

**Foreign Languages in Education Strategy**  
**Submission by the Integration Centre**

Name of respondent: Péter Szlovák

Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented: The Integration Centre

Email address: peter@integrationcentre.ie

Note: The Integration Centre is an NGO working towards the inclusion of people with a migrant background to all aspects of Irish society through capacity building, research and policy work. We welcome the development of the foreign languages in education strategy and particularly the inclusion of migrant languages as an important aspect. The submission will mostly concentrate on that question (No. 2), migrant languages in educational setting.

## 2. 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?*

A national campaign should be implemented with a view to raising awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages in schools. This should consist of emphasising the benefits of language learning in parent-teacher meetings and career guidance sessions. A circular and guidance document in consultation with both linguistics and industry experts should be adopted. Furthermore, speakers could be invited to schools who can make presentation how competency in foreign languages bring many benefits in building successful careers. A short film/video competition could be run to select the best entries to promote language learning in the school environment. Of course, the campaign should draw on the resources of the Post-primary Languages Initiatives including the videos made. Schools could hold foreign language day once a year; a possible option would be to co-ordinate that local level among schools. This could be combined with an intercultural event but if such approach is taken consideration should be given to afford sufficient focus on the importance of foreign languages. Organising such days should not be limited to schools with notable migrant student population. Summer camps which entail introducing foreign languages to students should be supported. Special small grants could be made available for introducing foreign languages through summer camps.<sup>i</sup>

On a medium term, the Department has to consider making foreign language learning compulsory in schools. Additionally, it could explore additional measures; for instance, allocating extra points for passing language exams for the purpose of entry to third level institutions (not just courses with foreign language component) or making language a compulsory subject in the Leaving Certificate examination.

### 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?**

On a broader level, the importance of creating an inclusive school environment needs to be underlined. Making efforts by schools in using images and words that reflect the school community, as a good number of schools already do, is an integral part of that inclusive approach. School may carry out a review of noticeboards and signs in classrooms and corridors to examine how they can ensure that the diversity of languages among students is represented. This is not to say that every notice needs to be translated into languages but that other languages become visible in the school environment and used as much as it is possible. One concrete implementation of such approach was done by the BEATA project in Castleknock, endorsed by Amnesty International. Such approach recognises heritage language and culture of migrant students and may also have a positive impact on the perception of heritage languages in schools, even among migrant students.

As to teaching migrant languages in some form, small exchanges & projects could be useful initial starting points. We pointed out in a previous submission that the method of co-operative learning could be explored in schools to help build relationship between different ethnic and social groups. Through co-operative learning small mixed groups are formed in which members are inter-dependent when carrying out tasks.<sup>1</sup> This method could be also utilised in facilitating small language exchange type of exercises between children with different mother tongues. Such task could generate interest in languages and would give an immediate experience of using other languages. Activities can take different forms: they may be run only very occasionally simply to help children to experience using other languages. The activity could be also organised as a project where children will need to work together over a longer period. Added to that, after-school activities and summer camps can also serve as a platform to introduce heritage languages to English/Irish speakers while such activities can also be an effective way of teaching English to non-English speaking children.

Strongly related to that is the option of running short-courses in migrant languages. The fact that this is going to be available through the new Junior Certificate cycle is to be welcomed. The initiative should be utilised to attract English/Irish speaker children to do a taster course of other languages. This would help them to appreciate other languages present at the school and in their communities, understand better their classmates from different backgrounds and experience the benefit of using other languages. In addition, groups could be formed where English/Irish speaker children could receive some support from speakers of those languages; for instance, if Polish is taught as a short course, English/Irish speaking children could be asked to work with Polish classmates. As indicated above, a possible further development could be to organise exchange types of activities so Polish children would in turn receive help from their English/Irish speaking peers.

Ideally, part of the tuition should be further progressed into a level where longer language courses are available as an option for pupils in schools. In Ireland the Leaving Certificate examination includes a range of languages including several of those spoken by migrant communities such as Russian, Arabic, French and German. A critical question to be considered - apart from the option of taking foreign languages as an exam – is to see whether more migrant/minority language tuition could be delivered within schools. In general approximating foreign language teaching and migrant/minority language tuition should be an important objective in the foreign languages in education strategy.

Currently there are a number of weekend schools that are run mostly by Central and East European communities. Further language teaching and heritage culture activities are carried out by cultural centres and religious establishments. It would be useful to explore closer collaboration between those voluntary initiatives and schools: to run heritage language classes and cultural activities in the school building if possible; establish relationship between organising bodies of those programmes and local schools; involving representatives in school events. A number of European countries decided to adopt bilateral agreements with countries of origin to facilitate mother tongue tuition of migrant communities. Such approach could be explored in Ireland in relation to large groups, particularly from Central and East Europe such Poland and Lithuania. It is acknowledged that there

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<sup>1</sup> See Johnson, D.W, and Johnson, R.T. (1989) *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Research* Edina, MN: Interaction; Ginsburg-Block, M.D., Rohrbeck, C.A., and Fantuzzo, J.W. (2006) 'A meta-analytical review of social, self-concept, and behavioural outcomes of peer-assisted learning'. *Journal of Education Psychology*, 98 (4), 732-749.

have been negotiations between Post-Primary Language Initiatives and the Polish Embassy in regard to the development of a short course in Polish. However, such negotiations could broaden out to discussing provision of Polish language (and cultural) tuition with a view to achieving closer collaboration between school education and voluntary initiatives. In countries with that approach teachers are often employed by countries of origin but such approach does not have to be adopted in Ireland necessarily. To date in Ireland, similarly to the UK, teachers were often employed by voluntary and private initiatives, with some support from embassies, or teachers worked as volunteers. In the UK however schools have also offered a foreign language within the modern languages curriculum and in recent years schools were helped to make efforts to offer language(s) spoken by the local community.<sup>2</sup>

Over the near future in Ireland the question of support is likely to concern supporting language tuition as extracurricular activity. Some framework document would be desirable for the purpose of helping schools' collaboration with voluntary initiatives. In such option partnership among schools should be encouraged, with one school offering its premise (or promote the initiative at least) for pupils of other neighbouring schools, too. This would ensure that sufficient number avail of those extra-curricular language classes. Over the medium-term, however, it is hoped that teaching some minority languages in schools where sufficient demand exist can be delivered as part of the curriculum – even if classes may be taught in the afternoon. In the UK Urdu and Bengali are an optional subjects in a number of schools; in Austria Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Turkish are the main migrant languages available but there are other 15 migrant languages taught in schools, mostly in afternoon classes.<sup>3</sup> Encouraging the use of mother tongue is seen as key determinant in increasing interest: for instance, in England there was a sharp rise between 2007 and 2011 in the share of pupils choosing Urdu as a subject.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of short courses through Junior Certificate is a positive step; but it is unlikely to meet stronger demand by migrant pupils. The Department of Education may set up an Advisory Group to establish a guideline for schools to establish parameters to consider in teaching new foreign languages classified as migrant (minority) languages.

One group that perhaps needs specific attention is French speakers, more specifically families with African origin where French is their first language. In 2011 about 56,000 people reported speaking French at home, greatly exceeding the number of French citizens living in Ireland where many of those families arrived from African countries. Approximately 19,000 of French speakers were younger than 18 at the time of Census 2011. It is important that French teaching involves strong engagement with local French speaking communities and that families are fully aware of the importance of the benefits of achieving high command of both oral and written French.

One recognised challenge is to establish a mechanism for the purpose of deciding on supporting minority language tuition in schools. Several countries opted to introduce a minimum threshold while some others – for instance Spain and UK - deferred the decision to schools. It may be useful for the Department to set out some guideline numbers. Where numbers are low, schools would be

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<sup>2</sup> Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe* (April 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Same as above

<sup>4</sup> "Teaching of Urdu has doubled over four years", 27 January 2011, *Independent* (Accessed at [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk))

advised to form a partnership with other schools to attract sufficient number of students for classes. Educational and Training Board could offer a liaison role. In Dublin the former VEC now Educational and Training Board decided to support Polish language teaching – a model that could be explored elsewhere, too. In general probably a combination of resources by Irish education system and countries of origins through embassies and private organisations will all be necessary to support migrant language tuition.

A further question is how to ensure that qualified teachers are available to teach those languages. The Post-Primary Languages Initiatives in collaboration with embassies and Teaching Council could develop simplified accreditation system for foreign language teachers trained in other countries with a view to offering small grants towards the provision of heritage (migrant) language classes with accredited teachers. The purpose of such measure would be to ensure that teachers hold appropriate qualifications. A further and more medium-term step can be facilitating the actual registration of teachers of foreign languages from other countries with the Teaching Council. Such process may involve taking an English language exam and verification of professional experience. Foreign trained teachers may need to pass an aptitude test or go through an adaptation period. An interim or additional measure could be extending the foreign language assistant scheme, if possible, to teachers from other countries such as Poland and Russia. Initial evidence suggests that many of the weekend classes are run by teacher qualified in countries of origin. In fact some already formed their organisations such as the Russian Language Teachers Association in Ireland. Such registration initiatives could be promoted in partnership with community/cultural organisations and embassies for the purpose of encouraging and facilitating registration of teachers of foreign languages, qualified in other countries.

In parallel with that, discussion has to begin as to third level institutes' expanding training in minority languages. Generally speaking, foreign languages tend to constitute a major subject in programmes or be offered as an elective module or evening course. Currently there are several third level institutions that offer courses where French, German and Spanish (or Italian sometimes) is a major subject. It would be beneficial to examine if other languages, spoken by large migrant communities, could become available in more institutions primarily as elective modules or evening courses (Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Romanian, Arabic and Yoruba<sup>5</sup>). It is recognised that creating courses where minority languages are a major subject is a complex process with strong resource implications and where the benefit of using the foreign language outside Ireland needs to be considered, too. However, offering courses, for instance, in Russian, Arabic, Polish and even Portuguese<sup>6</sup> can be explored with a view to supporting a few selected institutions. (Chinese language is also important but one which seems to have been recognised by a growing number of institutions that began to offer Chinese mainly with Business programmes in recognition of the growing trade and business opportunities between the two countries.) The example of the programmes by Trinity College teaching Russian and Polish can be examined by other colleges. It is also clear that collaborating with institutes and universities from countries of origin, as Trinity College has been doing with Moscow State University, is a key part in capacity building. It can be accepted that if minority languages are

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<sup>5</sup> Those were the most widely spoken foreign languages at home in Ireland in 2011 according to Census 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Teaching Portuguese can be justified by both the number of Brazilians living in Ireland but also the growing business relationship between Brazil and the European Union including Ireland.

promoted and especially taught at secondary level then third level institutions will be likely to experience stronger demand from students with inter-mediate/advanced language skills.

Teaching migrant languages at school does not need to jeopardise the learning of English language. It is essential that language provision continues and no further cuts are implemented without putting in place a proper tracking system of non-native speaking students (that can inform decision on resource allocations). In terms of practical implementation of language support, we recommend that language provision be integrated in schools life as far as possible. For instance, schools often use a dedicated room for teaching English. Such room should open up to other activities from time to time to ensure that other students do not see it as a room separate for “migrant students”. For instance, short courses in heritage (minority) languages or other foreign languages could take place here. What is important here is that bringing migrant (minority) languages to schools fosters a multilingual environment that benefits migrant students as well as the wider student community.

### **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.**

School lessons are the most frequent way of learning languages. The Eurobarometer on foreign languages reported that those countries with high proportion of foreign language speakers tend to name schools as by the far the most important place to learn languages (92% of people in Sweden and Slovenia; 91% of people in the Netherlands; 90% of people in Denmark and Latvia).<sup>7</sup> Therefore it is essential that students’ language learning is given sufficient focus and resources in schools.

One method, although resources intensive, is considered effective is teaching one or several subjects through a foreign language. This might be not suitable for every schools but it could be introduced more broadly than it is the case now. Clearly, Gaeltacht schools were shown to be effective in advancing students’ level of Irish. Notwithstanding the specific role played by Irish language in schools, teaching other languages could draw on the experience of teaching Irish effectively in those secondary schools. Initiatives in other countries demonstrated that such approach does not necessarily require teaching the whole curriculum in a foreign language but could involve teaching one or two subjects (although of course bilingual schools are very effective in teaching foreign languages). For instance, in Sweden a project awarded by the European Language Label consisted of teaching science in English with tangible positive impact on students. Content and Language Integrated Learning approach is a method that merit further consideration here as it teaches both foreign language and content simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, language is learnt through real-life content which increases motivation and makes language learning more of an acquisition than studying. In fact such approach has been used to teach English in several schools in Ireland.

Work placement, volunteering opportunities through Transition Year and school projects could be created where students can utilise their foreign languages in a practical environment including business and community organisations as well as partnering with schools in other EU countries. Visiting ethnic shops or ethnic organisations along with doing additional desk research can also be

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<sup>7</sup> Eurobarometer 386, “Europeans and Their Languages”

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/europe/our-work-in-europe/content-and-language-integrated-learning-clil>.

run as standalone activities that provide opportunities for students to use minority languages and learn about cultures. Neighbouring schools could also organise projects jointly. Libraries can play an important supporting role through offering resources and assist school in programmes and initiatives related to foreign (including minority) languages. Those resources can include films and online materials. The Tell Me More initiative by Central Library was proven to be successful among many (although mainly adult) users.

The Eurobarometer also demonstrated that there was an overwhelming support for watching foreign language programmes and movies with subtitles among Scandinavian countries and Netherlands, where those countries also reported good linguistics skills. This suggests that promoting and utilising visual tools such as programmes and movies are a great complimentary way of enhancing language skills.<sup>9</sup>

#### **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?**

Ensuring an adequate supply of highly-skilled teachers/trainers of foreign language is a major challenge in foreign language tuition. On the one hand, there are factors in the demand side that are important. As previously mentioned, as demand for foreign (and minority) language tuition in schools and further and higher education increases thanks to increased awareness of the benefits there will be an increased need for training foreign language teachers. It is particularly important, as recognised by the Department, that migrant communities that speak foreign languages in question are supported to become proficient and consider career in foreign language teaching. Measures to incentivise taking foreign language as a Leaving Certificate subject could contribute to sustaining such demand. As for the supply side, a key measure is to promote foreign language teaching as a career (alongside promoting foreign languages in schools in general). Information materials and videos can be created to generate interest in the career. The financial incentive introduced by the UK government to attract more people into foreign language teacher training should be strongly considered as an interim measure to boost the number of foreign and minority language teachers.<sup>10</sup> Outreach efforts should be made to communities that speak foreign languages in question. The Department may also engage with embassies and consulates for the purpose of promoting foreign language teaching among professionals from other countries. As mentioned before, such engagement should also target teaching professionals living in Ireland with a view to encouraging and supporting their entering the profession here.

It would be advisable that the Department set an interval target for and monitors the number of students sitting foreign language as a subject in the Leaving Certificate exam. Similarly, it is useful to have a target for the number of graduates in foreign language courses. This would allow the Department to measure progress in promoting foreign languages; but more specifically, to help to estimate the number of foreign language teachers to be trained to meet such demand. It is recognised that there is inevitably some fluctuation in demand and there is a merit in giving certain

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<sup>9</sup> Eurobarometer 386, 2012

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/subjects-age-groups/teach-mfl>



amount of freedom of school to decide on which languages they would teach. Nevertheless it is imperative that some framework is established for the Department and third level institutions to inform the policy in terms of facilitating teaching foreign languages in schools.

There are a number of institutions that teach foreign languages at a high standard. It would be beneficial to extend the number of courses that train foreign language teachers, particularly other than French and German. Naturally, such courses has to involve some form of studying abroad as it is well-documented that such experience raises language levels. It is also important that programmes engages with organisations within Ireland where appropriate. There are established cultural centres such as the Goethe Institute, Allais Frances or Cervantes, which are obvious partners for third level institutes. Nevertheless, there are also a considerable number of French speakers, particularly with an African background, who may not have connection with Allais Frances but would be worth engaging with. There are also significant number of Russian, Arabic, Mandarin and Polish speakers who do not have a cultural centre. Many of those groups do have however some organisations (for instance the Islamic Cultural Centre or the Irish-Polish Association play such role to a certain degree) and they merit attention in terms of engagement. The value in engaging with migrant communities is both using the language and understanding that the linguistic and cultural diversity now present in Ireland. In that manner the strong overlap between foreign and minority language teaching is recognised.

Equally important, that as far as possible, students are given the opportunity to visit businesses such as multinationals and SMEs and do projects that involve interacting with those workplaces or do short placement there if feasible to help them experience using vocabulary and communication style that is required in a business environment. It is clear that a number of language courses include such element, typically where the course has also a business aspect. However, such experience is also useful for students that do not necessarily teach business aspect of languages.

## **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?***

The education system has a role, as discussed, in raising awareness of the benefits of multilingualism. Part of that is to point out how the multilingual workforce, now primarily migrant population, has been a key asset for companies in Ireland, particularly multinationals but also small-medium size enterprises that trade abroad. It is equally important that the school system raises awareness of the linguistic diversity existing in Ireland through curricular and extracurricular activities as well as creating an inclusive school environment in terms of images, notices and displays. Further Education and Higher Education institutions could take inspiration from primary and secondary schools that have been more proactive in creating such inclusive environment. Existing local language exchange initiatives could be better supported by educational institutions. There are a number of voluntary initiatives, often run in libraries and other public places that could be linked to colleges, for instance languages centres.



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

Employers can promote language learning among their employees in general. They could explore the possibility of more practical support: for instance, offering venue for language classes (typically delivered in the evenings) or language exchanges among its employees. They could collaborate with cultural institutes or language centres to offer language classes. That may involve certain level of subsidy by them and securing a lower price for the group. They could incentivise language learning by offering bonus for completing language exams. On a more general level they should be consulted in determining the content of foreign language teaching in higher (and further) education, especially in regard to those courses that have business or technical component. Furthermore, as the it is already the case in some institutions for instance in Cork Institute of Technology, industry experts and company representatives could be invited as guest speakers to courses with foreign language component.

**8. Other Comments**

It is held that Irish language teaching reduces the option of teaching foreign language. The Modern Languages Initiatives in primary schools was finished on account of over-stretching of the curriculum. We feel that regarding teaching of foreign languages and Irish as either/or option is incorrect. 56% of Irish people stated in Eurobarometer than people should speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Most children tend to have the capacity to learn several languages and primary schools age group is the best to begin foreign language teaching. People from Scandinavian countries or Netherlands tend to have high command of language(s) (especially English) partly because children begin learning languages at an early age; in fact often in pre-school environment. Therefore, beginning language tuition at least in primary school level is highly recommended. Such introduction does not need to be extensive; but it is crucial to prepare children for more extensive language learning in secondary and higher education. The UK government recently decided to introduce compulsory teaching of foreign languages from the age of 7. In many European countries children learn two (foreign) languages and therefore it is reasonable to expect that Irish students are able to cope with learning Irish and foreign languages, as it happens in two-thirds of secondary schools at the moment. The key message here is that Irish and foreign language are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, learning both can have cross-fertilising effects. Migrant children often display good skills to learn Irish as they already speak another language at home.

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<sup>i</sup> The question of intensive summer language courses are not discussed here as they are not run for awareness raising purposes.