

**EIL INTERCULTURAL LEARNING  
RESPONSE TO DES FRAMEWORK FOR  
CONSULTATION**

**on a**

**FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**in**

**EDUCATION STRATEGY**

**For IRELAND**

**October 2014**

## **BACKGROUND**

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 for up to 2,000 people each year.

Part of the worldwide network of The Experiment in International Living, the organisation celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Ireland this year.

EIL has 50 years’ experience  
of experiential inter-cultural  
and language learning

The EIL Study Abroad programme primarily focuses on language immersion programmes abroad for Irish post-primary students. This has given the organisation very direct experience of the challenges and struggles we face as a nation in relation to foreign language skills.

### Enthusiastic Welcome for Process and DES commitment to a Strategy

It is against this background that we enthusiastically welcome the “Consultation on a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy for Ireland” and through this submission and the recent panel discussion we organised on 22 October 2014 in the RCSI we hope to make a positive contribution to the process.

**Note:** See Appendix 1 for report on the panel discussion.

The Framework document captures the problems faced by Ireland, specifically the growing language deficit as evidenced at post-primary and the economic challenge that arises from this deficit.

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%.

### **Evidence of the Language Deficit**

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

### **Socio-economic Impact**

As an island nation, dependent on service industries and overseas markets, our challenge is that less than half the EU population know English well enough to be able to communicate. Closing a deal requires deep knowledge of a people and their language and cultural norms. Companies with additional language capabilities enjoy competitive advantage, and sustainable development rests on our population's capacity to adapt to the changing demands of other markets and societal influences.

Minister Kevin Humphreys in his contribution to the EIL Conference on 22 October noted that of the 2500 plus employees in the Grand Canal Dock – Google/Facebook/Yahoo area – only 25% approx. were native Irish workers owing largely to the language deficit of Irish graduates. And of these, most were from parts of Dublin and socio-economic groups far removed from the inner-city flat complexes that border this massive investment, thus reducing those communities ability to capitalise on that investment. (Minister of State Kevin Humphreys, EIL Conference, 22 October 2014)

Core Message from EIL Conference 2014:

***Resource the Necessity that is Language Learning;  
Increase the Desirability for Life-long Learning;  
Convince Citizens it is Achievable at their own pace for their Benefit***

### **The Framework states:**

*“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”.<sup>3</sup>”*

**EIL welcomes this commitment.**

### **The Framework states:**

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<sup>1</sup> Forfás, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*, accessible on [www.skillsireland.ie](http://www.skillsireland.ie).

<sup>2</sup> IBEC, *National Survey of Employers' Views of Irish Higher Education Outcomes*, 2012. Accessible on [www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie).

<sup>3</sup> Action Plan for Jobs 2014, p26

The intention is to develop a foreign languages strategy which covers post-primary, further and higher education.

**EIL considers it deeply regrettable and limiting** that the proposed Foreign Languages Strategy will not cover pre-school or primary level given:

- The considerable evidence that early intervention works (see OECD analyses, ERC, European Council conclusions)
- Existence of the Aistear curriculum with relevant principles (e.g. communication, diversity) and themes (e.g. belonging, communication),
- Free pre-school year already State funded and with a high uptake
- Government commitment to an Early Years' Strategy
- Top OECD countries' success with early language acquisition (e.g. Finland)
- Evidence that the language deficit at second-level owes its origins to students' early language experiences (e.g. negative attitudes about own capacity, over-estimation of difficulty, prejudices, perceived irrelevance)
- Experience from the pilot Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative that delivery of innovative language programmes can be cost effective and deliver measurable results
- Existence of CEFR at European level that offers a benchmarking system that could be incorporated into an Irish system, albeit with more realistic targets if resources remains an issue

**EIL recommends strongly that this decision be re-considered**, that pre-school and/or primary school be included so that the Strategy reflects the necessity and value of early intervention. Early intervention may not be sufficient, but it is necessary to spark a child's love of language learning and capitalise on the plasticity of the brain at this point in their development. Life-long learning can be more easily facilitated then from pre-school to beyond school when children are socialised into viewing such language learning as second nature - the norm.

**The Framework refers** to the following:

- “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, Barcelona European Council call 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 2008, similarly Member States were encouraged to promote multilingualism for reasons of competitiveness, mobility, employability and intercultural dialogue.
- 2014 European Council call for Member States to promote multilingualism and enhance the quality and efficiency of language 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 competences<sup>4</sup>.

- A number of European programmes promote exchanges and links which allow students to learn about and experience other languages and cultures.
- The Council of Europe also, of which Ireland became a founder member in 1949, actively promotes multilingualism and plurilingualism<sup>5</sup>.
- 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.<sup>6</sup> Ireland also worked closely with the Council's Language Policy Division in Strasbourg towards developing a language education policy profile in 2008.

**And the Framework rightly acknowledges** the following:

*“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.<sup>7</sup> 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.”*

**The Framework summarises accurately the evidence on early education:**

*“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.<sup>8</sup>”*

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> 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’.

<sup>6</sup> [www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at).

<sup>7</sup> See O. García, *Bilingual Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> 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

And yet, the Framework goes on then to EXCLUDE early learning (recommended over and over again for empirical reasons in the EU and Council of Europe) and even primary school learning (the norm in the majority of European states).

## Why?

**The answer offered in the Framework is curriculum overload and resource constraints.** This came as a surprise to all of the panellists, bar the political representatives, since past pilots were shown to be cost effective; language learning is an investment that returns high dividends; the earlier the intervention the higher the rate of return at an individual and societal level (e.g. Young Ballymun research, Barnardos 2009); and innovative methods and clever use of existing resources cannot be ruled out, especially if a full inventory of Ireland's educational resources (not least our highly qualified linguistic educators) were carried out.

If resources and curriculum overload are the primary concerns, as stated in the document, these can be adequately addressed within the constraints that exist, e.g. by:

- Embedding language learning into other objectives of the curricula (e.g. 'belonging' theme could be explored by drawing on heritage languages of children or introducing a French week theme using all senses);
- Liaising with organisations such as EIL to provide innovative immersion options for groups/individuals that could have a whole school dimension;
- Better utilising young linguists, graduate teachers, heritage language speakers in local school communities;
- Availing of social funding in the EU and a variety of programmes;
- Seeking inter-disciplinary learning (e.g. French history taught with French vocab),
- Availing of support from Third Level Access programmes and
- Upskilling teachers through CPD to have confidence in using innovative methods and seeing cross curricular links.

**EIL believes also that early intervention offers a wonderful opportunity to help tackle the language deficit in disadvantaged communities,** opening up new life possibilities, and turn the challenge of diversity in some of these schools into a valuable educational opportunity.

**Including the primary sector would help** not only to tackle the current deficit, but also offset future decline, sustain interest in language acquisition and provide real added value.

Resource and curriculum constraints apply just as much to the Senior cycle, and are challenges for all schools across all countries, time and space as they endeavour to meet competing demands, reconcile competing rights and values, and seek to facilitate choices whilst also compelling students to undertake core curricula/subjects for reasons of national requirements (e.g. Irish) or the 'common good' (e.g. CSPE).

To exclude an entire sector raises more questions about the level of the government's commitment to the Strategy and its effective implementation, and this was openly raised at the EIL Conference on 22 October 2014.

**EIL is concerned also** that it raises serious equity and equality of opportunity questions, which should be informing Department of Education strategic thinking as a key participant in policy-making for all citizens, providing impartial advice. E.g. the reference to schools being 'free' to provide language classes after school negates the reality that for some DEIS schools over-stretched with meeting the running costs of schools and lacking fund-raising potential in their communities, this is not an option.

### **The Framework states also:**

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.

**EIL recommends** that the Department drop the reference to 'foreign' in the Strategy and refer to 'languages' instead.

After all, the very opening paragraph of the Framework states:

*"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."*

Moreover, the Framework continues:

*"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."<sup>9</sup>*

**EIL considers** this to be indicative of the fact that one cannot consider one language without the others that form the linguistic landscape.

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<sup>9</sup> 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](http://www.coe.int)), p. 34.



**EIL strongly recommends** that the Department of Education consider including English and Irish, following consultations, as separate chapters within an overall ‘Languages Strategy’.

**EIL recommends** that a common consultation of the language communities be held at the very least to allow and cross-fertilisation of ideas and lessons to be learned.

This would avoid an artificial segregation but allow for the specific challenges and opportunities that arise in respect of the official language of the State (Irish) and main spoken language (English) to be addressed.

**EIL is concerned** that having so many separate processes and strategies could undermine a cohesive approach to tackling the language deficit in Ireland.

**The Framework states:**

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.

**EIL welcomes** this commitment to involve all stakeholders.

**EIL recommends** that the proposed Forum be heavily publicised in social media, through networks and traditional media.

**The Framework states:**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), is a guideline, with 6 benchmarks/standards, used .... to provide guidelines for learning, teaching and assessing languages.

**EIL welcomes the existence of CEFR** not only for the benchmarks within the Framework but also for providing a benchmark against which the Strategy proposed by the Department of Education can be assessed.

**The Framework notes:**

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.

**EIL recommends very strongly** that immersion and experience opportunities be afforded and affordable (through EU funding avenues and Institute liaisons also) to as many students as possible. This is the area in which EIL has extensive, in-depth



experience over 50 years and globally over 82 years, and is happy to liaise with the Department on pointing to examples of best practice.

**EIL recommends highly that a JUNIOR ERASMUS PROGRAMME be championed by Ireland at EU level, e.g. a Junior Erasmus Group mid-term be established at senior primary school level and a JUNIOR ERASMUS TERM at TY with a variety of approaches possible during summer months and through exchanges.**

**EIL recommends also that language summer camps, akin to the Literacy and Numeracy camps within Ireland be established for students from DEIS schools.**

**EIL suggests that a President's Teanga Award be established**, akin to the Gaisce Award, whereby citizens of all age groups would be encouraged to undertake language learning at different levels (perhaps using CEFR as guidelines) and receive acknowledgement in a certification ceremony or award (special pin ceremony). This would tie in also with President Michael D. Higgins' personal commitment and professional agenda to encourage active citizenship.

Language learning should not be the preserve of the élite or be allowed to continue to be associated with elitism or a fixed notion of intelligence i.e. that views a person as either having linguistic intelligence or not. Ireland's language deficit has not been proven to be one of capacity, but rather one of motivation and supply.

### **The Framework notes:**

"....in some schools it is not possible to [take up a second language beyond Irish]." There is also a worrying tendency for some students not to take any foreign language at all.

**EIL considers it incumbent on the Department of Education to undertake qualitative and quantitative research as to why this is happening.** Which schools, and which students are in this position and why? And what can be done to provide for these schools and level the playing field e.g. use of networks of schools or link local schools together for shared use of facilities, band together for language course?

If there is a strong socio-economic dimension at play (i.e. students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to get exemptions than others) then early intervention needs to be considered strongly at the very least for DEIS and for those schools, not in DEIS, but with a significant language deficit to be assisted in a targeted manner based on best practice.

The framework document itself notes:

*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.*

**EIL welcomes in principle the Junior Cycle Student Award** 24 Statements of Learning, review of assessment methods away from a high stakes exam dominated system, and introduction of a variety of short courses to spark students' interests.

Indeed, EIL recommend that the NCCA work on short courses could be of benefit to primary school teachers, especially at senior primary level who could introduce their students to new languages and cultures, and draw on the diversity of his/her class.

**EIL considers it opportune to complement the short courses with increased immersion opportunities** for all schools, so the multiplier effect is not confined to schools that are already well resourced and from well educated, well-travelled families, reinforcing elitism.

### **The Framework states further:**

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.

**EIL agrees strongly and recommends that a comprehensive media campaign be run** across all platforms with the assistance of the various language Institutes and involving key role models who would promote the advantages of a multilingual society and language acquisition for the individual. The State broadcaster RTE should be encouraged also under its education remit to offer foreign language cartoons and educational programmes to younger age groups and/or sort snippets to introduce different languages and customs (there is some good practice already re. Dwali the festival of light, Eid etc).

For unemployed citizens, SOLAS and INTREO are obvious starting points and a media campaign needs to publicise the benefits, but also the ease of being able to learn another language. This capacity issue must be addressed among those in disadvantaged communities. It is noteworthy that in the Framework document it says: *“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.”* A survey of those who chose and those who did not would be most helpful in identifying what might be done to address this demand issue.

For older members of the community, isolated individuals and for vulnerable groups, like mentally ill people recovering in occupational therapy, language learning could be promoted for its cognitive and social benefits (e.g. mental health campaign, Men’s Sheds movement, recovery centres).

**EIL agrees also that greater diversification of foreign languages is the ideal** scenario in schools, but are less convinced that certain subjects should be championed from central government e.g. Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Indian might appear to be obvious choices for those in business, but what of Japanese or Arabic or French? Arguably, for students attracted to Foreign Affairs work, public sector, EU work, NGO peace work, French, German and Arabic are particularly important languages.

**EIL welcomes the joined up thinking** implied and sought in the alignment by the Higher Education sector of its international activities with the 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.

There was some concern expressed at the Conference with which we agree that there is some evidence in the Third Level sectors of language courses and arts and humanities courses being downgraded in the rush to produce engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs. Joined up strategic planning at Third level will be vital.

**EIL recommends strongly replicating the success of the Erasmus programme** in a more age appropriate level at second-level with a **Junior 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%<sup>10</sup>. The ripple effect is considerable.

## PART 2: QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

**Name of respondent:** Kevin Hickey, Director

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### 1. Raising Awareness

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

Media: Run a media campaign across all platforms, particularly social media and billboards, involving role models with language backgrounds/travel experience to inform citizens of the basics and inspire e.g. 167 languages spoken in Ireland (akin to the Discover Ireland warmly received ad campaign recently). Include young people who have participated in Erasmus or EIL programmes (see samples on [www.eilireland.org](http://www.eilireland.org)).

Note of Caution: Critically, this media messaging needs to be centred on the importance of communication skills in all languages (English and Irish also), on understanding (and how it can be lost in translation), on socio-economic and cultural benefits, on self-esteem and personal development, and on a strong 'can-do', proud of our linguistic heritage sentiment. A pro-European message will not necessarily achieve this since this could be interpreted politically as endorsement for a particular institutional set-up in Europe (i.e. the EU) and inimical to diversity. Rather, this is about celebrating diversity and the individual, (regardless of how he/she self-

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2013) On the Way to Erasmus+: A statistical overview of the ERASMUS programme in 2010-2011.

identifies), their community and their sense of belonging in society and encouraging them of the necessity, desirability and achievability of speaking, listening, reading and writing in other languages. A pro-business message might neglect some of these educational and socio-emotive benefits. The NALA campaign = good in this respect and also in countering the assumption that old dogs can't learn new tricks. This last point will be important for some sections of the older community or indeed working population who may have fixed ideas about the degree of difficulty with language.

Relevant messaging: Nor is this about preparing our young or not so young for export. The Grand Canal Quarter would be a natural starting point for any ad campaign, highlighting the jobs available within Ireland that require language skills, but speak to farmers also and small business owners about closing deals in different markets. And speak to our new communities and run a parallel ad campaign about the 'new' Irish and 'did you know...? E.g. did you know that the Romanian language is close to the Italian language?

Early Intervention: Again the bestselling device is early exposure to language learning and early experience of success at language learning. Pre-school and primary schools are the ideal places to start. Active, child-centred learning is already transforming the educational experience of our children. Language learning can contribute to and benefit from this. If students learn early through immersion activities even if they are not from a home that is fluent in that language, they can become competent in another or several languages, as indicated by the success of the gael scoileanna movement and polylingualism on the continent. Arguably, the Literacy and Numeracy strategy is necessitated, particularly the higher quota of time in DEIS, because of a deficit of exposure of some young children to language in the form of books, listening to adults speaking/radio, being listened to, and/or being exposed to excessive images on tv and consoles at the expense of language development stimulation.

National level: Special Seanad debate/session involving citizens from the main language communities, including Travellers, seeking their input into the strategy. Hosting a consultation in the very heart of the Oireachtas will generate more media coverage than on the margins or in other forums.

Additional joint consultation: with stakeholders from English, Irish and 'Foreign languages' consultation processes to finalise the documents and/or see connections across the Strategies. Again EIL favours one overall strategy but with different chapters as the teaching of Irish and English, but particularly Irish matters for the shaping of attitudes to learning other languages and habit forming, skill competency and perception of such competency.

Implementation Phase: Once the Strategy is agreed, and ideally an associated Action Plan akin to the Jobs Action Plan is set out, it needs to be driven by a cross departmental committee of civil servants, monitored for implementation by the Oireachtas, evaluated by a joint session of the Jobs and Education Committees on a biannual basis, and subject to annual review.

Community level: Libraries have become far more innovative in recent decades, serving as a hub for lots of community groups and for those wishing to practice their conversational French, German, Italian or Spanish or rent out language learning

equipment. Why not expand this through the Confucius Institutes and others to include lesser spoken languages by Irish people to date? SOLAS and INTREO will become increasingly important and need to communicate similar messaging to the overall national campaign i.e. language learning matters – e.g. it matters to Ireland, it matters to your community, it matters to your family, your children, it matters to you ....And providing citizens at this very local level with the practical options available to them through their local ETB, Men's Shed, local community centre etc to learn languages and the benefits that can accrue.

Schools: Encourage schools to link in with their local language bases e.g. all school principals and in DEIS Home School Community Liaison Officers should be provided by the Department or encouraged to identify in their Whole School Planning, the linguistic context in which the school is embedded e.g. how many students speak languages other than English as their mother tongue? How many speak additional languages to English? What organisations – embassies, institutes, library, further education/third level – are available within reach of the school that could assist the school in language provision? Contact details for same? What of the school network e.g. Loreto network has a mix of private and state schools, implying a range of resources? How could these be used to best effect?(already a common debating competition and inter Loreto development education and sports activities). Responsibility for undertaking this research could be undertaken by a junior teacher, seeking to establish their career.

Parents: Public Health Nurses are often the first point of contact for new parents and are increasingly embracing their role of encouraging parents to develop a child's language skills e.g. publications are given to all new mothers, some PhN give books on their first visit. Why not produce a short booklet with basic words in different languages e.g. see success of Dora the Explorer? Children love sounds or sign language or experimenting with new forms of communication. Resources need to be developed for blind children also to facilitate their foreign language development e.g. short youtube clips. RTE junior cultural programmes.

There is a strong appetite in parents to do the best by their children, and putting the latest research on child development in clear, plain language at the disposal of parents will be important for creating an environment conducive to stimulating more demand to learn new languages and master others. The National Parents' Council has become increasingly visible in recent years and this can play a role in promoting implementation of the Strategy and contributing to its review. But all parents need to be appraised through the PhN, the local school system, the national government and local authorities that under the Irish education system and given the Constitutional status afforded to parents as the 'primary educators' of the child, they can wield considerable influence and leverage for change or improvements. Addressing literacy challenges in parents in their own mother tongue is a critical element in empowering parents in particular communities or circumstances to be able to advocate as effectively for their children as others without those challenges can. Lessons need to be learned from the NALA Strategy.

Departmental level: Lots of this contextual information seems to be lacking in the DS for specific schools and needs to be built up quickly, using integrated services

technology that allows for full pictures to be gained e.g. social housing, demographics, unemployment rates etc etc which would assist in identifying range of supports suited to each school or cluster of schools. This job of work being undertaken by the Department will prove invaluable long-term.

## **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?*

As an organisation, we feel that this area is not in our core capacity. However, we do feel that the best sources on this are migrant children themselves, their advocates, teachers and relevant experts.

## **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.*

Again, post-primary should not be the starting point. If it is, this needs to be better explained than ‘curriculum overload and resources’. What aspects of the curriculum are overloaded for whom? And what resources are necessary and could these be sourced elsewhere, beyond the department within the community?

Pre-School and Primary are key: The language deficit is not originating at this point but at a far earlier point in the formative years of a child’s life when attitudes to learning, to educational potential, relevance of learning, motivation are being shaped, in addition to core skills and knowledge. All of the evidence cited in this Framework and at EU level and internationally at OECD, UN, USA, ASEAN is that early intervention pays dividends. Pregnant women need to be made aware in antenatal classes of the importance of language development for their babies. Parental education is a key aspect (as discussed previously).

Effective learning and Teaching: At all levels active learning & mixed methodologies; peer teaching (peers returned from immersion trips/older students); differentiation; use of ICT (youtube clips, interactive programmes); emphasis on core skills development (e.g. NCCA 5 core skills); practical/relevant scenarios (e.g. how to order food, how to discuss your favourite pop star/band/makeup/sport/passion); CEFR competencies/proficiency benchmarking; collaborative learning across school

departments, school networks or levels of education (e.g. graduates through Access programme assisting with team teaching in language classes); immersion opportunities and cultural, social, economic activities that bring the language to life matter.

Realise the potential learning opportunities that international exchange students can bring to a post-primary classroom. These students are a direct and real link to a language and culture and can provide a very different exposure to a language. As effective as a Junior Erasmus Programme would be for outbound students, the inbound students are also valuable resources.

Three specific suggestions from EIL:

Devise a **Junior Erasmus Programme** and implement it, particularly with a focus on DEIS or smaller rural schools, learning from the lessons of the Third level Erasmus programme and from EIL's extensive experience of what works well and does not.

Establish a **President's Teanga Award** to celebrate language acquisition and cultural diversity for all ages nation-wide. Similar to the Gaisce award, different challenges can be set for and met by citizens and different levels of success experienced.

Encourage **School Twinning** – akin to successful twinning of Towns - that would be of benefit to teachers and students allowing for inter-teacher (like Fellowships at Third level) and inter-student exchanges.

#### 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 access to Third Level, particularly those for whom fees may be a barrier and/or for whom Third level sets them apart as the first in their family. Access programmes offer considerable supports for students who may wish to become teachers and come from backgrounds not well represented in the professions e.g. working class, travellers, ethnic minorities in Ireland, new Irish citizens.

Active, relevant, stimulating methodologies and modules at Third Level that facilitate breadth and depth of learning and inspire young teachers to be learners always is key to the provision of an adequate and ongoing supply of highly skilled and professional teachers/trainers. Language teachers need not always be career teachers – 21 to 68 working in the classroom. Encouraging this flexibility of thought about career options will help to establish in students/citizens minds that they can contribute to their local school community or as a past pupil of another and put their skills at the school's disposal voluntarily as well or instead of professionally.



Third Level remains patchy in terms of teaching/communication skills. Due to resource constraints, many young PhD students are now undertaking the lion's share of tutorials and are not necessarily equipped to teach with teaching qualifications viewed as desirable but not necessary. This needs to change if Irish Third level universities and institutes are to compete with the best, and all Universities should be encouraged to offer PhD tutors training in the latest active methodologies and assessment for learning options.

The methodologies used in EFL training, for example CELTA, could be adopted and adapted by DES when it comes to teaching languages. The practices used in EFL training are quite participative, experiential, active and team-based allowing for a very broad and realistic comprehension of a language.

Internships/ teacher assistant positions abroad should be part of teacher training. Time spent living, learning and working in the country where the language is spoken would add hugely to a language teacher's understanding, appreciation for and knowledge of the language. This could in fact become a two-way process, with Ireland welcoming teacher assistants from other countries for periods of time.

## **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?*

This is not an area of particular expertise for EIL. We do, however, believe that a possible credit system and increased collaboration efforts across college departments would allow for greater choice and reinforce learning.

## **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?*

CEFR offers a very useful template for assessing the learning of students and for setting targets for teachers and policy-makers.

Evaluation by the Oireachtas and strong drive by a cross-departmental committee (Jobs, Justice, Foreign Affairs & Trade, Agriculture, Communications) will be critical to the success of the Strategy, preferably a Languages Strategy that intersects with the proposed Early Years Strategy. The Action Plan for Jobs is a good example of this relentless focus on delivery. It is important that timely submissions and feedback can

be made by stakeholders to the driving Department and committee so that there is a constant feedback loop facilitating rapid adaptation.

PhD students could be encouraged (akin to the D/Foreign Affairs Irish Aid section) to explore specific themes further, already identified here e.g.:

*Why is there such a poor uptake of additional languages in Ireland despite globalisation and economic imperatives?*

*In what ways and with what consequences is Ireland's language deficit similar or different to comparative countries, and what can be done to address it?*

*Why is the language deficit more pronounced in some communities than others? And what is to be done?*

*Why are some languages more popular to study than others?*

*How can migrant languages or heritage languages be sustained and what are the lessons from abroad?*

## **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?*

While this is not strictly within EIL field of expertise, two themes to emerge strongly from the business and language community in attendance at the EIL panel discussion were:

The importance of life-long learning, supported practically in our education system through accreditation and access routes, and through a strong multi-media campaign. Establish and retain links between schools and local businesses, and ensure timely implementation and review of the strategy and action plan informed by up to date evidence.

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

This is not within EIL field of expertise.

## 8. Other Comments

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

Please reconsider the omission of the early years from this Strategy.

Pay close attention to the links, cross-over and possible contradictions between the different language strategies being pursued, and consider joint consultations.

Establish an effective implementation feedback loop so that timely information is received by the Department as to what is delivering desirable results or not, and what problems/gaps/deficits need to be addressed.

Finally, best of luck. We are delighted to have been asked to contribute and look forward to engaging fully with the draft Strategy and consultations to follow.

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](mailto:foreignlanguages@education.gov.ie), or post it to: Tim O’Keeffe, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

## Appendix 1

### THE FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION ON A FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR IRELAND

Response from participants at the EIL Intercultural Learning Panel Discussion held on  
22 October 2014 at the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland

Both the Framework Document and Consultation process were warmly welcomed in principle and considered timely. Numerous reasons were cited as to why this matters, notably the **intrinsic value of education** for the individual and society; the **cultural understanding** fostered; the **socio-economic benefits** that accrue; and the **capacity of people** to better compete, adapt to change, exert influence, **be empowered** and **sustain success and development** in a globalised world.

Language acquisition is not merely a means of educating citizens or future employees for opportunities abroad or within the multinational sector. Rather it is **a vital skill-set** required to enhance the cultural and educational opportunities of all communities, affording the individual and businesses, disadvantaged or advantaged, SME or MNC, **increased opportunities to trade, travel and interact** with those beyond our borders and within, facilitating **life-long learning** and **personal development**, and providing a **strong social justice dividend** also, if facilitated thoughtfully. (Minister of State K. Humphreys, 2014; Kevin Hickey, Director of EIL, 2014).

Learning another language is critical to sustaining **“a strong indigenous SME backbone”** and ensuring that Irish companies can ‘close the deals’ in the language of the consumer to whom they are selling, a sign of cultural respect as much as economic nous (Tony Donohoe, IBEC, 2014 who also highlighted that 85% of Irish exports are from indigenous businesses/farms).

**Active methodologies** and **experiential learning** were highly recommended anecdotally and empirically, as these serve to spark the students’ interests and imaginations, convincing them of the relevance of the language to ‘real life’ situations and providing them with useful vocabulary with which to build their confidence at communicating. Language is learned best within its appropriate cultural and literary heritage (Edward DeBúrca, Google, 2014) and through policy-makers, parents and teachers supporting the *desirability* to learn the language and the *necessity* to continue to learn beyond the classroom. (Seánaí Kiely, EIL & TCD Student, 2014)  
The two core themes to emerge could be summarised as follows:

***Resource the Necessity that is Language Learning;***  
***Increase the Desirability for Life-long Learning;***

### ***Convince Citizens it is Achievable at their own pace for their Benefit***

Ireland's language deficit is similar to other Anglophone countries but there are unique aspects.

Overall the framework offers a ***“golden opportunity to re-evaluate this key aspect of education and sustainable development”*** and to do so within the context of a European framework that deems the primary years critical (T. Flanagan, 2014) and incorporates the **CEFR benchmarking system** with its six levels of proficiency to aid evaluation. (F.Rantz & K.Ruddock, 2014)

Informed by compelling evidence, the EIL Conference recommended the following:

- A clear strategy, complemented by a detailed Action Plan with short, medium and long-term goals, assessed regularly and informed by a holistic understanding of the role of language in cultural and identity formation as well as core skills development.
- Drop the term 'foreign' in the framework. It is superfluous and counterproductive to efforts aimed at encouraging more citizens to learn languages as normal and doable.
- Include the Pre-School and Primary Sectors in the Strategy. Early intervention offers the best opportunity to embed language skills and opportunities as evidenced in numerous studies and backed by neuroscience (plasticity of the brain) and parental demand. Pre-schools should be encouraged to offer 'tasters' of different languages, capitalising on the 'heritage' languages now present in Ireland via the Aistear and Síolta guidelines.
- Primary schools could embed language acquisition in other subjects, thus reducing resource and curriculum constraints cited in the Framework document as reasons for their exclusion and supporting the work of the NCCA to shift the education system from content obsession to skills focus (5 core skills being: information processing, critical thinking, communication, working together and personal effectiveness/development).
- Build on the lessons learned from the pilot language programmes with a view to facilitating inter-school and inter-country collaboration. (D.O'Leary, MLPSI 2014)
- Combine short language courses of the type envisaged in the JCSA reforms with opportunities for immersion in summer camps, trips abroad (EIL) and access to 3<sup>rd</sup> level.
- Provide targeted language supports to DEIS schools for students acquiring additional languages e.g. subsidised school trips, summer language camps.
- Incorporate the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a language benchmarking system, based on a communicative definition of language which is defined through 'can-do descriptors', (i.e. 'what I can do with/in the language') with its six levels of proficiency for each language skill (listening,

speaking, reading, writing) and realistic targets for exit points from the education system (e.g. B2 for 14 countries C for Luxembourg). (See the Eurydice 2012 report, recommended by K Ruddock & F Rantz 2014)

- Avoid exam dominance and instead learn from the CEFR benchmarking system for assessing competencies at entry and exit points: Primary, JCSA, Leaving Cert, 3rd Level.
- At Third Level, upskill all language teachers in active methodologies and ICT, and offer practical language modules to achieve so-called 'partial competences' for students in different disciplines, particularly for students in Tourism, Business and Service courses. (Chris Mulhall, P. Milloux, One Voice for Languages, Frederique Rantz, PPLI)
- Draw on the wealth of talent and skills among teachers, existence of school networks (e.g. global in case of some), and value of investing in CPD at all levels e.g. affording opportunities to young graduates to support schools with their language support.
- Consider a credit system for students and public servants to incentivise such learning.
- Mount a multi-platform media campaign to inspire citizens to learn languages.
- Consider including the teaching of Irish and English in this Strategy or at least facilitate cross-fertilisation of ideas at joint consultation conferences, implementation phase and evaluation stages at Oireachtas (avoid Luas disjointed lines fiasco: C. Mulhall 2014).

## **SNAPSHOT SOLUTIONS:**

### **Facilitating Necessity – the mother of language acquisition:**

- Early intervention key to investment
- Life-long learning ideal outcome (2002 Barcelona)
- Upskill teachers through CPD
- ICT learning and active methods vital
- Incentivise language learning via credits
- Target DEIS for immersion opportunities
- Fund/Co-sponsor Junior Erasmus (EIL)
- Encourage Extra-curricular activities (e.g. debates)
- Support inter-cultural links with Alliance, Goethe etc
- Embed schools in language communities
- Reward/credit key sectors who learn langs(e.g. tourism)

### **Facilitating Desirability:**

- Expose students to culture at a young age
- Focus on Skills, active, real world scenarios
- Mount Multi-platform media campaign
- Public Broadcast a la Baby Einstein/Sesame street

- Avoid exam dominance
- Enhance Career guidance
- Empower parents through joint learning sessions
- Generate political will, lobby

## TOP 6 WISH-LIST FROM 6 PANELISTS

**Tony Donohue** – Agree a Strategy that **includes Primary Schools** and possibly Irish. A holistic, **realistic languages strategy and action plan** should be the primary aim of the consultations, informed by the best minds in Higher education.

**Tanya Flanagan** – **Strategy can be provided cost efficiently** due to the supply of excellent linguists and educators, and past experience of pilots. **Awareness raising** (e.g. YES approach, media campaign) would help reinforce the message **that language learning matters**.

**Seánie Kiely** – **Active learning** and **experiential learning** are key to appreciating a language as both reflective of and a means of understanding that society and yourself. Three months in another country can facilitate more learning and personal development than 3 years in class. Language should never be divorced from its **cultural, practical context**.

**Philippe Milloux** – **Aim higher and deliver better**. Language is for life, not just for classrooms! Ireland's strategy must be premised on a **recognition of Ireland's strengths**, notably Irish people's love and experience of travel, capacity to 'bounce back' and communicate well. A political framework can help capitalise on these strengths with the **necessary leadership**. There should be **no sacred cows** (i.e. exempting Irish language, religious instruction from debate).

**Karen Ruddock** – Run a **media campaign** that emphasises the value of a multilingual society for all sectors since the key to sustaining change is for **people to deem it necessary**. **Parents need to know they can bring about change** whether at school board, Parents Council or political lobbying levels. This strategy matters. **Publicise better** the consultation process and strategy.

**Joanna Tuffy TD** – **Link the consultations and NCCA work** on teaching modern languages. To be successful, **include all stakeholders** and identify **realistic goals** and **better methods** for effective teaching. **Sparking students' interest** and sustaining motivation is key to sustainable change.

**Key Message:**

***Resource the Necessity that is Language Learning;***



***Increase the **Desirability** for Life-long Learning;  
Convince Citizens it is **Achievable** at their own pace for their Benefit***

A Strategy and Action Plan are priceless in providing strategic vision and realistic targets to incentivise learning and sustain motivation. The success of both will depend on their effective and timely implementation. The time is now, lest Ireland fall further behind with all its costs.