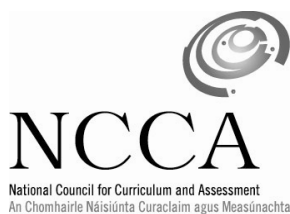


NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT



REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

January 2005

Table of contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	4
Section One – Background to the report	8
The Irish context	8
The European context	16
Section Two – Factors impacting on modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum	23
The Primary School Curriculum	23
Children and modern language learning	36
Teaching considerations	45
Planning	56
Resourcing and managing modern languages	66
Section Three – Options and recommendations	79
Options	79
Recommendations	88
Conclusion	89
Bibliography	90

Executive summary

This report on the feasibility of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum contains three sections. The first section provides background information about historical and policy developments throughout Ireland and Europe in modern language teaching and learning in primary schools. The second section addresses the specific factors impacting on the practicalities and processes that have to be considered while investigating the feasibility of including modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The third section of this report identifies five options in determining the future role of modern languages in primary schools. It identifies one preferred option which takes cognisance of the current implementation of the Primary School Curriculum as a whole and the demands that this places on teachers and schools.

Section One

The profile of modern languages in primary schools has been heightened considerably since the inception of the Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School in December 1997. However, before initial steps were taken to formalise and monitor the Pilot Project, some research and policy discussions had taken place to tease out whether and to what extent modern languages should be included in the Primary School Curriculum. For a variety of reasons, the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (NCCA, 1990) recommended that modern languages should not be included in the Primary School Curriculum. Some years afterwards, the White Paper on Education (Department of Education and Science, 1995) indicated that modern languages would contribute positively to the child's primary school education.

The report on the evaluation of the Pilot Project (Harris & Conway, 2002) has provided evidence that children who participated in the pilot phase were enthusiastic about learning modern languages. The children had also acquired acceptable levels of communicative competence in the languages being learned.

Ireland's position as a member state of the European Union has enabled the country to contribute towards the development of wider language and education policy throughout the EU. Possible directions for the future of education have been articulated in the strategy following the Lisbon Convention that was held in 2000. The strategy has highlighted the importance of foreign language teaching and learning in all levels of education.

Section Two

The factors impacting on the introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum are addressed in Section Two.

The inclusion of modern languages in primary schools can be viewed as being compatible with the aims, features and principles of the Primary School Curriculum. Having established this, the focus of the report turns to the nature of language learning and the interrelationship that this has with the child's learning. Research indicates that children in primary schools do not necessarily learn an

additional language better than older students. However, there are other factors that may justify the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. These include an enhancement of the child's cognitive development and the improved social and communicative skills that the child acquires with additional language learning. Transferable language learning skills acquired in the primary school can be developed and enhanced when the child progresses to the post-primary school.

Classroom teachers are primarily responsible for leading the learning in classrooms. Meeting their professional development and resource requirements to provide modern languages in primary schools would be a key factor in enabling an extended number of primary schools to provide modern language teaching and learning. In addition to teacher capacity, identifying time for teaching modern languages in primary schools is a critical concern.

In a context where there are already extensive demands on the time that schools and teachers have for planning and implementing the Primary School Curriculum, this report urges that a prudent approach should be adopted in considering the place of modern languages in primary schools. The report recommends the use of current best practice to inform future planning and implementation of modern languages in primary schools. Additional suggestions are made that would include the introduction of small-scale pilot projects. Monitoring and evaluation of the suggested projects should guide the future implementation of modern languages in primary schools and identify the most appropriate actions to be taken.

Section Three

Five options are identified and considered in Section Three. These options are:

1. Introducing modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum immediately
2. Gradually increasing the number of primary schools teaching modern languages
3. Introducing modern languages as an option in the Primary School Curriculum
4. Making no changes to the current Primary School Curriculum
5. Implementing the Primary School Curriculum fully before making a recommendation.

The NCCA identifies Option 5 as the preferred option at this time. This option provides for the full implementation of the Primary School Curriculum before a recommendation is made regarding the place of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. It allows time for schools and teachers to concentrate on the implementation of the current Primary School Curriculum without having to consider the immediate introduction of a new subject. It also facilitates the consideration of the findings from the Primary Curriculum review of the implementation of English and Gaeilge and their implications for language learning in primary schools.

In addition to the research outlined above, the findings from the Phase Two evaluation of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative will provide insights into the views of classroom teachers and school principals regarding

modern languages in primary schools. The introduction and monitoring of small-scale pilot projects, which are an integral part of Option 5, will ensure that there is sustained access to additional information gathering that will impact positively on, and inform, the nature of modern language teaching and learning in primary schools. Prior to the complete implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, the NCCA will initiate research on languages (English, Gaeilge and modern languages) in primary schools with a view to informing a future recommendation on languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Introduction

Background

The development of a feasibility report on modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum by the NCCA was planned for from the time of the initiation of the Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School. The Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School was initiated in December 1997 when the Minister for Education and Science invited all schools interested in becoming involved in the project to apply for inclusion. The project was assisted initially by the European Social Fund (ESF) and involves a broad spectrum of primary schools including, urban and rural schools, Gaelscoileanna, scoileanna Gaeltachta, schools in disadvantaged areas, schools for children with special needs and multi-denominational schools.

The Pilot Project commenced in primary schools in September 1998 and was scheduled to run for an initial period of two years. Participating schools were subsequently invited to continue their involvement. The project concerns all fifth and sixth classes in these schools. The target language is taught for one-and-a-half hours per class, per week. The Project's aim is to teach through the medium of the target language.

Rationale

The development of this feasibility report is consistent with the provisions of the Education Act 1998. Section 41, (1) (a) of the Act states that

The object of the Council shall be to advise the Minister on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools.
(Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 35)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was charged with preparing this feasibility report following the publication of ITÉ's evaluation of the Pilot Project (hereafter referred to as the evaluation report). The evaluation report entitled *Modern Languages in Irish Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the National Pilot Project* (Harris & Conway, 2002) was launched in 2003.

Aims

The primary aim of this report is to explore the feasibility of including modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. This report reviews the experiences of the current Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative and the preceding Pilot Project. It also explores options regarding the place of modern languages in primary schools.

Scope of this report

This report examines the extent to which the learning of modern languages is compatible with the Primary School Curriculum. It considers the extent to which teachers and schools are prepared for the possible introduction of modern languages in primary schools. This report considers options available for future policy in relation to modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The five options identified for modern languages in primary schools include:

1. Introducing modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum immediately
2. Gradually increasing the number of primary schools teaching modern languages
3. Introducing modern languages as an option in the Primary School Curriculum
4. Making no changes to the current Primary School Curriculum
5. Implementing the Primary School Curriculum fully before making a recommendation.

Given that the remit of the NCCA relates to the curriculum in schools, recommendations are not made in this report regarding the current Department of Education and Science (DES) Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative.

Methods

In preparing this report, the NCCA used a variety of research strategies and approaches including; conducting a literature review, hosting focus group/individual interviews and inviting written submissions. This report is also informed by research into the teaching and learning of modern languages in other countries. In addition, this feasibility report draws substantially on the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002).

Given that the ITÉ conducted comprehensive research with children to inform the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002), the NCCA did not include children in focus group or individual interviews.

Literature review

A comprehensive overview of the international literature pertinent to modern language teaching and learning in primary schools provided one key context for this report; references are included throughout this report. The feasibility report recognises the key significance of the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002). The evaluation report provides detailed quantitative and qualitative data about children's and teachers' perceptions towards modern languages, the levels of motivation and communicative competence attained by children and the difficulties experienced by both children and teachers participating in the Pilot Project during the initial two years. The evaluation report also contains a chapter which examines some of the issues and options for the future role of modern languages in primary schools.

Focus group/individual interviews

As part of an NCCA data collection exercise, semi-structured focus group interviews were scheduled with a number of stakeholders (identified below). Participants in the focus group interviews were selected because of their potential to inform the content of this feasibility report.

Two focus group sessions were conducted with Project Leaders each of over 90 minutes duration. The findings from their input are interwoven and acknowledged throughout the body of this report.

Focus group sessions were also conducted with two parents groups (one group of 5 parents, an additional group of 6 parents) and with three groups of teachers (two groups of five teachers, one group of six teachers). These focus group sessions were held in various parts of the country. One of the teacher groups consisted of principals and teachers in Gaelscoileanna. Interviews with two teachers in the Donegal Gaeltacht and one teacher in the Connamara Gaeltacht also provided generative data. Interview sessions lasted for an average of 90 minutes.

Responses from focus group interviews were recorded and analysed. The data collected has been included in this report.

Written submissions

Members of the Project Management Group and the Consultative Group were invited to make written submissions. Submissions were received from the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), the DES Inspectorate, the Post-primary Languages Initiative, and the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative. Observations and views identified in the submissions were incorporated into the body of this report.

Report Structure

There are three sections in this report.

Section One of this report investigates the current and past developments in modern language teaching and learning in Irish primary schools. The section also provides an overview of current policy developments in Europe and offers insights into European practices in modern language teaching and learning in primary schools. There are two subsections; the salient points are identified at the end of each subsection.

Section Two of this report examines five factors impacting on modern languages in primary schools. Some of the most important factors identified are:

- the compatibility of modern languages with the Primary School Curriculum
- the impact of modern languages learning on children's cognitive, social, academic and aesthetic development
- the implications of modern language teaching and learning for teachers.

At the end of each subsection, there is a summary of the significant points. The points identified help to provide an orientation for the options and recommendations made in Section Three.

Section Three features an overview of the five options considered in this feasibility report. The presentation of each option is informed by observations and suggestions made throughout Section Two. Following an investigation of the feasibility of each option, a recommendation is made that one of the options be chosen to guide decisions regarding modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Acknowledgements

The NCCA gratefully acknowledges the assistance and cooperation of groups and individuals who have contributed significantly to this work including parents, teachers and principals who participated in focus group interviews with NCCA staff, Directors of Education Centres in which these interviews were held, personnel associated with the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, and the Steering Committee for Modern Languages in Primary Schools. Particular thanks are due to Seán Bracken, Education Officer, Hilary Roche, Director, Curriculum and Assessment and Dr. Sarah FitzPatrick, Deputy Chief Executive for their contributions to this work.

Section One – Background to the report

There are two subsections featured in Section One
The Irish context
The European context.

The Irish context

The headings in this subsection are:

1. Modern language teaching in primary schools
2. Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School / Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative
3. Significant findings of the evaluation.

1. Modern language teaching in primary schools

A brief synopsis of reports and documents that have influenced policy and thinking regarding the teaching of modern languages in primary schools and the place of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum is provided below.

Report of the Board of Studies for Languages - NCCA (1987)

The *Report of the Board of Studies for Languages* addressed learner needs in both the primary and post-primary schools. The Board called for the development and elaboration of school language policies which would introduce a ‘coordinated approach to language education’ so that the teaching of English, Irish and additional languages could be mutually reinforced and integrated (NCCA, 1987, p. 48). Referring to teaching and learning modern languages in primary schools, the report found that, ‘there is a need for further research before formally introducing a modern language into the primary curriculum’ (NCCA, 1987, p. 28).

Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools - INTO (1991)

One of the first nationwide surveys on modern language provision in primary schools was conducted by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO). The 1991 survey revealed that, of the 1,834 schools that responded, 23.8% were teaching a modern language. As deliberations for a new curriculum were being conducted, teachers and policy makers were aware that a significant proportion of schools were teaching an additional foreign language. Most commonly the language being taught was French. In most cases languages were taught after school hours but in a minority of cases modern languages were taught within school hours.

Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, NCCA / Department of Education (1990)

The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum conducted a review of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum and suggested changes for inclusion within a revised curriculum. The recommendations of the resultant report paved the way for the present Primary School Curriculum. The introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum was considered. Having examined the arguments for and against inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, the Review Body recommended that modern languages would not become part of the Primary School Curriculum. The reasons cited for non-inclusion included:

- the restricted timeframe available to teachers to implement the teaching of an additional subject
- the perception that the curriculum was already crowded and that teachers may face ‘curriculum overload’
- the demands of the present curriculum which already included two languages. (NCCA / Department of Education, 1990, p. 79)

The Report noted that the National Parents Council, Primary regretted the findings of the review in respect of modern languages and requested the, ‘development of constructive solutions to identified problems, and the planned implementation of those solutions within a reasonable time span’. (NCCA / Department of Education, 1990, p. 105)

Culture and Communication, NCCA (1993)

An initial step taken by the NCCA to assess whether it would be beneficial to include modern languages in the curriculum for primary schools was the development of a discussion document on language teaching in primary schools. The document, *Culture and Communication* (NCCA, 1993) identified the arguments for and against the inclusion of modern languages in the primary school curriculum. Some of the central arguments for inclusion of modern language included:

- a desire to ensure that Ireland played an active part in the European family of nations
- a recognition that a prolonged exposure to learning of an additional language assisted acquisition of that language
- the availability of a platform for children to learn about other cultures and ways of being.

Arguments against the inclusion of a modern language included:

- the inability of the system to ensure that continuity of learning could be guaranteed between primary school and post-primary school
- the fact that children were already exposed to second language learning
- the inclusion of an additional language might create an imbalance in the curriculum for primary schools with an over-emphasis on language and literacy
- the overloaded nature of the curriculum for primary schools.

The positive points raised and the challenges identified are still relevant when considering the introduction of modern languages within the Primary School Curriculum.

The European Dimension in the Primary School Curriculum, NCCA (1994)

Following indications that the European dimension in education was going to play an increasing role in the Primary School Curriculum, the NCCA formulated a proposal for a Pilot Initiative (NCCA, 1994) that sought to investigate how the European Dimension in education could be integrated with other subjects in the curriculum for primary schools. The proposal called for the establishment of an investigation into how schools might go about accommodating aspects of European culture, history, geography and languages in their curriculum. The document indicated that:

Council is of the view that, in the current Irish context, a cross-curricular approach involving different aspects of the curriculum is the most appropriate way to proceed. To base a European Dimension Initiative solely on a foreign language component could encounter problems in relation to time constraints and, in the short-term, teacher competency and qualifications.
(NCCA, 1994, p. 4)

The report indicated that in the longer term, as teacher competency in a target language was achieved, there might be a basis for introducing the teaching of foreign European languages.

White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future (1995).

The White Paper on Education also addressed the inclusion of European languages in the Primary School Curriculum. In relation to primary schools it indicated that:

In the context of a European awareness programme, students will be introduced to European languages, life and culture. This programme will introduce students to various European languages, other than English and Irish, and instil in them an understanding and appreciation of European life, art and culture. It will foster links between Irish schools and those in other countries of the European Union, through for example, the Socrates Programme (Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 22).

Modern language learning was to form one component of a European awareness programme for children.

Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages: Implementation (2001).

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages were issued to schools participating in the Pilot Project in November 1999. The NCCA commissioned a report from Trinity College Dublin (NCCA, 2001) on the use of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages in classrooms. The report was informed by a survey of 103 teachers participating in the Pilot Project. The survey

was carried out in 2000-2001. Some of the most significant findings are outlined below:

- The majority of teachers spent most of the teaching and learning time on activities that developed communicative competence, as this was the strand that children most enjoyed.
- Teachers tended to spend little time on the teaching and learning of cultural competence. This was particularly the case in rural areas where teachers experienced difficulties in accessing appropriate resources.
- The vast majority of teachers were able to integrate aspects of the modern language curriculum into the Primary School Curriculum. However, there were challenges for visiting teachers in achieving this form of integration.
- Indicators of teachers' confidence in teaching the language were related to their prior experiences as language teachers. Teacher confidence in language teaching was also linked to their capacity to access avenues providing for professional development.
- The extent to which teachers made practical use of the Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages was varied.

Modern Languages in Primary Schools, Teacher Guidelines, were published in 2001 to support the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* (NCCA, 1999).

2. Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School/ Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

The Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School, more recently known as the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, is explicated below. An overview of how the initial Pilot Project and current Initiative are managed is provided.

Management of the Pilot Project and the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

As mentioned previously, the Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School was initiated in December 1997 when the Minister for Education and Science invited all schools interested in becoming involved in the project to apply for inclusion.

A Project Management Group (PMG), (which continues to meet) was formed to select schools and to direct the activities of the Pilot Project. The PMG has representation from:

- the NCCA
- the Department of Education and Science (DES) – Inspectorate
- the DES - Primary Administration
- the Colleges of Education
- Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
- the Post-Primary Languages Initiative
- the Kildare Education Centre, where the Pilot Project/Initiative is based.

A representative from the DES - Inspectorate, is the chairperson of the PMG. The PMG is responsible for providing feedback to the Consultative Group which meets on a biannual basis. The Consultative Group is comprised of the education partners and now also has representation from the Modern Languages Initiative Post-Primary.

Funding for the initial two year Pilot Project was provided by the European Social Fund (ESF) which allocated an annual budget of 1.77 million Euro.

Schools involved

An estimated one thousand three hundred schools submitted applications to the PMG expressing an interest in participating in the Pilot Project. All schools were requested

- to identify a suitably qualified person who could teach the modern language
- to indicate if consultations had taken place with parents
- to indicate if it was possible for children to continue learning the language at local post-primary schools.

The PMG selected two hundred and seventy schools to participate in the Pilot Project. The Pilot Project involved schools in urban and rural areas, Gaelscoileanna, scoileanna Gaeltachta, schools for children with special needs and multi-denominational schools. Schools designated as disadvantaged constituted approximately 20% of all schools participating. The Pilot Project commenced in participating primary schools in September 1998. The target language was taught in participating schools for one-and-a-half hours per class, per week. To qualify for ESF funding it was imperative to have a diversity of languages. It was intended that teaching would be through the medium of the target language. The number of participating schools according to language was:

- French 133 schools
- German 71 schools
- Spanish 44 schools
- Italian 22 schools.

Project aims

Four aims were identified for the project

1. to foster positive attitudes to language learning
2. to establish co-ordination between language teaching at first and second level
3. to encourage diversification in the range of languages taught
4. to enable a greater number of children in a wider range of school types to study modern languages in our primary schools.

Project Leaders

Seven Project Leaders were appointed to act as resource and in-service providers for all schools participating in the Pilot Project. Two Project Leaders were appointed to support teachers of French, two leaders were appointed to provide

support to teachers of German, one was appointed to support teachers of Spanish, one Project Leader was appointed to support teachers of Italian. A Project Leader was also appointed to support both teachers of Italian and teachers of French.

The Project Leaders worked closely with the NCCA Education Officer responsible for Modern Languages. This was critical, as the Project Leaders were provided with regular updates relating to the scope, sequence, contents and advised methodologies that were incorporated in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999).

Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

The Pilot Project was scheduled to run for a period of two years. Participating schools were subsequently invited to continue their involvement. The original Pilot Project became the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (hereafter referred to as the Initiative) in June 2001. Funding for the current Initiative is provided under the aegis of the National Development Plan (NDP). At present, there are 392 primary schools participating in the modern languages Initiative.

The management and administrative structures for the Initiative continue to be based at the Kildare Education Centre. A National Coordinator for the Initiative was appointed in 2001. The National Coordinator has overall responsibility for coordinating the activities of the Initiative and for providing line management guidance to Project Leaders.

3. Significant findings of the evaluation

Scope of the evaluation

The publication of the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) marked the culmination of Phase 1 of a programme of monitoring and research of the Pilot Project. The purpose of this first phase was to acquire information or views from classroom teachers, visiting teachers and children regarding:

- the types of methodologies that teachers were using in teaching the modern languages
- teachers' perceptions about the teaching of the modern language
- challenges and opportunities associated with teaching and learning the language
- teachers' opinions and views about the extension of the project
- teachers' perceptions about children's learning of the target languages
- children's language learning achievements
- children's views on learning the target language
- the relationship between children's attitudes, their motivation to learn a target language and their levels of communicative ability.

The first year of the ITÉ research work for the evaluation report, 1998-1999, was primarily concerned with accessing and analysing the views of teachers. The second year of the research focused on data collection from children involved in

the Pilot Project. A questionnaire was issued to all teachers involved in the Initiative. There was a response rate of 83% to the questionnaire.

Selected findings from the teacher questionnaire

Following an analysis of the questionnaires, it was found that 93% of teacher respondents felt that they had benefited professionally from teaching modern languages (Harris & Conway, 2002, p.102). To some degree, the finding can be explained by the fact that only schools that had opted to participate in the Pilot Project were involved. However, the significantly high percentage of teachers who responded positively indicates that there was generally goodwill toward the teaching of the language among teachers. Further, a similar 93% responded that their schools had benefited from the teaching of the modern language. Ninety eight percent of teachers believed that children whom they taught had benefited from the teaching and learning of the modern language.

A majority of teachers indicated that for them the teaching of a modern language was somehow different from the teaching of other subject areas. Teachers identified the exploratory means of modern language teaching and learning as one of the factors that made it appealing. The use of songs, drama and dance were seen as welcome strategies for reinforcing language learning. Additionally, there was a perception that language learning was a 'fun' oriented subject.

Teachers indicated that they had gained valuable insights into language teaching and learning from in-service seminars provided by the Project Leaders. They were more confident of their abilities at the end of the first year than they were at the beginning as a result of their experience and opportunities for professional development. The high quality of workshop presentation by the Project Leaders and the professional nature of the resources that they had created were mentioned as factors that resulted in positive in-service experiences.

Selected findings from the 22 Classes Study

From 1999-2000 the research was concerned with the attitudes and achievements of children. There was a strong consensus among the children that learning the language is a worthwhile endeavour. Eighty four percent of those who responded to the questionnaire for the study were happy that they started to learn the target language in primary school rather than waiting until post-primary school (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 182).

Language tests carried out on the representative sample of 22 classes revealed that children had also shown quite significant advancement in listening skills and initial competence in spoken language. The evaluation did not conduct an in-depth analysis of children's writing skills as the aims of the Pilot Project were primarily targeted toward the promotion of oral and aural modern language communicative competencies. The authors also stated that: 'No class we examined could be said to be failing to make significant progress in learning the language' (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 203).

Children in schools that were designated as disadvantaged also appeared to be making progress, sometimes beyond the expectations of their classroom teachers. The level of engagement and enthusiasm shown by children in these schools added to the children's participation. Their motivation to learn a modern language was reflected in the high levels of communicative competence attained by this cohort of children, which was on a par with children from schools that were not designated as disadvantaged (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 143).

Areas requiring strengthening

The incorporation of cultural awareness in the modern language classes proved to be challenging for teachers. Twenty three percent of teachers felt that they rarely or never managed to teach cultural awareness. Only 9% of teachers felt that they were teaching aspects of cultural awareness on a frequent basis (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 72). Children indicated that they would like to see a strengthening of the cultural awareness component.

Additionally, according to the evaluation, report (Harris & Conway, 2002) there is scope to improve the level of contact that schools might foster with other schools in Europe or the wider world. Almost four fifths of teachers indicated that they had not managed to use ICT to establish virtual and electronic links with other language classes or to make links with other speakers of the target language throughout Europe (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 75).

A further Pilot Project aim yet to be realised was the promotion of sustained contacts between the primary and post-primary modern language teachers. This posed a challenge for teachers, as there were few structures in place that enabled primary or post-primary teachers to bridge the gap in language provision (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 94).

The evaluation report also noted that there was significant room for improvement concerning the use of the target language as the means of teaching and learning. It was found that only 24% of teachers used the target language for more than 70% of the lesson (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 60).

Project Leaders who were aware of the proposed strands in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, did not receive the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages until November of 1999.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with the Irish context.

The Irish context: a summary

- The Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (NCCA / Department of Education, 1990) recommended that modern languages should not be included as part of the Primary School Curriculum.
- The White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995) indicated that children in primary schools would be introduced to European languages.
- The Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School was initiated in 1997. It continues in 10% of schools as the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, which commenced in June 2001.
- The evaluation of the Pilot Project found that 93% of teachers involved in the Initiative believed that children benefited from learning a modern language. Eighty four percent of children stated that they were satisfied that they had started learning a modern language.
- The evaluation of the Pilot Project identified a number of areas for further development, including
 - the teaching of cultural awareness
 - the use of ICT to assist in teaching and learning modern languages
 - the promotion of contact between primary school teachers of modern languages and those who teach modern languages in post-primary schools
 - the use of the target language as the medium of instruction
 - the need to strengthen communicative strategies in teaching the target languages.

The European context

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Language teaching and learning policy
2. Foreign languages: curriculum and practice.

1. Language teaching and learning policy

The Concrete Future Objectives

An important sub-objective of the Lisbon Strategy states that there is a need to improve foreign language teaching at all levels of educational sectors throughout Europe. This is seen to be a key means of giving expression to the multilingual nature of the European Union. According to the European Commission report entitled *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* (2001), the improvement of language skills provides for a better capacity for all to participate at different levels of the wider society and enables citizens to access an extended means of communication with fellow Europeans.

In the report, the European Commission recognised the significant progress that has been made in primary schools with the introduction of pilot programmes in

foreign languages throughout the EU. The Commission called on governments to strengthen the gains that have been made in supporting pilot phases by considering the expansion of foreign language teaching and learning in primary schools (European Commission, 2001, p.11).

The Commission urged that national policies for expansion of provision, which build on current strengths, should be mindful of

- continuity of language learning
- providing children with access to native language teachers
- improving access to in-service education programmes for teachers
- supporting the provision of foreign language teaching and learning by in-service and preservice teacher education providers.

The European Commission has recognised that there are considerable financial and other resource implications for each of the member states in any generalisation phase of pilot projects. The Commission also recognises that policy and resource requirements will vary greatly according to the local situations and the linguistic needs unique to different settings.

While the DES may be guided by the recommendations of the Lisbon Strategy, the principle of subsidiarity provides for each member state of the EU to form its own policy directives in line with the needs of its citizens and taking into consideration the resources that are available.

Promoting plurilingualism

In looking to the future language needs of the EU, the Commission has concluded that the adoption of one lingua franca for Europe, namely English, is not enough. The Commission contends that every European citizen should be enabled to engage in meaningful communicative competence in at least two other languages of the EU in addition to his or her mother tongue (European Commission, 2003, p. 4).

To achieve the aim of promoting plurilingualism from an early age, the Commission has called on all of the member states to make specific commitments that will involve additional investments in modern language teaching and learning in primary schools. It is hoped that modern language teaching in primary schools can be supported by

- the availability of appropriate teacher education and in-service provision
- the provision of enough curriculum time to advance communicative competence in target languages
- the availability of suitable teaching and learning resources for the language
- the teaching of a range of languages to promote choice and diversity
- the creation of appropriate class sizes where learning is meaningful.

Proposals from the Commission contained in *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006* (European Commission, 2003) indicate that the Commission will make available a range of resources, studies and

funds in the near future to assist language learning in all sectors of education. These should help support each member state in formulating language policies and progressing development in key areas identified.

The Council of Europe

The Language Policy Division (LPD) of the Council of Europe has created a policy guide for the development of language education policies in member states. Additional Council of Europe publications make a firm commitment to envisioning a future Europe where citizens have, 'plurilingual and pluricultural competence which ensures communication, and above all results in all languages being respected' (Beacco & Byram, 2003, p. 8).

2. Foreign languages: curriculum and practice

The nature of foreign language curricula used throughout Europe is considered here, along with an examination of some practices in language teaching with specific reference to countries within the UK. There is an overview of significant observations made in the report on Key Data on Education in Europe. Finally, there is a brief identification of materials that have been developed by the Council of Europe which may help in improving the planning and practice of foreign language teaching and learning.

Language curricula

Within Europe there are different models of language teaching and learning approaches that incorporate communicative competence, language awareness and/or cultural awareness. The majority of countries in the EU favour communicative competence models. These provide children with the capacity to interact, to some identifiable level, in a language other than national languages or those that are the child's first language.

Despite the predominance of competency-based models for teaching modern languages, there is a growing interest in language awareness and language sensitisation models of language teaching. Language sensitisation programmes are described by one commentator as providing children with 'language encounters' that are generally non-language specific (Martin, 2000). They aim to develop in learners an appreciation for the cultural and linguistic diversity that may be exhibited in classrooms. Therefore, they may not be particularly concerned with the promotion of one target language. Whereas the aims may be to enhance the underlying metalinguistic and cultural awareness skills of the learners, there is not as much of an expectation that children will be able to communicate in a target language apart from using some stock phrases.

There are different interpretations of language awareness. Programmes vary from language sensitisation programmes to a more robust embedding of language awareness as a means of adding cohesion to, and making links between, different languages being learned. Preferred methodologies identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) are more commensurate with the latter practice.

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) suggest how language awareness strategies can be applied to compare and contrast, ‘alphabet, sentence structure, conventions of language, the language appropriate to particular situations and simple rules applicable in the languages’ (*Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, NCCA, 1999, p. 8). In this context, the aim is to provide younger learners with concepts about how languages work and how structural representations of various languages are applied in specific conditions of expression (Candelier, 2000).

Language curricula that articulate a specifically cultural dimension are seen as increasingly important in the European context (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). The focus on cultural awareness tends to be closely allied to the learning of an additional language. As learners inquire about other ways of living and being, they gain a deeper understanding of what it might mean to be a speaker of the target language. The overall goal is to promote a sense of understanding of how to mediate between different cultural experiences through the use of another language. A cultural awareness dimension is seen as increasingly important as learners live in societies where there are growing levels of mobility. Children and adults will require skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities to engage with, and within, other cultural milieux.

Practices of language teaching

In regions of Europe exemplified by linguistic bilingualism and plurilingualism such as the Basque region of Spain, or countries such as Switzerland and Finland, it has been possible for education policy to reflect language and cultural aspirations at national or regional levels. The states or regions mentioned have been able to maintain and even reinvigorate official and regional languages while also providing children with access to wider linguistic experiences.

Generally, children in these plurilingual contexts are offered initial literacy skills in their first language. Their language learning experiences are then extended to include a dominant national or regional language. Later in primary education, children are offered an additional foreign language. However, for children in the Basque region, diversity of language learning starts particularly early. The regional language of Basque is introduced concurrently with the national language of Spanish and in almost all public schools the foreign language of English is offered for children from 4 to 6 years of age (Aliaga, 2003). The countries of the UK have incorporated the inclusion of modern languages to differing degrees. An indication of each country’s practices is included below.

Wales

In Wales children participate in bilingual forms of education from the first year in primary school, Welsh and English are the national languages. The document *Making the link Language learning 5-14* indicated that the ACCAC was commissioned to

draw up guidance on language learning from Key Stages 1-3. This guidance will establish principles and recommendations common to English, Welsh and foreign languages. It will help teachers build on earlier learning and help foster greater co-operation between Welsh, English and modern foreign language departments.

(Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, ACCAC, p3, 2003)

Generally, pupils do not start to learn a foreign language until Key Stage 3 (lower secondary-level). However, from September 2003, some primary schools are participating in pilot projects introducing modern foreign languages at key Stage 2. By developing the language skills of oracy, reading and writing in Key Stage 1 and 2 across languages, it is hoped that pupils' experiences of language learning will be mutually reinforcing.

In addition to the promotion of oracy, reading and writing, using a task-based approach and linking the language to other curricular areas, language awareness is also promoted where similarities are identified between new languages and languages that are known.

Scotland

The first initiative on modern language teaching in Scotland was introduced in 1989. Modern languages are now a core component of the 5-14 curriculum and are subject to inspection from HMI. The emphasis is on the development of communicative competence and continuity of learning from P6 and P7 (the final two years of primary school) through to S1 and S2 (the first two years of post-primary school).

Implementation of modern languages in schools is facilitated by collaboration at local level among clusters of primary schools that act as feeders for post-primary schools. The post-primary schools are also engaged in the clustering arrangements. Direction and coordination for school clustering is provided by Local Education Authorities.

England

The Steering Committee on the feasibility of including modern languages at primary level (2000) opted not to make modern languages obligatory for primary schools. However, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have produced non-statutory guidelines for the teaching of a modern language at Key Stage 2. Many schools are engaged in the teaching of modern languages early in Key Stage 2 and Ofsted reports on the level and quality of modern language provision as part of their regular inspection of primary schools.

The national languages strategy for England, *Languages for All, Languages for Life* (Department of Education and Skills, 2002), identifies the long term aim that, 'every child should have the opportunity throughout Key Stage 2 to study a foreign language and to develop their interest in the culture of other nations'. CILT and NACELL support the implementation of modern languages in primary schools.

Northern Ireland

A steering committee is currently focusing on the development of modern languages throughout the curriculum from Early Years to Key Stage 4. Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), in conjunction with its partners, is engaging in a variety of pilot initiatives from which it is hoped guidelines will be developed, that will link modern languages with the revised curriculum. The aim of the pilot projects is to cater for the diversity of schools and their ability to include modern languages in the curriculum.

There are 980 primary schools in Northern Ireland. Two hundred and twelve of these have indicated that a language in addition to English is being taught. Languages taught include Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian. Library Boards develop programmes for schools in their areas and endeavour to provide peripatetic teachers where necessary. There is a long-term goal to include modern languages as part of the child's education.

Key Data on Education

Key Data on Education is an annual report that provides a barometer of educational practices in different countries throughout the European Union. According to the *Key Data on Education in Europe: 2002* (European Commission, 2002, p. 157), almost 50% of primary pupils throughout Europe learn a foreign language apart from official or national languages in primary schools. This compares with approximately 3.6% of Irish children who are currently learning an additional foreign language as part of the Initiative.

The report notes that European countries generally choose between two modes of foreign language teaching. The first mode uses a block of time – usually about 10% of all teaching time, for teaching and learning modern languages. It is worth noting that the Primary School Curriculum already devotes approximately one third of all teaching and learning time to L1 and L2 learning. The second mode of language teaching and learning is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), wherein subject areas are taught through the medium of the L2 or L3.

Material support for language teaching from the Council of Europe

As mentioned earlier, the Languages Policy Division of the Council of Europe has provided leadership in assisting member countries to formulate language policies. It has also given practical assistance for language planning and teaching tools at a national and classroom level.

The Languages Policy Division has developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and the European Languages Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2001) to guide language learners, teachers and policy makers in setting achievable objectives. These language teaching and learning tools will play an increasingly important role in aiding curriculum planning for L2 and L3. The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. 'It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for

communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1).

The European Languages Portfolio (ELP), which enables learners to log and display their language learning experiences, may assist in ensuring greater continuity of language learning between primary schools and post-primary schools. The application of these documents for primary schools will be examined in Section Two.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with the European Context.

The European context: a summary

- The European Commission Report on *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* (European Commission, 2001) calls on EU member states to extend the teaching and learning of foreign languages in primary schools.
- Plurilingualism is a policy objective espoused by the European Commission.
- The number of children learning a foreign language in Irish primary schools is well below the European average.
- The approach to language teaching and learning incorporated in the NCCA Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages is reflective of broader European approaches.
- The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and the European Languages Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2001) can assist countries to develop and implement foreign language curricula.

Section Two – Factors impacting on modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum

This section considers factors that impact on modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Section Two is organised using five overarching headings:

- The Primary School Curriculum
- Children and modern language learning
- Teaching considerations
- Planning
- Resourcing and managing modern languages.

The Primary School Curriculum

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Primary School Curriculum: Aims, features and principles
2. European and global dimensions of the Primary School Curriculum
3. Integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum
4. Modern languages and the Primary School Curriculum
5. Transferable language skills
6. Integration of modern languages
7. Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages.

1. The Primary School Curriculum: aims, features and principles

The context

The introduction and on-going implementation of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) represents a continuing process of curriculum planning, development and delivery that has its roots in the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (NCCA / Department of Education, 1990). The findings of the Review Body resulted in a reorientation and strengthening of the concepts and principles first introduced in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971). Whereas the latter was a child-centered curriculum, the Primary School Curriculum is learner-centred.

The child's capacity to learn *how* to learn is an important feature of the Primary School Curriculum. The teacher becomes a mentor and guide in leading the child's learning. Each child should be enabled to attain his or her full learning potential. This may necessitate a teacher focusing on different aspects of teaching and learning styles and strategies. The Primary School Curriculum further expands the concept of activity-based learning so that teachers plan activities that will engage the child's interest and stimulate learning. It teases out the implications for introducing developmental learning techniques. Thus, processes of discovery learning are built firmly on the child's prior learning experiences.

The Primary School Curriculum also expands on the notion of using the child's environment as the impetus for learning experiences. Learning experiences should be relevant to the child's locale and culture.

The Primary School Curriculum promotes integrating learning across all subject areas. Knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in learning one subject area can help to build a corpus of transferable knowledge that is extended to the learning of other subject areas. Additionally, the knowledge acquired in school should be applied to learning and living in society.

These facets of the Primary School Curriculum are reflected in the aims, principles and features of the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999).

The general aims of primary education

The general aims of the Primary School Curriculum are as follows:

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

The general aims of the Primary School Curriculum seek to develop the whole child. The curriculum is concerned with the development of a variety of aspects of the human condition including the spiritual, moral, and creative. It also encourages both the physical and emotive development of the child. The Primary School Curriculum recognises that the nature of our changing society necessitates that children should have the capacity to interact effectively with others, and to have the confidence and capacity to accept change. Furthermore, the child is enabled to 'develop flexibility and creativity' (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p.7) to respond confidently to changing circumstances.

In learning how to learn, the child develops an awareness of how learning is embarked upon as an individual exercise and also how learning has a collaborative nature. This is realised cognitively through reflection and critical analysis. The capacity for learning how to learn also involves being able to articulate the processes that one engages in to complete a task. Thus, the child's development of knowledge is language based and this experience enables the child to grow in confidence while sharing how problems are resolved and how concepts are developed.

The Primary School Curriculum recognises the uniqueness of the child and celebrates learning so that foundations are laid for the happiness and fulfilment of the child's life. The Primary School Curriculum acknowledges that experiences in primary school education also provide the basis for positive learning experiences that will reinforce learning later in life. The child's learning takes place in the context of learning for life, as the curriculum

endeavours to equip children with the knowledge and skills that will serve them not only in their lives as children but later as adults; it is concerned to develop their capacity for creative expression and response.

(Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 7)

The general aims of the Primary School Curriculum, therefore are concerned with providing the child with

- the capacities to communicate with others
- the skills to act autonomously and cooperatively in learning how to learn
- the foundations for enjoyment in learning that forms the basis for future learning encounters.

The principles of the curriculum

The learning principles of the Primary School Curriculum articulate the philosophical beliefs that underpin the curriculum. The principles also provide the basis for the pedagogical approaches which should be adopted in classroom contexts. They highlight key dimensions of the child's engagement with the curriculum including

- the child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity
- the child as an active agent in his or her own learning
- the developmental nature of learning
- the child's existing knowledge and experience
- the child's immediate environment
- the social and emotional dimensions in learning
- the integration of learning experiences
- the transfer of learning
- the vital role of language in learning
- the aesthetic dimension of learning
- the development of higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving skills
- the collaborative nature of learning
- the individual differences and developmental needs of children
- the role of guided activity and discovery in learning
- the integral nature of assessment in teaching and learning.

(Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, Government of Ireland, 1999, pp. 14-17)

The features of the curriculum

The defining features of the curriculum establish the parameters for all of the subject areas that are included in the curriculum. The defining features of the Primary School Curriculum include the following:

- a relevant curriculum that prepares the children for their immediate learning needs as well as preparing the children to cope with the changing nature of society

- a broad and balanced curriculum that is reflective of the many facets of human creativity, expression and experience
- a developmental approach to learning that builds on the knowledge and ideas that children have acquired in other subject areas and in their lifetime experiences.

Curriculum implementation

The current implementation of the Primary School Curriculum is proving to be a challenging undertaking for teachers and schools. Making the time for teaching all of the subject areas, and taking cognisance of the new emphases in pedagogy and context have proven to be more professionally demanding than originally envisaged. As a result, the current year has been identified one of consolidation and review.

The challenges associated with implementing the existing curriculum have implications for any consideration of the further development of the curriculum such as the addition of another subject.

2. Integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum

The integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum is investigated below. There is further consideration of the importance the Primary School Curriculum places on making links across the curriculum to support the child's ongoing development of new knowledge.

A fundamental principle of the Primary School Curriculum is that there should be an integrated approach to learning throughout the child's primary school education. Learning in one subject area is therefore deepened and enhanced through with the child's experiences of discovery and learning in other areas of the curriculum.

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999) states how the curriculum

allows for the coherent expansion of knowledge and the gradual refinement of concepts. It recognises, too, the integrated nature of knowledge and thought and stresses the connections in content in the different curriculum areas. This creates harmony in the child's learning experiences and serves the complex nature of the learning process.

(*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 11)

The Primary School Curriculum, in acknowledging that integration is a key concept in the nature of planning and teaching of all subjects, states that

It is important, therefore, to make connections between learning in different subjects. As they mature, integration gives children's learning a broader and richer perspective, emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas and reinforces the learning process.

(*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 16)

In this context, it is imperative that if additional subjects are to be included in the Primary School Curriculum, they should be able to make a positive contribution to the integrative nature of the Primary School Curriculum and to the learning that it engenders.

3. The European and global dimensions of the Primary School Curriculum

The European and global dimensions to learning within the Primary School Curriculum are explored below.

Fifteen key issues have informed the planning and implementation of the Primary School Curriculum. The European and global dimensions in education are included among these. The dimensions are expressed in cultural and linguistic terms.

Learning through language is one of the principles of the Primary School Curriculum. Languages in the Primary School Curriculum are seen as conduits of cultural experiences and the child's linguistic repertoire goes to the core of learning as it enables the child to learn about his or her world through linguistic interaction with others. One key aspect of that learning is the appreciation of one's own cultural heritage; this appreciation can be strengthened as children interact with others from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Aspects of culture and identity are addressed in the key issues of the Primary School Curriculum, thus

In seeking to enable children to realise and express their individual and national identity the curriculum takes account of our historic links with European culture and our modern membership of the European Union.

(*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999 p. 27)

Children learn about a culture through its language. An appreciation for languages and for the cultures of others can make a positive contribution to the growing plurilingual and pluricultural nature of Irish society. A capacity to appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity is particularly beneficial if there are children in the class who might speak other languages and come from differing cultural backgrounds. In addition to promoting communicative competence, *Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge* (Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999) focuses on language awareness and cultural awareness as an integral component of the language learning experience.

Cuirfear san áireamh cultúr na tíre nach mbaineann go díreach leis an nGaeilge, cultúr páistí áirithe atá ag freastal ar an mbunscoil in Éirinn faoi láthair, agus cultúr cuid de thíortha na hEorpa chomh maith.

(*Curaclam na Bunscoil: Gaeilge*, Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, p. 12)

The Primary School Curriculum specifically mentions the fact that children's cultural awareness of other countries, particularly those in the EU, is enhanced by an experience of foreign language learning:

It recognises that children's linguistic and cultural awareness is enhanced by an experience of foreign language learning and that future curriculum development will take account of this in the context of the current pilot project in the teaching of modern languages.

(*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 27)

This extract from the Primary School Curriculum takes cognisance of the Pilot Project, now the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, and notes the influence that the outcomes of this Initiative will have on curriculum development in the future.

4. Modern languages and the Primary School Curriculum

This section examines the interrelationship between modern language learning and the Primary School Curriculum. A brief contextual orientation is provided; this is followed by an identification of how modern languages may be able to contribute to the aims, features and principles of the Primary School Curriculum.

Research findings suggest that for children who have participated in the Pilot Project and the Initiative, learning a modern language has been an enjoyable experience. Research findings in the evaluation of the Pilot Project indicate that, where the language learning experience is a positive one, the confidence and self-esteem of children is enhanced by the experience. The focus on oral and aural communication as the basis for cognitive development has raised children's participation rates in the language classroom. The focus on learning processes as well as outcomes has enabled children to participate without fear of failure ensuring that the learning experience is an enjoyable one.

Learning a modern language may contribute to the child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity, as children are naturally curious about the world that surrounds them. They enjoy opportunities to compare and contrast the way that they live and speak with the ways in which children from other countries and cultures live and speak. Providing access to modern language learning enriches the learning routes that children can take to encourage this sense of wonder and natural curiosity about the wider world.

Insights that children gain into how and where languages are spoken and the types of expressions that are used for particular language functions ensure that the child's learning is enriched (Robinson, 1998). The child learning an L3 has a different vantage point from which to reflect on her/his language and literacy learning in the L1 and L2. Thus the child, in keeping with the principles of the Primary School Curriculum, is enabled to , 'move from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the more complex, from the concrete to the abstract, (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 14) .

The skills that the child learns in L3 development further complement L1 and L2 development. The child has the capacity to reflect on how language is structured (Cheater & Farren, 2001). Heretofore with the learning of Gaeilge and English, the child will have used language as a medium of communication. In learning an additional language the child has to conceptualise the nature of language and language learning. He/she will be enabled to draw conclusions about similarities and differences in languages in relation to sounds and structure.

A focus on the use of cooperative and collaborative strategies is a hallmark of learning a modern language (*Modern Languages in Primary Schools, Teacher Guidelines*, NCCA, 2001, p 55). Language learning of its nature should be communicative and collaborative where children interact through the medium of the target language.

The cultural and linguistic skills acquired during modern language learning enable the child to develop a sense of empathy with other language speakers, to cultivate an appreciation for difference and to gain a more meaningful appreciation for cultural diversity. These are skills that are increasingly sought after in economic and social domains (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002).

While learning modern languages, children are able to develop and apply higher order thinking skills (Nuffield Foundation, 2000). For example, while recognising patterns and making inferences about how the target language might be structured, children are also learning how to learn by looking for patterns and interpreting how the patterns apply in other contexts. As children are asked to make informed judgements about how to interact with others in changing cultural settings they begin to develop a critical awareness of their own culture and its relationship with other cultures.

5. Transferable language learning skills

This section looks at the ways in which the learning of one language can complement and extend the learning of literacy and other languages.

Language teaching in the Primary School Curriculum aims to identify ways in which knowledge about one language can be transferred into deepening understandings of other languages. For example by focusing on how languages work, by illustrating how people use languages for differing purposes while communicating and by investigating how languages may be related, children will be able to apply knowledge that they have about one language to learning other languages.

This aspect of language learning is mentioned explicitly in the Gaeilge curriculum where teachers are urged to explore language awareness issues across Gaeilge, English and additional languages

Is é brí le feasacht teanga ná aire an pháiste a dhíriú ar an teanga agus ar struchtúir ró ar phatrúin éagsúla inti, ar phatrúin sa Ghaeilge féin agus ar na

cosúlachtaí agus na difríochtaí áta idir an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla agus teangacha eile.

(*Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí*. Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, p. 12)

The inclusion of a language awareness component in both the Gaeilge and English curricula has the potential to promote learning links between modern languages, English and Gaeilge. Raising awareness about the links that exist between languages helps to improve overall literacy skills as children extend their knowledge about how languages are related and how they are structured (Boyd & Rozendal, 2003).

The *Primary School Curriculum: English, Teacher Guidelines* state that

English vocabulary and grammar have been profoundly affected by Greek, Latin, the Scandinavian languages of the Middle Ages, Norman-French, modern European languages and, of course, Irish. This has given an enormous richness and expressive power to the language. In its turn English has influenced other European languages, especially in modern times.

(Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 37)

Within the *Primary School Curriculum: English, Teacher Guidelines* teachers are urged to focus on the importance of providing time for children to explore and discover the meanings of words and to investigate the nature of how the language works so that children's capacity to use and interact in the language is enriched. Further, by identifying the different language registers that children should be able to use in all subjects in the Primary School Curriculum, it may be possible to identify instances where modern language learning could strengthen literacy throughout the Primary School Curriculum.

There may, for example, be opportunities for children to create lists, engage in simple dialogues, and ask and receive directions while using a modern language. The focus should remain on learning the content of the non-language curriculum subject. The contribution that modern languages might make to the integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum is examined in further detail below.

6. Integration of modern languages

The section is concerned with the integration of modern languages with the Primary School Curriculum. It provides a rationale for integrating modern languages and identifies how modern languages might be integrated in the Primary School Curriculum. One of the means of integrating languages might be the promotion of content language integrated learning (CLIL). Support mechanisms for integrating modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum are also identified.

Rationale for integrating modern languages

There are two major reasons for investigating if and how modern languages might be integrated within the Primary School Curriculum. Firstly, it is imperative that children are able to make connections between prior language learning experiences and the experiences of learning another language. It is also important to link the learning of another language with other curriculum areas. The NCCA recognises that there are already extensive demands on teachers' time in delivering the Primary School Curriculum. A Modern languages curriculum would have to address how the language could be integrated with other areas of the Primary School Curriculum.

The report commissioned by the NCCA (2001) into the use of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) indicated that almost 95% of class teachers had integrated the target language with other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum.

The report stated that

Class teachers have found that the target language has had a very positive effect on other curricular areas. Overall, children have a great interest and awareness in the new language, which has benefited subjects such as Geography and History, where, 'it makes the topic more real'. Irish and English have also gained, as children have started to appreciate the similarities and differences between them and the target language.
(NCCA, 2001, p. 16)

Other subject areas have utilised the integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum to incorporate the teaching and learning of a subject in the restrictive time frame available for teachers. The drama curriculum, for example, 'borrows from other subject areas the time required to integrate the teaching of drama' (*Primary School Curriculum: Drama, Teacher Guidelines*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 20), in doing so, it reinforces the particular subject area being learned because children learn concepts through a variety of senses and learning styles.

Avenues for integrating modern languages into the learning of other subject areas can be identified in the Primary School Curriculum. For example, the *Primary School Curriculum: Visual Arts, Teacher Guidelines* (Government of Ireland, 1999) includes a unit of work for fifth and sixth classes that develops the theme of 'the street' through drawing, paint and colour, print and construction. This thematic approach to learning is one that lends itself naturally to the integrative nature of the curriculum and one that can be used to develop and extend learning of languages and culture as well as complementing the learning in visual arts.

A strand unit included in the Human Environment section of the geography curriculum for senior classes includes a study of how people live in a European country other than Ireland. An exemplar in the *Primary School Curriculum: Geography, Teacher Guidelines* (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 57) provides a concrete example of how teachers might use the study of a European capital city to make links across all of the strands included in the geography curriculum. The exemplar illustrates how teachers can integrate the teaching and learning of this

topic with language awareness and with other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum such as history, language, SPHE and PE. It is possible that this topic, within the geography curriculum, could be taught through the medium of an L2 or L3 target language. Such an approach could be termed as Content language integrated learning (CLIL).

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

CLIL uses the medium of an additional language to teach non-language subjects in the curriculum. It is an approach that is advocated by the National Centre for Languages in the UK for ensuring that modern language teaching and learning can be incorporated into the demanding nature of the primary school curriculum. A small-scale pilot project to investigate the benefits and challenges associated with CLIL could provide further information as to whether modern languages could be incorporated into the Primary School Curriculum.

A pilot project dealing with CLIL would have to pay particular attention to the time that would be required for planning and implementing changed methodologies and classroom practices. The issue of whether teaching time might be available for the introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum is revisited in the subsection incorporating Planning.

Supporting integration of modern languages

Project Leaders in the Initiative have indicated that there are practical ways in which the learning of modern languages can be integrated with PE, SPHE and the subjects of the SESE curriculum as well as the mathematics curriculum. For example, integration with mathematics is possible in the target language when children compare and contrast

- international time zones
- costing of food and other articles in other European countries
- recorded average temperatures in the countries where the target languages are spoken
- recorded analysis of the likes and dislikes of children in classes where the target language is spoken.

(Based on tasks identified in the *Primary School Curriculum: Mathematics*, Government of Ireland, 1999).

Information and Communications technology (ICT) can support innovative means of integrating modern languages, particularly if children are encouraged to engage in task-based or project work involving collaborative learning. The *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the Primary School Curriculum, Guidelines for Teachers* (Government of Ireland, 2004) provides concrete examples of how the use of ICT can promote teaching and learning across the curriculum, including languages. The document also illustrates how schools can initiate contacts with other schools where modern languages are spoken.

There is scope to identify where modern languages might be integrated with the Primary School Curriculum. However, it would be interesting to determine to what

extent schools have the capacity or time to conduct a comprehensive audit of the curriculum that would enable their teachers to identify the possible learning synergies to be created between modern languages and other subject areas in the curriculum through integration.

7. The Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages

This section provides an introduction to the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages. It identifies the structure of the document which outlines the strands and strand units. It also provides an overview of the preferred methodologies identified in the document for supporting the teaching of modern languages.

The document *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages was made available by the NCCA for schools in November 1999. This document provides the basis for teaching and learning modern languages in schools that are part of the Initiative. Provision of the Guidelines may have strengthened the planning and implementation of modern languages in those schools where modern languages are taught.

Strands, strand units and methodologies

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) integrates the teaching and learning of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing through a thematic approach. A list of topics enables teachers to identify how themes can be developed and how integration of learning can take place with other subjects.

Task-based cooperative strategies are explicated in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999). The document recommends that teachers and children should use the target languages in meaningful contexts to support learning. There is also a focus on developing communicative language skills through talking and listening to the teacher and others. Teachers and children work jointly through three different phases of activities, including

- a pre-communicative phase, which entails a motivational exercise that sets the scene for further development
- a communicative phase, which enables children to utilise their newly acquired linguistic representation in concrete interactions
- a post-communicative phase, which allows time for reflection and consolidation of what has been learned.

(Based on *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, NCCA, 1999, pp 6, 7)

These elements of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) also find expression in the Gaeilge curriculum which identifies a pre-communicative phase, (réamhchumarsáid), a communicative phase (cumarsáid), and a post communicative phase of activities (iarchumarsáid).

A focus on communication

The inclusion of the communicative competence strand in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) is in keeping with the general objectives mentioned in the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999) where one target identified is for the child to

develop a competence in a second, and perhaps a third, language at a level appropriate to his or her ability and cultural and linguistic background.
(*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999 p. 36)

The inclusion of the communicative competence strand ensures that children learn at least the basic elements of a modern language through tasks

that challenge the child to utilise the language at his or her disposal in order to interact effectively with others through role-playing effective communication, social interaction and language games.
(*Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, NCCA, 1999 p. 8)

The communicative strand is motivational for children, as they enjoy interacting through the target language. According to the report commissioned for the NCCA, this is the strand that teachers tend to concentrate most time on as, 'they find that children respond best to this strand' (2001, p. 3).

Language awareness in modern language classes

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 83) indicates that the language curriculum will be enhanced when teachers highlight and act upon the transferable language learning skills that can occur when children learn different languages.

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages reinforce this point and highlight the relevance of language awareness in the Irish context as, 'fifth and sixth classes have already been introduced to two languages' (*Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, NCCA, 1999 p. 8).

The Language Awareness strand of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) provides opportunities for the teachers to lead the child into rich, rewarding and engaging investigations into how languages are related and how they are structured.

A later section of this report identifies how a language awareness pilot programme might be designed to probe the benefits and challenges associated with the introduction of a language awareness curriculum for schools that may not have the capacity to implement a language competency model.

Cultural awareness in modern language classes

The cultural awareness strand focuses on the development of the child's knowledge and understanding of a range of skills and interests in the cultural, historical, geographical and scientific dimensions of the world.

The cultural awareness strand in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) is designed to facilitate learning about other countries and cultures. According to the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999), this strand helps to lay the foundation for understanding between nations. The strand provides integration with other subjects.

This strand can also be linked to other areas of the language curriculum. In *Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge* for example, it states that that children should explore aspects of Irish culture while increasing their knowledge of European cultures

Cuirfear san áireamh cultúr na tíre nach mbaineann go díreach leis an nGaeilge, cultúr páistí áirithe atá ag freastal ar an mbunscoil in Éirinn faoi láthair, agus cultúr cuid de thíortha na hEorpa chomh maith.
(*Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge*, Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, p. 12)

Research conducted as part of the evaluation of the Pilot Project indicates that 45% of teachers managed to integrate the cultural awareness strand into their classes at least one time per month and 9% managed to include the cultural awareness strand in each of the language classes that took place (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 72). There is scope for strengthening this dimension of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) in primary schools by providing teachers with models of good practice from the Initiative.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with the Primary School Curriculum.

The Primary School Curriculum: a summary

- Inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum is compatible with the Aims, Features and Principles of the curriculum.
- There is scope for integrating modern languages with other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum however consideration of the time available for planning and implementing an integrative approach should be further investigated.
- The current implementation of the Primary School Curriculum is already proving very challenging for teachers; the demands on time are great. The school year 2003-2004 has been designated a year of review and consolidation to facilitate teachers' implementation of curriculum subjects for which inservice professional development has already been provided.
- The provision of the Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages has been designed to further support modern language teaching and learning.

Children and modern language learning

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Cognitive development and affective factors
2. Modern languages for all children
3. An earlier start
4. Progressing modern language learning in primary schools
5. Continuity: primary and post-primary schools.

1. Cognitive development and affective factors

Research undertaken from the 1960s to the 1980s in second language learning (Lenneberg, 1967; Scovel, 1988) suggested that there are critical phases during which the acquisition of an additional language should take place. Arguments were postulated that children were better able to learn languages than were adults because learning the language during a critical period in children's development meant that they acquired more native like speaker fluency than older learners.

In contrast, more recent research is perhaps less equivocal regarding the 'critical phase' hypothesis. According to Dechert

in light of our present knowledge ... we do not know whether there is a critical or series of critical ages which only or mainly on a sound scientific basis would justify an institutionally motivated introduction of early primary second language teaching (1995, p. 77).

It is now generally agreed that even though younger learners may make some initial advances over and above those who learn a language later, there is a 'consistent finding that learners exposed to a second language at primary and who then at secondary level are mixed in with later beginners do not maintain an advantage for more than a modest period over these latter' (Singleton, 1989, p. 22). Thus, older learners can, in certain circumstances, make similar advances in second language learning as younger learners. There are indications that children may be better able to acquire attributes of second language learning such as phonology and intonation.

More importantly, recent studies (Hoffman, 2001; Cenoz & Jessner, 2000) indicate that children who learn an L3 in primary schools are able to draw significantly on their L1 and L2 acquisition skills to progress the learning of the L3. Children may also acquire a L2 and L3 more thoroughly if learning takes place in naturalistic settings. Language learning in naturalistic settings means that children are immersed in the language and are provided with very few opportunities to use their L1 as the practical means of communication. Naturalistic settings can rarely be replicated in schools, though total immersion or CLIL programmes over long periods of time do approximate some naturalistic conditions (Cummins, 1991).

Implications for policy

It appears that younger children do not learn a language faster or better than older children. However, Johnson (2002) states that learning modern languages in primary schools is a justifiable exercise as language learning leads

- to enhanced acquisition of the target language sound system and patterns of intonation
- to a willingness to experiment more in the target language and to have reduced levels of ‘language anxiety’ which can be detrimental to learning a language
- to an ability to make links and connections between the modern language and additional languages that the child may learn
- to language learning processes that can be developed and improved over time
- to a diversified curriculum which has positive implications for the child’s cognitive growth, cultural capacities and social skills.

The rationale for learning modern languages as provided above should be viewed from an Irish perspective where the child may already draw on the language learning techniques that he /she has learned whilst learning of Gaeilge or English as an L2. Learning of modern languages could complement the Primary School Curriculum when there are links made through the language awareness strands of Gaeilge and aspects of the English curriculum that draw attention to the interrelationships between languages. Learning a modern language should also enhance the child’s ability to gain cultural experiences which provide a European and global perspective on learning.

Affective factors

Findings from The NCCA focus group interviews with parents indicate that children might enjoy learning a modern language for a variety of reasons.

One parent interviewed believed children are interested in modern language learning because it prepares them for future learning experiences. The parent stated *‘when they go to secondary school they are suddenly hit with it, so if they have a taste of it before they go, it will be good for them’*. This parent believes that the exposure that children have to modern languages in primary school eases the way for the future.

Another parent indicated that children who have special educational needs *‘start off with the same focus as everyone else in the class, they are all starting together, there’s nothing to stop them learning’*. The fact that all children are seen to be starting a new subject from the same basis does not prejudice the potential for everyone to succeed.

The Primary School Curriculum postulates that learning should be applicable to the lives of children, this point is reflected in the quote from a parent who stated that, *‘they [children] can see a point in what they are doing, they are able to use a smattering of the language to talk with tourists who come here or if they travel’*. According to this parent the child is keen to learn about people from other countries and can use a modern language to interact with them.

Finally, reflecting the research conducted for the evaluation report one parent believed that children like learning a new language in 5th or 6th class because, 'it's different and it's new and they are at an age when they can appreciate new things'. Learning a modern language can offer new avenues for learning because it is different and fun.

2. Modern languages for all children

One of the key issues identified in the Primary School Curriculum is the function of the curriculum 'in contributing to equality and fairness of access in education' (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, p. 9). The question arises as to whether, in the interests of equality and fairness, modern languages should be made available for all children.

The question of whether or not, or to what extent there should be provision of modern languages for all children is particularly concerned with

1. children who may have special educational needs
2. children in schools classified as disadvantaged
3. children who may be speakers of English and Irish as additional languages to their L1.

Modern languages and children with special educational needs

In their research of L2 learners with special educational needs, Bovair and Roberts (1996) found that these learners motivated to participate in modern language classes if certain prerequisites for learning were put into place. Specifically, children were able to excel when they

- were aware of what was expected of them
- understood how to go about their work
- were offered opportunities for reinforcement
- were able to record and articulate progress in their work.

Enabling children with special education needs to participate in all facets of classroom based learning activities is a fundamental goal of the *Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2002). In the event that modern languages were to be included in the Primary School Curriculum every effort should be made to ensure that those with special educational needs are able to engage in modern language learning to their fullest potential.

The guidelines mentioned above encourage teachers to identify how the child with mild general learning disabilities can realise his/her potential as a unique individual. Children with moderate or profound learning disabilities are generally exempted from learning the additional national language so it is unreasonable to expect that they would engage in modern language learning. The methodologies in teaching and learning modern languages as identified in the *Draft Curriculum*

Guidelines for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) involve a multi-sensory approach and a focus on communication through talk. The use of experiential, task-based learning to assist the acquisition of modern languages and the encouragement of aural and oral techniques is compatible with the strategies used in the teaching of children with mild general learning disabilities.

While there is a realisation that some children with special educational needs may benefit from engagement with an additional language there is also a realisation that not all children will benefit to the same extent from such encounters. The NCCA recognises that:

Students with mild general learning disabilities are not a homogeneous group. Individual profiles will vary and some may be affected where additional sensory or physical disabilities are present.

(Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General learning disabilities: English. NCCA, 2002, p. 5)

In consultation with the child, with parents and other specialists charged with a child's care and education, teachers can get a sense of what children might be able to achieve. Modern language learning might be incorporated into the child's learning experience where this is seen as being advantageous for the child's social, cognitive and linguistic development.

The individual nature of the child's learning was recognised by parents who participated in a NCCA focus group interview. One parent indicated that, '*It would be nice for children with learning disabilities to have the option, if their Individual Education Plan allows for this*'. Parents of children with special educational needs wish for their children to be provided with opportunities to attain their fullest learning potential. If modern languages can assist in this realisation they may become part of the child's learning.

Modern languages and children in schools designated as disadvantaged

There is a paucity of research that investigates children's experiences in modern languages in schools designated as disadvantaged. Anecdotal information from the UK indicates that schools in disadvantaged areas are less likely to participate in modern language programmes than schools in more affluent areas.

There are some possible explanations as to why disadvantaged schools may not wish to participate in modern language programmes. There may be a sense that

- it is more important to focus on the child's first language literacy skills before promoting a focus on L2 or L3 curricula
- children in disadvantaged schools are not going to perform as well as others in modern language learning
- there are increasing time demands on teachers to mediate a primary curriculum in areas that experience particular socio-economic disadvantage.

When addressing the issue of the modern language performance capabilities of children who come from schools classified as disadvantaged, the evaluation report has made some crucial observations:

Of particular significance perhaps is the fact that pupils in disadvantaged schools do just as well as pupils in other schools on the ITÉ Listening Comprehension Test. (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 143)

NCCA focus group interviews with teachers from schools designated as disadvantaged found that teachers believed that the introduction of modern languages is motivational for children. Teachers in focus group interviews indicated that the emphasis on oral and aural communication in modern languages was a motivational aspect of language learning. Children were encouraged to learn without fear of failing in written forms of assessment.

Modern languages for second language learners

Increasingly, there are children in primary schools who have neither English nor Gaeilge as a first language. There are several considerations relevant to classroom teachers and schools wishing to introduce the teaching of a modern language in circumstances where school populations are typified by linguistic and cultural diversity. The choices available are determined by the levels of L2 language and literacy (English or Gaeilge) attainment of the child.

- For children who have very basic levels of L2 literacy skills of English or Gaeilge it would be important to concentrate on progressing the learning of these languages of instruction before introducing modern languages.
- For children whose language and literacy skills enable them to participate to the fullest capacity as other learners in the classroom, consideration might be given to their inclusion in modern language learning classrooms.

Insights into a child's previous language learning and his/her literacy skills will help to improve the capacity of schools and teachers to make informed decisions about the appropriateness of modern language pedagogy in each child's case. In some instances, it is possible that a modern language may also be the language of instruction used in the school in the child's country of origin. Opportunities to continue learning about and through a modern language may provide for a sense of continuity in the child's learning.

It should be remembered that many children throughout the world come from backgrounds that encourage and facilitate the learning and use of a wide repertoire of languages.

3. An earlier start

Research indicates that the longer the child has opportunities to learn an additional language the more likely it is that she/he will be able to acquire certain aspects of a new target language (Curtain & Pescola, 1994). Further research indicates that earlier additional language learning may have positive effects on the young child's

cognitive development. It is claimed that additional language literacy helps to create learning links with other areas of the curriculum thus improving learning (Robinson, 1998). As stated earlier, there are also arguments for ensuring that children have a high level of competency and literacy in the L1 and L2 before a L3 is introduced.

Preparing for modern language learning

The introduction of a structured language awareness curriculum may provide the most practical strategy for schools interested in extending modern language learning to 3^d and 4^h classes. The non-language specific nature of language awareness curriculum ensures that teachers would be able to use the current language awareness aspects of the Primary School Curriculum in preparing the ground for future language learning encounters.

Whilst, as yet, cohesive language awareness teaching and learning materials have not been made available in primary schools, there are existing materials that could greatly enhance such a programme. For example, the *Draft Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools* (NCCA, forthcoming) provides examples of where a language and cultural awareness programme can be integrated into the Primary School Curriculum from the early years. There are additional helpful resources that could support the adoption of language awareness curriculum available from the *Intercultural Guidelines* produced by the INTO (2002).

A small-scale pilot project could be developed to investigate the possible benefits of introducing a language awareness curriculum for children in 3rd and 4th classes. Such a project, perhaps based in schools that are currently part of the Initiative, could identify the resource and support requirements of teachers and children. Such a pilot project might also highlight how an early sensitisation to language learning might augment language learning at later stages.

In the longer term, an earlier start for children in 3^d and 4th classes may become possible if and when

- there is a general acceptance among parents, teachers and other school personnel that the concept of early language learning would be beneficial
- schools are provided with the support necessary for the implementation of a language awareness or modern languages competency curriculum for children in 3rd and 4th classes
- teachers are provided with the necessary professional development skills to implement language awareness or modern language competency curricula in 3rd and 4th classes.

4. Progressing modern language learning in primary schools

Project Leaders and teachers who participated in the NCCA focus group interviews indicated that in some instances there were challenges associated with further developing the child's modern language skills from earlier stages of acquisition to more cognitively demanding stages. This has implications for schools that may

wish to include the teaching of modern languages should modern language provision be extended.

Teachers can guide the child's progress in learning a modern language by

- providing assistance in creating and maintaining modern language portfolios
- critiquing samples of work jointly with children
- engaging in dialogue with children to identify possible future learning goals.

It is important that continuity and progression in language learning are planned for. Teachers are encouraged to review methodologies, practices and content of the modern language curriculum in this context.

The NCCA focus group interviews with teachers and Project Leaders found that teachers would welcome guidance in attaining a more structured approach to their long-term planning of a modern language curriculum.

Progressing the learning using the Common European Framework

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEF) offers teachers and curriculum planners the capacity to identify possible learning outcomes that children might have attained following the completion of a course of language learning.

It may be possible to form international partnerships to research how the CEF might be adapted to plan for progression of modern languages in primary schools using the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) as a basis for planning. Involvement of classroom teachers would be an important feature of any partnership arrangement. The identification of learning objectives could be stratified moving from the most simple of tasks to ones that are more cognitively demanding. However, it is important that the Framework would provide a facilitative and complementary guide for teachers rather than prescribing the basis of their engagements at classroom level (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1).

5. Continuity: primary and post-primary schools

Research conducted as part of the evaluation indicated that 18% of primary school teachers have had some contact with language teachers in post-primary schools (Harris & Conway, 2002). The aim to provide for continuity of learning in modern languages remains, to a large extent, unachieved.

Continuity of learning entails a seamless progression from one learning experience to the next as the child matures and progresses through schooling. The child should be enabled to access curricular pathways that provide for continuity of language, content and methodology as far as this is practicable.

However, the task for teachers and schools in planning for continuity of learning in specific languages between primary and post-primary schools is becoming

increasingly more challenging. From the perspective of a plurilingual society, the concept of the non-linear nature of language learning is becoming more significant. All language learning experiences, not only those that ensure continuity of learning in specific languages, are seen as being beneficial for enhancing the child's linguistic repertoire. The non-linear route that learning sometimes takes is recognised in the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 14.) 'Conceptual development is not necessarily a linear process. It may take place on a number of planes simultaneously or through the making of an intuitive leap'.

It may be desirable to ensure that continuity of language learning can be facilitated for specific languages. Nevertheless, where this is not possible, all foreign language learning experiences could be seen as enriching and beneficial, particularly when the language learning encounters can be self-monitored and applied to further language learning experiences. The emphasis should then shift to a focus on the need to maintain and extend the higher order thinking skills that the child who has learned a modern language should have acquired in the primary school. The child may have the capacity to learn how to learn an additional language and may also be able to use the L1 and L2 to further enhance his/her language-learning capabilities. These are the skills that he/she will build upon.

According to the European Commission (2001, p.10) lifelong learning includes: 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related activities'. The question remains to what extent post-primary schools can build on the modern language learning experiences that children may have had in primary schools in promoting lifelong learning. As children may be exposed to the learning of a variety of languages, it is also important that teachers in post-primary schools are enabled to teach for differentiation, while also taking cognisance of the prior language learning experiences that children have had in primary schools.

Providing networks of support systems that will facilitate communication between primary and post-primary schools is a challenging task for educators at all levels of curriculum implementation.

Supporting modern language continuity

Practical ways for achieving continuity in methodological approaches can be encouraged and adopted, for example by

- continuing to advocate that primary schools wishing to introduce modern languages should liaise with local post-primary schools
- encouraging Colleges of Education to raise awareness about how and why modern languages are learned in primary and post-primary schools
- encouraging the use of language portfolios to record experiences that children have had in learning about and through additional languages

- clustering primary and post-primary schools where knowledge and expectations of language learning can be shared.

To facilitate continuity between primary and post-primary modern language learning, Harris and Conway (2002, p. 227) have suggested that the potential of the Scottish model of school clustering might assist in promoting continuity of learning in modern languages between primary schools and post-primary schools. However, the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) highlights the difficulties of achieving a successful programme of clustering between primary and post-primary schools in Ireland where localised support mechanisms have not traditionally been a feature of curriculum implementation. A suggestion is made in the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) that a pilot project be established to investigate the strategies to be employed in fostering clustering arrangements between schools.

Specially appointed modern language personnel, based locally and regionally in Education Centres, may be able to promote the creation of local networks of teachers who can share knowledge about modern language pedagogy between primary schools and post-primary schools. A pilot project involving modern language support personnel in a number of Education Centres could identify the potential benefits of networking primary schools and post-primary schools.

Language learning portfolios can also inform teachers in post-primary schools about prior modern language experiences and possible future orientations for extending the learning. The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999, p. 56) recognise

The benefit of compiling modern languages portfolios is that it may be brought forward by the child from fifth class to sixth class and on to post-primary school as a record of the language learning experiences.

The Initiative has started to develop a European Language Portfolio (ELP) for modern languages in primary schools. It is important that any such development is seen to be in keeping with the general aims and objectives identified for assessment by the NCCA. As part of the local networking of schools, Initiative personnel could trial the use of the ELP as a tool to add continuity of learning in modern languages between primary and post-primary schools.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with Children and modern language learning.

Children and modern language learning: a summary

- Children do not necessarily learn modern languages better than adults or older students.
- Learning modern languages may have positive implications for the cognitive and affective development of children in primary schools.

- Providing for equality of access is a factor in future considerations of modern language provision in the Primary School Curriculum.
- Equality of access for modern languages is predicated upon the capacity of schools to provide the time and resources to offer modern languages
- Depending on individual circumstances, children with special educational needs, those who come from schools that are designated as disadvantaged and children who do not have English or Gaeilge as a first language, can all participate in modern language learning if provided with appropriate support and resources.
- A pilot project could identify the benefits and challenges associated with the introduction of modern languages in 3rd and 4th classes. Such a pilot project could use a language awareness model.
- There is scope for exploring how the effectiveness of progressing modern language learning might be increased.
- Local clusters of teachers could be established, with the assistance of the Education Centres, to promote continuity of learning between primary schools and post-primary schools.

Teaching considerations

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Language teachers
2. In-service requirements and continuing professional development
3. Pre-service teacher education
4. Language teacher assistants
5. Teaching modern languages in Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna Gaeltachta.

1. Language teachers

Modern language teachers in primary schools come from a variety of teaching backgrounds including school based teachers and visiting teachers.

- School based teachers can be
 - classroom teachers teaching their own classes
 - exchange teachers who are considered as ‘modern language specialists’
 - language teaching assistants or pre-service teachers on placements from European Colleges of Education or on Comenius placements.
- Visiting teachers can be
 - teachers with experience in post-primary schools
 - native teachers with European or other qualifications and non-native teachers with ESL or other language teaching qualifications
 - Native and non-native teachers with no teaching qualifications.

Classroom based teachers

Classroom teachers provide modern language teaching for approximately 30% of those schools participating in the Initiative. Not all teachers in 5th or 6th classes will have the competency necessary to teach a modern language, so in the event that modern languages are made available to an extended number of schools consideration may be given to the use of exchange specialist teachers within primary schools.

Exchange teachers within schools

Schools participating in the Initiative sometimes make arrangements whereby a teacher who has an interest and competency in the target language teaches the modern language to fifth and sixth classes within his/her school. In *Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí*, there is a recognition that some teachers may have a particular interest in language teaching

...ba cheart aitheantas a tabhairt do ...spéis faoi leith ag múinteoir amháin sa Ghaeilge nó i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaím teangacha.
(Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, p. 23)

Within these participating schools, a teacher from another class will take the modern language class while the classroom teacher takes this teacher's class. This arrangement allows for teachers to pursue personal pedagogical interests and is therefore likely to result in raised motivational levels among teachers and children. As children prepare for post-primary schools where specialist teaching is the norm, exchange teachers may help prepare children for the future learning experiences they will have in post-primary schools.

There are challenges associated with this model. According to information gleaned in the NCCA focus group interviews exchange teachers faced time constraints in planning for additional lessons as well as catering for the teaching in their own classes. This was particularly the case where the teacher of the modern language was also the 6th class teacher. This finding suggests that exchange teachers should be provided with adequate time and space and resources to organise and plan for exchange arrangements within schools.

Benefits of school based teachers of the modern language

In the longer term, school based teachers are best placed to be the key actors in leading modern languages within classrooms. School based teachers can

- ensure continuity in teaching style
- facilitate integration across the Primary School Curriculum
- respond to individual children's learning needs and styles
- implement the school disciplinary code
- teach literacy in all subjects of the Primary School Curriculum
- manage teaching and learning resources for sustained usage
- incorporate knowledge and skills that have come about as a result of on-going policy changes within the educational sector.

There are implications for the professional development requirements of classroom teachers if they are to be the prime gatekeepers in the implementation of modern languages in primary schools. The professional development requirements of classroom teachers will be discussed further below. This report also addresses the role that visiting teachers have in the provision of modern language pedagogy in primary schools.

Visiting modern language teachers

Visiting teachers perform important teaching duties in the current Initiative. They are a heterogeneous group that can be categorised into 4 major groupings, as illustrated in the chart below:

	Native speakers	Non-native speakers
Trained	This group may have formal teaching qualifications or qualifications from outside of Ireland.	This group may be trained in Ireland as post-primary teachers or as EFL teachers.
Untrained	This group have language skills in the target language but may lack formal qualifications and therefore pedagogical skills. This group may also include undergraduate teachers who act as language assistants.	A minority of visiting teachers, may have advanced target language skills but do not have formal teaching qualifications.

Visiting teachers constitute 70% of those who are teaching modern languages in the Initiative. According to the NCCA focus group interviews with teachers and those with parents, schools that have a visiting teacher find the arrangement is valuable. Classroom teachers do not feel overburdened as the visiting teacher takes on the role of teaching the class. Parents in NCCA focus group interviews expressed a desire for children to have access to native speakers of the target languages. The challenge is to ensure that schools have continued access expertise in modern language teaching and can tap into native or near-native familiarity with the target culture and language while also increasing the capacity of the school to provide modern language teaching expertise from within.

As indicated, visiting teachers constitute by far the majority of teachers engaged in the teaching of modern languages. Currently, the costs associated with visiting teachers constitute in the region of 30% of the total budget available for the Initiative.

In the eventuality that modern languages were to be made more available in an extended number of schools, the evaluation report has pointed out that one of the most significant financial costs to be incurred would result from an increase in the numbers of visiting teachers in modern language classrooms where no trained teachers were available (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 216). In a scenario where visiting teachers are involved in an extended provision of modern languages in

primary schools, the evaluation report identifies how systematic collaboration between the classroom teacher and the visiting teacher will ensure a more sustainable form of modern language provision. It is envisaged that the classroom teacher could improve his or her language proficiency over time by availing of in-service opportunities. Thus, schools would benefit from strengthening their internal capacity for modern language teaching and learning while engaging the services of a visiting teacher.

For those schools that rely on the services of a visiting teacher, the level of planning and communication between classroom teachers and visiting teachers has a bearing on the quality of children's learning in modern languages. Considerations of the time required for lesson planning and collaboration between visiting and classroom teachers should be kept to the fore in whole school and classroom planning.

Furthermore, guidelines for accessing the services of visiting teachers could be developed to ensure that the internal capacity of schools is given every opportunity to be developed before assistance is sought from outside of the school.

2. In-service requirements and continuing professional development

Research notes the strong correlation between teacher professional development and student achievement in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Fullan, 2003) Ongoing professional development for teachers is currently one key component of the Initiative.

Below is an overview of

- in-service education offered by the Project Leaders
- language competency Certificate and Diploma courses available for teachers in the Institutes of Technology
- professional development needs of visiting language teachers.

Project Leader support for modern language teachers

The work of Project Leaders in the Initiative is recognised in the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) as being one of the most positive factors in ensuring Pilot Project success. Their commitment to the current Initiative is invaluable and an extension of a similar support structure should be a feature of modern language provision in the event that modern languages are included in the Primary School Curriculum.

Classroom based modern language teachers and visiting teachers may have participated in up to 12 days of professional development in the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum since the introduction of the curriculum in 1999. There are similarities between the training provided by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and professional development provided by the Project Leaders.

Faced with time constraints in providing two days of in-service per year to all modern language teachers, Project Leaders have had to make difficult choices as to what to include in their teacher education sessions. Generally, the focus of in-service provision has been the honing of teacher strategies for improving target language pedagogy. Project leaders also conduct visits to schools to assist in provision and planning of modern languages.

The commitment of the Initiative to improved practices of professional development for modern language teachers in primary schools is further evidenced by the participation of the Initiative in a European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) international project to enhance teacher education in modern languages. The project is to run for a period of four years from 2004-2008. On-going improvements in teachers' professional development through international research will ensure that modern language teaching in primary schools is supported by the sharing of best practice on a national and international basis.

Language proficiency and language pedagogy in-service provision

According to the evaluation report some 20% of teachers felt that they did not have enough language knowledge and competency to teach the target language (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 44). To strengthen the language competency of teachers, the DES invited the Institutes of Technology (ITs) to design Graduate Diploma and Certificate courses, these are currently delivered by ITs.

Two-year diploma courses are now provided in French or German for teachers who have attained a Leaving Certificate qualification in these languages. National Certificate courses are offered in Spanish and Italian for teachers who have had no previous qualification in these languages. The courses have been recognised by HETAC. According to Nelson (2003), some 420 teachers completed language proficiency courses in January 2004. A further 80 teachers are due to graduate in January 2005.

Given the current funding available to the ITs for improving teacher competency in modern languages, it is unlikely that any more than 50 teachers per year will be able to attend the courses offered. Initially, the IT courses were fully funded by the DES but are now partially funded. Teachers now enrolling in modern language courses are required to pay 50% of their fees.

The Colleges of Education may also have a role to play in the future development and delivery of language competency courses. They also have expertise and experience that would enable them to develop pre-service and in-service modules for the provision of language pedagogy, methodology and cultural competency education.

A once off teacher education programme

Drawing parallels from the language competency education programme in Scotland (Johnstone, Cavani, Low & McPake, 2000), the evaluation report indicated that a once-off, intensive teacher education programme for all 5th and 6th class teachers to improve their modern language competency levels, would cost in the region of €9 million in total.

If consideration were to be given to such a programme, the logistics of implementation and the possible key players responsible for implementation would have to be identified. It is envisaged that such a programme would remain in place for a period of about 3-4 years with the objective of providing pedagogy and language competency skills for a representative teacher from each primary school. Such a commitment to professional development would result in a cohort of teachers with the required skills for modern language teaching in primary schools. The evaluation report proposes that a pilot project be established to identify the strengths and challenges associated with the implementation of an intensive programme of teacher professional development which has a focus on language pedagogy and promotes language proficiency (Harris & Conway, 2002, p.230).

Any consideration of professional development provision for modern languages teachers would have to take account of the mobility of teachers between classes each year. Thus, opportunities should open to all teachers within a school to avail of professional development.

Comenius programmes

Under the Comenius 2.2 programme of Socrates, approximately 150 primary teachers participated in modern language in-service programmes throughout the EU in 2001-2002 (Léargas, 2003). These two and three week courses strengthen either L2 pedagogy techniques or are focused on improving the L2 competency skills of teachers.

This European access to continued professional development is one that offers teachers practical experience and learning through the medium of the target language. The DES may wish to consider how an increased number of teachers can avail of these EU funded professional development courses. In the longer term, official recognition of the courses might be investigated so that the courses are recognised for the contribution that they make in strengthening primary teachers' modern language teaching skills.

Professional development of visiting modern language teachers

Visiting teachers attend the in-career development days provided by the Initiative at their own expense. In-career resource materials developed by Project Leaders do not appear to differentiate between the professional development requirements of visiting teachers and those of classroom teachers.

Possible topics for professional development for visiting teachers might include

- appreciation for the integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum
- collaboration and interaction with classroom teachers.

The evaluation report identified a need to support visiting teachers in the use of effective teaching strategies in challenging circumstances. It is advisable that visiting teachers would also become adept at ensuring the involvement of children with special educational needs. In addition, the evaluation report stated that 72% of visiting teachers in schools designated as disadvantaged felt that teaching in these schools was a challenging experience (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 82).

According to Project Leaders, visiting teachers who have formal European teaching qualifications have indicated their willingness and desire to access professional development programmes. The DES might consider the implications of providing training for visiting teachers with native language skills. The Colleges of Education and ITs may wish to identify possibilities for creating professional development courses for visiting teachers.

3. Pre-service teacher education

Preparation for the teaching of modern languages in Ireland is an optional component of some pre-service teacher education programmes. Though none of the Colleges of Education currently feature modern language pedagogy and competency as a core subject, some Colleges of Education offer additional optional courses in modern languages. In some instances, the availability of optional courses reflects the language diversity of the Initiative. The optional courses are attracting a significant level of interest among pre-service teachers. One College of Education records a rate of approximately 20% participation among the total student body in optional modern language courses.

A language module

The report prepared for the DES on the future national teaching requirements in primary schools, *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century*, suggested that

an elective module on language teaching (relevant to all four languages) be provided in the colleges. Students would need to acquire competence in a language separately. (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p.118)

It might also be possible to envisage the teaching of a core module that integrates related aspects of language teaching and learning in the Primary School Curriculum. Such a module could include aspects of

- language awareness in Gaeilge and English and modern languages
- L1, L2 and L3 language and literacy acquisition
- L2 and L3 pedagogy, strategies and resources
- learning English as a Second Language (ESL) or Gaeilge as a second language
- intercultural education and language learning.

A core language module for pre-service teachers would have the potential to add additional coherence to all language teaching and learning courses in the Colleges of Education.

To complement pre-service teacher participation in such a module Colleges of Education could extend the availability and range of options available for pre-service teachers in the modern languages. Colleges of Education would have to consider the resource and timetabling implications of such a provision.

Making European connections

A consideration for the Colleges of Education to further enhance the language and cultural component of their pre-service education programmes would be to promote increased interaction with European colleagues engaged in teacher education.

There are instances throughout Europe where Colleges of Education have sought to network with similar institutions and to provide for student exchanges. Colleges of education have created a mutual recognition of modules so that in some instances pre-service teachers can gain expertise in a different teacher education college in Europe. Increased mobility for pre-service teachers has been achieved through the development of Erasmus exchange programmes providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain practical and applicable skills in language and cultures other than their own (for example, the NACELL programme of teacher mobility which has been adopted in around 20% of teacher education colleges in the UK, 2003).

4. Language teacher assistants

Benefits of language assistants in primary schools

There are important ways in which the learning encounter with a language assistant can be beneficial for children and for classroom teachers. Assistants may

- help teachers in planning and organising more extensive cultural or linguistic links with countries where the target language is spoken
- support teachers by working with learners who have particular difficulties in any of the language skills of listening speaking reading or writing in the target language
- identify resources that will be beneficial in dealing with themes and topics the classroom teacher wishes to cover in the teaching and learning of the modern language
- encourage children to communicate in the target language by providing a real impetus for children to use the language
- support experiential and task-based approaches to modern language learning
- provide for the application of the European and global dimension to teaching and learning as identified in the Primary School Curriculum
- strengthen acceptance of cultural diversity within all schools
- introduce children to personnel from outside of the school who have a role in enriching educational encounters
- reinforce the target language skills of the whole school community.

Language assistants in schools

Twelve schools involved in the Initiative hosted French language assistants (stagiaires) in the 2002/2003 academic year. The language assistants were based in Ireland under an agreement between the PMG and the Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres (IUFM). The IUFM is responsible for pre-service teacher education in France. The language assistants' residencies in primary schools lasted for three weeks. According to the *2002 End of Year Report* produced by the

Initiative, schools that hosted language assistants welcomed their participation in the teaching and learning of the French language and culture.

Structured bilateral agreements between the DES and the European countries where the modern languages are spoken may provide for on-going provision of language assistants to a wider body of primary schools.

Comenius language assistants

Additional language assistants who can provide children with access to native speakers of target languages could be identified through the Comenius 1 Action of Socrates. Under this EU supported and funded programme, language assistants from any of the EU or accession states can visit Ireland for a period of between three to eight months to work in one school or to serve a cluster of schools in a particular region.

One of the European Commission objectives for the language Action Plan 2004-2006 is that

The Commission services and National Agencies will work to increase take-up of the Language Assistantship action, in particular to support language teaching at primary level. (European Commission, 2003, p. 15)

The specific objective to increase the numbers of language assistants is targeted for 2005-2006. This time frame allows the DES to explore the possibilities for developing bilateral agreements with countries where the modern languages of the Initiative are spoken and to investigate mutual exchange programmes for pre-service teachers.

Possible means of supporting the involvement of language assistants

Education Centres are hubs for implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, so their experiences in curriculum implementation could be an important feature of enabling language assistants to engage with the maximum numbers of primary schools.

If language-teaching assistants were based regionally at Education Centres they might be able to serve clusters of schools. The language assistants could be hosted by the Initiative rather than by individual schools. Thus the responsibility of managing the recruitment and placement of language assistants could become a task for the modern language Initiative. The Initiative could assess the potential demand for language assistants as well as ensuring that the language assistants are able to teach in a variety of schools.

Modern language assistants would require initial induction to provide them with a familiarisation of the Primary School Curriculum. Induction might also include an orientation programme illustrating what the role and responsibilities of a language assistant might be.

Providing schools with capacities to engage the occasional services of a language assistant, who might complement the role of a classroom teacher, could strengthen the long-term capacity of modern language teaching and learning in primary schools.

5. Teaching modern languages in Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna Gaeltachta

Research that informed the evaluation report indicated that about 90% of children in schools where Irish was the medium of instruction enjoyed the opportunities to participate in cultural awareness activities in the modern language classes (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 74).

Gaelscoileanna

Similar views were expressed in an NCCA focus group interview with a group of teachers from Gaelscoileanna currently participating in the Initiative. These teachers suggested that the teaching of modern languages was supported in the Gaelscoileanna by

- the linking and reinforcement between the teaching of all language subjects
- the focus on oral and aural language learning
- the level of communication that enabled primary school personnel to communicate with colleagues in post-primary schools
- the inclusion of modern languages in the whole school planning process
- the successful integration of the modern language in other curriculum subjects.

Nevertheless, there were also observations made which indicated that aspects of the teaching and learning of modern languages could be strengthened. For example, in some instances, schools had concerns about the continuity of learning when visiting teachers continued to change over time.

The amount of time allocated to the teaching of the modern language also posed a challenge for planning and implementing the Primary School Curriculum as a whole. These are also concerns that are voiced by teachers in schools where Irish is not the medium of instruction.

Scoileanna Gaeltachta

From focus group interviews with three teachers in Gaeltacht areas, it is clear that those who have participated in the Initiative have found the experience to be a rewarding one. An investigation into the nature of language teaching and learning in the Primary School Curriculum that focused on schools that use Irish as the medium of instruction would add significantly to decision-making processes regarding the place of modern languages in the curriculum.

To enhance the capacity of schools, where Irish is the medium of instruction, in teaching and learning modern languages, it would be beneficial for these schools to

be able to draw on the experiences of similar schools involved in the Initiative. The identification of best practice for teaching and learning modern languages in Gaelscoileanna and Scoileanna Gaeltachta would allow these schools to better plan for the introduction of modern languages.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with teaching considerations.

Teaching considerations: a summary

- Long-term sustainability of modern language teaching and learning will be best served by developing classroom teachers' knowledge, skills and competencies in teaching modern languages.
- An estimated 420 primary school teachers graduated with a Certificate or Diploma in modern languages from the Institutes of Technology in January 2004. A further 80 are due to graduate in 2005.
- An intensive, once-off professional development course for primary school teachers that augmented their L3 pedagogy skills and focused on language competency could be developed. A programme could be piloted to determine whether this approach would assist in the provision of a quality professional development programme for teachers of modern languages in primary schools.
- The DES may wish to identify how an increased number of teachers who teach modern languages in primary schools could avail of professional development under EU funded Comenius 2.2 courses.
- The DES could investigate the professional development needs of visiting modern language teachers to determine how their skills can be enhanced.
- Structured bilateral agreements between the DES and agencies in other countries may ensure a greater provision of language assistants who can assist in teaching and learning modern languages.
- Language assistants could be based in Education Centres to provide for clusters of schools under the direction of support personnel associated with the implementation of a modern languages curriculum.
- Developing models of best practice for teaching and learning modern languages Irish medium schools may improve the capacity of these schools to introduce modern languages.

Planning

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Time for teaching and learning modern languages
2. School planning for modern languages
3. Classroom planning for modern languages
4. Languages to be taught.

1. Time for teaching and learning modern languages

The issue of time as a key factor in influencing the introduction of a changed curriculum is recognised as central in curriculum change research (Donohoe, 1997). Identifying how modern languages can be taught in classrooms with the time available is challenging. There are now 11 subjects in the Primary School Curriculum, so finding the time for teaching and learning modern languages in addition to these 11 subjects may prove challenging for schools.

Time for learning the target language

The time allocated for teaching and learning modern languages in the Initiative is ninety minutes per week.

The evaluation report indicated that up to 67% of teachers who were involved in the initial phases of the Pilot Project were content with the allocation of a 90-minute time frame (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 63). When the responses from teachers are classified according to whether they are classroom teachers or visiting teachers, it becomes clear that the time factor became more problematic for classroom teachers. Fifty three percent of classroom teachers felt that they were able to devote 90 minutes to the teaching and learning of the modern language. As Harris and Conway suggest, this may be due to the fact that teachers are 'constrained by curriculum overload and (*for exchange teachers*) concerns about being absent from their own classes for too long' (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 63).

The report commissioned by the NCCA (2001) into the use of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages indicated that 59% of the 103 teachers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the 90-minute time frame allocated to modern language teaching was appropriate. Thirteen percent of the teacher respondents indicated that they would like more time available for the teaching of modern languages. About 15% of the teachers indicated that timetabling constraints or the 'overcrowded nature of the curriculum' precluded them from realising their target teaching time (NCCA, 2001, p. 16).

The challenge associated with utilising the 90-minute time frame allocated for teaching modern languages in the Initiative is further recognised in the evaluation report. The report states

It is clear that pressures on timetabling and on schools will have to be taken into account in any attempt to extend the teaching of modern languages at primary level to schools generally. If the extension of the Pilot Project were

to involve a significant increase in the use of non-staff teachers – while continuing to adhere to the one and a half hour requirement – it is likely that the underlying pressures on schools and teachers, which are revealed by our data, would become even more apparent.

(Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 206)

Research findings indicate that a sizable minority of classroom teachers participating in the Pilot Project were experiencing difficulties in attaining the target teaching time for the modern languages given the demands of implementing the Primary School Curriculum. Given that research for ITÉ's evaluation of the Pilot Project took place before the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, it is probable that the demands on teachers' time for planning and implementing the Primary School Curriculum have since increased.

If modern language learning is to be made more readily available in an increased number of primary schools, there should be latitude for schools to determine whether a 60 minute or 90 minute timeframe best suits their needs. Schools should be guided in the implementation of a modern language curriculum that maximise the capacity to improve the child's communicative competence in a modern language

Suggestions are provided below that might enable schools to facilitate teaching and learning modern languages; these considerations could be investigated further to determine the benefits and challenges associated with their implementation.

Time required for teaching a target language

An evaluation carried out by Curtain (2000) into the teaching of foreign languages in the American elementary schools, revealed that if a communicative competence model of language learning is to be used, children require sustained exposure to the target language. They also require opportunities to use the language meaningfully.

An assessment of findings from an audit of primary school modern language learning curricula throughout Europe indicated that

The overall amount of time devoted to early language learning (and especially to speaking) should be increased, wherever possible. There should preferably be short, daily lessons instead of one or two longer lessons per week. (Europa server, accessed December 2003)

In European countries the teaching of a foreign language in primary schools takes place in time allocations of between one and three hours per week. Modern language competency can be achieved in short daily lessons, in blocks of time on a weekly or biweekly basis, or in content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

Possibilities for language competency teaching

If the language competency model is to be maintained, it is not unreasonable to expect that there should be an allocation of at least one hour per week for the teaching and learning of the communicative competence strand. The most pressing

concern then becomes identifying time for modern language learning within the confines of existing time constraints for the teaching and learning of all subject areas.

Three suggestions are provided below:

1) Discretionary time

The Primary School Curriculum allows schools to use discretionary time to incorporate teaching and learning modern languages. The teaching of modern languages could form a component of the overall language curriculum and draw on this time to be allocated to the language curriculum. According to the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* discretionary time

can be allocated, at the teacher's and at the school's discretion, to any of the six curriculum areas—language; mathematics; social, environmental and scientific education; arts education; physical education; social, personal and health education—or to any of the subjects within them. This framework also allows for the inclusion of a modern language in the curriculum where this is available. (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 64)

If one hour of discretionary time were allocated to the language curriculum then the total time for the language curriculum would increase to 8 hours per week. According to this model no hours would be taken from other subject areas. However, the percentage of time devoted to the language curriculum would then rise to 40% of all teaching and learning contact time between teachers and children.

2) Use existing number of hours in the language curriculum

An alternative proposal might be to situate teaching and learning modern languages in the existing number of hours that is available in the language curriculum. Thus, the language curriculum would continue to constitute 35% of all teaching and learning time. A more integrated approach to language teaching and learning that includes reinforcement of literacy across all of the curricular areas might provide latitude for including one hour of modern language communicative competency into the available language curriculum.

The time that is 'lost out' in focusing on modern language competency might be recuperated in imaginative ways as the teacher addresses L1 or L2 literacy skills in other areas of the Primary School Curriculum. For example, by incorporating a process writing approach to a history research project children are able to spend time on L1 development as well as history.

As part of their L1 development, children might also respond to poetry or songs that are written in French, Italian, Spanish or German. This sets the foundation for the specific objective

to enable children to develop literacy skills, comprehension skills and expressive skills in language and to appreciate the power and beauty of

language (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 34).

In this case, teachers could devote 10-15 minutes per day in teaching the modern language. Teachers could incorporate modern language teaching every two or three days so that there would be sufficient time for meaningful interaction and linguistic development to take place.

3) Content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

As evidenced in the in-service resource materials developed by Project Leaders, teachers can utilise resources available for content-based teaching of modern languages.

A small-scale pilot project that supported and monitored the implementation of a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach for modern languages could be implemented in primary schools. The aims of a CLIL pilot project could be

- to identify aspects of the Primary School Curriculum where CLIL approaches may be suitable
- to develop appropriate materials for integrating the teaching of languages in the Primary School Curriculum
- to assess which teaching strategies and methodologies are best suited to CLIL
- to develop case studies of best practice so that a CLIL approach to integrating modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum would provide practical support to modern language teachers by providing exemplars of how CLIL might be realised in different teaching and learning contexts.

In 2004, the EU proposes to host a major conference of educators and language policy makers to investigate how CLIL methodologies and strategies can become more thoroughly incorporated into second and foreign language pedagogy. The EU Commission has indicated that it intends to provide funding so that transnational partnerships can be created that will enable member countries to further develop CLIL approaches to language teaching and learning (European Commission, 2003, p. 16). In this context, a pilot project could be progressed which investigated the benefits and challenges of a CLIL approach to modern language teaching and learning in primary schools.

A CLIL approach to teaching modern languages would reinforce the integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum and may help to alleviate some of the challenges faced by teachers in locating the time to teach modern languages.

Time for teaching and learning of language awareness

Language awareness will also be part of any modern languages curriculum. Language awareness is a feature of the strand *Receptiveness to Language* in the English curriculum. It is also a feature of the Gaeilge curriculum where *Feasacht Teanga* incorporates the concept of language awareness. The *Draft Curriculum*

Guidelines for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) encourages teachers to make links between the languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Each week, the classroom teacher can set aside some time, a suggested time of say 15-20 minutes, to explore the relationships that have arisen during the teaching of all language and literacy encounters. Children could use this allocated time to investigate the interrelationships between English, Gaeilge and modern languages.

The teacher may also wish to use time set aside for language awareness to compare and contrast differences or similarities that might exist in different languages for achieving the same register. In addition there is scope for investigating, 'more structured and formal contexts for developing the appropriate use of language' as children get older (*English, Teacher Guidelines*, NCCA, 1999, p. 35).

It is possible for teachers to incorporate language awareness as unstructured 'teaching moments', which are recorded and monitored. Such teaching moments may arise where the child's concept of the meaning of a word or phrase is grasped because of their previous knowledge in the L1, L2 or L3.

In this way, language learning and literacy become mutually reinforcing. Links would be forged between the language curriculum and modern languages. Language awareness currently features in the allocated time within the language curriculum. It is not intended that additional time be created to facilitate its inclusion.

Time for teaching and learning cultural awareness

There are various ways in which the cultural awareness strand can be incorporated into the current teaching time available. Project work involving ICT based research and exchanges of information with other schools where the target language is spoken could be incorporated into a thematic unit of learning for children in 5th and 6th classes.

The cultural awareness strand of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) could also be realised through learning about geographical or historical features of a European or other country where the modern language is spoken.

The thematic nature of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) may assist teachers in identifying how the cultural aspects of the target language can be integrated into the teaching and learning of other subject areas. Teachers may wish to set aside some time for promoting cultural awareness or wish to incorporate it into the time provided for Arts Education, the science curriculum or the history curriculum in addition to the curriculum for Social Personal and Health Education.

2. School planning for modern languages

The document *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools* has identified some of the key considerations in effective school planning, including the

collaborative effort and collaboration that takes place between the principal, the teachers, the board of management and the parents of the pupils attending the school. The involvement of all partners in this collaborative exercise enables each to make its own special contribution which in turn is complemented by the contributions of the other partners.

(Department of Education and Science, 1999, p. 9)

The Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) supports schools with the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum. Once a change has been introduced, the PCSP advises that programmes of continuous self-reflection should be introduced within schools. The considerations associated with curriculum change facilitated by PCSP are pertinent to the possible introduction of modern languages. Before deciding to introduce modern languages, school personnel may wish to

- set aside time for discussion on curriculum and assessment
- engage in conversations and dialogue about classroom practice, teaching, learning and assessment procedures
- explore how the special expertise of the staff can be shared
- evaluate current planning procedures and structures in the school
- review the allocation of resources, with a view to supporting curriculum planning
- involve parents and parent associations in considering their existing role in supporting children's learning.

Exemplars provided in the school planning document mentioned above (Department of Education and Science, 1999) may help to guide long-term planning for schools that are part of the Initiative and assist those schools considering options available for teaching and learning modern languages.

Further considerations for schools interested in introducing modern languages might include

- developing a whole school language policy
- identifying support necessary to involve learners with special educational needs
- exploring how modern languages could contribute to its implementation
- logging and monitoring all available modern language teaching resources within the school
- using ICT to facilitate interaction with other speakers of the modern language
- complying with local and national policies on assessment.

The implications that modern language teaching and learning might have on the school staff, may include

- identifying staff members who might be interested teaching a modern language
- researching the professional development options available to the school to improve human resource capacity for the teaching and learning of a modern language
- identifying additional staff members who would have a willingness to contribute to the introduction of modern languages
- identifying additional sources of support for staff in the community
- determining whether the school could engage the services of a language assistant.

Determining how teaching and learning modern languages might impact on the relationship that the school has with others outside the school might include an analysis of how the school could

- liaise with teachers in the post-primary sector
- engage parents and community members
- create and maintain learning partnerships with other schools through local networks and clusters, regional or national affiliations or transnational learning partnerships (for example, Comenius projects supported by the EU and implemented by the International Section of the DES).
- identify steps that will be taken to ensure there is regular feedback to children and their parents that provides them with an analysis of the assessment so that there can be further promotion of learning.

Proposals for introducing modern languages in an increased number of schools would necessitate further support personnel to guide the planning phases of introducing modern languages in primary schools.

The findings from the NCCA's research into effective strategies for curriculum implementation may provide one orientation for possible future support mechanisms for languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

3. Classroom planning for modern languages

Planning for teaching and learning modern languages involves key persons within and outside the school, including teachers in the school, external visiting teachers, the school principal, the board of management, members of the community and local institutions that may be interested in contributing to the learning of the modern language in schools.

Methodologies and approaches for teaching modern languages

The following considerations will affect how modern languages are planned for and implemented including

- the focus on enjoyment in the learning of modern languages
- the use of the target language for teaching and learning
- the centrality of integration and linking

- the promotion of literacy in the language through visual displays of the language in the classroom and the school environment.
(Based on *Modern Languages in Primary Schools, Teacher Guidelines*, NCCA, 2001, p. 44)

Long-term planning for modern languages

A suggested approach to planning at classroom level might be to approach the task according to long-term and short-term perspectives. A long-term plan could set the scope and sequence of the work to be done over a year and could include indications of how this work is to be achieved in the space of each term.

A long-term plan could identify possible links between modern languages and the other subject areas. As the timeframe is likely to be on the basis of school terms, it could also involve mapping out the intended progression of learning and identify how progression builds on previous learning. As monitoring of progress is recognised as an important attribute of teaching and learning, a long-term plan might indicate the possible methods of assessment of learning and for learning that would be used to determine to what extent learning goals are achieved.

Providing teachers with exemplars for long-term planning may be one way of supporting the process of planning.

Long-term planning for modern languages would include key personnel who are responsible for teaching the language. In the event that a visiting teacher is involved, this teacher should be involved in the planning process.

Monthly and weekly planning

A grid that enables teachers to identify all of the strand areas to be taught in the short-term might prove to be a useful tool in the planning process. For example, the grid provided to Scottish teachers in the *Modern Languages 5-14 National Guidelines* (Teaching and Learning Scotland, 2000) identifies what content will be delivered and there indicates how learner progress will be assessed and how the lessons are built into the progression of learning.

Research for the evaluation of the Pilot Project revealed that 45% of visiting modern language teachers had regular contact with the classroom teacher (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 35). If the visiting teacher is to build on and support the learning that is delivered by the classroom teacher, it is vital that time is set aside for classroom teachers and visiting teachers to plan for the modern language lesson and that such time is built into the allocation of resources.

Approaches to planning for a modern language curriculum necessitate collaboration. Planning involves an understanding of how the progression of modern language learning can be achieved. It is based on the content and strategies identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999). Planning is a complex undertaking that will require guidance and support from those who might be charged with providing assistance to schools in the event of an extended availability of modern languages in primary schools.

4. Languages to be taught

The question of what languages might be offered in primary schools in the future is one that can only be addressed in the context of a national policy on languages in the curriculum. This section looks at the present provision of modern languages as part of the Initiative and identifies ways in which diversity of modern language provision might be maintained. The increasing emphasis on plurilingualism at a European level is identified and discussed.

The current situation

There are 392 schools participating in the Initiative, of those

- 56% are teaching French
- 23.5 % are teaching German
- 16% are teaching Spanish and
- 4.5% are teaching Italian.

Of the 501 teachers who will have graduated from Institutes of Technology with language competency skills in January 2005, the percentages of teachers taking each of the languages is as follows

- 63% French
- 19% Spanish
- 13% Italian
- 6% German.

If all of the teachers who have received Diplomas and Certificates in the Institute of Technology language competency courses were to introduce modern language teaching in their schools, this would result in shifts in the current percentages of the languages being taught.

A requirement of the Pilot Project involved selecting a percentage of schools that were able and willing to introduce one of the lesser-taught European languages. In the event of a more generalised availability of language teaching in primary schools, it is possible that there will be more fluidity in the percentages of languages that schools choose to teach.

The evaluation report points out that if there is more generalised availability of modern languages within primary schools, the position of French is likely to become more dominant, especially if visiting teachers were to be excluded during the short and medium terms (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 216). Without recourse to visiting teachers, schools would rely on teachers from within the schools to be the sole language teacher. Due to teachers' experiences of learning French as the predominant language taught in post-primary schools there might well be an increase in the number of primary schools choosing to teach French.

However, if the professional development of teachers offers a diversity of languages on a predetermined percentage basis in the future, it may be possible to ensure that a diversity of languages would be maintained.

Plurilingualism and modern languages in primary school

There are now developments throughout Europe to broaden the language choices available within schools so that students can access more economic and social systems. For pupils, this appreciation for the diversity of languages and cultures is manifested in the expanded learning choices available.

By stipulating that one modern language would be sufficient for the modern language learning experiences of children in primary schools, there is a danger that the development of linguistic diversity in Ireland might be hampered.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative has provided an impetus for diversification of language teaching and learning in post-primary schools. The Initiative supports schools that wish to introduce the teaching of Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese. There are well-established links between the primary school Initiative and the Post-primary Languages Initiative, which would enable an increased number of primary schools to choose to teach one of the less-widely-taught European languages. Links between the two modern language initiatives may go some way towards ensuring continuity in language learning between primary schools and post-primary schools.

A number of the post-primary schools offer the less widely taught modern languages in the senior cycle or as options within the Leaving Certificate Applied programmes. Children who have achieved a level of communicative competence in the lesser taught languages might wish to reinvigorate the language competency that they will have achieved in primary school by reengaging with the language later in post-primary education.

As identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages, a decision about which language a school might adopt is influenced by a number of factors including

- the training and capacity of the teachers or proposed language teaching personnel
- the level of support that is available for the language within the community
- the languages that are being taught at post-primary schools in the locality. (NCCA, 2001, p. 35),

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with teaching planning.

Planning: a summary

- A significant minority of classroom teachers in the Pilot Project faced challenges in adhering to the 90 minutes that were provided for modern language teaching and learning.
- The identification and trial of effective strategies for modern language teaching, taking cognisance of the time constraints in implementing the Primary School Curriculum, are important features of NCCA modern language policy considerations.

- Suggestions for providing time for modern language teaching and learning include the use of discretionary time, using the time allocated for language in the Primary School Curriculum and developing CLIL techniques that may facilitate time for teaching modern languages while focusing on the teaching of non-language subjects.
- A pilot project to research the benefits and challenges associated with CLIL would provide information regarding time constraints and the teaching of modern languages in primary schools.
- The introduction of modern languages on a more generalised basis would necessitate strengthening the skills of support personnel to guide the implementation process.
- The NCCA should consider developing guidelines that will assist teachers in using the Primary School Curriculum to integrate teaching and learning modern languages.
- Planning for modern languages should be situated in the whole school planning process.
- Long-term and short-term planning frameworks may assist in facilitating the progression of modern languages in primary schools.
- Visiting teachers should be involved in the short and long-term planning for modern languages in primary schools.
- A national policy on languages in the curriculum that endorses plurilingualism would ensure that children could add a diversity of languages to their language-learning repertoire.

Resourcing and managing modern languages

This subsection includes the following headings:

1. Classroom materials for teaching modern languages
2. Information and communications technology (ICT)
3. Planning and monitoring modern language programmes
4. The role of Project Leaders as support personnel
5. Proposed pilot projects.

1. Classroom materials for teaching modern languages

The availability and use of teaching materials for modern languages is discussed below. Each year, the Project Leaders develop materials for the two in-career development days provided for modern language teachers in primary schools. Schools involved in the Initiative also receive grants for their first two years of involvement enabling them to purchase language teaching and learning materials in printed or electronic form.

Materials generated by Project Leaders

In-career development materials generated by Project Leaders provide the most practical link between the objectives identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) and the activities and strategies that teachers use in classroom interactions with children.

An audit of the materials provided by the Initiative for in-career development over the past three years reveals that there is scope for improving the level of cohesion in the materials prepared for the different languages.

In some instances, in-service materials could be more consistent with the aims and objectives identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999). Teacher education materials may include inventories of activities that will improve children's modern language proficiency. However, it should be clear for modern language teachers how these activities derive from objectives identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) and how they relate to the three strands in the Guidelines.

Recent samples of resource materials generated by Project Leaders address issues concerning modern language curriculum planning, continuity of learning and making connections with the Primary School Curriculum. Nevertheless, a more strategic identification of teacher education resource needs across all languages in the Initiative would help to identify a shared content and lay-out for future resource publications which are funded by the DES.

In the development of future resource materials modern language support personnel may wish to develop a shared and systematic approach to resource development and dissemination. Resources can be linked in practical ways to the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) thus reinforcing their implementation.

Resource grant and management

In the current Initiative, schools receive a resource grant during the first two years of involvement in modern language teaching. This is used to identify and purchase materials for modern language teaching and learning. The grant is dependent on the number of children that are learning the modern language. Project Leaders often assist schools in the task of identifying appropriate resources for teaching children.

Schools have begun to put structures in place to ensure resources are catalogued and maintained. Resources should be made available upon request for new modern language teachers or for visiting teachers. However, as revealed in the NCCA focus group interviews with the Project Leaders, there have been incidences where resources have gone missing or are difficult to locate. This sometimes occurs when classroom teachers or visiting teachers have moved to different schools or to different jobs.

In the interests of sustainability for the learning of modern languages, it is important that resource materials, developed to support the child's learning, are stored in schools. Planning the management of teaching and learning resources

may be an aspect of the initial in-career support that is offered by project support personnel to teachers.

Supporting implementation of modern languages

The Initiative newsletter, Language Links has proven to be a popular forum for teachers to share what they have done within their classes. The publication has been particularly beneficial as a motivational tool for children, whose work is validated in the newsletter.

A similar publication might be made available for a target audience of teachers. The publication could highlight good practice or illustrate how teachers can, for example

- involve parents with modern language learning
- participate in international projects and partnerships
- identify continuous professional development opportunities
- network with local community members and post-primary schools
- integrate the language learning within the Primary School Curriculum
- plan for the involvement of visiting teachers
- manage language teaching materials
- optimise the use of ICT in modern language teaching and learning.

Scaffolding the learning of modern languages through the provision of good practice guides for teachers has become a feature of foreign language curricula throughout Europe. The provision of guides for best practice with models of how practice can be implemented would be a task for those managing the introduction of modern languages. It is possible that much of the information regarding models of good practice can be made available in electronic format.

2. Information and communications technology (ICT)

According to the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 205), 19% of teachers gave an affirmative response when asked if ICT had been integrated within their modern language teaching and learning classes. Additionally, 78% of teachers indicated that they had not used emails as part of their modern language class, while 74% had not availed of the Internet as a language teaching and learning tool (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 205).

Some possible explanations as to why ICT was not integrated to a greater extent with modern language learning include

- difficulties accessing hardware when modern language classes are being taught, especially when classes are taught by visiting teachers who may not have been involved in planning for integration of ICT in the classroom
- confidence and competence of teachers in the use of ICT
- perceptions of the practical benefits that can be associated with the use of ICT to strengthen the learning of modern languages
- in-career professional development opportunities available for teachers.

Supporting use of ICT

Since the research for ITÉ's evaluation of the Pilot Project was conducted, it is possible that increasing levels of support and guidance in the use of ICT in the primary school classroom may have had a positive impact on the use of ICT for modern language learning. For example, the involvement of the National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE) in School IT 2000 projects supporting the application of ICT in learning modern languages. Additionally teachers have been able to avail of in-career courses specifically designed for those who teach an L2 or L3.

A pilot project entitled Oilte (Organising In-service for Languages and Technology in Education) has resulted in a series of in-career development programmes in ICT for language teacher educators and classroom teachers (Rickard, 2002). The programme of in career courses resulted from a collaborative partnership between ITÉ, NCTE and the Curriculum Development Unit of the Marino Institute of Education. The existence of courses specifically designed for language teachers may facilitate an increased level of expertise in the field of ICT and language pedagogy.

One of the principle benefits of having access to ICT in the modern language classroom might be to facilitate communication between children in Ireland and those in different European countries and countries throughout the world. The practice of engendering transnational communication between schools is a growing practice (Buckland, 2000). A web portal, eSchoolnet, hosted by the EU, provides insights into the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool and also facilitates virtual and actual links among teachers and schools throughout Europe. Johnson (2002, p. 20) has commented that

a new additional logic for language learning might arise which is not primarily linguistic in essence. If primary schools in different countries see merit in developing strong 'virtual' links with each other so that their students may co-operate on joint projects, e.g. social, historical, geographical, economic, artistic, cultural, then communication in two or more languages might come to be seen as an excellent way of facilitating such projects.

Project support personnel have taken the first steps towards creating an Initiative website that has the potential to engage teachers and learners in new and exciting ways. This work is at an initial stage and will require sustained support and direction from the PMG.

The development of a strategic planning framework for modern languages in primary schools and the possible inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum are discussed below.

3. Planning and monitoring a modern language curriculum

As school planning provides an orientation for schools, strategic planning guides the activities of organisations and projects. In its Strategic Statement 2001-2004, the DES advises of the necessity for all publicly funded education institutions to

‘promote and foster the development of a partnership and strategic management approach’.

The evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002, p.219) recommends the setting up of a coordinating committee that would be responsible for developing a strategic plan to determine future plans and outputs associated with modern languages in primary schools. It further states that the PMG, which has managed the Initiative and Pilot Project for the past 5 years, has already considered such a development.

Activities for strategic planning

In considering the implications for whatever option is identified by the DES for the future of modern languages in primary schools and in the Primary School Curriculum, a coordination committee responsible for strategic planning may wish to

- identify implications of the option for future management and support structures to be put in place
- review the strengths and weakness of the Initiative to date
- identify possible obstacles to achieving desired programme outcomes
- specify a set of strategic objectives for the programme that target key areas of curriculum delivery and support provision
- identify SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, reliable and timed) activities that will be used to attain the strategic objectives
- indicate desired levels of potential project achievements through provision of clear performance indicators which can become the basis for on-going monitoring and evaluation
- establish clear processes for on-going planning, reporting and review
- appoint an independent body that can monitor and evaluate teaching and learning of modern languages in primary schools
- identify how pilot projects will be introduced and monitored.

Monitoring modern languages in schools

On-going evaluation and monitoring of the Pilot Project by ITÉ provided objective quantitative and quantitative information about the capacity of teachers and schools to engage in teaching and learning modern languages in primary schools.

As the agency charged with conducting the evaluation of the learning that was taking place as part of the Pilot Project, ITÉ provided insightful observations about the impact that the Initiative has had on teacher and principal perceptions toward language teaching and learning. On-going independent monitoring and evaluation is necessary for an informed implementation of a modern languages curriculum.

Increasingly primary school teachers are using a focus on modern languages in primary schools to inform undergraduate and postgraduate research. A culture of classroom-based research will support the advancement of curriculum development and the practicalities of implementing modern languages in primary schools.

4. The role of Project Leaders as support personnel

Project Leaders have been central to the success of the Pilot Project and the Initiative. Teachers have endorsed the role of Project Leaders in providing guidance and support in the Pilot Project, for example 96% of teachers felt that Project Leaders had conducted their work in a very satisfactory or satisfactory manner (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 45).

Project leaders support teachers and schools involved in the Initiative through

- the provision of in-career professional development
- the development and distribution of language teaching and learning materials
- the modelling of lessons exhibiting good practice for language teachers
- the support offered to schools planning to introduce a modern languages component in their curriculum.

Maintenance of a support programme for teachers would be a key component of a modern languages curriculum for primary schools if there were to be a more extended availability in schools. In the event of an expanded number of schools participating in the provision of modern languages, it would be necessary to review current support provision and to determine the changes needed to best serve children and teachers.

Project Leaders conduct most of their work from their homes. Meetings are held regularly for the Project Leaders at the Kildare Education Centre where the centralised planning and project development is processed. Project Leaders also make visits to schools throughout the country where modern languages are taught.

Strengthening local capacity

Correlations have been drawn between the provision of local support networks and success changing curriculum practice (Callan, 2001). Teachers and schools can build on the support offered by local modern language support personnel who help to establish networks of teachers. Networks can be created among

- all primary teachers who teach modern languages in primary schools
- teachers who teach a specific language in a locality or region
- modern language teachers in primary schools and modern languages teachers in post-primary schools.

Project Leaders could be based in Education Centres and could assist local schools by

- fostering the development of clusters of primary schools and post-primary schools
- assessing the impact of the languages portfolio as a tool in assisting the progression of language learning in primary schools
- providing professional and logistical support to all teachers and schools in their assigned area who are teaching modern languages
- supporting schools that would like to introduce language awareness projects

- providing language specific support to schools in their regions
- publicising the availability of support
- coordinating the hosting of language assistants for schools
- providing generic forms of in-career development for networks of modern language teachers, for example in the areas of integrating modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum
- supporting cooperation between visiting teachers and classroom teachers.

The strengthening of local capacity building could provide motivation for teachers. It could also help to create the sustainable development of good practices that can easily be shared among schools.

Models of current practice in supporting curriculum change

The role of the Primary School Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) in facilitating curriculum implementation provides a possible model that could be adopted and adapted to suit the needs of modern language teaching in primary schools. Cuiditheoirí, based in Education Centres on a regional basis, ensure that support is available so that the PCSP supports curriculum change by

- the adoption of a partnership approach to planning the support programme at national, regional and local level
- the facilitation of quality in-career development events where teachers become familiar with the content, principles, teaching methodologies and assessment approaches of the Primary School Curriculum
- the on-going evaluation of the support programme where future activities are informed and shaped accordingly
- the encouragement provided to teachers and schools.
(Accessed from PCSP web site, www.pcsp.ie).

As well as providing cross curricular help, cuiditheoirí

- have organised specific times when the teachers can drop in and use the Education Centre as an advice centre
- have reinforced local networking capacities
- have collated resource materials that could be provided and shared locally.

The PCSP maintains a link with all of the regional and local representatives through establishing its operations in one of the Education Centres. The Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative also has had a long tradition of association with an individual Education Centre. The Centre has a bank of knowledge and expertise that identifies it as an established centralised location for administration and programme management for modern languages in the primary schools.

Basing modern language curriculum support personnel at Education Centres is one of the pilot projects proposed below.

5. Proposed pilot projects

The pilot projects featured below have been identified in the preceding sub-sections of Section Two. The proposed pilot projects are suggested to meet the needs of teachers or to strengthen the capacity for modern languages in primary schools.

Proposing additional pilot projects recognises the complexity of introducing modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The pilot projects suggested below would allow for differentiation to occur in the provision of L3 learning or language awareness programmes for children. Proposals are made for small-scale well-monitored pilot projects in the areas of

1. An intensive professional development programme for teachers
2. Content language integrated learning (CLIL)
3. Networking of schools at local level
4. Language awareness
5. An earlier start.

Two of the proposed pilot projects itemised above, those addressing the language awareness approach and the suggestion for an intensive professional development programme for teachers were featured in the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002, p. 45). A rationale for these pilots is identified and explicated in a comprehensive manner in the final chapter of the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002). Aspects of the proposed pilot project to facilitate networking of schools at a local level are also discussed in the evaluation report where there is a proposal for a pilot project that would provide for clustering of primary and post-primary schools.

Each proposed pilot project is discussed further below.

1) **An intensive professional development programme for teachers**

The evaluation report (Harris and Conway, 2002, p. 231) advocates the introduction, on a trial basis, of a small-scale, intensive professional development programme in modern languages. Depending on the possible outcomes of such a programme, it could be used later to ensure a more extensive provision of professional development in modern languages pedagogy and competency. The evaluation report indicates that a professional development programme should adopt a language competency approach.

It is estimated that, in the event of a trial programme being successful, it may take in the region of 5-10 years before all schools would have the capacity to introduce modern languages.

A pilot project aimed at providing an intensive professional development programme for teachers would be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses associated with this model for extending the capacity of teachers in modern language pedagogy in primary schools. The provision of professional development in the area of modern languages could take place over a three-week period during

the summer or at another time that would be convenient for teachers. The Education Centres could play a role in providing the administrative and managerial aspects of such a programme, which could be designed by the Colleges of Education, the Institutes of Technology or other appropriate providers. An independent evaluation of the project would ensure that it could be improved over time so that the quality of professional development is optimised.

Objectives for the proposed pilot project might include

- promoting modern language competency among primary school teachers
- illustrating how modern languages complement the Primary School Curriculum, particularly in the area of language teaching and learning
- familiarising teachers with the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999)
- providing guidance for the planning and implementation of modern languages
- supporting teacher capacity to develop and use appropriate L3 teaching and learning skills and materials
- encouraging learning autonomy and collaborative forms of language learning
- increasing awareness about language teaching and learning in post-primary schools
- strengthening school and teacher capacities for managing resources (including ICT) and personnel (including language assistants) associated with modern language teaching and learning.

Activities might include

- learning a target modern language
- identifying how modern languages could be integrated into the teaching and learning of other subject areas in the Primary School Curriculum
- applying the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) to the planning process
- developing and testing age appropriate activities for use in the modern language classroom
- conducting an audit of materials and resources available
- developing scenarios for independent or collaborative modern language teaching and learning experiences
- identifying how continuity of learning can be progressed between primary schools and post-primary schools
- preparing logs and catalogues of materials, identifying possible tasks, duties and responsibilities for visiting teachers and language teaching assistants.

2) Content language integrated learning

The already crowded nature of the Primary School Curriculum has been identified by teachers participating in the NCCA focus group interviews as one of the major challenges in incorporating modern languages in primary schools. Content language integrated learning offers one means of determining whether and to what extent modern language can be used to facilitate the teaching of other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum through a modern language and vice versa. Clarification of how CLIL is practiced in language teaching and learning curricula is addressed earlier in this document.

Objectives for the proposed pilot project might include

- identifying a cross section of schools to participate in a small-scale CLIL project
- identifying subjects, units of learning and themes in the Primary School Curriculum where CLIL approaches may be appropriate
- developing materials for integrated learning
- raising the level of learning taking place in the content area and in the modern language.

Possible activities might include

- creating learning partnerships for CLIL schools to share best practice
- identifying which subject areas might be able to be taught and learned using the modern language
- matching the Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) to other aspects of the Primary School Curriculum
- identifying which activities could be delivered using CLIL strategies
- developing appropriate tools to record levels of learning in the content area as well as in the language being taught and learned.

3) Networking of schools at local level

Strengthening the support offered to teachers on a regional basis may create conditions where language support personnel could be more responsive to the needs of teacher networks. The creation of local or regional networks of teachers guided and facilitated by support personnel based in Education Centres may create the potential for teachers to capitalise on the sharing of best practice with others who are engaged in teaching and learning modern languages. A further benefit to be derived from the localisation of support personnel would be in their growing capacity to learn from and engage with other curriculum change leaders who are based in Education Centres.

Objectives for the proposed pilot project might include

- identifying how the European Language Portfolio (ELP) can add to continuity of learning between primary and post-primary schools
- forming local networks of schools to strengthen capacity for sustaining modern languages
- designing strategies to support all teachers of modern languages in one catchment area
- supporting the introduction of language assistants.

Possible activities might include

- monitoring the use of the ELP and recording how post-primary teachers incorporate information gleaned from the portfolio in their language classes, where this happens
- establishing procedures for creating links between primary and post-primary schools
- establishing procedures for networking of schools that teach modern languages
- conducting a needs analysis for professional development of teachers
- developing a strategy to address those needs.

4) A language awareness approach

As indicated throughout this report, there are schools that may lack the human and resource capacity to introduce a language competency model in their schools. In the event that an expanded number of primary schools were to teach modern languages, consideration should be given to involving the maximum number of children. For those schools that do not have the capacity to introduce a language competency model alternative means of involvement should be considered. One of the most practical means of providing a language learning experience for all children may be to trial a language awareness model of provision. Initially, a small number of schools could be invited to participate in the development and implementation of a language awareness pilot project.

The findings from schools' participation would be used to inform whether such a curriculum might be extended to a greater number of primary schools.

Objectives for the proposed pilot project might include

- developing transferable language learning skills
- creating appropriate teaching and learning resources for schools interested in introducing language awareness programme
- incorporating of intercultural awareness skills in the language curriculum and in other subject areas
- developing of teaching strategies that would increase children's knowledge about languages and cultures other than those associated with the L1 and L2.

Possible activities might include

- identifying how schools can create partnerships within schools typified by linguistic or cultural diversity or how they might develop multilingual and multicultural materials if there is linguistic diversity in the school
- identifying aspects of the Primary School Curriculum which can incorporate language awareness and interculturalism
- networking with schools in Europe and beyond where language awareness curricula are being developed.

5) An earlier start, teaching modern languages in third and fourth classes

There are benefits and challenges associated with the teaching of modern languages or the introduction of a language awareness curriculum for children in 3rd and 4th classes. This pilot project would explore the benefits and constraints in the introduction of language awareness or language competency curricula for children in 3rd and 4th classes. Findings from experience and research associated with the pilot project can be used to inform future decision-making policies regarding modern languages and language awareness in 3rd and 4th classes.

Objectives for the proposed pilot project might include

- raising the language development of children involved in additional language learning experiences in 3rd and 4th classes
- developing appropriate materials and supports needed for schools and teachers involved in learning experiences in 3rd and 4th classes

- incorporating aspects of the Primary School Curriculum that would allow the inclusion of additional learning about or through other languages for children in 3rd and 4th classes
- introducing a variety of early-start approaches to the teaching of languages, for example a language awareness approach and a communicative competence approach.

Possible activities might include

- assessing the language learning of children participating in the pilot project
- conducting trials of the materials developed to support additional language learning in 3rd and 4th classes
- identifying incidences within the curriculum for 3rd and 4th classes where additional language learning could complement the teaching and learning of all subjects
- comparing and evaluating the successes and challenges associated with different models of additional language learning in 3rd and 4th classes.

The summary below identifies the salient points from this subsection dealing with resources and management.

Resourcing and managing modern languages: a summary

- Teachers and schools might benefit from guidance on how to store and monitor language teaching and learning resources.
- An assessment of teachers' resource requirements would guide on-going development and dissemination of resources that scaffold children's learning needs in modern languages.
- A mechanism, whether in electronic or hard copy format, for the identification and dissemination of best practice among teachers could be developed so that successes in modern language teaching and learning might be shared among teachers.
- The use of ICT by teachers in modern language classrooms can facilitate the establishment of learning links between children within Europe and beyond.
- Strategies for strengthening the professional development requirements of teachers in integrating ICT as a teaching and learning tool for modern languages should be continued and supported.
- A process of strategic planning that engages all stakeholders is advised in order to facilitate the implementation of whatever option is chosen by the DES for the future of modern languages in primary schools.
- On-going independent monitoring and evaluation of modern languages teaching and learning in primary schools is an important aspect of improving system capacity.
- Project support personnel may be better able to guide and support teachers and children in modern language learning if based in local or regional Education Centres.
- Networking and clustering of schools should improve the capacity of primary schools to sustain teaching and learning modern languages.

- Five pilot projects are suggested to inform possible further developments for the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The suggestions for pilot projects include:
 1. an intensive professional development programme for teachers
 2. content language integrated learning (CLIL)
 3. networking of schools at local level
 4. language awareness
 5. an earlier start.

Section Three – Options and recommendations

The options and recommendations examined in this section are informed by the findings of Section One and Section Two. Section One provides an overview of the conceptual framework which has shaped developments to date regarding the relationship between modern languages and their possible place in the Primary School Curriculum. The overview is informed by an Irish educational perspective and a European one. Section Two identifies some of the key factors that have to be investigated when the introduction of an additional subject in the Primary School Curriculum is under consideration. Findings from Section Two regarding the nature and scope of the current implementation of the Primary School Curriculum are critical to the discussion below relating to the options available and the recommendations suggested.

The subsections of Section Three include

- Options
- Recommendations.

Options

Five options are outlined below. Each of the options available will be investigated. The reasons for considering each of the options are provided along with additional factors for consideration.

The following options are identified and discussed:

1. Introducing modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum immediately
2. Gradually increasing the number of primary schools teaching modern languages
3. Introducing modern languages as an option in the Primary School Curriculum
4. Making no changes to the current Primary School Curriculum
5. Implementing the Primary School Curriculum fully before making a recommendation.

1 Introducing modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum immediately

An NCCA decision to advise the immediate inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum would necessitate a momentous commitment to additional resources, both capital and human which would have to be accessed directly and made available for the long-term. Procedures would have to be put in place to support different aspects of curriculum implementation and monitoring including the strengthening of professional capacities of teachers, and a

commitment to reformulate the delivery of the Primary School Curriculum as a whole.

In terms of preparation of teaching capacity, an intensive programme of professional development for teachers in the pedagogy of modern languages would have to be devised and implemented. A course aimed at improving modern language pedagogy and methods would also have to be complemented by in-service provision for teachers who wished to improve their competency in target modern languages. In the short term, it is likely that the skills shortfall would have to be bridged through the recruitment of a significant number of visiting teachers. However, there is not enough evidence to suggest that there are sufficient numbers of visiting teachers available to ensure that all schools would be able to offer modern languages on their curriculum.

Additionally, a decision to introduce modern languages into the Primary School Curriculum at this time would necessitate attention to how the new subject area would interact with the other 11 subjects that are already part of the curriculum.

The current levels of human and resource availability are likely to preclude the introduction of modern languages in all schools. Inevitably, the immediate introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum would influence the current implementation of the Primary School Curriculum.

Nevertheless, there are also reasons why the option should be considered, not least of which is a recognition that learning of modern languages is compatible with the Primary School Curriculum as a whole, this provides theoretical basis on which the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum should be considered. Additionally, according to the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) children have benefited from their learning of an additional language, findings from the research which informed the evaluation report may provide a practical rationale for the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. However, the question of timing is hugely significant while considering this option.

This option

- acknowledges that learning modern languages is compatible with the Primary School Curriculum
- recognises findings from the research which informed the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) revealing that teachers and children benefited from teaching and learning modern languages
- accepts that learning modern languages adds to the cognitive and affective development of the child
- advances the possibilities of achieving goals outlined in the Lisbon Strategy
- utilises and extends the professional experiences and resources of modern language support staff and teachers
- ensures there is equality of provision in all schools
- allows for on-going identification and dissemination of best practice that could be shared among teachers and schools.

Issues for consideration

- There are eleven subjects in the Primary School Curriculum; these subjects are being introduced on a phased basis to schools. The addition of a further subject will further challenge schools.
- The introduction of a new subject in the Primary School Curriculum would necessitate a commitment to a significant investment in professional development and material resources.
- Current challenges associated with implementing the Primary School Curriculum are now being researched as part of the year of consolidation and review. Findings from this review will increase our understanding of how teachers can be supported during the process of curriculum implementation. Acting before the full implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, and the review of this process is likely to contribute to a sense of curriculum overload.
- Material resources and support mechanisms necessary for the implementation of modern languages in primary schools may not be available for all schools.
- The introduction of modern languages in all schools may require the involvement of a significant number of visiting teachers; this would necessitate an initial financial investment that may not be sustainable in the longer term.
- Colleges of Education would need to plan for the provision of modern language in pre-service education.
- Strategies would have to be identified to integrate the learning of modern languages into the Primary School Curriculum.

2 Gradually increasing the number of primary schools teaching modern languages

Increasing the number of primary schools teaching modern languages over time would enable the exponential introduction of modern languages into primary schools. By introducing modern languages into a growing number of schools advantage could be taken of the experience and developments that have accrued to date in teaching and learning modern languages. A decision to introduce modern languages gradually over time could be justified in light of the positive nature of the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002). It is possible that by expanding the number of schools which teach modern languages, a realisation of the goals outlined in the Lisbon Strategy would become more attainable.

A decision to choose this option would enable work to commence toward the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, a prospect that was alluded to in the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (NCCA, 1999). Inherent in the option would be an understanding that modern languages would be included in the Primary School Curriculum once there is a sufficient capacity to ensure that modern languages can be taught in primary schools.

However, there is a possibility that increasing the number of schools that offer modern languages over time could result in inequity of provision, where some schools would offer modern languages while others would not. By increasing the

numbers of schools that offer modern languages over time, there is also a possibility that the introduction of modern languages could be executed in a manner that was somewhat haphazard. There is greater likelihood that the introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, if it occurs, would be sustainable if the implementation is part of a planned process. That process may also take consideration of the place of other languages in the Primary School Curriculum. There is also a danger that the gradual introduction of modern languages, at this time, could impact negatively on the teaching and learning of languages and literacy in primary schools.

This option

- acknowledges that learning modern languages is compatible with the Primary School Curriculum
- takes cognisance of findings from the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002), which showed that teachers and children benefited from teaching and learning modern languages
- recognises that the learning modern languages adds to the cognitive and affective development of the child
- acknowledges that the current level of structural and resource capacity may not facilitate the introduction of modern languages in all primary schools
- utilises and extends the professional experiences and resources of modern language support staff and teachers
- allows for on-going identification and dissemination of best practice that could be shared among teachers and schools
- facilitates a range of modern language curricula depending on the needs and capacities of individual schools
- works toward a realisation of the Lisbon Strategy
- allows schools to adapt for change over the long-term
- allows for the introduction of all subjects in the Primary School Curriculum before introducing modern languages
- facilitates the development and trial of appropriate resources over time to assist in integrating modern languages with the Primary School Curriculum
- enables the implementation process to be further guided by the research, particularly that made available as part of Phase Two and subsequent phases (if any) of evaluation which is to be conducted on the Initiative.

Issues for consideration

- Additional financial and human resources would have to be made available to facilitate a growing number of schools introducing modern languages.
- Planning for a range of options for schools to introduce modern languages or introduce a language awareness curriculum would pose a particular challenge.
- Management and implementation structures would necessarily evolve to assist the introduction of modern languages in an increased number of primary schools. Some of the aspects of changed management and implementation processes are identified in Section Two under the heading *Resourcing and management of modern languages*.

- Pilot projects to investigate new approaches to language pedagogy and methodology would be an integral part of a phased introduction of modern languages. The following small scale pilot projects have been recommended in Section Two under the heading *Resourcing and management of modern languages*
an intensive professional development programme for teachers
content language integrated learning (CLIL)
networking of schools at local level
language awareness
an earlier start.
- Colleges of Education would need to plan for the provision of modern language in pre-service education.
- Boards of Management would play an integral part in determining how and when schools could offer modern languages.

3 Introducing modern languages as an option in primary schools

Introducing modern languages as an option in the Primary School Curriculum acknowledges that schools are best placed to facilitate curriculum change at local level. The Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum states that discretionary time could be used for the teaching of modern languages. It would be possible, in keeping with the curriculum, for schools to choose to use this time for the introduction of an optional subject, such as modern languages. The introduction of modern languages as an option for schools having the capacity and interest to do so could avail of the discretionary time within the Primary School Curriculum. There is also a possibility that providing modern languages as an option initially could be a first step for a more widespread implementation of a modern languages curriculum. By introducing the languages as an option initially there is scope to engage in strategic planning to ensure that capacity for more extensive inclusion of modern languages is put into place.

However, there are limitations associated with recommending Option 3. A decision to act on this option would contest our commitment to equity of educational provision for all children. There is a possibility that the number of schools offering modern languages might increase in the short term and then reach a plateau where inclusion becomes more difficult to realise. This could give rise to a situation where there are disparities in the broad and balanced nature of the curriculum, as some schools would incorporate modern languages into their curriculum while others would not.

Additionally, a recommendation that one subject in the Primary School Curriculum assumes optional status while all others are seen to be mandatory would undermine the nature of the Primary School Curriculum as a holistic and integrated construct. Availability of modern languages as an optional subject for schools may have implications in the future for teaching and learning of other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum.

This option

- allows for individual schools to make decisions based on the nature of the school and the needs of children who attend the school
- facilitates the use of discretionary time for teaching and learning modern languages
- accepts that learning modern languages adds to the cognitive and affective development of the child
- enables primary schools to plan for possible future involvement in the introduction of modern languages.

Issues for consideration

- Children who do not learn a modern language will not benefit from the social, cognitive and emotional benefits associated with the learning of a modern language.
- All subjects in the Primary School Curriculum are compulsory as the curriculum is an integrated and holistic construct, the inclusion of each subject adds value to all of the others. The introduction of modern languages as an option would represent a new departure from existing policy and may indicate that particular subjects are not central to the integrative nature of the learning.
- The decision on whether to consider the introduction of modern languages would necessitate involving all of those who are engaged in school planning including members of the Boards of Management, school staff and parent representatives.
- Not all schools may have the same capacity to introduce modern languages, resulting in inequitable educational opportunities for primary school children.

4 Making no changes to the current Primary School Curriculum

A decision to act on Option 4 would result in there being no changes in the nature and scope of the current Primary School Curriculum in relation to inclusion of modern languages, at least for the foreseeable future. By choosing to implement this option there is a realisation that the current capacity to introduce modern languages is not sufficient in terms of resources and personnel. This option could also be considered as justified in a context where there are growing concerns about the crowded nature of the curriculum and the challenges posed by its implementation.

Conversely, an aim of the current review of curriculum implementation is to inform future decisions regarding the scope and nature of future changes in the Primary School Curriculum. Thus, acting to exclude modern languages from the curriculum before the findings of the review become available may not be in the best interests of the NCCA whose decisions are based on research and informed by consultation with the partners in education.

Additionally, the rationale behind initiating the Pilot Project on Modern Languages in the Primary School was to determine the effects that such a programme of modern language learning would have on the child who learns a modern language in primary school. The evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) indicated that children were benefiting from their involvement in modern language classes and that teachers involved were supportive of the Project.

The Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA, 1999) also indicates that the inclusion of modern languages will be considered based on the findings from the evaluation of the Pilot Project. Findings from the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) are generally quite encouraging regarding the place of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. This feasibility report has also identified the high level of compatibility between the aims, features and principles of the Primary School Curriculum and the capacity of modern languages to strengthen the curriculum. Moreover, a decision not to include modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum would also make it difficult for Irish schools to attain the objectives identified in the Lisbon Strategy.

This option

- accepts that an expanded inclusion of schools in the provision of modern languages would result in significant cost implications to facilitate the provision of professional development and resources to teachers
- takes cognisance of the amount of time currently devoted to language and literacy teaching and learning in the Primary School Curriculum, and thus avoids a possible overburdening of language in the curriculum
- recognises that language awareness and cultural awareness are already facets of the Primary School Curriculum
- acknowledges that the DES would have to make significant investments to facilitate the introduction of modern languages
- does not incorporate modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, leading to the possibility that the progress to date in teaching and learning modern languages will be inhibited.

Issues for consideration

- The Primary School Curriculum indicates that the implementation of modern languages in primary schools will be considered following the evaluation of the Pilot Project.
- The teaching and learning of modern languages is compatible with the Primary School Curriculum and has the potential to complement the learning of L1 and L2.
- Schools that have participated in the Initiative generally have been satisfied with the inclusion of modern languages as part of their curriculum, therefore consideration should be given to recognising and consolidating their experiences.
- Previous investments made by the DES in professional and resource development would be lost.

- Maintaining a Primary School Curriculum that does not include modern languages, will impact on the ability of Irish primary schools to attain the objectives outlined in the Lisbon Strategy.

5 Implementing the Primary School Curriculum fully before making a recommendation

Awaiting the full implementation of the Primary School Curriculum before a recommendation is made regarding the place of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum effectively means that a decision will not be made regarding modern languages until 2007, at the earliest. This option recognises that the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum is an on-going process that is challenging for schools and teachers. It takes cognisance of the fact that the current year is one of consolidation and review for teachers and schools, enabling them to reflect on their experiences in implementing the Primary School Curriculum. A structured review of curriculum implementation is being conducted by the NCCA and the findings that are made available from this review should assist in providing additional information regarding the place of modern languages in relation to the learning other languages and in relation to the Primary School Curriculum as a whole.

Awaiting the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum as planned before making a decision on the place of modern languages in the curriculum provides further capacity for schools and teachers to put the mechanisms in place that will support the implementation of the curriculum. Thereafter, it may be possible to envisage changes in the scope and nature of the Primary School Curriculum. Additional research on the nature of language teaching and learning in the primary schools should provide information to assist in decision making that will help to shape the future of language learning in primary schools.

A decision to act on this Option is progressive, it takes account of the positive findings of the ITÉ research on the Pilot Project which informed the evaluation report (Harris & Conway 2002) and recognises advances that have been made as a result of the Initiative. Thus, a decision to act on Option 5 acknowledges that the DES may wish to facilitate the continuation and/or expansion of the current Initiative. Such a decision should be mindful that due regard is afforded to the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum and take into consideration that any intervention should not impede this implementation.

A core component of Option 5 would include the introduction of additional small-scale pilot projects that could complement the current Initiative by providing information about the professional development requirements of teachers who might engage in modern language teaching. The pilot projects should also investigate whether and to what extent it might be possible to integrate modern languages into the Primary School Curriculum. One feature of modern language teaching and learning across Europe that has received increasing attention is the role of language awareness. The effectiveness of a language awareness curriculum

in Irish primary schools could be investigated further in the context of the proposed pilot projects. It is possible that the networking of schools locally would add further coherence and continuity of language learning within primary schools and possibly in post-primary schools as well.

This option

- recognises that there are challenges for schools and teachers associated with the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum
- acknowledges that the current level of professional development and resource capacity may not facilitate the introduction of modern languages in all primary schools
- enables schools to introduce all of the subjects in the Primary School Curriculum before making a commitment to introducing an additional subject
- facilitates consideration of the findings current review of the Primary School Curriculum
- allows for the consideration of findings from ongoing and future research relevant to modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Issues for consideration

- There are issues of equity in educational provision that could arise should some schools offer modern languages (for example 20% of primary schools) as part of the Primary School Curriculum while other schools do not offer the same opportunity.
- Delaying a decision may lead to the loss of investment in professional development and resources made by the DES as part of the current Initiative.
- There is a possibility that delaying the decision making process could lead to continued uncertainty regarding the place of modern languages in primary schools.
- While the Department of Education and Science may decide to allow the current Initiative to continue/expand it is important that the full implementation of the Primary School Curriculum in schools is not affected by any such decision.

Recommendations

The feasibility of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum must be considered having regard to the present programme of implementation of the Primary School Curriculum. The phased implementation of the Primary School Curriculum commenced in 1999. The Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) facilitates the programme of curriculum implementation. In response to teachers' concerns regarding the demands of the current implementation process, the 2003-2004 school year has been designated a year of consolidation and review. During this year, school staffs are engaged in a review of their curriculum implementation to date. The subject areas currently the focus of this review include English, Mathematics and Visual arts. As a result of this review and consolidation of curriculum implementation to date, the initial implementation programme for full delivery of the Primary School Curriculum has been delayed by one year.

It is in this context that the NCCA proposes that Option 5 is the preferred option at this time. Option 5 would allow for the Primary School Curriculum to be fully implemented before a recommendation is made regarding the inclusion of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. This proposal recognises the current challenges for schools and for teachers in implementing the Primary School Curriculum and recognises the demands that would ensue from the introduction of an additional subject at this time.

Option 5 would support the introduction of pilot projects to further elucidate the nature of modern language learning in primary schools. It would also provide time for consideration of the substantive issues that are addressed in the current year of curriculum review and would allow information from Phase Two and any subsequent phases of a monitoring and evaluation programme of the Initiative to feed into future decision-making processes. In the intervening period, the NCCA proposes consideration of the following issues:

- The introduction of the proposed pilot projects
- The Primary Curriculum Review of English and Gaeilge
- The findings from additional research.

1. The introduction of the proposed pilot projects

The pilot projects identified below were proposed in Section Two of the report:

- An intensive professional development programme for teachers
- Content language integrated learning (CLIL)
- Networking of schools at local level
- Language awareness
- An earlier start.

In each case the NCCA will work closely with those involved to ensure that the implications of each project for the Primary School Curriculum are comprehensively examined.

2. The Primary Curriculum Review of English and Gaeilge

English is one of the subjects considered in the first phase of the Primary Curriculum Review. Gaeilge will be reviewed subsequently. One of the aims of the review is to inform future curriculum and assessment projects. It is important that any consideration given to the introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum occurs in the context of findings gleaned from this focus on languages.

3. Findings from additional research

The NCCA will also take account of

- findings from the Primary Curriculum Review
- findings from Phases One and Two, and any subsequent phases, of a monitoring and evaluation programme, and
- findings from other research conducted in the interim.

In light of the above, the NCCA will initiate research on the teaching and learning of languages (English, Gaeilge and modern languages) in the Primary School Curriculum toward completion of curriculum implementation.

The information and knowledge that will result from engaging in the three strategies outlined above will inform two important aspects of decision-making. They will guide decisions taken on the feasibility of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. In addition, they will provide the basis for decision-making on the relationship between languages at primary and post-primary. In conclusion the expertise and knowledge that is gained over the forthcoming years, together with the outcomes of the *Review of Languages in the Post-primary Curriculum*, will be contributory factors in the formation of a national policy on languages in the curriculum.

Conclusion

The NCCA will consider the introduction of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum once the curriculum has been fully implemented and in the light of the results and findings from the interim activities and projects recommended. This can also be considered as a time of preparation for those who are charged with the provision of preservice and continuing professional development education for teachers, as the aim of coherence in language teaching and learning is further planned for and realised.

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