

FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION

on a

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

in

EDUCATION STRATEGY

For IRELAND

August 2014

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.

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Preamble:

Léargas manages national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, vocational education and training and adult education. Léargas is appointed by the Department of Education and Skills to manage the Erasmus+ programme in Ireland, jointly with the Higher Education Authority. Léargas manages the European Language Label for Ireland and also acts as the national relay for the European Day of Languages and the national contact point for the European Centre for Modern Languages.

The premise of this submission is to showcase examples of good practice in language learning and language pedagogy across the broad spectrum of programmes that Léargas manages. It is hoped that such examples will act as models of quality and innovation that may inform the development of a foreign languages strategy, and indeed other relevant language strategies.

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?

Showcasing excellence and rewarding innovation in language teaching and learning is one way to successfully raise awareness and increase motivation for language learning. One such initiative is the European Language Label (ELL). This competition is run annually or biannually across approximately 30 European countries. The award encourages new initiatives in the field of teaching and learning languages, promotes new language pedagogies and helps to disseminate good practice in the field. By supporting these projects, at a local and national level, the ELL seeks to raise the standards of language teaching cross Europe.

The NELLIP National Report (2012) on the Implementation of the European Language Label in Ireland¹ notes that “For the Irish campaign, winners are selected on the basis of excellence, innovation, creativity and their ability to serve as a model for others” (p. 4). With regard to the impact of the European Language Label in Ireland, the NELLIP National Report (pp.10-11) states:

The Label gives a strong degree of recognition and acknowledgement to project promoters. A critical aspect is the enhanced visibility not only in language specific areas (although that is very important) but also in the wider community. The ELL award in particular was seen as enhancing the motivation of the project promoters. The increased visibility for initiatives around technological innovation acts as a particular incentive for those working on e-learning and ICT supported learning. Many university sponsored language learning start-ups have participated in calls and the achievement of an award acts as a genuine spur. For those working with immigration and social integration, achievement of ELL can have a powerful effect and act as a really important form of validation.

On the occasion of the 2013 ELL award ceremony in Ireland, Dr. Céline Healy, Chair of the Irish National Jury, commented that the winning projects illustrate the importance of innovative language-learning initiatives during times of economic challenge. Dr. Healy also noted, “These award-winning projects provide a potential source of inspiration and motivation for others teaching and learning languages”.²

¹ http://nellip.pixel-online.org/RP_national.php

² http://www.leargas.ie/programme_extra.php?prog_code=7019&content=9176

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?

In 2013, the Refugee Access Programme (RAP), a project of the CDETB Separated Children's Service, was awarded the European Language Label. The RAP is an intensive transition programme which aims to equip newly-arrived separated children seeking asylum and other young people from refugee backgrounds with the skills and tools necessary to engage with the mainstream curriculum and to enhance integration in Irish society. While the project works with a specific target audience to enrich curricular engagement, the methodologies, learning outcomes and resources³ could be adapted for other second-language students and migrant learners.⁴

At European level, the ECML project "Language descriptors for migrant and minority learners' success in compulsory education" focuses on "the language competence required in the language of schooling in order to achieve educational success. Eliciting language requirements in curriculum subjects and linking these to CEFR levels will raise educators' awareness of the language migrant and minority language learners' need to perform successfully in compulsory education".⁵ Another ECML project "Collaborative Community Approach to Migrant Education" examines new ways to enhance young migrants' education by developing links between schools, home and local community. "This educational joint venture aims to develop the learners' skills in the language of schooling and their plurilingual competences".⁶

The Foreign Language Assistant Scheme run by the Department of Education and Skills gives participating pupils and teachers the opportunity to experience foreign language as a living language rather than just a curricular subject. Currently, Irish schools may apply to host French, German/Austrian, Spanish and Italian assistants under this scheme. Expanding this scheme to include foreign language assistants from other countries would help to better support migrant languages in educational settings as borne out by the success of the European Commission's Comenius Assistantship programme. This programme enabled future teachers to spend between 13 to 45 weeks in a school in another European country, assisting with classroom teaching, supporting school projects and teaching their mother tongue. During the period of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), approximately 300 assistants were hosted by Irish schools.

A 2008 study examining the impact of Comenius Assistantships on Irish host institutions, noted that language awareness is enhanced by the presence of a Comenius Assistant. One respondent to the study concluded that "Comenius

³ <http://www.separatedchildrenservice.ie/resources/index/classroom-materials>

⁴ <http://www.separatedchildrenservice.ie/services/refugee-access-programme>

⁵ <http://www.ecml.at/F6/tabid/696/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.ecml.at/I3/tabid/948/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

assistants provide living language learning opportunities especially in oral and aural areas. Their input into cultural aspects of language learning is invaluable. They may be the only real encounter in the target language for some learners”.⁷ It is worth noting that during the Lifelong Learning Programme, a significant number of Irish schools requested to host assistants from countries like Poland, Latvia, Czech Republic etc. These schools were motivated to host Comenius Assistants in order to better support newcomer pupils both culturally and linguistically as well as to create a stronger link to the multicultural community in which their schools were located.

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.

The Barcelona Council of 2002 called for action to improve the mastery of basic skills by introducing at least two foreign languages from an early age. A 2012 Eurobarometer indicated that 98% of European citizens believed that mastering languages would be good for the future of their children and 77% believed that ‘mother tongue plus two’ should be a political priority⁸. In addition, recent research by Luk, Bialystok, Craik and Grady (2011) provides compelling evidence as to the positive impact of bilingualism on cognitive function during the lifespan.⁹ Therefore, it is disappointing that the proposed strategy for foreign languages focuses on those students from post-primary level and beyond.

The Framework document for this consultation indicates that the MLPSI was ended in 2012 “...in light of concerns about curriculum overload at primary level...” (p. 8). In the final year of the Comenius Assistantship programme (2013), a significant number of applications cited the abolition of the MLPSI as a primary motivator in hosting a Comenius Assistant. This suggests that, for some primary schools, the importance of maintaining the linguistic and cultural benefits fostered by the work of the MLPSI was not a burden on their curriculum and was an important aspect for the school and the local community. One applicant stated “We believe that the cancellation of the MLPSI has led to a missed opportunity for schools to promote European languages and culture. We envisage using the [Comenius] assistant to promote European languages and customs and introduce our students to basic foreign languages”.

Comenius School Partnerships (2007-2013) projects enabled Irish schools to create partnerships with other European schools to work on projects which were pedagogically relevant and encouraged intercultural exchange. At post-primary level, Comenius bilateral partnerships promoted an immersion approach to language

⁷ Fox, Lisa (2008). *The Impact of Comenius Assistantships on Irish Host Institutions*. Dublin: Research Study.

⁸ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-679_en.htm

⁹ <http://www.jneurosci.org/content/31/46/16808.short>

learning through 10 day reciprocal exchanges with the partner institution. CBS Tramore participated in such a partnership between 2011 and 2013 with a partner school in Spain. The coordinating teacher commented:

[Through] this project we have succeeded at promoting linguistic diversity amongst the participants in the project; students, teachers and families. We have helped to improve the self-esteem of our students, their personal development and their independence. Social cohesion has been promoted with the students learning to respect all personality types within the group. Our students have more knowledge of the world that surrounds them, are more respectful, more tolerant and less self-centered.

Funding for similar projects which foster language learning is supported through Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships in the field of Education, Training and Youth of the Erasmus+ programme.¹⁰

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?

A cohesive and targeted approach to modern foreign language provision during pre-service and in-service education of teaching staff is crucial to ensure that linguistic needs are catered for at all educational levels.

Erasmus placements, assistantships or similar initiatives are very important in fostering lifelong language learning for those in initial teacher education. A 2010 study of the impact of Comenius Assistantships cited the following as the main reasons for future teachers to apply for a Comenius Assistantship¹¹:

- 86% to improve their professional competencies
- 83% to learn a foreign language
- 76% to improve their career prospects

With regard to the specific impact on language competence as a result of undertaking a Comenius Assistantship, the report states that 88% of Assistants noted a substantial improvement of their respective language proficiency and 79% indicated an increased motivation to learn a new foreign language. "However, in order to maximise the impact on language proficiency, the duration of the assistantship should last at least four months; six or more months would be even better" (p. 60).

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm#

¹¹ <http://www.ges-kassel.de/default.aspx?lang=en§ion=4&Project=53>

Undertaking continuous professional development at European level is an excellent way to enhance pedagogical and linguistic competences and provide an opportunity to network with other European colleagues. Comenius In-Service Training (2007-2013) supported three different types of in-service training for up to 6 weeks: structured training courses, European seminars/conferences and a less formal type of training: job-shadowing/work placements/observation periods. A 2010 study of the impact of Comenius In-Service Training activities indicated that the average training under this action lasted 11 days.¹² Positive impact was observed in terms of professional competences and changes at institutional level. Significant impact was noted in terms of pupil learning processes (p.5):

The improvement of learning processes of pupils is the third link in the chain of outcomes and impacts of Comenius In-Service Training and it is a direct result of changes of contents and teaching methods, i.e. the ways in which the professional work is conducted. Overall, the majority of IST-participants reported not only a substantial improvement of subject/content related learning processes but also an increase of social and personal competency of pupils.

Ludmila Snigireva, from Galway attended a Comenius In-Service Training course entitled 'Teaching Russian in Europe: Development of Creativity and Thinking Skills' in Latvia, 2012. Her experience highlights not only the positive impact in terms of her own professional development but also notes the important multiplier effect as a result of targeted dissemination.

During my five days of training I got a unique experience of independent work on teaching the Russian language in Europe and using problem-solving skills with students. I have a long-standing experience of teaching English and Russian, but to be taught how to inspire students - to use their creativity; how to think not in a trivial way; to formulate their ideas not in a standard format - was absolutely revealing to me. Introducing the thinking dimension in the learning process became my priority after taking this course.

I gained not only that. I became so "infected" with the ideas which I got during the training activities that I started to spread the virus of developing my learners thinking approach to studies among my colleagues as well as my students. I presented a report to my colleagues and distributed handout materials which I brought from the course to them. Apart from these colleagues, I gave a talk

¹² www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product.../29745_istreport_en.pdf

at a Eurolog-Ireland¹³ seminar and took part in round tables at International Conferences for Slavic Studies in the UK (in April) and Ireland (in May).

Funding for similar continuous professional development opportunities is available through Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals under the Erasmus+ programme.¹⁴

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 European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a personal document charting the progress of a language learner. This document permits learners of all ages to record their language learning and cultural experiences at school or outside school. The adoption of the ELP at all levels of education would allow for greater transparency regarding true skill level as well as helping to foster motivation for language progression. 51 versions of the ELP currently exist and can be viewed and downloaded from the ELP database.¹⁵ Little, Goulier and Hughes (2011) (p. 12) attest to the impact of the ELP¹⁶:

The overwhelming initial reaction to the ELP from both learners and teachers in all the different contexts for which models were developed was positive. Learners reported that they found the ELP motivating. They found the ways in which it described the different components of communicative competence clear and illuminating. They enjoyed the possibilities for self-assessment and goal-setting that the ELP provided. They appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their plurilingual and pluricultural experience. Teachers, too, observed the benefits of the ELP...where the ELP fully reflected curriculum goals and where self-assessment and other aspects of learner autonomy were being fostered, the ELP was perceived as providing a valuable mediating tool between teachers and learners and between the classroom and the curriculum.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was designed “to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language

¹³ <http://www.russianireland.com/index.php/en/news/153-russians-in-ireland/6439-eurolog-ireland>

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm#

¹⁵ <http://elp.ecml.at/UsingtheELP/Browseportfolios/tabid/2370/language/en-EN/Default.aspx>

¹⁶ www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Publications/ELP_StorySoFar_July2011_Final_EN.pdf

syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency”.¹⁷ It has worldwide recognition as an indicator of foreign language competence. The inclusion of CEFR benchmarking in accreditation systems at all educational levels in Ireland would permit greater equivalency and transparency for language competences at national and international levels.

6. Assuring Quality

What measures should be in place to support quality assurance measures, evaluation processes and research projects and to provide a knowledge and evidence base for policy making in the area of foreign languages?

Close collaboration with the European Centre for Modern Languages and the European Commission will allow for mainstreaming and localisation of best practice derived from evidence-based initiatives conducted on a European level.

The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) is a Council of Europe institution based in Graz, Austria. In cooperation with the Language Policy Unit of the Council the Centre functions as a catalyst for reform in the teaching and learning of languages. It assists its stakeholders in member states in bringing language education policies and practices together¹⁸. A pertinent ECML project is “Plurilingual whole school curricula” (PlurCur)¹⁹ which aims to “assess the concept of a plurilingual, inclusive and intercultural whole school policy comprising majority and minority, regional, heritage and neighbouring languages”. The intention of this project is to develop tools which will help to create and implement plurilingual, inclusive and intercultural school policies in the ECML member states.

The European Commission’s DG EAC key responsibilities in the field of languages are: “to help support the learning of languages across Europe, as well as promote linguistic diversity”.²⁰ Working with OECD, Unesco and Eurostat, the DG EAC collects and analyses data on language acquisition, teaching and progress across the member states in order to develop evidence-based standards and relevant indicators. Forthcoming initiatives in this area include: a mapping of national assessment and testing methods in Member States (to be carried out by Eurydice in 2015). Additionally, a tender will be launched for a study on the comparability of different assessment methods.

¹⁷ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp

¹⁸ <http://www.ecml.at/>

¹⁹ <http://www.ecml.at/F1/tabid/756/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/index_en.htm

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?

Although this strategy focuses on foreign languages, consideration should be given to other languages (including sign languages) which foster inclusion and allow full participation in a multilingual society. A good example of this is the DeafICT Grundtvig Learning Partnership (2013-2015). This project aims to exchange good practice in the field of career guidance towards adult Deaf people by creating common learning tools and career guidance methodologies to increase the employability of Deaf people and to support them in the job market.

Meeting the needs of EAL students is an important consideration for educational institutions. Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB was awarded the European Language Label in 2011 for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) training for mainstream teachers in the post primary classroom. The aim of this initiative is to make the curriculum more accessible and inclusive for EAL students. "Since January 2011, a total of 142 post primary subject teachers have been trained to be more aware of the language needs of the students in their classes and to adapt their teaching accordingly".²¹

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

There are a number of excellent initiatives that support multilingualism in the broader educational context. These projects help to create links with business and address multilingual gaps. One such project is Vocal Medical, a Leonardo da Vinci (Transfer of Innovation) project. This project "aims to produce training materials and a tool to support communication in emergency situations where there is no common language and/or a need to bridge cultural gaps between different healthcare systems".²² The outputs of this project will be particularly useful for medical practitioners, nurses and member of the emergency services as well as those who healthcare professionals. There is a compelling rationale for this project as "inadequate communication increases the risk of diagnostic or therapeutic failure".

²¹ <http://www.ddletb.ie/Second-Level/University-of-Cambridge-ESOL-Exams.aspx>

²² <http://www.vocal-medical.eu/>

8. Other Comments

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

Léargas would welcome the broadening of the proposed strategy to comprise all educational sectors to include pre-school, primary school and adult education in addition to those sectors currently covered by the proposed strategy. In addition, the consideration of migrant languages, sign-languages as well as English and Irish would make for a more robust and inclusive strategy.

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