

## **DES Strategy on Foreign Languages in Education: DDLETB Consultation**

### **Q1 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?**

#### **1.1 General**

- The DES national strategy on foreign languages needs to make reference to existing educational strategies in relation to literacy and numeracy and to the promotion of STEM subjects: it is vital that all such strategies in education are seen as complementary rather than competitive, especially in the light of changes at second level with the introduction of the new Junior Cycle
- Measures within the strategy should include information and supports for schools at primary and second level on how to ensure that language learning is part of a whole school approach.

#### **1.2 Public Awareness Campaign**

- A public awareness campaign is required regarding the importance of learning additional languages from the point of view of
  - enhancing learning skills and lifelong cognitive skills in general
  - improving career prospects in particular
- The campaign should make best use of the media, especially television, with high profile 'personalities' eg, Hector Ó hEochagáin as a speaker of Irish, English and Spanish and Des Bishop who has learnt and performed in Irish and Chinese
- Such a campaign should include a specific focus and information for parents regarding encouraging their children to include language options not only at second level but at third level

- Embassies have a role to play in supporting teenagers from their communities to develop an appreciation for their native language. They could be available to schools to sponsor cultural events, send materials (eg, realia), offer prizes for competitions and debates, give talks etc. (see additional comments in response to question 2)
- Businesses have a role to play eg, in drawing attention to the fact that many of them provide training in foreign languages with incentives for promotion.

### **1.3 Language Events for 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Schools**

- There should be an annual high profile event for school students eg, languages week
  - to promote interest in and motivation for language learning
  - to celebrate achievement in language learning (perhaps in the form of a school award eg, language learner of the year)
  - to promote opportunities for exchange visits (ideally these would be partly funded visits eg, during Transition Year) and for work placements in other countries, in the EU in particular
- There are a number of events which demonstrate the effectiveness of such an approach such as the BT Young Scientist event and the GRADChances Languages Fair held in February of this year. This event should be targeted not only at graduates but also at second level students. Schools should be encouraged to bring Transition Year students to this event
- It would be helpful if representatives from international companies such as Google, Facebook and PayPal participated in such events by giving talks to students to highlight the importance of languages in business

- There should be a significant presence/stall promoting 'languages for life' at the Higher Options Fair and this event should specifically target 6<sup>th</sup> Year students in order to encourage them to maintain their language skills eg, by pursuing their studies at third level. Second level students could have their language skills tested (reading and listening) at the event by doing an on-line interactive test which interprets and aligns their second language ability to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This information would enhance students' CV
- Career Guidance teachers should identify students with strong language skills and promote third level options which include a language combination (Business, Law, IT etc); the benefits of such options (including pay) should be pointed out to teenagers
- Job opportunities in the EU (eg, Brussels) should also be highlighted to students so that they see a clear career progression. This would help ensure Ireland meets its quota of applicants for these jobs.

## **Q2 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?**

### **2.1 Standardised testing of students**

- Testing and monitoring of migrant students' English language proficiency was previously linked to teaching posts for English as an Additional Language (EAL). Although this may no longer be an official requirement due to the reduction in Language Support teachers, testing by skilled and qualified teachers should continue to take place. This would help to identify and monitor individual students' needs (as recommended in the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy) and enable migrant students to access the curriculum on an equal basis. In the absence of trained in-house staff, the Cambridge Placement Test could be used for this as it is an on-line 30 minute test which is easy to administer
- The Cambridge English suite of examinations, which are specifically written for teenagers, should be used in schools in Ireland. The examination 'Preliminary English Test (PET) for Schools' benchmarks a level at which a student can cope with everyday language and can begin to cope with academic language. No student should enter senior cycle unless they have this level
- Leaving Certificate Students who do not have English as their first language could be facilitated to sit the 'First Certificate' (Cambridge English examination) in June along with the other Leaving Certificate examinations. The First Certificate would benchmark their language proficiency on leaving school in a meaningful way and serve to enhance their future study and job prospects. This would be a lifelong investment in the integration of migrant students.

## 2.2 Language proficiency in students' mother tongue

- The skills deficit Ireland is experiencing in relation to languages in the workplace could be offset by supporting migrants not only to maintain and improve their language skills (in particular reading and writing) in their first language but also to support them in learning the post-primary curriculum through English
- Supporting migrant students in accessing the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate curriculum through English would help them to acquire the points they need for third level. This in turn would enable them to combine their first language with other studies, for example Chinese and Business/IT/Law
- The Swedish Education model whereby migrant students can study their first language (L1) within school time and take an examination in their L1 as part of the school curriculum is commendable (although this approach could possibly put too much pressure on the curriculum, especially in Senior Cycle)
- Non-curricular languages should be available in the Junior Certificate as well as the Leaving Certificate, thus supporting students to maintain their L1 skills throughout their post-primary education
- Minority languages should be available to study for the Leaving Certificate (Turkish, Urdu, Persian etc), not only EU languages. The current situation creates a two tier system whereby some languages are valued more than others. The UK organisation 'Asset Languages' facilitates this for migrants to the UK
- Examinations in non-curricular languages should place greater emphasis on communicative skills while still promoting the reading and writing development of migrants in their L1. Some students may only speak their parents' first language and not read or write it: success in Leaving Certificate non-curricular languages needs to be achievable
- There could be two versions of the Russian examination for the Leaving Certificate: one for those who take it up from scratch (to include oral and listening exams) and another one for those who speak it at home. This would level the playing field.

### **2.3 The role of parents and embassies**

- Parents should be encouraged to value and promote their children's L1 competence
- Embassies also have a role to play in this by funding/organising language classes for young people from their communities outside school hours eg, to prepare students for sitting non-curricular languages for the Leaving Certificate. Few embassies currently embrace this role.
- Migrant parents should be supported to understand the CAO system. Key documents should be available in different languages. The Immigrant Parents and Guardians Support Association (IPGSA) should receive state funding to carry out this work.

### **2.4 Language levels of school text books**

- A review of the language level of all text books in use in our schools (History in particular) should take place. This would ensure 12 year olds are not studying texts aimed at adults who have a C2 language competence in English (ie, the language level of a native speaker studying at third level). In many cases, books are written by academics who do not have an awareness of how language can be a barrier to understanding. Using plain English may not be enough to benefit migrant students: an awareness of vocabulary and grammar is also required
- All post-primary text books should have a glossary as standard to support the language and literacy development of all students. (Other aspects of layout could also be examined to ensure that school text books support the language and literacy development of students).

## 2.5 State examinations

- The additional effort required of migrant students to learn subjects through another language could be rewarded with bonus points in the Leaving Certificate
- Curriculum and examination changes arising from Project Maths need careful monitoring in relation to increased language and literacy demands eg, mathematical tasks and questions should not become so wordy as to disadvantage students who do not have English as a first language
- All state examination papers should be carefully screened for language which could create a barrier to students' achieving their potential: this would benefit all students
- The use of dictionaries as reasonable accommodation in State examinations should be available to all EAL students who are below a B2 English language competence (with reference to the CEFR). Less emphasis should be put on the characteristics of the dictionary (eg, a translation dictionary) than on the level of need of the student. EAL students should be allowed to use the dictionary which they are accustomed to and have been trained to use in class.

## 2.6 Information and supports for teachers

- Information and guidelines are needed to raise the awareness of all teachers in relation to the needs of migrant students
- It is important to dispel the myth that migrant students should never use their first language during school: students need to use their L1 to process information and to help them make sense of their learning
- Migrant students do not currently receive enough recognition and praise from teachers for the significant challenge and effort required to learn subjects through another language, especially now that there are decreasing levels of language support available

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- As mentioned above, suggestions for teachers as to how to choose books and resources which help language learners to access the curriculum would be useful
- Continuing Professional Development in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) training should be available for all mainstream teachers (eg, History, Maths, Science) to support the language and literacy needs of all students (as recommended in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy). Not all teachers currently have the confidence or the tools to embrace their role in supporting the language and literacy development of their students.



### **Q3 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.**

#### **3.1 Awareness-raising in educational settings**

- As part of the awareness campaign (see response to Question 1), it should be clear to everyone involved in the educational sector that language learning is an essential learning skill for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- First Year students should be offered language ‘tasters’ as part of their induction at second level; this would provide students with the opportunity to try subjects prior to making choices. (This would of course necessitate a flexible approach to timetabling in the first term)
- A special language-themed assembly could be held to coincide with the European day of languages (26<sup>th</sup> September) during which the Principal would say a few words in another language. This could be followed up by all members of the teaching staff attempting to do the same in each lesson throughout the day. The day could be supported by posters promoting different languages with fun facts and figures and other events eg, a French class teaching basic vocabulary to a German or Spanish class, a table quiz in one or two European languages
- On a separate note, students need to be made aware that another language is often required of applicants to colleges in the National University of Ireland.

#### **3.2 Curriculum**

- Language learning should be a compulsory part of the curriculum at primary and throughout second level
- There should be clear guidance to schools at second level regarding the provision of at least one foreign language in the curriculum

- Where possible, timetabling should permit students to study two languages (in addition to Irish) at second level if they wish. Timetabling of Leaving Certificate examinations should also facilitate this.

### **3.3 Junior and Senior Cycles**

- It is essential that language learning is promoted within the new Junior Cycle
- A wider range of language options should be available in our school system ie, not only French, German and Spanish
- There should be a much greater emphasis on speaking the language within the Junior Cycle so that students get into the habit of speaking their chosen language/s early. The oral component should be made compulsory at Junior Certificate level. The curriculum may need to be reduced to incorporate this.
- Continuity of approach between primary and post-primary sectors would support interest in language learning: young students who have experienced language learning as fun and as primarily about communication may be inclined to drop languages at second level if there is too much of a focus on drilling students to pass examinations. Students should be given the time and space to enjoy language learning, including learning about the culture of the country and availing of opportunities to visit the country
- A smaller teacher: student ratio (eg, 17:1) would facilitate oral language development in language classrooms
- A higher percentage of marks should be given to oral examinations for the Leaving Certificate to encourage students to be competent using and interacting in the language. Currently this stands at 20-25% for French and Spanish for example which is in stark contrast to the 40% allocated to the oral component in the Irish Leaving Certificate examination
- When reviewing Leaving Certificate examination scripts in Foreign Languages, it would be helpful if the marks awarded for the oral were open to scrutiny in the same way that other components of the examination are. (Oral examinations are recorded so this should not be an issue)

- Students should be offered the opportunity to do examinations for the European Framework of languages as these are the standards which are recognised across the EU and hence would support students seeking employment in Europe
- Support is needed for the establishment of e-networks (e-twinning) with other EU schools to enable our students to talk to their peers in other countries in the target language, do projects together and/or for students to talk to teachers from other countries eg, via Skype. While there could be logistical issues in including such contact within the school day (eg, timetable constraints, time differences across Europe), Transition Year might be the stage during which such initiatives could be accommodated. The benefits of E-twinning need to be promoted and the logistical difficulties addressed
- Events and competitions should be available which help students make the link between literacy and language learning eg, the provision of a national 'Spelling Bee' competition through another language such as French or Spanish. The Association of Spanish Teachers' inter-schools debating competition is a model of excellence and should be replicated in other languages
- The role of Transition Year (TY) in the promotion of language learning should be highlighted and all schools should be encouraged to offer it. TY is the ideal time for students to travel to the country of the language they are learning and to experience the culture as well as the life of students in another country. Funding should be made available to support DEIS schools to participate in such exchanges
- Students who study a second or additional Foreign Language should gain extra points through the CAO process in order to encourage take-up of languages at second level (in the same way that Mathematics at Honours Level has been promoted to address a skills deficit).

### 3.4 Resources

- A more comprehensive system for the provision of Language Assistants to second level schools should be developed. Targeting assistants from certain under-represented ethnic backgrounds (eg, the Roma community) as well as facilitating non-EU language assistants to participate could enhance the scheme. Also, language assistants for non-curricular languages should be encouraged to provide language support as part of their hours to prepare students for the Leaving Certificate examinations in these languages and to support learning of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate curriculum through students' L1
- There are few members of staff in second level schools from ethnic communities. Recognition of qualifications is currently one of the barriers to making the profile of teaching staff more diverse and more representative of the student population. Students need role models from different backgrounds with different ideas/approaches
- Grants to fund travel to the country of the target language are needed as cost is a major disincentive (grants should also be available in the case of students for whom Irish is a L2 and who wish to attend immersion courses in the Gaeltacht)
- The provision of funding for language-related travel may require creative approaches eg, the Spanish Embassy has set up an essay-writing competition for students where the prize is funding for a trip to Spain. The issue of insurance and child protection issues are currently disincentives for schools to participate in such trips during school time

- A comprehensive resource bank is needed for primary and second level (eg, as an extension to the resources available via Scoilnet) to
  - ensure teachers have access to a wide range of up-to-date teaching and learning materials
  - support differentiation in relation to students' skill levels and learning styles
  - promote the use of ICT in language learning
  - provide resources which are relevant to the Irish context (eg, Spanish resources developed in the US use Latino Spanish which is not suitable for learners of Spanish in Ireland)
  - provide resources which are categorised according to the CEFR
  - encourage sharing and collaboration in the design of resources by teachers for teachers
- Financial and technical supports are needed to enable all schools to have a language laboratory to supplement group work. Individual stations allow for differentiated learning and student self-access eg, software such as *Audacity* enables students to choose which sections of audio material they need to spend more time on.

### 3.5 Higher Education

- Third level providers should offer greater access and flexible learning opportunities for language learning eg, by offering language modules which can be combined with other subjects such as law, engineering, ICT etc.
- Work placements and Erasmus programmes in Europe should be promoted more widely: the option to study abroad and/or to undertake work placements should be targeted at all students, not just language undergraduates/graduates
- On returning to Ireland from Erasmus/Erasmus + programmes, students should receive a qualification in the language they have studied. Currently students are awarded a degree with no separate language qualification benchmarked against the CEFR. Language outcomes of students currently vary significantly from one university to another or from one course to another
- All of the above would encourage students not only to maintain their languages but to improve their skills with a view to enhancing their employment opportunities.

## Q4 Teacher Education

How can we ensure an adequate and on-going supply of highly-skilled, professional teachers/trainers of foreign language at all educational levels to meet on-going and emerging needs?

- The main issue for language teachers is the current lack of opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) eg, the only in-service course for Spanish is for teachers of Leaving Certificate Applied Spanish and while there may be an annual AGM for each language, there is no in-service training on how to teach the oral examination, aural examination, written components etc
- There is therefore an urgent need for
  - a wide range of CPD events/courses in the various languages on offer in our schools
  - language teacher networks
  - refresher/up-skilling courses for teachers in the country of the target language (some financial support for travel expenses would be necessary since some of the language courses available for second level teachers cost in excess of €600)
  - week long courses incorporating grammar and culture: Léargas used to sponsor a Comenius programme in France and Spain to support French and Spanish teachers but this was cancelled
  - training in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) for both second, Further Education and third level teaching staff. Erasmus students coming to Ireland as well as non-EU students and migrants living here would all benefit if third level lecturers took into consideration their language needs when planning and delivering lectures

- greater access to language assistants from European countries (as mentioned in response to Question 3) as this would help show students the language in a real context: the DES do offer this facility but it can be difficult to access on a continuous basis
- teacher mobility through teacher exchanges in the EU so that students have access to trained native teachers
- Irish teachers should also have the opportunity to apply for this eg, a month in the school year to look at teaching and learning in a different country
- The recommendations from the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in relation to rebalancing supports to address the literacy and numeracy needs of EAL students<sup>1</sup> should be implemented in order to:
  - ensure that all initial teacher education courses include mandatory modules to enable teachers to address the specific literacy and numeracy needs of EAL students
  - ensure that serving teachers and principals have access to CPD and guidance on meeting the learning needs of students for whom English is an additional language
  - improve the skills of teachers in assessing, monitoring and recording literacy and numeracy outcomes for EAL students.

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, p69, DES, 2011



## **Q5 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?

- Greater flexibility in the level of courses is needed to bridge the gap between the demands of language learning in school and that in further and higher education
- There is a need for more modules/options at third level which can be combined with other subjects (as mentioned in response to Question 3)
- There is a problem with the current accreditation system for degrees in which a language is combined with another field of learning: an overall 2:1 in a joint degree does not clearly indicate the language level of the learner eg, with reference to the CEFR
- Learning outcomes of QQI (formerly FETAC) language modules (including ESOL modules) should be benchmarked against the CEFR.

## Q6 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?

- An audit/research should be commissioned (eg, from the Educational Research Centre and perhaps with support or input from the Inspectorate) regarding the provision of language learning in the second level sector to address a range of questions eg,
  - how many schools are offering languages?
  - what is the take-up of languages by students?
  - what are the trends in terms of language choice, examination results etc?
  - are there any differences in the type and breadth of language provision in the various types of second level schools eg, secondary schools, community colleges?
  - which teaching and learning approaches are the most successful eg, in terms of motivating students, building their communication skills in the target language, enabling them to achieve good examination grades, encouraging them to pursue languages at third level?
- A national audit of the English language skills of migrant students should be undertaken in our post-primary schools to assess how teenage migrant students are currently accessing the curriculum, especially in light of the changes to language support. This would provide evidence as to how migrant students fare in our education system and would make recommendations regarding appropriate supports. Currently it is at the discretion of individual principals to prioritize support for EAL students.

## **Q7 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 needs to

- promote a positive image of language skills (cf what has been achieved in relation to attitudes to learning Irish – now more likely to be seen as ‘cool’ by young people)
- facilitate language learning from a younger age (in keeping with best international practice) so students can achieve a higher level of competence on leaving school than is currently the case. According to a report by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland<sup>2</sup>, the language competence of Honours Leaving Certificate equates to B1 on the CEFR. This is very low by European standards, especially if a student plans to study abroad under an Erasmus scheme
- challenge the mind-set among students and parents that people in other countries speak English so there is no need to speak another language when going abroad
- emphasise the value of being able to communicate with others in their own language
- implement the initiatives/objectives outlined in the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (as mentioned in response to Question 4) to ensure support is available to address the literacy and numeracy learning needs of EAL students, particularly in the wake of the value for money study on EAL provision<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Towards the Establishment of a Relationship between the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the National Framework of Qualifications, NQAI, December 2007

<sup>3</sup> Language Support for Migrants: A Value For Money Review of Expenditure on the Education at Primary and Post Primary Level of Migrant Students Who Do Not Speak English (or Irish) as a First Language 2001 – 2009, DES.

- address the discrepancy in the level of language competence achieved by third level students studying a language – even across awards of the same type and at the same level. (As mentioned in response to Question 5, language attainment should be assessed and accredited separately within the overall award)
  - Migrant second level students should be facilitated to learn Irish (on a case by case basis), especially if they already have proven language ability
  - Migrant adults resident in Ireland who are long term unemployed should receive academic language support (to work towards the International English Language Testing System - IELTS) if they wish to enter 3rd level. They may speak English fluently and have excellent comprehension skills but have difficulty with grammatical precision and academic writing. Language competence to enter third level is currently a major barrier to migrants on the live register seeking to re-skill or up-skill.
- b) What role can employers play in enhancing the linguistic skills of their employees, particularly their Irish employees?
- Employers could provide language classes (eg, conversation classes) for their Irish employees during work hours or fund classes directly with Alliance Française, Instituto Cervantes etc
  - Employers could also provide or partly fund language classes (eg, in Business English) for their migrant employees
  - A language and culture day in the workplace would help to raise awareness about language learning as well as celebrating diversity in Ireland
  - Such an event could be timed to coincide with a national holiday eg, in a relevant European country.

## **Q8 Other Comments**

Any other comments relevant to the development of the Strategy?

- The strategy could be called the 'Languages in Education Strategy' in recognition that Ireland is a multi-lingual society, not only because of our two official languages of Irish and English but also because we have residents from ethnic communities who have their own first language.