Report on Language Provision in Ireland's

Institutes of Technology

Report conducted on behalf of IoTs' Languages Network and One Voice for Languages (OVFL)

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Foreword and Introduction – Background into the report

This report presents the results of a survey we conducted between January and April 2018 to assess the current language provision in the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) operating in Ireland. Two major factors motivated us to conduct such a survey at the time.

The most decisive factor that inspired us to conduct the survey is the launch in December 2017 by the then Minister for Education Richard Bruton of the 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026[1]'. This document – the very first modern language strategy to ever be launched in Ireland – establishes ambitious aims in terms of modern foreign language[2] learning and teaching in Ireland at all levels of education. As language lecturers in IoTs, the authors of the present report realised that research on the actual language provision in our institutions was needed to help us establish ways of meeting the goals set out in the strategy.

The second factor to help was that members of IoTs' Language Network – an association whose aim is to promote language learning and education in IoTs – previously conducted such a survey on a regular basis in IoTs. The survey was unfortunately discontinued after 2008 due to lack of resources. However, at a meeting on the 6th of January 2018, it was decided to renew with the tradition in light of the publication of 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026'. The older version was reviewed and revised to make it fit for our purpose (i.e., gather data relevant in light of the strategy and also include Irish and English as English as a Foreign Languages (EFL) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP)) to give a full picture of all language provision in the IoTs. The survey was piloted and then disseminated across all IoTs that provide modern language teaching and learning as the 'Snapshot: Language Provision in IoTs'. The present report presents findings from the survey.

Our endeavour at collecting data was very well received by colleagues who were eager to participate and have their voices heard. This is a reflection of not only their professionalism

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[1] https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/fls_languages_connect_strategy.pdf
[2] It is important to note that this document does not include Irish nor English as both these languages are national languages in the Republic of Ireland and thus are not foreign languages per se.

in wanting to improve language teaching and learning but also of the renewed energy for language education in Ireland. The language impetus one can witness at present is really heartening. While IoTs only represent a segment of higher education institutions in Ireland, the segment is far from negligible. A report from the HEA published in 2016-2017 reveals that 43% of full-time undergraduate new entrants enrol in an IoT[3]. If the strategy is to have an impact for undergraduates, the situation in IoTs needs serious attention and consideration by all stakeholders who can ensure that 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026' is realised. To achieve the targets set out in 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026', all stakeholders must know precisely what the situation in terms of modern language teaching and learning on the ground is. This is exactly what this report aims to do: provide an insight into which languages are taught, at what level, what the uptake is, and highlight issues in modern language teaching and learning from the ground up. This report is only a modest contribution but we do hope that it will build on the renewed interest in modern language learning and teaching, and thus contribute to ensure that the strategy becomes a reality so that the citizens of Ireland can acquire modern languages so they can be truly connected to the rest of the world.

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[3] http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/02/HEA-Key-Facts-And-Figures-2016-17-FINAL.pdf

Methodology

Participants

The aim of the survey was to gather information on the current language provision within IoTs. There are currently fourteen IoTs in Ireland. One IoT – the Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT) – does not provide any modern language modules at present. Thus, no IADT staff were contacted to fill in the survey. One language lecturer from each of the following remaining thirteen IoTs was contacted and sent an email containing a link to complete the survey:

1. Athlone Institute of Technology
2. Cork Institute of Technology
3. Dublin Institute of Technology
4. Dundalk Institute of Technology
5. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
6. Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
7. Institute of Technology, Carlow
8. Institute of Technology, Sligo
9. Institute of Technology, Tallaght
10. Institute of Technology, Tralee
11. Letterkenny Institute of Technology
12. Limerick Institute of Technology
13. Waterford Institute of Technology

Survey

The survey was delivered via SurveyMonkey® and included three different sections. The first section aimed to gather generic information about each language team in terms of number of lecturers, languages taught, lecturing duties, lecturers' continuous professional development. The second section was designed to gather information on the courses where languages are taught. It aimed to clarify which departments/schools offer courses with languages; which courses with languages were discontinued, were created or are being created. The third section aimed to gather information about the actual delivery focussing on student numbers for each year and each language; the number of contact hours; and maximum numbers of students in the classroom. Lastly, a comment box was added at the very end for any other comment each language lecturing team might wish to make.

Procedure

Each member of staff contacted about the survey was requested to gather information from all language lecturers and administrative staff in their IoT and collate all the information so that only one answer per institution was entered into the online survey. The survey was open from mid-February to mid-April 2018 to give enough time to lecturers to collect and collate all the information required.

Results

Section 1: Language Lecturing Teams: Languages Taught and Other Duties

A total of eleven IoTs completed the survey. Nine IoTs fully completed the survey but two IoTs only provided partial answers. However, all eleven IoTs provided answers for Questions 1 to 4 and Question 6[4].

Our results show that across the eleven IoTs in Ireland, there are seven different modern languages being taught: Chinese, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)/ English for Academic Purposes (EAP), French, German, Irish, Italian, and Spanish. However, there are severe discrepancies in provision in the eleven IoTs. Figure 1 shows that only one IoT provides Chinese teaching. The same is true of Italian. Figure 1 also shows that there are nine IoTs that provide Spanish and French (they may not necessarily be the same IoTs for both languages); eight IoTs that provide Irish teaching; seven that provide German teaching; and four that provide EFL/EAP teaching.
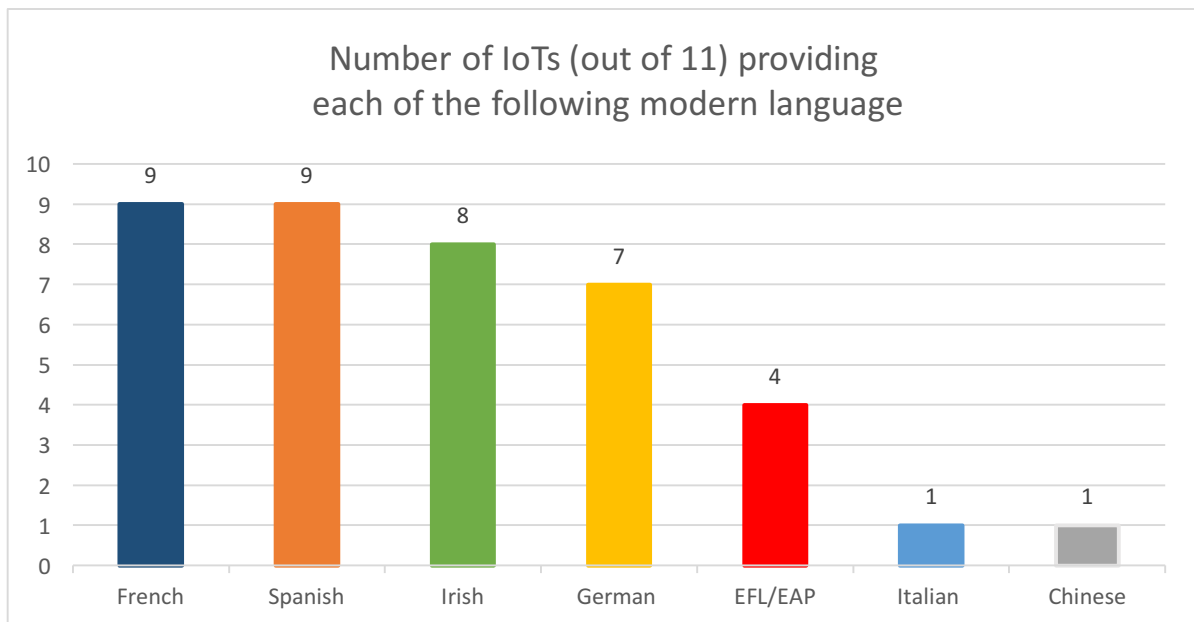

Figure 1: Number of IoTs (out of 11) that provides French, Spanish, Irish, German, EFL/EAP, Italian, and Chinese.

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[4] Due to a phrasing issue that was not captured during the piloting phase, we cannot report the figures for Question 1.

Across the eleven IoTs who participated, our results show variation in the number of lecturers per language. Figure 2 shows that there are more lecturers of French (n = 26) than Spanish (n = 24), Irish (n = 13), German (n = 18), Italian (n = 3), EFL/EAP (n = 15), and Chinese (n = 1).
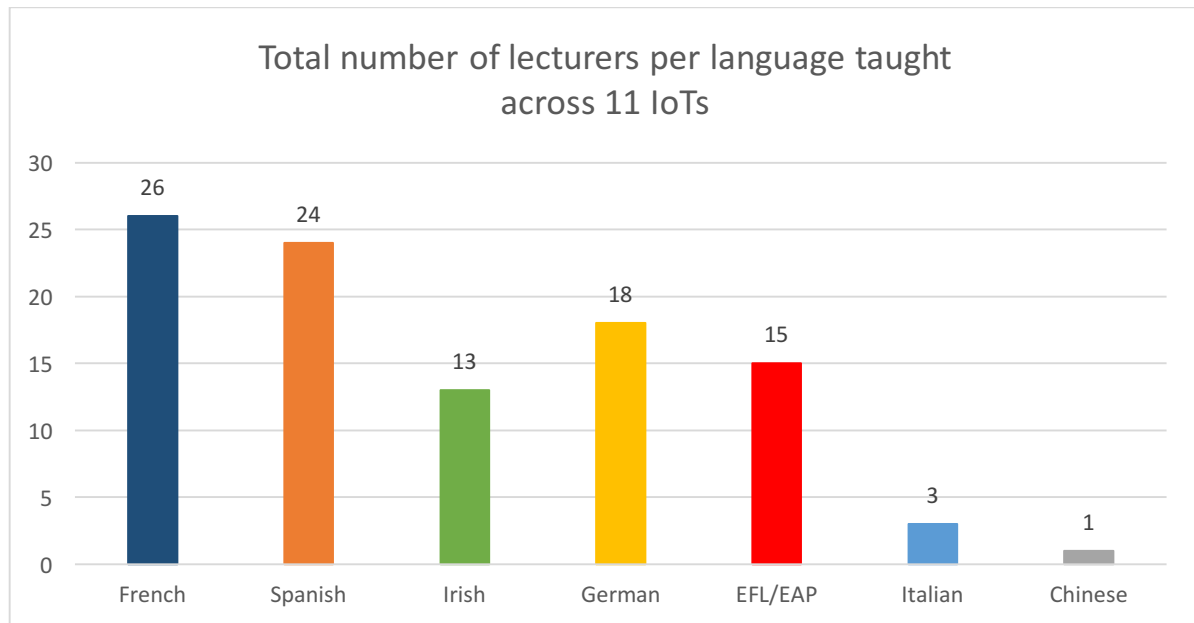
Figure 2: Total number of lecturers per language taught across 11 IoTs.

Five of the eleven IoTs reported that within their language lecturing team, some lecturers exclusively taught languages. All eleven IoTs reported that there were language lecturers in their team teaching subjects other than languages in the academic year 2018-2019. Table 1 shows the list of other subjects taught by current language lecturers in 11 of the IoTs. None of the IoTs reported their language lecturers undertaking retraining for 2017-2018. In the additional comments, some IoTs reported that the language lecturers were teaching non-language subjects that were '*loosely-related to their skills*'; '*not always related to their skill set*'. Other reported that the language lecturers had some experience in the subject ('*studied at degree level*'); had undertaken '*private retraining*' to deliver the non-language subjects; '*had to retrain*'.

Subject other than modern language taught	Number of IoTs where a language lecturer teaches the subject
- Intercultural Communication	4
- Communication	4
- EFL/English[5]	4
- Psychology	3
- Business	3
- Academic writing	3
- Research methods	2
- IT	2
- Politics in the EU	2
- Learning in HE	2
- Supervision	2
- Irish culture & literature	1
- EU project	1
- Personal development	1
- Management	1
- Marketing	1
- Innovation	1
- Irish politics	1
- Media studies	1
- Law	1
- Social care	1
- Career guidance	1
- World cultures	1

Table 1: List of non-language modules delivered by language lecturers and number of response across the 11 IoTs.

All 11 IoTs also reported that some of their language staff had to perform additional duties (non-lecturing duties). These ranged from Erasmus coordination to organising and attending field trips. Table 2 provides a full list of all additional non-lecturing duties performed.

Additional duty performed	Number of IoTs where at least one language lecturer performs the duty
- Erasmus coordination	6
- Research	5
- Placement visits	3
- Year head/ coordination	3
- Exchanges with EU partners	3
- International Office duties	1
- Providing CPD for colleagues	1
- Help with language assistantship programme	1
- Field trips	1
- Marketing and promotion	1

Table 2: Additional duties performed and number of IoTs where at least one language lecturer performs the duty.

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[5] This designates staff who would not have taught English as part of their original duties.

Section 2: Languages, Programmes, and Departments/Schools

Our results show that the Business Departments/Schools (n=9) and the Humanities Departments/Schools (n=7) are the main providers of language learning and teaching across IoTs. However, in some IoTs, Sciences (n=3) and Engineering Departments/Schools (n=2) – as well as Nursing (n=1) – also provide language teaching and learning (see Figure 3).

Participants (n=4) reported that some language courses were discontinued between 2017 and 2018. The courses discontinued concerned French, German, Irish, Italian, and Spanish. They spanned from Year 1 to Year 4. The main reasons given was the very low interest from students for studying languages, as well as a lack of resources (e.g., timetable clashes, clashes with electives, staff availability). There seems to be little the lecturing staff can do as one participating IoT noted that the lecturing staff were '*only hoping that the intake will improve in those [i.e. language courses] not offered due to lack of intake*'.
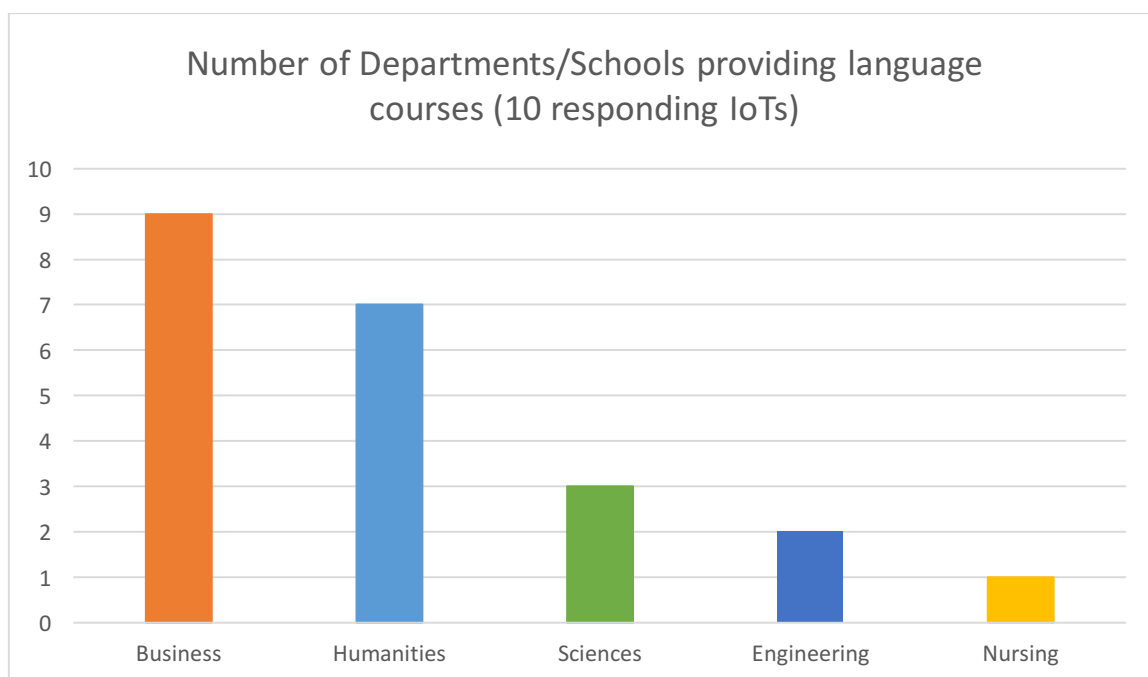
Figure 3: Number of Departments/Schools providing language courses on 10 responding IoTs.

Participants (n=3) reported that new courses with languages were provided between 2017 and 2018 (see Table 3). Each of these participants reported that 1 new programme with languages was developed. One of the IoTs to offer a new course with languages also reported that courses with languages were discontinued. Our results also reveal that 3 IoTs plan on

developing new programmes with languages for 2018-2019 (see Table 3). The participants also commented that '*colleagues are all too busy and disillusioned to create new courses; [there is] no support from management*' and '*there was a language meeting initiated by one of the language lecturers after the publication of the DES' Language Strategy, but [there was] no follow up by management.*'

New courses with languages offered in 2017-2018	New courses with languages developed for 2018-2019
BSc Microbiology with Language (elective)	BB Bus Digital Marketing with EFL
BA (Hons) International Business	BA Hospitality Management
Sales & Customer Services Springboard	Culinary Arts

Table 3: New courses with languages offered in 2017-2018 and to be developed for 2018-2019 and to be offered in some IoTs.

Section 3: Enrolment[6], contact hours, class size.

In terms of number of students enrolled per language for academic year 2017-2018, per year of study, across nine responding IoTs, **in first year,** our results are as follow (see Table 4):

- in French, there were two groups of more than 30 students, two groups of 16-20 students, one group of 10-15 students, and one group of 1-10 students.

- in German, there were one group of more than 30 students, one group of 20-30 students, one group of 16-20 students, two groups of 10-15 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

- in Irish, there were one group of more than 30 students, one group of 20-30 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

- in Italian, there was one group of 10-15 students.

- in Spanish, there were four groups of more than 30 students, one group of 16-20 students, and one group of 1-10 students.

- in ELF and EAP, there were two groups of more than 30 students, and one group of 16-20 students.

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[6] To ensure the participants would be willing to share their data (in case of reluctance due to low numbers) and also to guarantee anonymity, it was decided that participants would indicate a band (i.e., 1-10 or 10-15) rather than a specific number of students.

YEAR 1 17-18	1-10 students	10-15 students	16-20 students	20-30 students	+ 30 students
French	1	1	2	0	2
Spanish	1	0	1	0	4
Irish	2	0	0	1	1
German	2	2	1	1	1
Italian	0	1	0	0	0
EFL/EAP	0	0	1	0	2

Table 4: Number of groups of students enrolled per language in Year 1.

Across nine responding IoTs, **in second year**, our results are as follow (see Table 5):

    - in French, there were one group of more than 30 students, one group of 20-30 students, two groups of 16-20 students, one group of 10-15 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

    - in German, there were one group of more than 30 students, one group of 10-15 students, and four groups of 1-10 students.

    - in Irish, there were one group of 20-30 students, one group of 10-15 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

    - in Italian, there was one group of 1-10 students.

    - in Spanish, there were three groups of more than 30 students, two groups of 16-20 students, and one group of 1-10 students.

    - in ELF and EAP, there was one group of 20-30 students.

YEAR 2 17-18	1-10 students	10-15 students	16-20 students	20-30 students	+ 30 students
French	2	1	2	1	1
Spanish	1	0	2	0	3
Irish	2	1	0	1	0
German	4	1	0	0	1
Italian	1	0	0	0	0
EFL/EAP	0	0	1	0	0

Table 5: Number of groups of students enrolled per language in Year 2.

Across nine responding IoTs, **in third year**, our results are as follow (see Table 6):

- in French, there were one group of 20-30 students, one group of 10-15 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

- in German, there were one group of 10-15 students, and four groups of 1-10 students.

- in Irish, there were one group of 16-20 students, one group of 10-15 students, and two groups of 1-10 students.

- in Italian, there was one group of 1-10 students.

- in Spanish, there were one group of more than 30 students, one group of 20-30 students, two groups of 16-20 students, one group of 10-15 students, and one group of 1-10 students.

- in ELF and EAP, there was one group of 16-20 students.

YEAR 3 17-18	1-10 students	10-15 students	16-20 students	20-30 students	+ 30 students
French	2	1	0	1	0
Spanish	1	1	2	1	1
Irish	2	1	1	0	0
German	4	1	0	0	0
Italian	1	0	0	0	0
EFL/EAP	0	0	1	0	0

Table 6: Number of groups of students enrolled per language in Year 3.

Across nine responding IoTs, **in fourth year**, our results are as follow (see Table 7):

- in French, there were two groups of 10-15 students, and three groups of 1-10 students.

- in German, there were five groups of 1-10 students.

- in Irish, there was one group of 20-30 students.

- in Italian, there was one group of 1-10 students.

- in Spanish, there were two groups of 10-15 students, and three groups of 1-10 students.

- in ELF and EAP, there was one group of more than 30 students.

YEAR 4 17-18	1-10 students	10-15 students	16-20 students	20-30 students	+ 30 students
French	3	2	0	0	0
Spanish	3	2	0	0	0
Irish	0	0	0	1	0
German	5	0	0	0	0
Italian	1	0	0	0	0
EFL/EAP	0	0	0	0	1

Table 7: Number of groups of students enrolled per language in Year 4.

Across 9 responding IoTs, at **postgraduate level**, our results are as follow:

- in Spanish, there was one group of 1-10 students.

- in Irish, there was one group of 10-15 students.

- in ELF and EAP, there was one group of 1-10 students.

When it comes to contact hours, our results show variations (n=7). The maximum number of contact hours offered on a language module varies from eight to three (see Figure 4). The minimum number of contact hours offered on a language module varies from three (n=4) to four (n=3). Only four responding IoTs reported having a policy about the maximum number of students allowed per language class. The number allowed varies from 15 to 25 students. The number is decided depending on language lab classroom capacity according to three responding IoTs. However, two of them reported that the maximum number allowed per language class is not always respected.
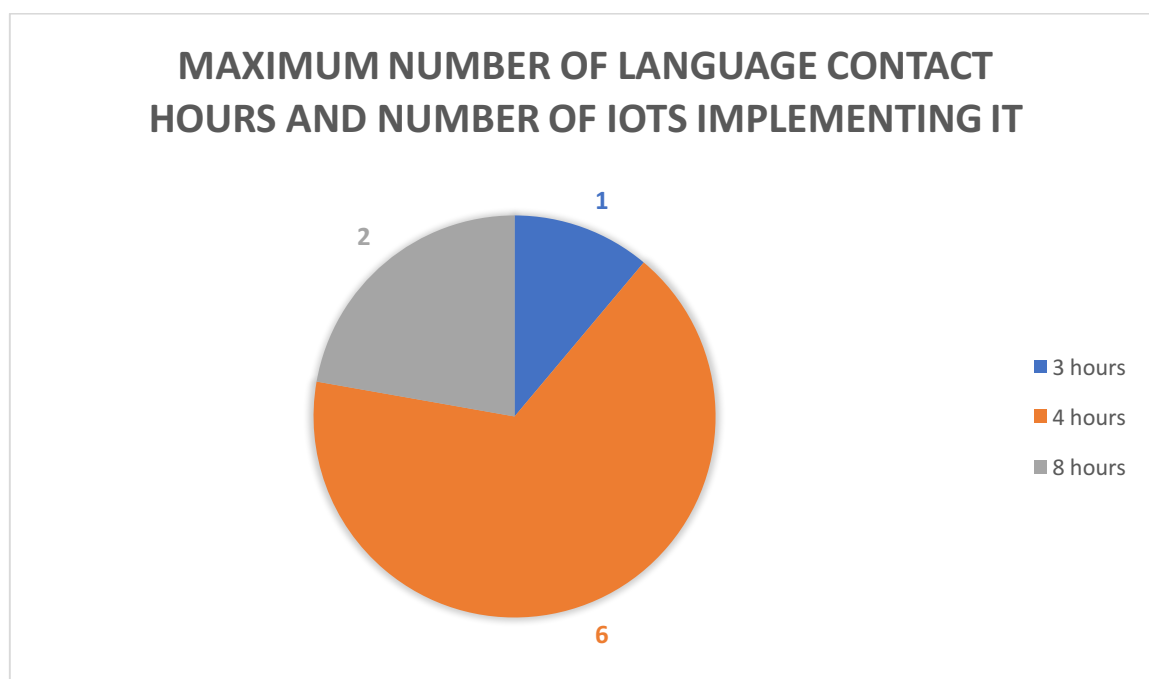

Figure 4: Maximum number of language contact hours chosen and number of IoTs implementing the maximum.

Section 4: Additional comments.

The last part of the questionnaire included a comment box for any other comments the responding IoTs wished to make. Comments were made on numerous topics:

'Very small classes are tedious for both teachers and students.'

'*Language provision is facing many issues: Suspension of programmes (Heads of Department can decide what they want); bad press for campus; falling student intake; timetabling issues (clashes or odd times); poor classrooms and facilities; fake elective choice (e.g., languages on offer but can't be chosen if the students do not have ECDL. Then they have to do IT).*'

'*At a current ECML project, we are looking at "learning environments" that support language learning > structure/people/culture are the main pillars. IoT sector does not have the "structure" to support language learning; the "people" in management often don't support language learning and parents are not involved and the students are often not given a "real" choice; the culture is "possessing English is enough".*'

'*The only language on offer is German. The only French lecturer got promoted to management and French has not been offered since.*'

'*There is a lack of support from management.*'

'*Thank you for carrying this survey. It will be good to get a sense of what is currently happening in all the IoTs.*'

Conclusion

While not all IoTs participated in our survey, the number who responded can be taken as representative of the current situation. The results from our survey show that all responding IoTs (n=11) offer modern language provision. The most common languages offered (in order) are French and Spanish (same level), Irish, German, EFL/EAP, Italian, and Chinese. The diversity of languages offered is currently modest. The focus on the teaching and learning of European languages at present can be justified by the fact that demand for Irish graduates with European languages is still strong on the Irish job market. However, it is also heartening to see Chinese being offered even if only in one IoT. In addition, careful consideration will be required if IoTs are to increase the range of languages offered in their programmes; considerable investments in terms of time, staffing, and facilities will be required. These need to be researched further.

Our results reveal existing issues with staffing: many language lecturers are now teaching a myriad of subjects other than languages and have been given many diverse duties due to the decrease in student intake and lack of structure to offer language courses to a wide range of students. The participants' comments also describe issues in the way language modules are offered to students. As electives, the modules can be scheduled at difficult times or even clash with other modules; they can be unavailable due to requirements from other modules; the facilities are not always adequate. Such difficulties echo further comments made by staff that reveal that they perceive a disengagement from management towards language provision[7]. Such disengagement is detrimental to course development and delivery. Ideally, the future of language provision in IoTs should involve discussions between representatives of government, industries, students, parents, teaching staff and more importantly management (i.e., Heads of School and Heads of Department). It is clear from our results that the language strategy cannot be implemented in the IoTs with the current management issues. Further research should be conducted in the area to ensure the sustainability of language teaching and learning in IoTs.

Most of the language courses are offered by the Business and Humanities Departments/Schools. It is worth noting though that Engineering, Sciences, and Nursing Departments/Schools do contribute to language provision. This contribution should be further

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[7] The impact of the cost of delivering language units should be researched in further projects. It is difficult to teach languages to large groups of students which makes language teaching and learning more expensive for departments and managers.

researched so that successes can be built upon present practice. The strategy aims to increase the uptake in languages in STEM-related courses. At present, in the IoTs who replied to our survey, STEM-related Departments/Schools are very unlikely to provide language modules for their students. Thus, it is imperative that marketing actions about the language strategy are undertaken to target the Heads of such Departments/School.

The number of students enrolled throughout the years shows a steady decline from Year 1 to Year 4. Natural attrition plays a part in such decreasing student numbers from Year 1 to Year 4. However, the rate of the decline is quite steep and thus may reveal further problems – such as the problems mentioned above – undermining intake in language learning and teaching. Another factor that needs to be considered is that even though IoTs currently recruit about 43% of the total new undergraduate entrants (i.e., a considerable portion of the undergraduates), the uptake for languages only represents a very small percentage of the total amount of undergraduates who enrol in IoTs. This serious lack of uptake of languages amongst graduates could be further researched.

In summary, language provision faces many challenging issues in the IoTs. There is a clear need to conduct research, on the ground, on the requirements for further language diversity, including costing; language provision sustainability, including the 'elective' mode and its implications for staffing; student motivation towards languages in IoTs, including motivating the study of languages via consistent and transparent opportunities to send students abroad to their target countries. Lastly, marketing efforts should be undertaken to inspire Heads of Departments/Schools, especially in STEM-related areas, so that the aims established in the 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026' can be realised. It is clear that, in the globalised economy we live in and compared to students' multilingualism in the rest of Europe, the monolingual perspective that 'English is enough' is actually not satisfactory and modern foreign language skills need to be acquired by Irish graduates.