

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: Sandrine Pac-Kenny

Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented: I am a language teacher in a secondary school in Ireland.

Email address:

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?

In no particular order:

- There is a deficiency in some schools at a career guidance level to promote languages. Reason 1: the lack of career guidance in school since the cuts. Reason 2: some career guidance counsellors do not see the link between languages and jobs in Ireland. There is a real need to talk about successful language graduates in Ireland and abroad.

Lately I attended the GradLink in Trinity for language graduates and I was most impressed by the set up and also by the calibre of the language graduates. I was there to represent teaching as a profession after studying languages. My teaching colleague and I could not have competed against the amazing jobs in Foreign Affairs, in the European commission, in big businesses language graduates presented. Unfortunately, there is nothing of the sort at secondary level unless organised by the language teachers in a school and most of the time it is difficult to justify taking a class out of your timetable.

- From having worked in Dublin and in the country, it is much more difficult to get access to professional to come and talk about the importance of languages in jobs in the country side as the jobs seemed to be concentrated in the big cities.

- At a school level, students tend to see languages as a difficult subject. This can come from several reasons:

- Bad experience in primary school with Irish.

- Lack of understanding what it means to learn a language and its possible value on the employment market. It is not seen as a useful subject but only a way to get into university.

- A lack of oral proficiency in the junior cycle. Many students and teachers (sorry to say) do not see the importance of developing that skill until later on as the junior cert oral is optional. If not tested, does not need to be taught/learnt attitude.

- The introduction of Maths bonus points has had a bad influence on languages. I have seen many students not keeping higher level in their language to dedicate more time to higher Maths where they are struggling or spending their language study time going to Maths grinds.

- There is also a belief that it is impossible to get an A in MFL.

- In schools, there are more opportunities to reward STEM students with the offer of 3 sciences including Applied maths. Rarely do the linguists get rewarded with 3 MFL on offer (and English and Irish should not be counted as two languages).

I would suggest that may be students who study 2 sciences, 2 languages (other than Irish unless Irish was started in secondary school), 2 business, 2 social subjects, be rewarded for extra points in these subjects or give them more weight.

- At junior level, students should be given the choice for extra language tuition like the "European class" in France where they receive 3 hours of FL a week on top of their normal classes.

- The content at Junior cycle is very babyish due to the fact that they start from scratch. If the basics of “me” were taught in Primary school, the curriculum at junior cycle could move on to more interesting topics for students. The new KS2 in primary schools in England is going to give students a better grounding when they hit secondary level. The curriculum can become more engaging at secondary.
- We also need to have students have a better understanding of the countries which language they study. This could be linked to geography and history courses for example.
- There is also this association that studying languages is done via an Arts degree and art degree are not as valued as other degrees and will be the next unemployed on the list. The value of a language degree must be realised.
- Many studies show that once a child (early age) learns one foreign language, they will find it easy to learn other ones.
- Make it compulsory for schools to offer students the possibility to study at least two languages at junior cycle.
- Make the examinations less set and less based on learnt off pieces. Allow students to make presentations in oral examinations, review the written sections of both Junior cert and Leaving cert. If there is an exam it should test their ability to use the language not their memory. At present, some students will only get a B and still are able to hold a very good conversation on several topics and understand the working of the language while other students might get an A but are not at ease with the language as they were able to rely on learnt off pieces in their exam.
- It is very important for students to also meet “real” speakers. It can be done by way of school exchanges (but the cost can be prohibitive for students and schools who need to pay for the substitution of the teachers from their own funds); language assistants (not every school get one); visits from native speakers to schools...
- Profiling of language students who do well. I once taught a student who studied French, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Irish and English. She did fantastically well (As in all) but she did not receive the same accolade as if she had been studying STEM subjects.
- The government must put an emphasis on language learning and attaining a level of proficiency. As the saying goes when doing international business, you can buy using your native language but you can't sell until you speak theirs.

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?

As a parent of a bilingual 4 years old child, I find it difficult to see how I will manage to keep up her second native language. I do think if we lived in a bigger city, there would be more opportunities at least paid ones.

I am actually not worried about her English nor her Irish proficiency, but will she be catered for her second native language? I don't think that if she attends classes in her native language while already fluent in this language, she would benefit from it. I would rather she learnt a fourth language.

As there are Irish primary schools, may be multi lingual primary schools could be looked as a model. Luxemburg, Belgium are good examples.

Possibility of having links with schools in native country where students could go and spend a year without losing a year in the Irish system. This would be demanding on the parents to go to the country – can they take a year out of their job? And also on the school – common curriculum?

We must also ask are the parents of the children equipped with enough English to participate fully in school life and be able to make a contribution about their own culture and language.

I see many migrant or bilingual students sitting the “normal” leaving cert paper in their own native language which for some is extremely easy. Are we not by doing this damning down the value of the language itself. Should they not have the opportunity to sit an exam representative of their level?

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.

- Any courses from University should be offered with a language. I would favour an applied language. i.e. if you study Engineering, it should be FL engineering being taught so that there is an immediate link to jobs.

- Team teaching like they have in Maths would be of great help to language teachers. It would help students get more practice and would allow personal attention to learners. It would also help with maintaining students with learning disability learning a foreign language.

- Language assistants can also be a great asset to the language classroom. Only a small number is available to secondary schools every year. Links to universities where student are studying to teach the Foreign language as a foreign language like FLE for French should be made so more teacher students could come and help in the

Irish classroom. The language assistants must also realise that their role must be of helping the teacher and students with French. It seems some look at it at their way of improving their English.

- Have the curriculum developed so that it reflects students' interests.
- With technology available nowadays, it would be wise for school to be able to avail of it. Having used iPads in the language classroom, it has really transformed the language class into a living language class and also outside the class. Investment for schools to be able to use this technology with students must be made. This is will include the machines, teacher and students' training.
- It is important to realise the student's ability is his/her competency to do things in the target language. Students will be more likely to see the value of their course if defined in I can...
- Initiative like 1000 words, speak for the future seen in the UK are also great ways to put languages in the lime light and help students developed skills.

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?

- From my discussion with the language students at the GradLink, they did not see teaching as a worth while career as the permanent job prospect is very low. It can take many years of non full time hours to get a permanent job. Language teaching is the key to creating a solid base of language learners and it is a very important and enjoyable job. The recognition of language teaching is must valued by society.
- Language teaching is demanding and keeping up with the skills required comes with travelling abroad which can be costly every year. Moreover once you have a family it can become very difficult to organise it.
- It would be great for teachers to be able to refresh their language skills with native speakers in Ireland. The idea was mentioned by the French Ambassador at the FTA conference and I think it would make language training available to teachers.
- It is important to recruit native or near native professional for any professional training post primary as they will have the expertise of the country which language we study.
- Teachers should be given the opportunity to improve on their own language skills. Language evolves and needs to be refreshed constantly. CPD is not all about teaching methodology.

- As mentioned before, the language assistants are also vital in the classroom and help the teacher develop their own skills.
- Many national organisations organise a national conference and then at county level smaller CPD of best practice but since the introduction of the Croke park/Haddington road agreements, teachers cannot find the time to give two evenings a week. It is a step forward that teachers can now avail of 5 hours to attend these but they still could be better valued.
- The PME must also equip future language teachers with enough fluency to conduct the class in the target language.

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?

- More bursaries to go and spend time abroad. Recognition of time spent abroad studying or working.
- The assessment must be flexible and in a form of a portfolio so students can show what they can do with the language.
- Continuity comes from a curriculum which starts in primary school and continues all the way. All entities involved must talk to each other.
- Accreditation must follow European standards such as the CEFR so that language skills are easily recognised in Europe. This will give it more weight.
- Assessment and qualifications must be best on what can one do in/with the 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?

- If the policy is clear and has involved the language teachers or trainers, it should be understood by all.
- Evaluations must be set with clear criteria while still allowing creativity.
- Studies of multi lingual schools in Europe should be envisaged so we can draw the best policy.

- Language teachers and trainers must have attained and must be able to maintain a level of fluency. This can be done by language CPD.
- Evaluation has to be based on merit. No more curves!
- Language teachers are in the heart of it and are the best to talk about language learning in secondary.
- Review the curriculum so that it is up to date and to interest to students.

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?

- Education must learn to value the linguistic qualities of the students.
- A better choice of languages in schools.
- Language learning takes time and short courses are not of any help with there is no option to continue long term after the first course.
- Equip schools with technology so students are able to access many means of learning a language. This includes broadband, machines...

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

- They need to lobby so that like sciences got its STEM, languages get the place they deserve.
- There is to be a link between all parties for the curriculum especially post primary.
- Offer employees to up skill in FL by doing courses or spending time working abroad.
- Exchange in between companies so that employees can improve their language abilities.
- A bigger presence in the media of the need of language graduates.

8. Other Comments

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

- MFL learning must start at primary level.
- Language departments in school should form a MFL and work together to develop languages in school. I would also invite the Irish department to join.
- I do believe that languages are part of one common MFL and they should not have to fight for their places against each other.
- I found out by chance the text of this consultation and very few colleagues had heard about it. It would have been very wise to send the text to principals and allow teachers to go through it at the beginning of the teaching year.
- I do hope that the next step will include further consultation with current teachers.

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