and without cost implications
- **Enterprise:**
 - Encourage enterprise to create more opportunities for more internships. Expand schemes such as the IBEC EOP Graduate Placement programme where the use of a foreign language is essential
 - Promote Awareness and understanding of CEFR levels as benchmarking tool as well as use of ELP (Europass)
- **Individual:**
 - run a social media campaign on the above information e.g. a competition using video clips of Irish foreign language speakers which offers good prizes would ensure that many would access and share the information
 - Make available the facts regarding the importance of Foreign Language Education and promote the idea that all or any language levels make a difference i.e. do not have to have native competence in order for languages to be useful
 - Raise awareness of the value of using the European Language Portfolio (ELP) for language learning and documentation of learning which assists with mobility in the context of Europe (see 3. Learning and Teaching for elaboration)

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?

Jim Cummins argues that educators have a responsibility to educate the 'whole child' and that when educators choose to ignore the linguistic competencies that students bring to school they are also choosing to devalue the linguistic and cultural capital of their students. By contrast, he argues that when educators implement pedagogical approaches that explicitly affirm students' plurilingualism as a cognitive and academic resource, they are sending a message of validation that is likely to

motivate students to continue to develop their home language. (see ‘Mainstreaming Plurilingualism: Restructuring Heritage Language Provision in Schools’ in *Rethinking Heritage Language Education* CUP 2014). Literacy in the mother tongue not only allows the transfer of skills to the L2 but also strengthens cultural awareness and identity (e.g. Cummins 1994, Dutcher 1995, Thomas and Collier 2002). It also enhances cognitive development more generally and thus the possibility of engagement with the whole curriculum.

(i) How to encourage proficiency in the language of adopted community

- In order for all migrant children to develop CALP in English also it would probably be necessary to provide systematic instruction in English for a minimum of five to seven years which is what the researchers have established it would take (see e.g. Cummins 1994:10)
- Training in CLIL should be provided for all subject teachers e.g. expansion of schemes such as that provided by the ETB offices in Tallaght. See [here](#)

(ii) How to maintain oral, written and cognitive academic language proficiency in their own mother tongue

- Mother tongue support in school or if this is not economically viable arranged in groups comprised of clusters of schools, outside of school time (should be a week-day as Saturday and Sunday schools may preclude children from participating in sports activities). It is generally agreed that those who are literate in their native language make better progress in the L2. This could be provided in collaboration with the relevant embassies.
- An additional possibility would be to promote online courses in mother tongue that could span all educational levels
- Review related migrant language issues which include resourcing issues, regulation issues, quality assurance issues, issues around the (non-) complementarity of complementary education, and training.
 - Ensure that all teachers (including those involved in complementary schools) have access to the same training and are expected to meet similar criteria in terms of qualifications
 - Ensure that Teaching Council regulations are widened to acknowledge the need for different criteria for different levels e.g. the level of language required to teach a short course in Junior Cycle would be different to that required to teach a non-curricular language for Leaving Cert
- Campaign using relevant target languages to educate parents, many of whom do not necessarily appreciate the value of maintenance of the mother tongue e.g. leaflets, letters from schools, letters from DES, social media campaign, use migrant support groups, libraries etc
- Enlist the support of organisations such as the [Bilingual Forum](#).
- Build in to the system recognition and accreditation for the effort involved in maintaining home languages beyond what is offered at LC level at present. The Junior Cycle short courses can contribute to this. Other accreditation options could be considered to take into account proficiency progression throughout the school system. Systems as those implemented in Australia or

those explored by the HoLa project or the CoLa Intensive projects the UK, for example, could be considered.

- Encourage schools to have their own language/multilingual policies including the promotion of home languages which would include recommendations on when and where the use of home languages is allowed or encouraged
- Ensure that all teachers in training, including pre-school staff, are given training to support students in the area of home language maintenance
- Include non-EU home languages as non-curricular languages for Leaving Cert
- Create a central body for languages which would also have responsibility for home languages

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.

Post-Primary

- In order to meet the needs of students insist on regular language upskilling for language teachers
- Require that all post-primary students be given the opportunity to study another language in addition to Irish and English, and wherever possible, more than one. Short courses provide an opportunity to introduce additional languages
- Require schools to develop a plan which spans 1st -6th year and includes progression for the teaching and learning of languages in school
- Encourage additional CEFR benchmarked certification e.g. at TY students could be taking external assessment which would also relieve teachers of assessment that they do not want to do e.g. such as those provided by the Alliance Francaise, the Goethe Institute, and the Instituto Cervantes in Dublin. See here for example
- Include assessment of oral skills for all students at Junior Cert/Junior Cycle Awards level
- Offer Junior Cycle Short Courses for students who are not taking any other languages in Junior Cycle (based on 2012 statistics it seems as if there are circa 8000 students not taking any language)
- Bridge gap between foreign language learning and the digital culture of younger people by integrating digital literacy resources and skills into the MFL curriculum
- Revise the LCA curriculum
- Introduce possibilities for CLIL where teachers have a dual subject degree which includes a curricular language or where there is capacity. These post-primary schools could potentially become 'schools of excellence' regarding MFL by making it possible for students to choose these 'reinforced' language options.

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?

- Facilitate migrant language speakers to train as language teachers and to become qualified
- Agree a set of outcomes for all PME programmes which prepare graduates to teach languages. For example, currently a MFL teacher may receive as little as 33 hours of teaching methodology in some of the universities but up to 100 hours in others. This should be standardised (towards the upper end), especially in the context of the new two year PME.
- Introduce concurrent models of the PME which involve language specific subject study as well as teacher education
- Ensure that language teachers spend time abroad in a country where the target language is spoken. This would give them more confidence to teach in the target language and thus improve foreign language competence among students (the current minimum of three months as stipulated by the Teaching Council for registration is not appropriate).
- Encourage the Teaching Council to review its criteria regarding registration of modern foreign language teachers who are natives of the language they offer to teach but do not have a third level qualification in it, as they have done for Japanese. For example a French native teacher who has a third level qualifications in another Modern Foreign language or languages and/or other areas of specialism (humanities or STEM), as well as post primary teacher training including special methods in MFL but does not have a BA in French.
- Make mobility programmes that already exist for teachers more accessible and provide incentives for participation. See example of German teacher exchange that is currently advertised on the DES website [here](#) and French teacher exchange [here](#)
- Introduce more mobility programmes for teachers at all levels in order to ensure that quality use of the target language remains high
- Provide upskilling courses (including blended learning courses) for teachers at all levels to ensure the most up-to-date language teaching methodologies are being employed. Provide directives and incentives for teachers to upskill
- Revise provision of CPD for language teachers through the TPNs
 - Make CPD a requirement
 - Decentralise CPD to encourage more participation
 - Provide CPD for MFL teachers that is non-language specific and move it to school clusters that could meet in the network of education centres rather than language specific centralised meetings. This would also highlight the benefits of collaboration and sharing of expertise and practice across languages. A useful model which is inclusive of all languages is the dynamic [Association for Language Learning \(ALL\)](#) organisation in the UK.

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?

- Ensure that all programmes are benchmarked against the CEFR and best European practice and placed also within the National Framework of Qualifications

Begin by aligning the exams with the CEFR: The new Junior Cycle provides an ideal opportunity to introduce benchmarking against the CEFR. Benchmarking the Leaving Certificate exams would be a natural progression of benchmarking languages in Junior Cycle and would then have implications for provision of languages education at third level.

The DES/NCCA/SEC could benchmark key educational stages in terms of language learning e.g. by establishing B1 as a target for end of compulsory education (Junior Cert/Junior Cycle Awards) and B2 as a target for the end of general secondary education (Leaving Cert) Ireland would be placed on a par with the majority of EU countries. These targets are ambitious and in order to meet them early MFL learning would need to be revisited. Otherwise, Ireland may have to adopt the current unofficial targets which are A2 for Junior Cycle and B1 for Senior Cycle, levels well below the rest of Europe.

Note for comparison purposes: the Eurydice 2012 report (on key data on languages at school) shows that among the 20 countries which state a target level, 14 place the end of general education at B2 (or C1 for Luxembourg) and 6 at level B1.

Benchmarking in the post-primary system would make it easier to introduce entry and exit levels for further and higher education as well as establishing minimum language requirements for post primary language teachers.

As such benchmarks would be used by learners, teachers, trainers, examiners, curriculum designers, certification bodies, course designers and publishers, they would introduce transparency and improve accountability within the language learning sector.

The implementation of the CEFR across all educational levels would ensure the introduction of a reliable benchmarking tool for employers and the recruitment industry. By establishing 'can-do' profiles for different areas of industry and employers there would be transparency in relation to the specific needs of industry and enterprise which would be helpful for education providers. (The CEFR has promoted the idea that different levels of language proficiency can be valuable for different purposes and in different contexts. It has in particular developed the concept of 'partial competencies' which provides further clarity as to what skills in particular can be valuable at what level and for what purpose which is particularly relevant in vocational and professional contexts)

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?

- Quality assurance also linked to CEFR benchmarking
- Implement the CEFR across all educational levels and then stipulate a minimum level of proficiency for language applicants to PME programmes
- Introduce regulation in the complementary schools sector so that, for example, the teachers who work in complementary schools are required to meet the criteria of the Teaching Council (some of the criteria may need to be revised). It would be helpful if these teachers could undertake some courses with students in Initial Teacher Education programmes and participate in CPD with Irish teachers so that complementarity of complementary education could be assured. Similarly, provision could be made for Irish teachers to visit complementary schools in order to become more informed about the experiences of their students in week-end schools. Some of this kind of work has been undertaken in UCC where student teachers visit the Polish school in Cork as part of their course see [here](#).
- Work with Quality and Qualifications Ireland to ensure that benchmarking for languages education and provision could be aligned to their systems of quality assurance

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?

- Provide information about the benefits of multilingualism e.g. make such information available on the DES website
- Encourage more diversification of languages taught at post-primary level
- Make languages accessible to all through provision of short courses in both new and existing curricular languages

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

- Provide internships abroad
- Provide in-house language training and encourage employees to learn languages in the context of life-long learning

- Provide incentives for language upskilling by staff training externally but obtaining accreditation: such as reimbursement of exams or other
- Establish avenues of collaboration between industry and Further Education whereby language courses could be used to get people back in to employment

8. Other Comments

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

The [Language Education Policy Profile of Ireland](#), published jointly by the DES and the Council of Europe remains extremely relevant to the drafting of a strategy. The action priorities contained therein remain a useful summary of what needs to be done.

The first action priority is to define a clear policy position, in consultation with other government departments and agencies as appropriate, regarding the place and role of languages in Irish society and in the education system. It is only on the basis of such a policy choice that a coherent languages in education policy can be formulated....

Whatever decisions are taken regarding the place of languages in society and in the education system, the second action priority is the professional development (initial and continuing) of language teachers...

The third priority, closely linked to the first and the second, concerns the primary level, which should be the keystone of language learning in the education system...

The fourth priority is assessment and certification of attainment in language learning (and implications in the context of the CEFR)....

The fifth priority is to develop in society at large the conviction that “English is not enough”. That is to say, to convey the message that the economic, cultural and European future of Ireland depends on the valorisation of plurilingualism....

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