



LANGUAGES CONNECT

IRELAND'S STRATEGY FOR
FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN
EDUCATION

2017-2026

© 2017 Department of Education and Skills
Published by
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
This publication may be accessed at
www.education.ie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	13
GOAL 1: IMPROVE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY BY CREATING A MORE ENGAGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	20
GOAL 2: DIVERSIFY AND INCREASE THE UPTAKE OF LANGUAGES LEARNED AND CULTIVATE THE LANGUAGES OF THE NEW IRISH	26
GOAL 3: INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING TO ENCOURAGE THE WIDER USE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES	34
GOAL 4: ENHANCE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF TRADE LANGUAGES	36
STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION	39
CONCLUSION	40

FOREWORD

I am delighted to publish *Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017 – 2026*. The name is apt: languages connect our citizens with one another and our country with the world.

Education is central to all our ambitions as a nation. It supports the development of a strong, growing economy, while also promoting a multicultural and inclusive society. In our *Action Plan for Education 2016 -2019*, I committed to providing for Ireland the best education and training system in Europe over the next decade. Part of that commitment involves the publication of this *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education*, and through its implementation, supporting increased levels of participation and competence in foreign language learning.

While providing high-quality language learning opportunities and promoting competence in both of our official languages, Irish and English, is a very important objective of Government, we must also target the learning of a range of foreign languages in Ireland.

The education system must support learners of all ages to gain the skills and confidence to be not only Irish and EU citizens but also global citizens, to understand other cultures and societies, as well as to develop the skills to function and thrive in our modern global economy.

The teaching of Irish and English in our primary schools means that our children become familiar with bilingualism from an early age. We also have strong immigrant communities who now make up over 11% of our population. These new Irish bring with them their own languages from almost two hundred countries around the world.

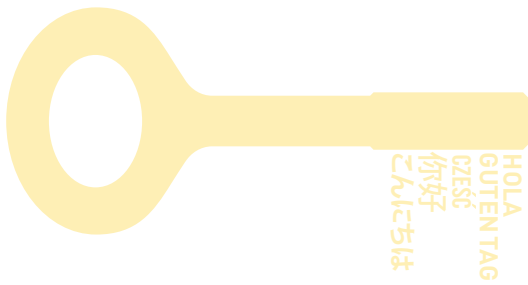
We need to change our mindset around language learning. There is a significant opportunity for Ireland to excel on the global stage. Our education providers and employers must work together to increase awareness of the importance of gaining proficiency in foreign languages. Parents must act as advocates and motivate their children to learn foreign languages.

Working together, we will heighten awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages and will motivate more of our learners to embrace this opportunity with enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Richard Bruton TD

Minister for Education and Skills

4th December 2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why do we need a foreign languages strategy?

Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 has been developed in the context of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, which aims to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe within the next decade. One of the objectives of the Action Plan is to enable learners to communicate effectively and improve their standards of competence in languages.¹ This is not a new objective: for the past decade at least there has been a growing awareness in Ireland of the need for an integrated policy covering all aspects of languages in the education system. The Department of Education and Skills (the Department) and other stakeholders have been asking whether the considerable State investment in the teaching of languages—Irish, English and foreign languages—is producing the best outcomes for individual learners and for society.

Language is one of the means by which we think, express our thoughts, communicate and connect with others. Knowledge of foreign languages is essential for Ireland's cultural, social and economic welfare. Even though we are a small, open economy which depends on international trade and are now home to immigrants from almost 200 countries who, for the most part, have migrated here since 2000, our competency levels in foreign languages remains low. The range of languages which are offered to students by schools is not sufficiently diverse, and too few students take advantage of mobility opportunities, such as Erasmus+, to experience language immersion as part of their studies. This has led to the enterprise sector indicating that there is a shortage of graduates and sufficiently skilled people in the languages of trade and business.

Knowledge of at least one foreign language can enrich a person's life experiences, and the *European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2007) recognises the ability to communicate in a foreign language as one of the key competences needed for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. In learning a foreign language, a learner opens not only career opportunities, but also the opportunity for cultural engagement and understanding.

What was the process leading to this Strategy?

As a first step towards developing this Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education, a public consultation process was launched in August 2014 to gather the views of stakeholders. Almost 80 submissions were received in response to an online questionnaire. When the submissions were analysed, two consultation events were organised in the first half of 2015. The first event focused on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in schools. The second sought input from stakeholders in the higher education (HE) sector, the further education and training (FET) sector, and industry.

This Strategy draws together the inputs of the wide range of stakeholders who responded to the consultation process and attended the consultation event, and is also informed by a comprehensive review of international policy and practices and draws on experience in language learning in Ireland and further afield.

In December 2016, Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Education and Skills, hosted a round table discussion with invited stakeholders to discuss the findings of the consultation process and the proposed direction for the strategy.

What are our strengths?

Notwithstanding the recognised need for change and the many challenges identified in the consultation process, Ireland does have certain strengths on which to build a better future for foreign languages in education:

- Ireland's tradition of language learning.
- Bilingualism in primary education.
- The high uptake of foreign languages at post-primary level.
- The new junior cycle specification for modern foreign languages.
- The Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI).
- The languages of the immigrant communities.
- Membership of the European Union (EU).
- Ireland's position as a small country with a globalised economy.

What are the challenges?

The consultation process and earlier studies identified a number of challenges to developing a truly multilingual society. Among the most significant are the following:

- The global dominance of English.
- Lack of awareness of the opportunities that foreign languages offer for careers and mobility.
- The perceived difficulty of learning languages.
- The limited choice of foreign languages available in schools.
- The shortage of qualified teachers of foreign languages.
- The traditional dominance of French in the system.
- Low uptake of foreign languages in further and higher education.
- Lack of adequate support for immigrant languages.

What is our vision?

Our vision is that Ireland's education system will promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy.

In achieving this, Ireland will be a nation

- which recognises the value that linguistic and cultural diversity delivers to individuals, society and the economy;
- where language learning is a rewarding experience characterised by ease of access and progression, and by interest and enjoyment;

- where all stakeholders engage in actively encouraging and supporting citizens to communicate in multiple languages and appreciate other cultures, enabling people who live here to become global citizens.

In many respects, the strengths listed previously represent potential as yet unrealised. While acknowledging these strengths, the consultation process identified the need to strengthen provision, to increase the diversity of languages on offer and to raise general awareness of the importance of foreign languages. The 2008 *Language Policy Profile, Ireland*, published jointly by the Council of Europe and the then Department of Education and Science, stated that the main challenge for Ireland was “to move away from ‘an official but lame bilingualism’ to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and throughout lifelong education.”² This Strategy aims to move Ireland in that direction.

What are our goals?

It is clear that in order to achieve the high level of national ambition in this area that a whole system approach will be key to success in this area. This document illustrates the complex interdependencies which exist between the various parts of the education system, the need to better understand these interconnections and the requirement to craft solutions which involve the whole sector in order to achieve the ambition. At its heart, this Strategy aims to support the better learning of foreign languages in the Irish education system and to increase the diversity of provision for the inherent benefits to individuals, society and the economy. Therefore, in order to address the undoubted challenges which exist and to realise our vision, this Strategy sets out four overarching goals:

1. Improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment.
2. Diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish.
3. Increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages.
4. Enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages.

What actions will we take?

The main actions which will be taken during the life span of the Strategy to reach these goals are the following:

Goal 1, Creating a more engaging learning environment:

Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development

- Require all applicants for registration as teachers of foreign languages to submit evidence of having completed an independent language competency test and having achieved a minimum Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level of B2.2 across all language skills.
- Increase the possibilities for short-term teacher exchanges in the post-primary sector and promote their uptake.

- Continue to encourage and support the use of innovative teaching methods and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) supports for teaching and learning languages.

Supports for Teaching and Learning

- Expand the language assistants scheme to include other languages and countries, and increase the number of assistants and the participation by schools in the scheme.
- The Department's Inspectorate will, through its evaluation and advisory processes, provide positive support for a quality foreign language education for learners. This will include advice and guidance to schools about using school self-evaluation, school planning to improve foreign language education, and a range of evaluation approaches to monitor and report on the quality of foreign language education.
- Carry out periodic surveys of students' attitudes and experiences of foreign language learning.

Mobility Opportunities

- Consider ways to further encourage students in FET and HE to avail of opportunities on the Erasmus+ programme and to improve the language competence of students returning from the programme.

Content and Language Integrated Learning

- Explore the potential of using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to support and reinforce language learning.
- Ask the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to give consideration to including foreign languages in senior classes as part of its review of the primary curriculum. The Department will consider the recommendations of the review following completion.

Goal 2, Diversify, increase and cultivate:

Teacher Supply

- Carry out research to identify future language needs, and aim for provision and uptake in line with those needs.
- Complete the audit to identify teachers who are qualified to teach a foreign language but who may not have the opportunity to teach that language in their schools. Provide opportunities and incentives for these teachers to upskill by means of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or post-graduate courses.
- Explore the potential for alternative, flexible models such as blended learning (a combination of face-to-face teaching with computer technology), clustering learners, and evening /weekend classes.
- Incentivise schools to diversify their language offer, including by means of concessionary hours, where appropriate.
- Develop a model of peripatetic deployment of teachers for Japanese, Russian, Italian, and for new and immigrant languages including Chinese and Polish.

Junior Cycle

- Develop a range of short courses in other languages (immigrant or new languages) for junior cycle and make them available to schools.

Senior Cycle

- Develop a Leaving Certificate specification in Mandarin Chinese for non-native speakers, which would follow on from the junior cycle short course in Chinese Language and Culture.
- Develop Leaving Certificate syllabuses for Portuguese, Polish and Lithuanian aimed at mother tongue speakers of these languages.
- The higher education institutions (HEIs), in consultation with the Transitions Reform Steering Group chaired by the Department, will explore the issue of providing bonus points in Higher Level Leaving Certificate foreign language subjects in cases where students apply for higher education courses in language-related areas.

Support for Immigrant Languages

- Carry out an audit, in collaboration with interested embassies, in order to identify locations where there is a level of interest and demand for mother tongue support to inform further provision.

Learning Beyond School

- Through the review of the Systems Performance Framework for Higher Education ensure relevant indicators are developed and included to support the provision of a diversity of language learning opportunities as a national priority.
- Monitor the development and implementation of languages strategies and policies through the Strategic Dialogue process for HEIs.

Structures

- Review the functions, structures, staffing and funding of the PPLI to enable it to support the implementation of relevant actions in this Strategy.

Goal 3, Awareness of language learning:

Awareness Raising

- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign, similar to that organised for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), to highlight the personal, social, professional and economic benefits of language learning. Target school principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and students, and all stakeholders in the third-level sector.
- Enlist the support of embassies, cultural services and bodies such as Ibec and Enterprise Ireland (EI) in raising awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages.
- In implementing the new specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages, seek to raise awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages.

Guidance

- Establish greater links between post-primary schools and higher education language schools to support language learning, cultural awareness and to raise awareness of career options and opportunities for studying abroad.

Goal 4, Employer engagement and language use:

Employer Engagement

- Encourage the involvement of employers, Industrial Development Agency (IDA) Ireland, and EI with post-primary schools, particularly in Transition Year programmes, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).
- Encourage collaboration between employers with identified language needs and HEIs in their region including in curriculum and programme design.
- Encourage employers to engage with students and education and training providers on opportunities for part-time work that provide students with work that requires the use of foreign languages.
- Progress pilot programme for co-operation with foreign-owned companies to enable students in FET and HE to do work placements in the parent country.
- Enterprise agencies and enterprise representative groups to encourage Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to implement a language management strategy (LMS) appropriate to their markets.

Language Use

- Promote information on and use of the CEFR among employers, in order to enable them to communicate their language needs more clearly.
- FET and HE providers to ensure the concept and purpose of an LMS is well understood and introduced into Master of Business Administration (MBA) courses and other Executive Education programmes.
- Consider setting up a national awards scheme, which recognises and promotes excellence in both infrastructure support (including intermediary support) for SMEs and excellence in SMEs' use of LMS.

What are the key target outcomes?

Implementation of this Strategy will require active engagement from stakeholders across the education and training sector, government departments and agencies, cultural organisations and the media. The following are the key targets to be achieved by 2026:

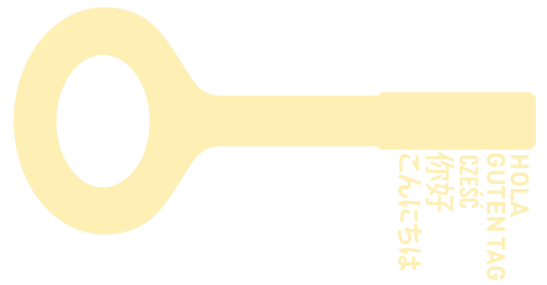
- Increase the uptake in key languages from their present Leaving Certificate examination uptakes: German (13%), Spanish (11%), Italian (0.9%), Russian (0.6%), Japanese (0.6%), Arabic (0.2%), Mandarin Chinese (N/A), Portuguese (0.2% - non-curricular).
- Introduce a curricular specification for new learners of Mandarin Chinese for Leaving Certificate and curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese.
- Increase in the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages and increase the number of students sitting two languages for state examinations by 25%.
- Increase the proportion of the higher education cohort studying a foreign language, in any capacity, as part of their course to 20%.
- Increase the number of participants in Erasmus+ by at least 50%.
- Double the number of teachers participating in teacher mobility programmes.
- Double the number of Foreign Language Assistants.
- Improvement in learners' attitude to foreign language learning.

- Improvement in the quality of foreign language teaching at all levels.
- Adoption of the CEFR in education and by employers and increase the proportion of graduates leaving HE who reach the “Independent User” standard.

Implementation

This Strategy acknowledges that its implementation will require a significant change of mindset about foreign language learning. It will take time, commitment, and additional resources. However, this is an area which must be a major priority in an increasingly global world and globalised Ireland.

A separate implementation plan will set out more detailed actions and timescales and will identify lead agencies responsible for each of the actions. A Foreign Languages Advisory Group (FLAG) will be set up to oversee and monitor the implementation of the Strategy.



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Why learn foreign languages?

Language is one of the means by which we think, organise our knowledge, express our thoughts and feelings, and communicate and connect with others. We live in a world which is rich in languages and Ireland has its own linguistic heritage. Irish and English and the many other languages used in Ireland today are part of our unique, ever-evolving cultural and linguistic identity. As citizens of Europe and the world, we are also exposed to many other languages and cultures.

Knowledge of foreign languages is essential for Ireland's cultural, social and economic well-being. English may be a lingua franca of international communications, but knowing English is not enough. Competence in a number of languages is a key skill that our citizens should be encouraged to achieve. Our enhanced language diversity, predominantly due to the arrival of immigrants from almost 200 countries since 2000, is a social, cultural and national resource to be welcomed and nurtured. In a changing, multicultural and multilingual Ireland, knowing and being aware of the languages and cultures of our immigrants is important for social cohesion.

The *European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2007) recognises the ability to communicate in a foreign language as one of the key competences needed for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. The EU's *Strategic Framework—Education and Training 2020* lists foreign language competences and attitudes as key to enhancing employability, innovation and active citizenship.

With the increasing globalisation of the world economy, and the rise of emerging non-English speaking markets as a major source of growth, the importance of foreign language skills to the economy cannot be overstated. In the world of international business, where competence in English is increasingly taken for granted, it is companies with additional foreign language capabilities and an understanding of local cultures that will enjoy competitive advantage in new markets.

In 2012, the *Expert Group on Future Skills Needs* (EGFSN) published a report on the skills required to trade internationally³ both in existing and emerging export markets. Among the skills required are foreign languages and cultural awareness. The *National Employer Survey 2015* showed that approximately one quarter of employers indicated that they had a specific requirement for foreign language proficiency skills in their organisation.⁴ *The National Skills Strategy 2025* lists foreign languages and cultural awareness among the cross-sectoral skills which improve an individual's employability and enable occupational mobility.⁵

EI has identified eight languages as important for Ireland's future skills needs: German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Arabic and Japanese. A workforce possessed of significant foreign language capabilities will make Ireland a more attractive destination for investment, and provide the skills required by our indigenous companies to enable them to expand into overseas markets.

3 <http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2012/Key-Skills-for-Enterprise-to-Trade-Internationally.html>.

4 <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/National-Employer-Survey-Employers-Further-Higher-Education.pdf>. p. 10.

5 https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf. p. 32

How well are we doing?

Irish citizens lag behind most of their European counterparts as regards language competence. Eurostat figures show that 20.8% of Irish adults aged 25-64 knew one foreign language at the time of the most recent survey (2011). The numbers that had two or more languages was much lower (5.2% with two languages and 1.3% with three or more languages). This compared with the European average of over 35% with one foreign language, 21% with two languages and almost 9% with three languages. Confidence in proficiency was also higher among our European neighbours, with over 56% considering themselves to be proficient in a foreign language, compared with fewer than 40% in Ireland.

A Eurobarometer survey in 2011 showed that French was the most frequently spoken foreign language by Irish adults, reflecting the traditional dominance of French at post-primary level. The survey showed that Irish respondents considered language learning primarily as a benefit for employment, with 59% considering language learning an advantage for getting work in another country, and 43% for using it at work or while on business travel. However, only 27% considered it important from the perspective of obtaining a better job in Ireland.

In relation to the languages available for business, the IMD (Institute for Management Development) *World Talent Ranking 2017* shows Ireland as ranked 44th for language skills that meet the needs of enterprise, with an overall score of 5.06 out of 10.⁶ Ireland is ranked below Australia (37th) and New Zealand (34th) but above the USA (47th) and United Kingdom (48th). Ireland's position has dropped slightly from the first iteration of the report in 2014, where it was ranked 41st with an overall score of 5.04.

The 'New Irish' and their languages

The Census 2016 Summary Report, published in April 2017, provides statistics on the diversity of foreign nationals living in Ireland by nationality. Poles constitute the largest group of foreign nationals (122,515), followed by UK nationals. The other significant groups of foreign nationals living in Ireland are: Lithuanians (36,552), Romanians (29,186), Latvians (19,933), Brazilians (13,640), Spaniards (12,112), and Italians (11,732). Over 612,000 who responded to the Census speak a language other than Irish or English at home, up from 514,000 in 2011. Just over 22% of these speak Polish and 9% speak French.

These immigrant communities are providing Ireland with a rich and diverse source of new languages. They need to be supported in maintaining their own languages, which constitute a new resource, as yet largely untapped, for Ireland. Some of the languages—those of the European Community which are not already on the curriculum—are offered as non-curricular languages in the Leaving Certificate.

The Action Plan for Education (2016-2019)

This Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education has been developed in the context of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, which aims to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe in the next decade. For the past decade at least, the Department and other stakeholders have been asking whether the considerable State investment in the teaching of languages—Irish, English and foreign languages—is producing the best outcomes for individual learners and for society. Objective 1.6 of the Action Plan is:

“to enable learners to communicate effectively and improve their standards of competence in languages.” According to the Action Plan, this objective will entail:

- improving awareness of the benefits of language learning for career opportunities and for opportunities for studying abroad,
- enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and ensuring a supply of skilled teachers and educators of foreign languages in schools and in the higher education sector, and
- increasing the diversity and provision of foreign language learning opportunities.⁷

The consultation process

This Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education is the result of a series of studies and a detailed process of consultation. Two of the key publications which have informed discussions on language policy were the NCCA’s 2003 discussion paper, *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum*⁸ and the *Language Education Policy Profile, Ireland*, published jointly by the then Department of Education and Science and the Council of Europe in 2008. Both stressed the need for an over-arching policy which would address issues such as:

- the sustainability of foreign languages in the longer term,
- the need for diversification of languages and greater choice for students,
- teacher supply and the quality of teacher education,
- the quality of language teaching, and
- the levels of communicative proficiency attained by learners.

In August 2014, a consultation process was launched to gather the views of stakeholders and to inform the development of a strategy for foreign languages. As the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* had been launched in 2010, and the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* in the same year had addressed many of the concerns regarding Irish and English, it was decided that the 2014 consultation and the resulting strategy would concentrate on foreign languages, which had received little attention up to that point.

Almost 80 submissions were received in response to an online questionnaire. Among the main findings from the submissions were the following:

- The need to raise awareness in society at large of the benefits of varied language capacity for intercultural understanding, for positive citizenship and for job and career opportunities.
- The critical importance of teacher education, both initial and continuing, and of the language proficiency of teachers.
- The need to diversify the range of languages on offer in the system to meet the real and emerging needs in business and society.
- The role of employers and HE/FET in promoting the importance of learning foreign languages.
- The importance of the languages of immigrants, their value as a national resource, and the need to support and enhance the proficiency of our immigrants in their home languages.

7 Department of Education and Skills. *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, p. 25. Objective 1.6.

8 D. Little. *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a discussion paper*. 2003.

When the submissions were analysed, two consultation events were organised in the first half of 2015. The first event concentrated on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in schools. The second event sought input from stakeholders in the FET sector, the HE sector and industry to inform the drafting of the strategy. Finally, in 2016 the Minister for Education and Skills hosted a round table discussion with invited stakeholders to discuss the findings of the consultation process and the proposed strategy.⁹

Current strengths and challenges

Arising from the studies referred to above and the results of the consultation process, certain strengths and challenges emerged. The main strengths identified are the following:

- There is a tradition of language learning in Ireland: foreign languages are still considered by most people to be an important part of a good general education.
- Although foreign languages are not in the primary curriculum, the teaching and learning of Irish and English enables pupils to become functionally bilingual, an asset which can be exploited for the learning of a third or fourth language.
- The new Primary Language Curriculum (for Irish and English) promotes the transfer of skills across the two languages and aims to develop a lifelong interest in and love of language learning.
- Almost 90% of students in junior cycle and almost 70% in senior cycle are currently studying a foreign language.
- The new specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages promotes a more motivating, communicative style of teaching and learning. The junior cycle short courses allow schools to broaden and diversify the range of languages they offer, including the languages of immigrant communities.
- Transition Year affords students the opportunity for new language-learning experiences.
- The PPLI, a Department initiative to strengthen and diversify the teaching of foreign languages, has built up significant expertise and resources to support growth and change.
- The language departments in the HEIs offer a range of foreign languages and many of their graduates go on to become teachers of languages.
- Current matriculation requirements for some higher education institutions and particular courses encourage students to learn foreign languages as part of their second-level education.
- The arrival of immigrant communities in recent years has provided Ireland with a rich and diverse source of new languages, which are a national resource.
- The presence of these new languages in every part of the country raises general awareness of the existence of other languages.
- The growing number of Irish-medium schools exemplify good practice in teaching and learning subjects through a student's second language, a model of CLIL which could be extended to the learning of other languages at all levels of education and training.
- Especially in the context of Brexit, Ireland's active membership of the EU and our generally positive attitude to the languages and cultures of other European countries are further incentives to language learning.

⁹ A detailed report on the findings of the consultation process is available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/>.

- Ireland’s position as a small country with a globalised economy is an impetus for employers and companies to promote language proficiency and intercultural skills among their employees.

The main challenges identified were:

- The global dominance of English and its status as a lingua franca gives rise to the mistaken belief that “English is enough”, and can result in complacency and a lack of motivation to learn other languages.
- Many parents and students are unaware of the opportunities that languages offer for careers and mobility.
- School principals and boards of management rarely see diversification of the languages they offer as a priority, even where there is demand from parents and students for other languages and when there are qualified teachers on staff who could broaden a school’s offering.
- There are concerns about the language competence of a minority of teachers.
- Many students find languages difficult, and their language learning experience is not a positive one.¹⁰ Motivating students to engage with languages can be a challenge, especially when they are not given a choice of languages.
- Although the majority of Irish students study foreign languages in school, international surveys show that Irish adults lag behind their European counterparts in relation to language competence—20% knowing one foreign language as compared with the European average of 35%.
- Although the range of foreign languages available for schools to offer is good (French, German, Italian, and Spanish in junior cycle, with the addition of Arabic, Japanese and Russian in senior cycle; short courses are also available in junior cycle), the choice of languages available to most students is quite limited. Very few schools offer more than one or two foreign languages. It is desirable that students who have a particular interest or aptitude should have access to more than one foreign language.
- Even where there is willingness to offer a wider range of languages, it is difficult for schools to provide teaching hours out of their normal allocation for small numbers of students wishing to study a particular language.
- There is at present a shortage of qualified teachers of foreign languages, and the numbers of language graduates going on to become teachers is not sufficient to satisfy current and future needs.
- The proportionate uptake of the languages in the system is unbalanced. French accounts for over half of all foreign language sits in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations.
- Students choosing subjects for Leaving Certificate are already obliged to take two compulsory national languages before adding a foreign language.
- Certain languages which have been identified as important for Ireland’s future skills needs are either not offered by schools or are under-represented in our education system.
- Concerns were expressed in the consultation process that a significant proportion of those taking languages to Leaving Certificate level do so largely due to the matriculation requirements of HEIs.
- The proportion of students in FET and HE studying foreign languages is low.
- It is difficult for students from immigrant communities to maintain their languages without additional supports including qualified teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council.

10 ESRI research cited in NCCA’s *Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Modern Languages*, 2015, pp. 34-35

What is our vision?

Our vision is that Ireland's education system will promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy.

In achieving this vision, Ireland will be a nation

- which recognises the value that linguistic and cultural diversity delivers to individuals, society and the economy;
- where language learning is a rewarding experience characterised by ease of access and progression, and by interest and enjoyment;
- where all stakeholders engage in actively encouraging and supporting citizens to communicate in multiple languages and appreciate other cultures, enabling people who live here to become global citizens.

In many respects, the strengths outlined above represent potential as yet unrealised. The consultation process identified the need to strengthen provision, to increase the diversity of languages on offer and to raise general awareness of the importance of foreign languages. The 2008 *Language Policy Profile* stated that the main challenge for Ireland was “to move away from ‘an official but lame bilingualism’ to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and throughout lifelong education.”¹¹ This Strategy aims to move Ireland in that direction.

What are our goals?

To overcome the challenges, respond to our strengths, and to realise our vision, this Strategy sets out four overarching goals:

1. Improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment.
2. Diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish.
3. Increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages.
4. Enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages.

Action 1.6 of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, the series of studies referred to previously, as well as the determination of the consultation process have all been influential in formulating the goals of this Strategy.

Commitment and resources

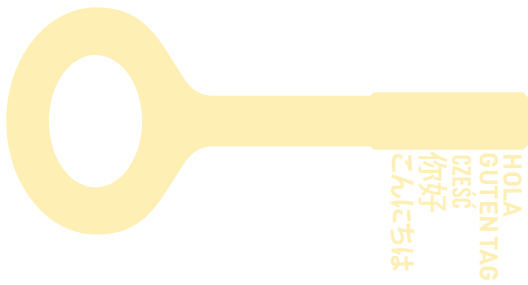
Implementation of this Strategy will require active engagement from stakeholders across the education and training sector, across government departments and agencies, cultural organisations, employers and the media. Most importantly, it will require the commitment and motivation of education leaders and teachers

as well as learners, their parents, and employers. This Strategy acknowledges that its implementation will require a significant change of mindset about language learning. It will take time, commitment, and additional resources. However, this is an area which must be a major priority in an increasingly global world and globalised Ireland.

Key target outcomes by 2026

By 2026, with the cooperation of all stakeholders, we will aim to achieve the following targets:

- Increase the uptake in key languages from their present Leaving Certificate examination uptakes: German (13%), Spanish (11%), Italian (0.9%), Russian (0.6%), Japanese (0.6%), Arabic (0.2%), Mandarin Chinese (N/A), Portuguese (0.2% - non-curricular).
- Introduce a curricular specification for new learners of Mandarin Chinese for Leaving Certificate and curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese.
- Increase in the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages and increase the number of students sitting two languages for state examinations by 25%.
- Increase the proportion of the higher education cohort studying a foreign language, in any capacity, as part of their course to 20%.
- Increase the number of participants in Erasmus+ by at least 50%.
- Double the number of teachers participating in teacher mobility programmes.
- Double the number of Foreign Language Assistants.
- Improvement in learners' attitude to foreign language learning.
- Improvement in quality of foreign language teaching at all levels.
- Adoption of the CEFR in education and by employers and increase the proportion of graduates leaving HE who reach the "Independent User" standard.



GOAL 1: IMPROVE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY BY CREATING A MORE ENGAGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A critical success factor in a strategy for foreign languages in education must be the quality of teaching and learning of foreign languages. Concerns have been expressed about the quality of teaching and learning of languages and about the level of language competence attained by learners at all levels in the education system. The National Employers Survey, for example, indicated a lack of satisfaction with graduates in relation to language skills, with satisfaction rates of between 28% and 46%. A 2003 NCCA discussion paper¹² raised questions about the level of communicative proficiency of school leavers and recommended undertaking independent measurement of the communicative proficiency achieved by students in Irish and foreign languages at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an important tool for measuring language proficiency. The CEFR was designed by the Council of Europe and is used throughout the world by professionals responsible for language teaching and assessment.¹³ The Framework is best known for its six Common Reference levels, which describe the developmental stages of language learner from “basic user” (levels A1 and A2), through “independent user” (B1 and B2) to “proficient user” (levels C1 and C2). Each of these levels can be further broken down into intermediate levels, A1.1, A1.2 etc.

To support a greater understanding and transparency of language competence across all levels of the education and training system, as part of the implementation of this Strategy, all examinations of foreign languages will be aligned with the CEFR. Table 1 provides an indication of the range of CEFR achievement levels to be expected at the end of different key stages of learning.

It emerged from the consultation process that employers often do not understand the competence levels of graduates with foreign languages. The promotion of the use of the CEFR could assist in both helping employers better articulate their language needs and also ensure a good match between employers’ needs and graduates’ qualification requirements.

¹² D. Little. *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a discussion paper*. 2003.

¹³ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

Level	Course / Module	Indicative CEFR level/ range	Indicative Proficiency Level
Junior Cycle	Short Courses in Foreign Languages (European)	A1	Basic
	Short Courses in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese	A1.1	
	Short Courses in immigrant languages	A2 to B2 ¹⁴	Basic to Independent
	Full Courses	A1 – A2 ¹⁵	Basic
Leaving Certificate	Full Courses	A2 – B1 ¹⁶	Basic to Independent
	Non-curricular languages ¹⁷	B2	Independent
Further Education And Training		Depending on the course, from level A1 upwards	Basic to Proficient
Higher Education		Depending on the module / course content, from A1 to C2	Basic to Proficient

TABLE 1 INDICATIVE CEFR ACHIEVEMENT BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Teacher education and registration, post-primary

Teachers and lecturers play a key role in the teaching and learning of languages at all levels of the education and training system. The consultation process highlighted the critical importance of teacher education, both initial and continuing, and of the language proficiency of entrants to the teaching profession.

To ensure high quality communicative language teaching, teachers' language competence should be at the upper end of the "independent user" range, if not in the "proficient user" range, of the CEFR. The Teaching Council's curriculum subject requirements for French, German, Italian and Spanish specify that applicants for registration as teachers of these languages must provide evidence of achieving a minimum level of B2.2 on the CEFR (or equivalent) from the HEI where the qualification was completed. Alternatively, applicants can provide certification of successful completion of an independent language competency test. In the interests of equity and quality assurance, this Strategy proposes that all candidates for registration be required to provide certification of successful completion of an independent competency test at a minimum level of B2.2 across all the language skills.

Registration of teachers of non-curricular languages at Leaving Certificate is a matter that should be reviewed if provision for the teaching of non-curricular languages is to be developed and grown. The Department will request the Teaching Council to consider the feasibility of registering teachers of non-curricular languages so as to support their deployment in the education system to teach those languages.

14 The course in Polish is aligned with the Polish government syllabus for Polish students abroad, but is based on CEFR principles: in fact the CEFR is not intended to measure native speaker proficiency. The course is broad enough to cater for varied levels between A2 and B2. It allows each learner to progress from their current level to a higher level.

15 "The Specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages aims to develop communicative language skills broadly aligned with the A band (A1 to A2, basic user) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its descriptors." NCCA. Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages. p. 6. Available at: <http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/bbb30195-a78a-4d66-9b80-04af66349905/JCMFLspec.pdf>

16 The existing Leaving Certificate syllabuses have not been aligned to the CEFR, but Ordinary and Higher level candidates typically perform in the range A2 – B1, with a minority of candidates achieving elements of B2.

17 Polish, Portuguese, Lithuanian and other non-curricular languages.

The roll-out of the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* provides dedicated professional development for teachers of foreign languages, delivered by JCT (Junior Cycle for Teachers) as the new specification for Modern Foreign Languages is introduced. There are many other opportunities for CPD provided by PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers), the Teacher Professional Networks (TPN), the PPLI and other agencies. A particularly valuable opportunity for teachers to enhance their linguistic, cultural and pedagogical skills is the Department's exchange programme for teachers of French and German. As part of this Strategy, the Department will extend the possibilities for more short-term exchanges for post-primary language teachers.

Currently schools are reporting difficulties in finding qualified language teachers to fill posts they wish to allocate to languages. While this Strategy intends to increase the uptake in languages in schools, there must be a sufficient supply of teachers to meet the demands of the system. The supply of teachers of foreign languages depends on the availability of a sufficient number of graduates in the curricular languages. Prospective undergraduates will be encouraged by initiatives under Goals 2, 3 and 4 to study languages in HE.

Continuing professional development in Higher Education

The *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* highlighted the importance of continuing professional development for the HE sector. Students must have access to teaching that has been kept up to date and relevant through scholarship, research and professional development. Academics must not only be experts in their disciplinary area; they also need to know how best to teach that discipline. They need to appreciate what teaching and learning approaches work best for different students in different situations.

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is leading on the implementation of a new professional development framework¹⁸ for those who teach in Irish HEIs. The framework can assist institutions in planning for provision and support staff to plan for their future professional development needs.

Mobility to increase language competence and intercultural awareness, Erasmus+

Spending time abroad studying through a foreign language or on in-company placements can play an important role in language learning, and in improving language competence and intercultural knowledge. The majority of students currently studying overseas do so as part of Erasmus+, the EU's mobility programme, which runs from 2014 to 2020. Ireland will receive a total of €169m through Erasmus+ throughout this period. While it is intended to increase the numbers of students participating in Erasmus+, the availability of opportunities on the programme are dependent on the continuation of the Erasmus+ programme beyond 2020 by the EU and the budget made available to Ireland.

Over 200 students and staff from post-primary schools took part in Erasmus+ mobility programmes during 2016. In the area of FET mobility, over 850 learners and staff took part in mobility programmes in the same period. Approximately 3,200 Irish HE students undertook outward Erasmus+ mobility in 2015/16. This is an increase of 75% on 2008 figures.

As of 2015, all students undertaking an Erasmus+ placement must take an online language proficiency test before departure and on return to Ireland. This test is benchmarked against the CEFR. Preliminary data from this testing show that the mobility period abroad can provide significant improvements in language competence for students. The data for 2015 show that on departure for Erasmus+ mobility programmes, 78% of students were at level B1 or below. On return, approximately 86% of those who took the second assessment were at B1 or above, with over 63% at B2 or above.

Erasmus+ should be considered not only in the context of language competence and development, but also as a potential tool for encouraging teacher education. The programme allows for participants to engage not only in study but also work placements. In the context of promoting initial foreign language teacher education, the potential for undergraduate language students to undertake an Erasmus+ period wherein there would be two elements to their time abroad, third level study and a school-based work placement, will be considered.

Foreign Language Assistants

The Foreign Language Assistants scheme allows post-primary schools to apply to host a native speaker graduate of French, German, Spanish or Italian from 1 October to 31 May each year. The scheme allows the students in the hosting schools to experience the language as a living language. Cultural agreements are already in place with Spain, France, Germany, Italy and Austria. As part of this Strategy's efforts to expand the range of languages available in schools, the possibility of establishing new cultural agreements will be explored. These arrangements would allow for the addition of language assistants from countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Portugal and China to support new curricular languages, and Japan and Russia to further support existing curricular languages which currently have no language assistant support. As the Foreign Language Assistants scheme is reciprocal, it also allows Irish graduates to spend time teaching in other countries, and is a tool for developing the language and intercultural competence of future language teachers.

Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is the teaching of non-language content through the medium of a second or subsequent language—for example, teaching Maths through Irish or Physical Education through French. CLIL gives students greater exposure to the target language without overloading the curriculum. Research shows that “language learning is more effective when it is combined with content learning in another subject other than the language being learned.”¹⁹ CLIL has been widely used throughout Europe and beyond to supplement the formal teaching of languages and to provide students with effective opportunities to practice their new language skills outside the language classroom. Although widely used for teaching other subjects through Irish, little use has been made of CLIL for the teaching of foreign languages. As part of the implementation of this Strategy, pilot projects using CLIL for foreign languages in Transition Year and in HE will be set up to explore its potential with a view to extending its use.

19 J. Harris & P. Ó Duibhir, *Effective language teaching: a synthesis of research*, NCCA, 2011, p. 14.

Languages in primary school

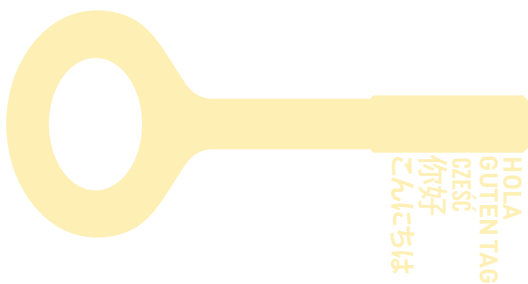
In September 2016, the new Primary Language Curriculum (for Irish and English) was introduced, on a phased basis, for junior infants to second class in primary schools across the country. It is expected that the second stage of the curriculum will be introduced for senior classes (third to sixth class) from September 2019. The curriculum promotes bilingualism and intends to foster and develop transferrable language skills between Irish and English from an early age. The potential of adopting a CLIL approach is recommended for both Irish and English within the curriculum. In fact, CLIL is a feature of the CPD being provided to support the implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum and is being promoted as an effective approach for embedding language learning in a second language. Work is underway to develop a pilot project to explore how CLIL might be used within primary schools. In addition, the NCCA will be asked to give consideration to including foreign languages in senior classes as part of its review of the primary curriculum. The Department will consider the recommendations of the review following completion.

Main actions to improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment

- Require all applicants for registration as teachers of foreign languages to submit evidence of having completed an independent language competency test and having achieved a minimum CEFR level of B2.2 across all language skills.
- Expand the language assistants scheme to include other languages and countries, and increase the number of assistants and the participation by schools in the scheme.
- The Department's Inspectorate will, through its evaluation and advisory processes, provide positive support for a quality foreign language education for learners. This will include advice and guidance to schools about using school self-evaluation, and school planning to improve foreign language education, and a range of evaluation approaches to monitor and report on the quality of foreign language education.
- Carry out periodic surveys of students' attitudes and experiences of foreign language learning.
- Increase the possibilities for short-term teacher exchanges in the post-primary sector and promote their uptake.
- Continue to encourage and support the use of innovative teaching methods and ICT supports for teaching and learning languages.
- Consider ways to further encourage students in FET and HE to avail of opportunities on the Erasmus+ programme and to improve the language competence of students returning from the programme.
- Explore the potential of using CLIL to support and reinforce language learning.
- Ask the NCCA to give consideration to including foreign languages in senior classes as part of its review of the primary curriculum. The Department will consider the recommendations of the review following completion.

Measurables for delivery

MEASURE	BASELINE (2016)	MID TERM TARGET (2022)	END TARGET (2026)
Number Of Foreign Language Assistants Coming To Ireland	110	160	220
Participation In Erasmus+ In Higher Education And Other Study And Work Placements Abroad	3,135	4,400	5,400
Improvement In CEFR Levels Of Returning Erasmus+ Students	63% at level B2 or above	68%	75%



GOAL 2: DIVERSIFY AND INCREASE THE UPTAKE OF LANGUAGES LEARNED AND CULTIVATE THE LANGUAGES OF THE NEW IRISH

The need for diversification and increased provision

The range of foreign languages currently available for schools to offer is good: French, German, Italian and Spanish in junior cycle, with the addition of Arabic, Japanese and Russian in senior cycle. Short courses in languages are also available for schools to offer as part of their junior cycle programme. In most schools, however, the choice of languages available to students is quite limited. Very few schools offer more than one or two foreign languages, and many students are not given a choice of languages to study. Table 2 shows the number of schools (out of a total of 730) presenting more than five candidates for each of the Leaving Certificate curricular foreign languages in 2016.

French	634
German	322
Spanish	176
Italian	14
Japanese	15
Russian	0
Arabic	0

TABLE 2: NUMBERS OF SCHOOLS PRESENTING VARIOUS LANGUAGES IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE²⁰

One of the most striking features of the data is the predominance of French. This pattern is also reflected in the numbers of sittings for the various languages in Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations, as shown in the charts below. Chart 1 shows the number of sittings for foreign languages and the number of students not presenting for any foreign language in the 2016 Junior Certificate, while chart 2 shows the number of sittings for foreign curricular and non-curricular languages and the number of students not presenting for any foreign language in the 2016 Leaving Certificate.

The two charts show that the uptake of the languages offered in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate is unbalanced, and highlights the need for greater diversification in the range of languages offered by schools and chosen by students. Schools need to be encouraged and incentivised to offer students a wider choice of languages. One of the desired outcomes of this Strategy is that the proportionate uptake of the various languages at national and local level should more accurately reflect the identified needs of the economy and of society.

²⁰ Students preparing for Leaving Certificate Russian and Arabic tend to do so outside the regular school hours, either privately or in complementary schools.

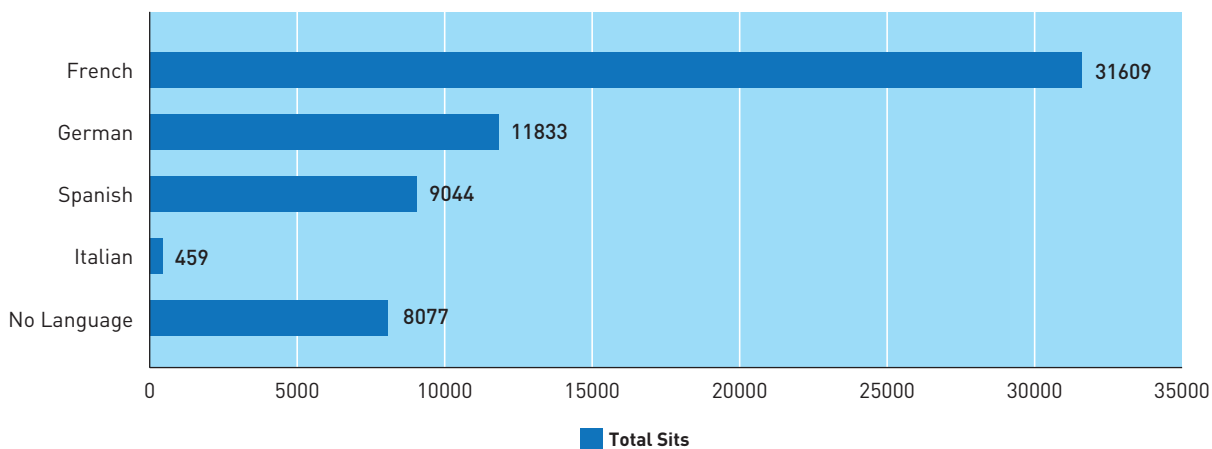


CHART 1 NUMBER OF SITS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN JUNIOR CERTIFICATE, 2016

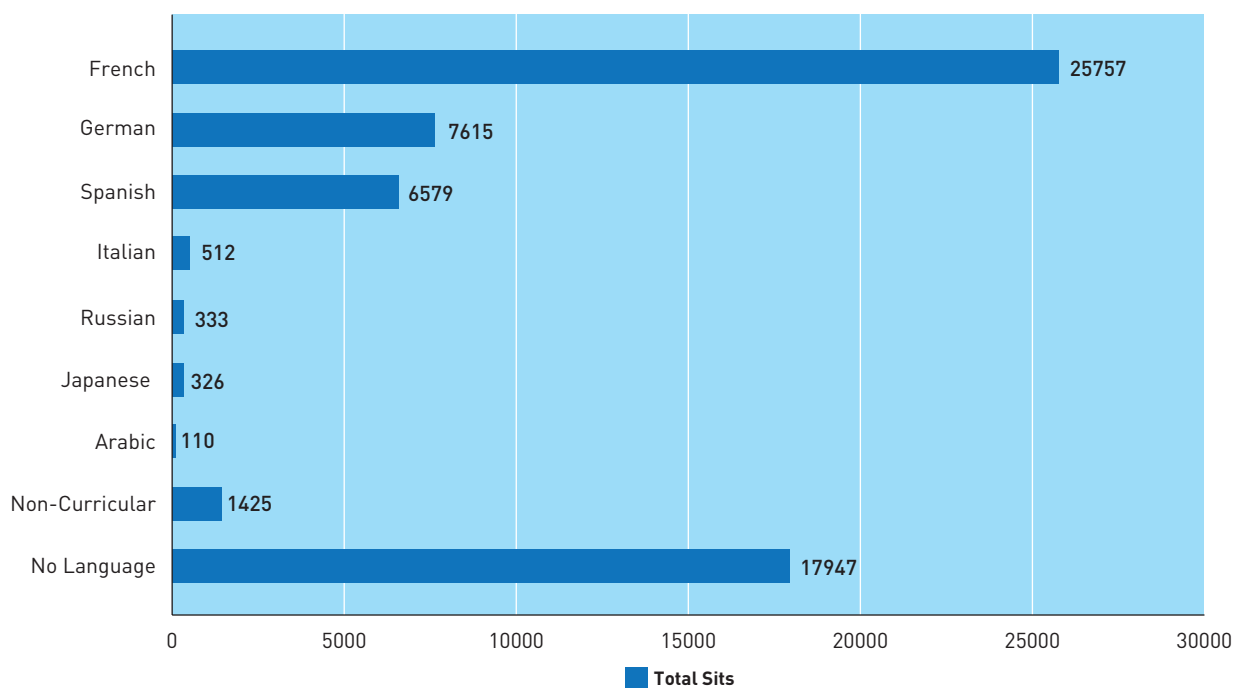


CHART 2 NUMBER OF SITS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE, 2016

The data also highlight the number of students who do not study any foreign language—about 13% in Junior Certificate, rising to about 30% in Leaving Certificate.²¹ Although the great majority of students do study a foreign language in junior cycle, there has been a tendency in recent years for some schools to allow students to opt out of the study of foreign languages. This highlights the need to raise awareness among school principals, students and their parents of the benefits of foreign language learning, which is covered under Goal 3 of this strategy. In doing this, the Strategy intends to see a reduction in the number of candidates who sit no foreign language for state examinations.

21 In the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the study of a foreign language is compulsory.

With 13% of our population speaking a language other than English or Irish at home, there is need to diversify beyond the current curricular languages. The 2016 census recorded significant populations speaking languages other than English or Irish at home with 135,895 speaking Polish and 35,362 speaking Lithuanian. There were substantial numbers recorded for people speaking key trading languages, with 21,707 speaking Russian at home, 20,833 speaking Portuguese and 17,584 recorded as speaking Chinese. It is important that speakers of languages other than Irish or English are supported in retaining and developing their language skills, particularly those of a young age.

The challenge of diversification

The need to diversify has long been recognised. In the year 2000, the Department set up the Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI) with the purpose of achieving greater diversification of foreign languages by promoting and supporting the two lesser-taught curricular languages already in the system (Italian and Spanish), and by introducing and supporting two new curricular languages (Japanese and Russian). The supports provided by the Department through the PPLI included: the employment and allocation on an ex-quota basis of peripatetic teachers for Japanese and Russian; the provision of concessionary teaching hours for Italian and Spanish for a limited period; the provision of Saturday classes for Japanese and Russian; and the provision of resources to support quality teaching and learning of the four target languages.

Since the setting up of the PPLI, the number of students taking Italian and Spanish has grown. Japanese has been successfully introduced into a number of schools, although it remains almost entirely dependent on continued ex-quota support through the PPLI. Russian tends to be taken as a subject outside the regular school hours (Saturday classes are provided by PPLI in Dublin, Galway and Limerick) and no school had more than 5 candidates presenting for the Leaving Certificate examination in 2016. The experience with Russian and Japanese highlights the significant challenges involved in introducing and embedding a new language into the curriculum. That experience will be valuable in devising and implementing new models of provision and actions to extend the range of languages on offer in the system. Support for Japanese, Russian and Italian will be continued under this Strategy, in order to build on the successes achieved to date.

Among the obstacles to greater diversification are those relating to teacher supply and allocation. It is difficult for a school to provide teaching hours out of its normal allocation for small numbers of students wishing to study a particular language. This would be the case where a school introduces a new language to its curriculum, starting with only first year classes. In such cases, concessionary hours, blended learning or some model of peripatetic teaching—as in the case of Japanese and Russian through the PPLI supports—are possible solutions.

A related challenge in achieving diversity of language teaching in the school system is the lack of diversity of language graduates entering teacher education programmes. If we are to address the historical dominance of French in the school system and provide a wider range of languages in post-primary schools, then we will need to encourage greater proportions of foreign language graduates to enter teacher education programmes.

The PPLI has recently carried out an audit of languages in post-primary schools which sought to identify the range of languages schools offer, the languages schools wish to offer, and the range of language teachers

employed in schools. The results of the audit will be used to inform future actions which will be taken as part of this Strategy.

Foreign languages in Junior Cycle

One of the statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* is that “The student listens, speaks, reads and writes in [Language 2] and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to her or his ability”.

The new specification for modern foreign languages was launched in September 2017. It is a common specification for the four modern languages currently available within the curriculum. The Framework for Junior Cycle also allows schools to offer short courses (100 hours of class contact, as opposed to 200 hours for a full subject) in languages other than French, German, Italian or Spanish. Short courses are one way of offering students a wider choice of languages: students may take a short course in addition to, or instead of, one of the four curricular languages.

The NCCA has developed a short course in Chinese Language and Culture. The PPLI has developed short courses in Polish as a heritage/home language, in Irish Sign Language, and in Japanese and Russian as foreign languages. A short course in Lithuanian will be available from September 2018. In addition, a Generic Modern Foreign Languages Short Course Specification has been developed by the PPLI, which could be used to teach any language.

The availability of languages as full and short courses provides opportunities for all Junior Cycle students to engage with a foreign language, if not as a full subject then as a short course.

Foreign languages in Transition Year

Transition Year provides an opportunity for schools to offer language courses which will build on what students have learned in junior cycle. Transition Year also provides an opportunity for students to take up a new language, which they can then keep on for Leaving Certificate. This is how Japanese (in 31 schools) and Russian (in 17 schools) are currently offered as ab initio subjects, supported by the PPLI. Mandarin Chinese was offered as a Transition Year module in 86 schools in 2016, supported by the Confucius Institutes.

A total of 341 schools offered two or more languages in the same year, a pattern this Strategy aims to extend to all schools.

Foreign languages in the Leaving Certificate

In the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the study of a foreign language is compulsory. In the Leaving Certificate (established), it is optional, although almost 70% of candidates take a foreign language in the final examination. It is likely that the matriculation requirement of some higher education institutions accounts, in part at least, for the relatively high number of students continuing to study a foreign language to Leaving Certificate level. It is desirable to maintain such

a matriculation requirement, at least in the medium term, so as to support the uptake of foreign languages. This will be discussed with HE representatives as part of the work on Transition Reform.²²

The range of languages available at Leaving Certificate level is broader than in junior cycle, with the addition of Japanese, Russian and Arabic, and also the non-curricular languages for speakers of EU languages other than French, German, Italian and Spanish. In 2016, candidates sat examinations in 16 non-curricular languages in the Leaving Certificate. It is interesting that of the six official languages of the United Nations, all except Chinese are currently available as Leaving Certificate subjects. In the course of the consultation leading to this Strategy, there were calls to extend the range of Leaving Certificate curricular languages, particularly by the addition of Mandarin Chinese.

Support for home/heritage languages

One of the main needs identified in the consultation process was to support the languages of immigrant communities and to consider offering at least some of the non-curricular languages as full curricular languages. Sustaining the language capacity of these speakers will support the growth of language competencies which is sought by this Strategy.

Support for these languages begins in primary school. The Primary Language Curriculum recognises that “most schools and classrooms include children whose home language is a language other than English or Irish.” Proficiency in their home language contributes to these children’s development of proficiency in the language of instruction. There are examples of good practice where schools have succeeded in cultivating positive attitudes towards home languages among children and their parents.²³ Such good practice also fosters greater language awareness and positive attitudes among the general school population.

In junior cycle, short courses are one way in which students from immigrant communities can be supported in enhancing their fluency and in developing the range of competences in their home language. The PPLI has been working with embassies to develop short courses in students’ home languages, based on the generic Foreign Language Short Course specification. The language learning of students who take these short courses will be acknowledged in their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement.

At Leaving Certificate level, students who are from EU member states may take their home language as a non-curricular subject where it is not available as a curricular language. These languages do not appear as part of the normal school curriculum, nor are there syllabuses available in these languages. They may be taken by students who meet certain criteria: they speak the language as a home/heritage language; they are following a programme of teaching aimed at sitting the Leaving Certificate, and are taking Leaving Certificate English as an examination subject. Students are normally prepared for these examinations privately, sometimes by complementary language schools, some of which are supported by national embassies.

Given the small numbers of any one language likely to be found in a school, it would be difficult to provide classes in these languages from within the normal teacher allocation, even assuming that there was a suitably qualified and registered teacher available to the school. Therefore, alternative models of provision need to be explored. These could include the introduction of shared classes after school in locations where

²² See <http://www.transition.ie> for further information.

²³ See Déirdre Kirwan, “Cultivating Plurilingual Environment: Opportunities in Pre-school, Primary School and Beyond”, in ETBI Newsletter, Spring 2015.

a critical mass of students would be available. Blended learning models could be provided by peripatetic teachers, where teaching and learning would consist of a mixture of online and face-to-face classes.

In their present format, the non-curricular examinations assess only the skills of reading and writing, although the strength of the candidates is more likely to lie in their spoken language. If their home languages were offered as full Leaving Certificate subjects, these students would be enabled to demonstrate the full range of their language competences and to enhance their opportunities for further education and employment.

Language learning beyond school: further education

Occupations requiring languages for which skill shortages have been identified usually require relatively high proficiency. While there is some language provision at Post-Leaving Certificate level, within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector generally, it is limited in nature and the sector is not well positioned to develop capacity to deliver the necessary proficiency in foreign languages in key sectors. The normal one-year length of FET courses mitigates against language learning.

While an attempt was made to provide some language training through the employer-led Skillnets²⁴ programme, there has not been a high level of demand for language training. Significant efforts were made to address languages by the Languages and International Trade Skillnet but the level of take-up by employers has been disappointing, with the network primarily delivering programmes related to its international trade remit. The network did not seek funding in 2016. Indications are that, due to the wide variety of roles and sectors that require languages, there were some difficulties in creating programmes that were broad enough to be accessible for multiple competence levels, while still providing opportunities to improve proficiency.

Language learning beyond school: higher education

The Higher Education (HE) system plays an important role in the development of foreign language skills in Ireland. Prospective students have access to a wide range of foreign language courses that can be taken as core subjects or in combination with a range of other disciplines across business, the arts, the humanities and the sciences. A number of HEIs also offer part-time or evening courses in a range of languages which is an important contribution to lifelong learning. The majority of language graduates come from the universities sector.

Research undertaken by the HEA suggested that up to 9,000 HE students, or about 4%, were studying a foreign language either as a single core subject or as an accredited part of a wide range of other undergraduate disciplines in 2012/13. Most students (around 6,000) were in universities, with around 3,000 in the Institutes of Technology sector. This Strategy will aim to support 20% of the higher education cohort studying a foreign language, in some capacity, by 2026.

In terms of those registered on courses that are solely language-focused or which contain a significant language component, it was estimated in 2012²⁵ that around 3,400 students were registered on such programmes in 2009/10. This represented about 2% of the total student cohort at the time.

These statistics regarding languages in HE highlight a weakness in the education system as regards the provision and uptake of foreign languages at third level. Much of the need for speakers of foreign languages

24 Skillnets funds and facilitates training through over 50 networks of private sector companies under the Training Networks Programme (TNP), in a range of sectors and regions across the country. These networks identify their own common training needs, typically on a regional or sectoral basis. They also source their own training providers and develop their own learning solutions. This ensures projects remain enterprise-led and aligned with their needs.

25 The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs' 2012 report on *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*

with high levels of competence is currently being met by native speakers. However, given that about 70% of our school leavers attain some competence in at least one foreign language, it is highly desirable that we capitalise on this attainment and encourage students at third level to maintain and improve on their language skills. This Strategy aims to increase significantly the number of students in HE studying courses with a language component, in order to provide the education system and industry with sufficient numbers.

Language learning beyond school: lifelong learning

The learning of a language is an ongoing process that does not stop once a student has left school, FET or HE. There is a need for ongoing development of language skills, as well as the provision of the opportunity for employees to learn and develop language skills that become necessary in the course of their working life.

Both Skillnets and Springboard+ mentioned above enable people to upskill and reskill in areas of skills needs. Other existing programmes include private language training offered by cultural institutions such as Alliance Francaise, and Goethe Institut, many of which have a “languages for business” focus and international graduate placement programmes, such as EI’s Graduates for International Growth programme, Ibec’s Global Graduates Programme, and Bord Bia’s Global Graduate/Food marketing programme, which allow graduates to improve their language skills while also attaining practical business experience.

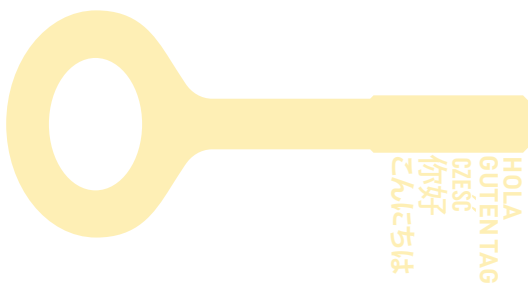
Main actions to diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish

- Carry out research to identify future language needs, and aim for provision and uptake in line with those needs.
- Complete the audit to identify teachers who are qualified to teach a foreign language but who may not have the opportunity to teach that language in their schools. Provide opportunities and incentives for these teachers to upskill by means of CPD or post-graduate courses.
- Explore the potential for alternative, flexible models such as blended learning (a combination of face-to-face teaching with computer technology), clustering learners, and evening /weekend classes.
- Incentivise schools to diversify their language offer, including by means of concessionary hours, where appropriate.
- Develop a model of peripatetic deployment of teachers for Japanese, Russian, Italian, and for new and immigrant languages including Chinese and Polish.
- Develop a range of short courses in other languages (immigrant or new languages) for junior cycle and make them available to schools.
- Develop a Leaving Certificate specification in Mandarin Chinese for non-native speakers, which would follow on from the junior cycle short course in Chinese Language and Culture.
- Develop Leaving Certificate syllabuses for Portuguese, Polish and Lithuanian aimed at mother tongue speakers of these languages.
- Carry out an audit, in collaboration with interested embassies, in order to identify locations where there is a level of interest and demand for mother tongue support to inform further provision.

- The HEIs, in consultation with the Transitions Reform Steering Group chaired by the Department, will explore the issue of providing bonus points in Higher Level Leaving Certificate foreign language subjects in cases where students apply for HE courses in language-related areas.
- Through the review of the Systems Performance Framework for Higher Education ensure relevant indicators are developed and included to support the provision of a diversity of language learning opportunities as a national priority.
- Monitor the development and implementation of languages strategies and policies through the Strategic Dialogue process for HEIs.
- Review the functions, structures, staffing and funding of the PPLI to enable it to support the implementation of relevant actions in this Strategy.

Measurables for delivery

MEASURE	BASELINE (2016)	MID TERM TARGET (2022)	END TARGET (2026)
Percentage Of Candidates Presenting For A Foreign Language For Junior Certificate/Cycle Examination	87%	92%	100%
Percentage Of Junior Certificate/Cycle Candidates Sitting German, Spanish And Italian As A Proportion Of Total Curricular Foreign Language Sits	40%	45%	50%
Percentage Of Schools Offering Two Or More Foreign Languages As Part Of Transition Year	53%	75%	100%
Percentage Of Candidates Presenting For A Foreign Language For Leaving Certificate Examination	69%	74%	79%
Percentage Of Leaving Certificate Candidates Sitting German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Japanese And Arabic As A Proportion Of Total Curricular Foreign Language Sits	38%	41%	45%
Percentage Of Students Studying Courses With A Language Component In Higher Education	4% (2012/13)	10%	20%



GOAL 3: INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING TO ENCOURAGE THE WIDER USE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

A key goal of this Strategy is to raise awareness in society at large of the educational, cognitive, social, intercultural, professional and economic benefits of language learning. Awareness-raising measures need to focus on key stakeholders: school principals and management, teachers, students and their families, graduates and employers. This will require a multi-faceted approach. Organisations such as National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), teacher unions, national parents associations, and student organisations need to be targeted both separately and, where opportunities exist, together. Local County Council Economic and Community Plans and the enterprise sector could also play a role in promoting the importance of foreign languages, not only for our multicultural communities but also for local entrepreneurs who now must compete in a global and multicultural environment.

As stated in Goal 2, the number of students who do not study any foreign language (see Charts 1 and 2) — about 13% in Junior Certificate, rising to about 30% in Leaving Certificate,²⁶ highlights the need for an awareness raising initiative to encourage students to undertake foreign language study during post-primary education.

HEIs and their prospective students are a particularly important target audience. To ensure a supply of graduates with foreign language competences for the business and the education sectors, there will need to be a greater uptake of foreign languages in HE.

There are already a number of awareness-raising activities underway in relation to languages. The European Day of Languages, a Council of Europe initiative organised in Ireland by Léargas, is held annually in September. Among its aims are to raise awareness of the importance of language learning and to encourage lifelong learning of languages. In addition to this, Léargas also organises the European Language Label, an EU initiative which rewards innovative language-learning projects and excellence in language learning and teaching.²⁷

Various other initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to promote individual languages, for example those organised by the PPLI for its target languages, as well as the benefits of languages learning in general. However, there is clearly a need to increase the promotion of language learning in general among the widest possible public, and to increase general awareness of the benefits of all language learning. To affect this change of mindset, commitment and resources over the lifetime of this Strategy will be required.

Ireland can no longer be content that its citizens are proficient in English. In the context of Brexit, the increasing global importance of the non-Western countries, our diversifying markets for exports, and our increasingly diverse population, the assumption that English is the principal common language of international communication may no longer hold true.

²⁶ In the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the study of a foreign language is compulsory.

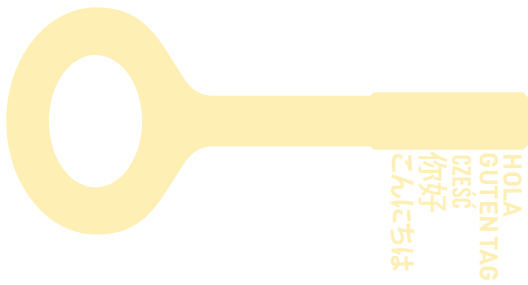
²⁷ <https://www.leargas.ie/programmes/languages/european-language-label/>

Main actions to increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages

- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign, similar to that organised for STEM, to highlight the personal, social, professional and economic benefits of language learning. Target school principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and students, and all the third-level institutions.
- Enlist the support of embassies, cultural services and bodies such as Ibec and EI in raising awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages.
- In implementing the new specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages, seek to raise awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages.
- Establish greater links between post-primary schools and higher education language schools to support language learning, cultural awareness and to raise awareness of career options and opportunities for studying abroad.

Measurables for delivery

MEASURE	BASELINE (2016)	MID TERM TARGET (2022)	END TARGET (2026)
Learner Attitudes Towards Foreign Language Learning	To be established	-	-



GOAL 4: ENHANCE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF TRADE LANGUAGES

While language teaching and learning quality throughout the education system will be enhanced through measures set out in previous goals, real-world engagements through languages need to be encouraged. Language learning continues beyond classroom and examination settings, and use of languages in daily life opens opportunities in business, intercultural awareness and international relations. In using languages in daily life, positive attitudes towards, and appreciation of, cultural diversity can be fostered, as well as an interest and curiosity in learning further languages and intercultural communication.

In its submission to the consultation process, Ibec argued that a lack of language competence is leading to “unquantifiable missed opportunities” for Irish exporters. Ibec noted also that for many SMEs in particular “it is a question of not knowing what they don’t know” and that they “tend to not even consider markets where they perceive language and cultural differences are an entry barrier”.

A thematic working group of European member states has noted that “many employers ... know neither how to identify and articulate language skills needs correctly nor how to deploy the existing skills of their employees effectively”, suggesting that there is a role for enterprise promotion agencies in addressing this issue. The question of identifying language skills needs arises not only in areas where native or professional language competence is required, but also where lower levels of competence could be beneficial.

Furthermore, a 2006 study²⁸ showed that less than 1% of Irish companies had a language management strategy (LMS), compared with 48% of companies across the EU. An LMS is the planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad. It can include the provision of language training and cultural briefing, focused employee recruitment, the temporary employment of foreign students, the employment of international graduates with their diverse languages on the stay-back scheme, and the use of local agents or translators.

In the PIMLICO study,²⁹ “super SMEs” were singled out by three particular additional features in how they implemented LMS:

- They adapted and applied their LMS to particular market conditions in a highly innovative and sometimes unique manner;
- They demonstrated a deeper awareness of linguistic and cultural issues in the marketplace and demonstrate flexibility in adapting to reach the desired goals; and
- In all but one particular case, they enjoy significant export success in terms of export sales relative to total sales which can be directly attributed to the existence of their LMS.

28 ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan_en.pdf

29 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/pimlico-full-report_en.pdf

While this Strategy intends to significantly increase the number of graduates and school-leavers with language skills, it must be acknowledged that this will be a gradual change to the system which may not meet the short-term needs of employers. International students in HEIs have the potential to be a significant resource in supplying the language needs of employers, particularly in languages where there is greater need for native or full professional competence.

As part of the *International Education Strategy, 2016-2020*, changes have been made to the HE graduate permission scheme which allows graduates from Non-EEA Countries the right to work in Ireland for a period of one year following graduation at level 8, and for a period of two years following graduation at level 9 or above, on the National Framework of Qualifications. These graduates can not only provide language and intercultural awareness expertise for their employer, but also an opportunity for other employees to interact through another language in a workplace setting. In addition, multilingual individuals living in Ireland, who have a home language other than Irish or English, can be a valuable resource in supplying language skills, particularly in combination with other skills needs.

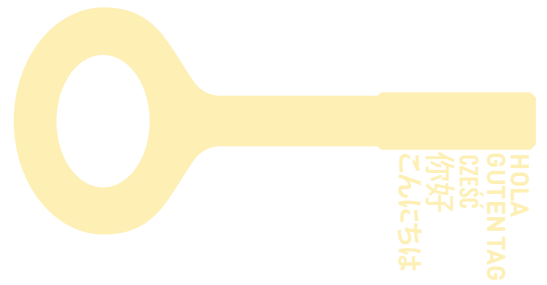
Increased cooperation between language schools of HEIs and employers, including government bodies, in the context of their own language needs and those of the EU, will ensure the development of programmes that are more aligned to the needs of employers and allow employees to use, and enhance, the language skills they have developed. The increased promotion of the career opportunities for graduates with language skills, as set out in Goal 3, will complement this activity. The Regional Skills Fora currently being developed can play a role in facilitating better links between the language schools and employers to achieve these objectives.

Main actions to enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages

- Encourage the involvement of employers, IDA Ireland, and EI with post-primary schools, particularly in Transition Year programmes, LCVP and LCA.
- Encourage collaboration between employers with identified language needs and HEIs in their region including in curriculum and programme design.
- Encourage employers to engage with students and education and training providers on opportunities for part-time work that provide students with work that requires the use of foreign languages.
- Progress pilot programme for co-operation with foreign-owned companies to enable students in FET and HE to do work placements in the parent country.
- Promote information on and use of the CEFR among employers, in order to enable them to communicate their language needs more clearly.
- FET and HE providers to ensure the concept and purpose of an LMS is well understood and introduced into MBA courses and other Executive Education programmes.
- Enterprise agencies and enterprise representative groups to encourage SMEs to implement an LMS appropriate to their markets.
- Consider setting up a national awards scheme, which recognises and promotes excellence in both infrastructure support (including intermediary support) for SMEs and excellence in SMEs' use of LMS.

Measurables for delivery

MEASURE	BASELINE (2016)	MID TERM TARGET (2022)	END TARGET (2026)
Percentage Of Employers Reporting Use Of The CEFR	To be established	-	-
Percentage Of Employers Reporting Use Of Language Management Strategies (LMS)	To be established	-	-
Number Of Education And Training Providers Incorporating LMS Into MBA And Other Executive Education Programmes	To be established	-	-



STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

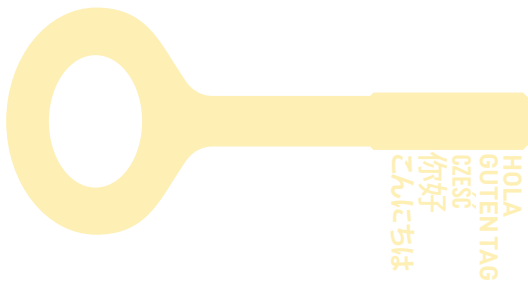
It is proposed to establish a Foreign Language Advisory Group (FLAG) to provide support for the implementation of this Strategy. The group will include representatives of the education sector, enterprise and cultural institutions, among others.

A separate implementation plan will set out more detailed actions, with timescales and lead agencies identified to support and enhance the teaching and learning of a wider range of foreign languages, both European and global, over the next decade. The Strategy provides for additional funding of €2m in 2018 to support implementation of the actions herein. Decisions in relation to funding requirements beyond 2018 will be decided in the context of the estimates process.

The implementation of the Strategy will be regularly reviewed to ascertain progress in relation to the identified targets and actions, but also in the context of the changing needs of the economy. The implementation plan will set out indicators of success for the desired outcomes. Baseline data will be established where not already available and indicators of success will be developed. These indicators will be reviewed as part of the ongoing monitoring of the Strategy. A formal interim review will be carried out in 2022.

Relevant actions from the implementation plan will be included in the work plans of relevant bodies including the Department's Inspectorate, NCCA, SEC, HEA, Teaching and Learning Forum and the Teaching Council. Progress in implementation within the higher education sector will be monitored through implementation of the System Performance Framework and strategic dialogue process. Additional resources will be required in order to implement the actions included in this Strategy and this will form part of the annual Estimates process.

The remit of the PPLI will be extended, with appropriate resources provided, to enable it to support the implementation of new actions set out within the Strategy and Implementation Plan that come under its remit.



CONCLUSION

Languages Connect – Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017 – 2026 is based on the findings of research and an extensive consultation process. The Strategy recognises the key role that our education system plays in supporting the expansion and diversification of foreign language learning in our schools and FET and HE sectors. It also acknowledges that the education sector cannot succeed without the assistance of other sectors. This is especially relevant to the enterprise sector. There is a need to heighten awareness of the importance of expanding our foreign language capacity for the benefit not only of the economy but also for individuals and society.

English may be a global lingua franca but, in the world of international business, knowledge of English is increasingly taken for granted. It is companies with additional language capabilities and an understanding of local cultures that will enjoy competitive advantage in new but also in existing markets.

The Strategy also acknowledges the importance of home languages. The 2016 census reported that over 612,000 people in Ireland speak a foreign language at home. Ireland is a multicultural society with our new Irish originating from almost 200 countries. They bring with them their own languages and cultures. New Irish learners will be encouraged to enhance their proficiency in their own languages as well as their proficiency in Irish and English. The availability of this extended range of foreign languages provides Ireland with a very valuable resource.

In line with the *European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2007), it is hoped that our learners will find their study of foreign languages and associated cultures a rewarding experience, one that they continue to enjoy throughout their lives.

This is not an easy task, but it is a vital one for our people, our multicultural society and our economy. The most difficult hurdle to cross will be that of changing the Irish mindset about the importance of foreign language learning. Parents have an important role to play in encouraging their children to study foreign languages and to gain an appreciation and understanding of world cultures.

Learning a foreign language is no longer a luxury for some but a necessity for most. It is an international key which upon turning will open many doors and opportunities for those that embrace and enjoy the challenge.