

## 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.

Name of respondent:

**Fiona Healy**

Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented:

**None. I am responding as an individual teacher of foreign languages. I teach French and German in a post-primary school.**

Email address:

### **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?*

#### **National**

Make more use of embassies and other language organisations to raise awareness of language learning as well as language institutes such as the Goethe Institute and Alliance Francaise to raise awareness. For example, last year the Goethe Institute had a language bus that went around different schools to raise awareness of German.

Promote European Day of Languages which takes place on September 26th every year at national level. It is often celebrated in schools but there seems to be little awareness at national level.

#### **Community**

Use the speakers of different languages in your community to raise awareness of different languages by holding more cultural events in your local area, for example to coincide with national days or festivals in a particular country. Food tasting and music/dance are always good ways of showcasing a language. Get local schools and community organisations involved and speakers of different languages can learn more about Irish and Irish culture.

## **Enterprise**

Invite more guest speakers from companies who need foreign language graduates into second level schools and get them to explain how essential languages are. Many students want to study business but do not consider studying a language with it or are put off by the perceived difficulty of it.

## **Third level**

Establish more links between third level colleges and second level schools so students can learn more about studying a foreign language. Open Days are busy and students do not always visit a language department in a college on open days. Inviting schools from a particular area into a college for a cultural day with exposure to lots of languages could be a way of doing this. Also tutors/lecturers could visit schools and talk about what is involved in studying languages at third level.

## **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?*

Many migrant children attend pre-school and it is important to ensure that all of them avail of the free pre-school year. This will encourage them to become proficient in the language of their adopted country and provide an ideal social setting in which they can speak with other children of their own age.

It is essential that migrant children receive support with English as soon as they start primary school as they also face the challenge of learning Irish. I think it would be vital for parents of migrant children to also receive support and guidance from schools so they can help their children with homework. Sometimes parents are not proficient in English and may lack the confidence to help their children with reading and writing in English. They face a double challenge as they need to help their children to become proficient in their mother tongue as well as English.

It would be a good idea to use teachers from migrant communities to teach the language to students in a particular area after school and get schools to cooperate with each other to facilitate this. I have spoken to a number of parents of migrant children and they tell me the challenge is to teach children how to write in their mother tongue while they are in primary school. Time and cost would also be an issue for schools and parents to consider.

I am not sure what the current arrangements are for migrant children nationally so some of the suggestions may be in place already. It would be interesting to see what countries like Germany, England and France do as they have had migrant communities for far longer than Ireland.

## 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.*

In my view, the biggest challenge I face as a teacher and that students face is that they are often learning a foreign language that has no relevance to their daily lives and many students will never have the opportunity to visit the country where the language they are learning is spoken or hear native speakers in Ireland speaking the language. This has a considerable impact on students' motivation to learn the language and to communicate in that language. Certain students will not be affected by this particularly if they need the language for third level and if they have the financial means or opportunity to visit the country.

In comparison, our European counterparts are constantly exposed to English through the medium of music, television, films, and social media and have an immediate platform in which to use English as well as contact with native speakers of English. Motivation and exposure to a language are the cornerstones of learning a new language and it is worth exploring how we can enhance these two essential elements in post-primary schools.

In an ideal world all students learning a foreign language in post-primary schools would visit the country of the foreign language they are learning. However, this can involve significant cost and may not always be feasible. However, having a partner school in another country can facilitate this greatly. In the school I teach in, students visit Germany for a week and stay with German families, attend school and go on trips. Although it is a short time in terms of speaking German, it gives them an unique insight into the culture and students gain valuable exposure to the language. It greatly improves their motivation for learning German. Even if students cannot visit the country, they can speak to students in the school using Skype and other similar social media forums.

Many schools now have students from other European schools attending Irish schools for a few months. They could support Irish students with their foreign language learning and Irish students in turn can help the European students with their English. Irish students often lack the confidence to speak a foreign language and a classroom setting does not always facilitate this. Students in other European countries receive so much exposure to English through music, films and the Internet and this enhances their motivation greatly, we need to give Irish students this same exposure to learn a foreign language by supporting them in accessing films, music and news online.

We also have a language assistant in our school and are lucky to have one every year. Having a native speaker is an excellent way of supporting students in speaking a foreign language as well as teaching students about society and culture. However, many teachers I have spoken to

are not aware of how to apply for a foreign language assistant. A language assistant could teach in two post-primary schools or in a primary school as well as a post-primary school.

## **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?*

- Make it easier for students to study two foreign languages at post-primary level, it should at least be possible in schools of over 500 students.
- Encourage teachers to study two foreign languages at third level if doing a BA.
- Ensure that those studying languages at third level spend a year abroad and after graduating work as a foreign language assistant for a year.
- Create better career pathways for teachers to encourage more highly qualified language graduates to pursue a career in teaching languages particularly those who have spent time in the country where the foreign language is spoken.
- More time should be spent on language pedagogy during the Higher Diploma in Education particularly in how to teach through the target language. In my case we only spent one hour per week on each foreign language.

## **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?*

## **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?*

## **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?*

*What role can the education system play?*

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

- Give them more opportunities to do work placements in the country where the foreign language is spoken
- Invest in more language courses during working hours and encourage employees to gain accreditation in the foreign language
- Ensure there are opportunities for employees to use the language by holding events in a social setting such as food tasting and events to coincide with festivals. Employees need a social setting as well as a work-based context to enhance their oral competence and understand the culture which is an essential part of a foreign language

## **Other Comments**

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

## **Primary Education**

Most other countries in Europe start learning a foreign language at the age of 6 or 7 and at the very latest at age 10. Most students in Ireland are 12 when they start learning a foreign language and only have 5 to 6 years to learn the language before they finish school. As a result most countries gain an advantage in terms of their young people having spent on average 8 to 10 years learning a foreign language. We are constantly trying to catch up in the workplace and at third level. I feel this is extremely difficult and we are missing out on a golden opportunity to introduce a foreign language at a young age. Students are less inhibited at a young age and will happily sing songs and play games in a foreign language. This means that by the time they are 12 they know the sounds of the language and can communicate at a basic level and can then move on to writing and more complex language. I have seen this firsthand in a German school where students were singing songs at the age of 10 and by the age of 18 they were reading a novel and writing a critical analysis of it.

I accept the argument that the primary curriculum is overloaded but I think it is essential to reconsider the teaching of foreign languages at primary level. This is the age at which students are most receptive to learning the sounds of a language. Moreover, if language learning is fun and enjoyable and parents see this, students are more likely to want to continue the language at post-primary level. I strongly believe that the framework on foreign languages needs to include primary education in the discussions.

The Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative was an excellent way of introducing a foreign language in primary schools. It would be worth reconsidering this initiative as the curriculum is already in place. Also, has any research been carried out on students who are now in post-primary schools or third level and what difference learning a foreign language at a young age made to their experience of learning a foreign language.

It is worth noting that if primary schools offer an additional modern language outside of the normal school day, this involves parents paying for classes and could lead to further educational disadvantage.

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