



**IRISH TRANSLATORS' and INTERPRETERS' ASSOCIATION
CUMANN AISTRITHEOIRÍ agus ATEANGAIRÍ na hÉIREANN**

Department of Education and Skills Language Consultation

**Response of Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association
November 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.

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?

There is a perception in Ireland and other English-speaking countries that everyone around the world speaks the language. While many people do speak English, not everyone does and it is a distinct advantage in business for example to speak other languages apart from English. We need to hear from people who are bilingual or multilingual about the reasons why knowledge of other languages has helped them obtain employment, live abroad, have more options career wise.

Time spent in the country where a language is spoken is invaluable and there need to be more opportunities for secondary school students to go abroad on student exchanges for example.

More exposure to foreign languages in the form of films and music would be very helpful. A foreign language film could be part of the foreign language curriculum for Leaving Cert.

More TV channels than ever are available nowadays but in Ireland practically all provided on Sky and UPC are English language. In contrast, most European countries offer the option of TV programmes in a number of languages. Another possibility would be a 30-

minute current affairs programme each week on RTÉ 2 for German, Spanish, French, Italian, Japanese and Chinese on what is happening in the respective countries conducted totally in the respective language.

Language classes after hours in every school for conversation and a minimum of grammar/syntax for as many languages as possible conducted by native speakers from among the New Irish – making the New Irish feel really welcome

Many continental Europeans are now resident and working in Ireland. Irish people now meet and get to know French, Germans, Spaniards and Italians, and are exposed to their language and culture – perhaps the mingling of peoples will achieve more than any public information campaign would.

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?

It is important to raise awareness among migrant parents that children generally have no problem learning multiple languages and that immersion in English outside the home (including in school) will be adequate for their needs in Ireland. Learning additional languages, including Irish, will still 'leave space' for their heritage language.

Proficiency in the heritage language and in English allows for more study and career options. It facilitates contact with family members who speak the heritage language. It allows for more options regarding study, a career, and a place to live.

In schools, it is important that teachers encourage the use of other languages in the schoolyard, among siblings and groups of friends with the same language. Students who are learning English could be encouraged to do some project work or writing in their own language. Reading groups organised by language could help as parents often do a great job with oral and aural skills but may find it more difficult and time-consuming to teach their child to read and write in the heritage language.

Maintaining high proficiency in mother-tongue is down to parents, so create support for parents and kids at the school, to organise play-groups or reading/writing groups in relevant languages.

Support for Saturday or Sunday schools that provide education in migrant families' language and culture is essential. It would also be very helpful to recognise the education that takes place in such schools through assessment at curricular level.

Offer Spanish, German, Polish and other languages at primary level as part of the curriculum.

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.

Children should be taught English grammar so that they are not first confronted with concepts such as subject, verb, clause, relative pronoun, etc., when they are learning a foreign language. Knowledge of how English works would help people to relate to the workings of other languages a bit better.

More language learning at primary school level is essential – this is the norm in most European countries.

It is vital to learn to write the language properly, and to have reading ability. There is no point in speaking a language if you are functionally illiterate in that language. The oral skills will kick in once the groundwork is done in reading and writing. Students must go abroad for at least for a year to the country where the language they are studying is spoken, read and written (and, where necessary, subsidies should be provided for these stays). Language teaching should not be limited to the language alone: study of the music, literature, cinema, culture, and customs of the country must be included.

Already, at third-level (university) in Ireland students can take a degree course (e.g., engineering, architecture, economics etc.) plus one language. Many do opt for this combination. This trend should receive the utmost encouragement.

Beginning with Irish at primary level, introduce grammar earlier, as the building-structure of any language, then words (the “bricks”) become useful!

Have an “Erasmus-type” year for secondary school children in a bilateral programme with other countries – swap my son/daughter for your son/daughter for three months.

Primary and Secondary school teachers should speak to the students in the target language for a significant amount of each class. Obviously some things should be explained in the English, but there's no reason why a good teacher cannot slowly habituate students to listening and understanding the foreign language if it used in a suitable and progressive manner.

Students at secondary school should have the option of taking two foreign languages to Leaving Cert level. This would help towards the 1 + 2 ideal of the EU.

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?

Time spent abroad should be compulsory for anyone studying modern languages and in particular for teachers. The Teaching Council should introduce this as one of their criteria for recognition of teachers of foreign languages.

It would be helpful for schools to have some members of staff who are native speakers of the foreign languages taught in the school.

The option of, for example, a French teacher based in Ireland doing a swap with an English teacher in France should be encouraged.

It can be difficult for established teachers to keep up their skills – an annual holiday in the country where the language they teach is spoken may not actually challenge them. Support for time spent attending language courses abroad would be helpful or indeed sabbaticals.

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 framework should be implemented so that people actually can be placed and work towards something. If one did a language module every year, one could conceivably leave college with a B1 or B2 level, which even if it isn't full professional proficiency, is certainly something to build upon.

Encourage students of engineering, architecture, science, law, to spend an Erasmus semester or year in another European country where they either improve their skills in a language they already know or they learn a new language.

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?

Have clear learning outcomes at each level of the education system for languages that are studied. The European Framework is useful as it gives some concrete landmarks.

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 language classes for newcomers, and allow easy access to interpreters. Publicly invite and promote all languages spoken in Ireland.

There are many multinational companies in Ireland who need people with languages. More could be done to nurture the language skills of children living in Ireland to ensure that they can have the option of accessing these jobs in the future.

There are very few opportunities for people in Ireland who speak languages other than French, German, and Spanish, to improve their knowledge of their languages and to study them at third level.

The education system plays a role by training translators to work in Ireland and abroad. However, the languages on offer are those taught traditionally in Ireland: French, German, Spanish, Italian, plus Japanese and more recently Chinese. More could be done for other European languages such as Polish, Romanian, Greek etc. as well as for languages such as Arabic and Russian.

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

Afford employees opportunities to learn languages within their working environment and reward those who apply themselves and excel therein.

Offer employees with language skills the opportunity to spend time in a branch of the company in another country where they can perfect their skills.

Give employees who have/acquire languages skills opportunities to use them in their professional environment; this, however, also requires some understanding on the part of

employers that just because someone gets 100% in a written test, it does not necessarily mean that they can automatically breeze through any given situation in a foreign language.

Pay employees with language skills extra.

Pay for or subsidise employees' languages courses with such costs being a deductible expense on the P/L account under employee training.

8. Other Comments

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

Schoolchildren across Europe learn grammar – they are familiar with terms such as verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, subordinate clause etc. This knowledge of the grammar of their first language helps them learn and understand the grammar of new languages. In Ireland, most schoolchildren do not have this knowledge and this is a drawback when it comes to learning foreign languages.

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

Acknowledgement: The Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association would like to thank members who kindly responded to our request for views on this questionnaire.