

## PART 2: QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

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The Department of Education and Skills is drafting a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy. The views of stakeholders are being sought to inform the development of this Strategy. Outlined below are a number of key questions. You are invited to provide your feedback on each question. There is also a space at the end of this template for any other more general comments you may wish to make that are relevant to the issue of foreign languages in education. It would be important to note that the submissions received will be available for general distribution.

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*Name of respondents:*

Please see details on the OVFL website.

*Organisation, if any, whose views are being represented:*

**One Voice for Languages (OVFL)**

Email address: [info@onevoiceforlanguages.com](mailto:info@onevoiceforlanguages.com)

Website: [www.onevoiceforlanguages.com](http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com)

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### **Preamble**

We would like to make a few general comments before addressing the questions in more detail. These general comments inform many of the responses and suggestions below.

The aims and aspirations of the Framework for Consultation are welcome, well-stated and timely. However, the document excludes the pre-school and primary sectors from the outset, and the infrastructure as described in the document does not appear to be able to support those aspirations. The Framework document refrains from suggesting how the present infrastructure might be reformed to meet these aspirations; we welcome the opportunity to suggest infrastructural developments and ways in which these aims may be realised.

It is also regrettable that the Framework for Consultation limits its remit to so-called ‘foreign’ languages in Ireland. Perhaps a decision has been taken that English and Irish should be excluded from the current consultation document, presumably because of their L1 status for the majority of people in the State. But that fails to take full cognisance of the fact that for many (and indeed for increasing numbers) these are ‘foreign’ languages and therefore do/should have a place in this context. Moreover, there are profound continuities between L1(s) and L2(s)<sup>1</sup> in individuals’ plurilingual repertoires,<sup>2</sup> and therefore, we feel that it is not only warranted, but essential, to take an integrated approach to all language provision in the Irish education system and beyond.

The system’s privileging of English–Irish bilingualism over any other is deleterious to all if it is the intention of the Strategy to equip Irish citizens and long-

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, we use ‘L2(s)’ to mean second, third, fourth, etc. languages acquired.

<sup>2</sup> In line with the conceptual distinction drawn by the Council of Europe, we use ‘plurilingualism’ throughout this document to refer to an individual’s knowledge and use of more than one language (in juxtaposition with ‘monolingualism’), and ‘multilingualism’ for the presence of more than one language in a society. ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Division\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Division_en.asp))

term residents with the language proficiency which the Framework, quite rightly, sees as ‘essential for Ireland’s cultural, social and economic well-being’ and ‘social cohesion’ (p. 3). Additionally, the document assumes that homes in Ireland are monolingual sites: for example, it makes reference to children who ‘speak a language other than English’, in this way exposing a monolingual bias whilst advocating plurilingualism. Furthermore, the Framework for Consultation appears to valorise certain minority languages to the exclusion of others. We also need to be mindful of the warning issued by the President of the European Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity in response to the European Commission’s recent reassignment of portfolios and consequent loss of a Commissioner in charge of multilingualism:

The new Commission’s approach on multilingualism gives a utilitarian, market-oriented approach to the languages of Europe, which will only prioritise big, hegemonic languages and will leave a remarkable number of lesser-used languages — small-state, regional or minority languages — aside.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, though the introductory section of the Framework (*Why a foreign languages strategy*) acknowledges the benefits of a multilingual society for economic, social and individual well-being, this balanced assessment regrettably disappears in favour of the economic arguments as the document progresses. In this way, the document undermines its own starting point.

When completing this form it became increasingly apparent that what is best practice in relation to one language or constituency is also best practice in relation to all; similarly, what is best practice in one sector (state, private, complementary) or at one level (pre-school, primary, post-primary, further and higher) is also best practice in other sectors and at other levels.

## 1. Raising Awareness

*What measures should be undertaken to promote awareness, at national, community, enterprise and individual level, of the importance of language learning and to increase interest in and motivation for foreign language learning?*

### **I. Active promotion of the benefits of plurilingualism and multilingualism**

OVFL believes that a national communications and public awareness and education strategy is essential in raising awareness of the importance and benefits of the knowledge of more than one language in society in general, with all educational sectors being especially targeted. The results of research<sup>4</sup> need to be communicated to key decision-makers, teachers, teacher trainers, parents and children, as well as to

<sup>3</sup> NPLD press release, September 2014, accessed on <http://www.npld.eu/news-and-events/latest-news/103/new-european-commission-no-place-for-multilingualism>

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Roberts, G. & Irvine, F. (2006) LLAIS Briefing Paper 1: Language Appropriate Practice in Health and Social Care. University of Wales, Bangor. Available from: [http://www.bangor.ac.uk/llais/brief/LLAIS\\_ORG.pdf](http://www.bangor.ac.uk/llais/brief/LLAIS_ORG.pdf); Roberts, G. & Irvine, F. (2007) LLAIS Briefing Paper 2: Language Awareness in Health and Social Care Research Governance. University of Wales Bangor. Available from: <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/llais/brief/Papur%20Briffio%202.pdf>; Tranter, S., Irvine, F., Roberts, G., Spencer, L. & Jones, P. (2010) The role of midwives and health visitors in promoting intergenerational language maintenance in the bilingual setting: Perceptions of parents and health professionals. *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 20, 1/2, 204-213.

childcare workers, healthcare professionals and other professional groups who may assess children's development. In addition to the media, channels for dissemination should include community groups, teacher training and healthcare facilities. Furthermore, language learning and teaching has seen unprecedented developments over the past 30 years in Europe. As yet, these resources have remained largely untapped by the Irish education system; for more detail on these developments, see the European Centre for Modern languages (ECML).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the OVFL website and social media are specifically designed to raise awareness of language matters, and the OVFL website contains an actively managed repository of relevant links and documents.<sup>6</sup>

Not only should the DES be raising awareness of the need for children to learn second languages, but they should also be raising awareness that children are never too young to learn a second language. Apart from the cognitive, cultural and social benefits of plurilingualism, students could be made aware of economic opportunities through roadshows such as *Deutschmobil* by the German Embassy in Ireland/Goethe-Institute.<sup>7</sup> Other similar events could be organised which involve leading multinational companies based in Ireland, as well as smaller indigenous Irish companies servicing overseas markets who would visit secondary schools and HEIs and highlight the many employment opportunities open to graduates with language skills.

One example of good practice in this area is the Skills@Work Programme which partners disadvantaged post-primary schools with local companies. Under this programme, one OVFL member's school, St. Farnan's Post-Primary school in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, has been partnered with SAP Ireland. Fifth-year students work with a team of mentors from SAP on career options, interview preparation and workplace skills. As SAP Ireland is a large multinational company with a need for plurilingual employees, the experience is especially valuable for the students who are taking a language for their Leaving Certificate (LC) and it will hopefully encourage them to keep up their language learning at third level. A Business Language Champions programme, such as that developed in Wales and now operating in the UK and Scotland, could build on this type of initiative by identifying language skills and needs and their complementarity to STEM skills and needs in engagements between post-primary schools and local or other employers.<sup>8</sup>

The DES Strategy could consider encouraging, supporting and replicating initiatives for other languages that have already focused on raising awareness, e.g. initiatives by the German Embassy in Dublin and the Goethe-Institut Dublin.<sup>9</sup> Equally, the DES could continue to engage with different Embassies and Cultural Services regarding CPD opportunities for teachers both in Ireland and in the target countries.

There needs to be awareness-raising of the can-do communicative definition of language promoted by the Council of Europe through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP), as well as the concept of the validity and potential of 'partial competences' promoted through both instruments. The communicative definition of language focuses on what 'I can do' with a language. Language competence is

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ecml.at/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/OneVoiceForLanguages>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.germanconnects.ie/deutschmobil>

<sup>8</sup> See further information on BLC at: <http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/blc/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.germanconnects.ie/home> and <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ie/en/dub/lrn/ger.html>

described through ‘can-do descriptors’ and in relation to five language skills. ‘Partial competences’ is the recognition that different skills can develop at a different pace but also that all aspects of proficiency, all ‘can-dos’ in one or more languages, add up to an inclusive plurilingual competence. Communicative language competence is complemented by knowledge and reflection about the language and languages (language awareness) and knowledge and reflection about culture(s) and the learner’s interaction with people from (an)other culture(s) (intercultural awareness). Raising awareness of the CEFR in terms of its 6 levels of proficiency and their definition through graded can-do descriptors, as well as the availability of can-do descriptors as a common descriptive tool to be used by all (language learners, teachers, curriculum designers, assessors, examination and certification bodies, but also employers, recruitment industry and parents) needs to be such that it is used as the natural benchmark by all in the education, training and industry sectors in Ireland, as it is throughout Europe and beyond. In this context, the benefits for industry of fully adopting the CEFR benchmark in their description of language skills cannot be over-emphasised, nor can the need for support for language specialists in education and training to engage in needs analysis and partnerships for greater industry/education/training engagement in this area.

Information can be made available regarding the main reference tool (free online self-access + multilingual) DIALANG (previously Dialang.org).<sup>10</sup> The Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) also provides assessment tools for a number of languages.<sup>11</sup> At post-primary, the following are regularly used: German: Fit in Deutsch 2 (level A2);<sup>12</sup> Italian: CILS A2;<sup>13</sup> French: DELF Junior/Scolaire A2.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Proposals:**

- 1. Organise an annual showcase for languages (in cooperation with OVFL). Colleagues from all sectors could share their case studies of successful learning and teaching languages in Ireland. This could follow the example of the annual language show in London.<sup>15</sup>**
- 2. Organise a national roadshow-type event as part of an overall strategy of the DES. This strategy could also include co-operation between local schools and immigrant communities, e.g. native speakers visiting their local school and talking about their language and culture.**
- 3. Support the initiative of the annual ‘Language Fair’ by gradireland (AHECS/GTI Ireland) during which various companies offer vacancies to language graduates.<sup>16</sup>**
- 4. Run a campaign similar to the *Speak to the Future* campaign in order to raise awareness of the benefits of language learning among the general public, the media, government and policymakers.<sup>17</sup>**
- 5. Use social media to raise awareness and run an education campaign on the benefits of plurilingualism and multilingualism.**

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/researchenterprise/dialang/about>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bulats.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ie/en/dub/lrn/prf/ft2.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://cils.unistrasi.it/articolo.asp?sez0=79&sez1=0&sez2=0&art=82>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ciep.fr/delf-scolaire/exemples-sujets-1> and <http://www.ciep.fr/delf-dalf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.languageshowlive.co.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://gradireland.com/career-sectors/languages-and-culture>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.speaktothefuture.org/>

## II. Start early

Plurilingualism and language awareness across the L1(s) and L2(s) should be supported from pre-school onwards. Research data point to the positive benefits of L1 proficiency on the development of L2. This has been articulated by Professor Jim Cummins (1981) as the Linguistic Interdependence Principle, which, today, is emerging as central to the development of literacy/literacies.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, L1 awareness assists the learning of other languages, and this should increase interest in and the uptake of language learning opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

The DES Framework document highlights the significance of early years in the formation of a child's language (p. 8), but it does not suggest how existing structures in pre-school or primary provision might best capitalise on this window of opportunity, either for children from monolingual English or Irish speaking homes, or indeed for children whose home language/languages is/are not one of the mediums of instruction in the Irish education system.

The Irish preschool curriculum is called *Aistear*. According to Education and Science Minister Batt O'Keeffe, T.D., preschool education represents 'the beginning [...] of an exciting journey'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, *aistear* is the Irish word for *journey*. That children learn through play is an accepted fact, and what they learn depends on what they play. Preschool children do not discriminate over what they will learn. By and large, they embrace all new experiences. Languages are not taught, they are learnt, they are lived. An important tool to build English vocabulary at preschool is through stories, poems and songs, and the same would apply to learning any language. The Irish-language naíonraí have blazed a trail in second-language learning for preschoolers for many years now and so the DES would not have far to look to find some excellent working examples of how to incorporate second-language learning into contemporary preschools. Too often in Ireland, children have their first introduction to a language that is not English or Irish at the age of 12 when they start at secondary school. By this stage, too many opportunities for language learning have been missed. It is also a time in their lives where they are transitioning from childhood to adolescence and they become more self-conscious. This inhibits their willingness to make a mistake. Preschool children have no fear of making mistakes and this contributes greatly to the ease with which they absorb and reproduce a second language, thus making the preschool years the ideal time to introduce young children to a new language.

### Proposal:

**6. The Strategy will need to consider ways in which pre-school and early primary school children's experience of language learning/exposure to other languages is positive and normalised (multilingual crèches<sup>21</sup> or play groups; educational settings which draw on the languages represented in the group in a meaningful way; immersion settings with multiple languages; integrated**

<sup>18</sup> see Cummins, J., Brown, K., & Sayers, D. (2007). *Literacy, technology, and diversity: Teaching for success in changing times*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon

<sup>19</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/early\\_language\\_learning\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/early_language_learning_en.htm)

<sup>20</sup> NCCA, 2009, p. 3

<sup>21</sup> At the 2014 EDL conference organised by the EU Commission, an example was given by a panel speaker: Approved National Policy for specific federal state (Saarland) at the French/German border – German/French bilingual approach for all pupils at pre-school stage: <http://edl-2014.teamwork.fr/en/programme>

**content and language learning; encouraging learners to draw on their own linguistic resources in relation to content across the curriculum which presupposes fostering literacy in all languages in a child's repertoire).**<sup>22</sup>

### **III. Promote and normalise language learning across the life-span**

Moving beyond the school context, the Strategy should ensure that (English, Irish and other) languages may be studied country-wide at all levels and at times of the day when potential learners are available. It should also ensure that available language courses and the methodologies/language teaching resources are appropriate to the needs of the learners. In this context, the separation of English and Irish from other languages is an artificial one, since best practice in language teaching depends more on the age of learners and the environmental conditions than the status of a language as an L1 or an L2. There has to be a fundamental change of attitude away from the separation of Irish and English from other languages.

As the Framework document rightly points out (p. 3), plurilingualism has an important part to play in fostering social cohesion. It is imperative that we convince parents and families of the importance of learning English and Irish while maintaining the language(s) that the children (or family) already speak at home. Similarly, we need to continue to enable adult migrants to avail of training in order to better their employment prospects or to regain pre-migration levels of occupational status; to negotiate the services and systems in their new cultural environment (health system, banking, insurance, welfare, legal); and to develop personal friendships and integrate socially. However, we ultimately need to convince everybody, no matter what age or language background, to avail of opportunities to learn other languages whether inside or outside a language classroom and we must combat the attitude that English is enough.

### **IV. Normalise plurilingualism**

Following on from point III above, it is imperative not to treat 'foreign' languages any differently from the ways in which we promote the benefits of English and Irish language learning. Promotional material should stress that there is a continuum between no-proficiency and native-proficiency, and that any point along that continuum is worthwhile and valuable.

#### **Proposal:**

**7. As a short-term measure to increase the uptake of foreign languages, providing extra points<sup>23</sup> in LC examinations for languages could be considered. However, this should ultimately become unnecessary if society succeeds in fostering plurilingualism.**<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> DES (2011) Literacy and numeracy for learning and life. The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people, 2011-2020. Available from: <https://www.edl-2014.teamwork.fr/en/programme>

<sup>23</sup> A panel speaker from Sweden highlighted the strategy of awarding extra points, something which led to increased numbers of language learners at secondary level (EDL 2014 EU Commission conference; see <http://edl-2014.teamwork.fr/en/programme>).

<sup>24</sup> In considering giving extra points to one or another subject, the DES must consider the potential knock-on effects on other subjects. For example, it is quite possible that by rewarding maths skills, students are turned away from language subjects. We are also quite conscious that this suggestion may lead to a 'points race', where different subjects may each lobby for points to increase uptake. Therefore, once incentivisation has shown results, points for that subject should return to normal.

8. **Stipulate that students must have a MFL in order to access further education or third level courses.**
9. **Industry needs to clearly state its needs in relation to particular language(s) and language(s) skills at an explicitly stated level (with reference to CEFR levels).**

## 2. Supporting migrant languages in educational settings

*How can we encourage our migrant children to become proficient in the language of their adopted community, while at the same time maintaining oral, written and cognitive academic language proficiency in their own mother tongue?*

### I. Language of adopted country

Currently migrant schoolchildren whose home language is neither English nor Irish are entitled to receive EAL support for two years (commonly, one lesson each day). The DES is aware of some of the risks associated with underdeveloped English language skills:

While some students may acquire a level of competence in English or Irish and become able to converse socially, their acquisition of communicative language may mask a deficit in academic language skills that are needed to succeed at school. A further barrier for migrant students is their parents' lack of knowledge of English, in some cases, and of the Irish education system. The outcomes of the OECD's PISA 2009 tests demonstrated clearly that, like migrant students in other countries, migrant students in Ireland perform less well in literacy and numeracy than their native peers. The OECD has highlighted the need to target resources at non-English speaking migrant students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It also points out that experience in other countries shows that second generation migrant students may be particularly at risk of low achievement.<sup>25</sup>

We would agree with those concerns and add that:

- Poor English language skills are often treated as 'remediable' by withdrawing learners from mainstream classrooms and providing them with tuition in groups, sometimes with children who have special educational needs. This is not to the benefit of either group of learners nor is it an appropriate response to either group's educational and psychosocial needs.
- Jim Cummins (e.g. 1984; and other researchers)<sup>26</sup> suggest that it takes learners approximately two years to achieve a functional, social use of an L2 but that it may take five to seven years or longer for some bilingual learners to achieve a level of academic linguistic proficiency comparable to their monolingual English-speaking peers.

The two-year rule for EAL support needs to be replaced by more robust and flexible criteria to ensure that children for whom the home language is other than English or Irish are not stigmatised and/or disadvantaged in the education sector.

<sup>25</sup> DES (2011: 64-65).

<sup>26</sup> See also Baker, C. (2006) Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism (4th ed.). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

### Proposals:

10. Provide affordable or free English-medium pre-school facilities.
11. Provide affordable or free English language courses (online, community-based language support, formal language classes) for parents at times of the day that suit parents.
12. Provide EAL support in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.
13. Fund research designed to increase our understanding of the language learning challenges faced by newcomer pupils and students, and the barriers that stand in the way of their educational success. There has been very significant work done by individuals across the primary and post-primary sectors to develop expertise among professionals working in the field of EAL and to develop ways of integrating the home languages of pupils in a meaningful way into routine classroom activities; at present, we do not have any formal way of pooling that expertise. We need to recognise the very high quality of work that has been undertaken on the ground to date and which continues. We need to provide structures for exchanging resources and strategies and to mainstream best practice across all sectors from pre-school to third level.

## II. Maintenance of home language

Jim Cummins' *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis* states that a learner's competence in an L2 is partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the L1.<sup>27</sup> Thus, we must realise the value of proficiency in the home language(s) for:

- Further learning, including learning of the target language (TL) and additional languages
- Individuals' educational and psychosocial needs
- Social, emotional and cultural reasons, e.g. keeping contact with family and friends in the country of origin

and, consequently, encourage the maintenance and development of the home language(s). The EU Commission report on 'Languages for Jobs' also highlights the importance of supporting heritage languages and the opportunities that immigrant languages may offer.<sup>28</sup> The website of the EU Commission (Languages) has a specific unit dedicated to regional and minority languages.<sup>29</sup>

The DES acknowledges this when it states that migrant students 'require extra language support which *builds on their mother tongue knowledge* to achieve better literacy and numeracy outcomes in English and Irish'.<sup>30</sup> However, it does not flesh out why this is the case and, in particular, how teachers may build and capitalise on already existing capacities and skills in the L1. To date, there has been little to no support in the mainstream educational sector for the home languages and cultures of immigrant families. It has been deemed the responsibility of immigrant communities to transmit and maintain immigrant languages/cultures, and this function has often been assumed by foreign consular sections of Embassies, as well as church and

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g. Cummins, 1978, 1979.

<sup>28</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/languages-for-jobs-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/languages-for-jobs-report_en.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/linguistic-diversity/regional-minority-languages\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/linguistic-diversity/regional-minority-languages_en.htm)

<sup>30</sup> DES, 2011, 64; our italics

cultural organisations. While the DES acknowledges the existence of these community-led educational initiatives and recommends teacher training, the acknowledgement is relatively vague:

[A]ll initial teacher education courses and ECCE training programmes [should] include mandatory modules to raise awareness among teachers and ECCE practitioners that some migrant students will be receiving informal support in their mother tongue in out-of-school educational settings.<sup>31</sup>

The DES does not expand on what these ‘out-of-school educational settings’ may be, nor does it highlight the vital contribution of the community to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in the L1, for example as a result of efforts both in or outside of the home, and in complementary schools.

Taken together, the provision of EAL support to children, the failure to promote home language transmission, and the failure to provide adequate EAL support for adults mean that there may be an ever-increasing linguistic and cultural wedge being driven between generations of migrants. It will become increasingly difficult for migrant grandparents, parents, offspring and grandchildren (and sometimes siblings) to provide supportive familial bonds, based on mutual understanding and shared values.

Therefore, from the earliest days of their child’s education, parents need to be encouraged to read to children in their L1. This will serve both to cultivate the L1 and a love of reading at the same time. Additionally, children may be encouraged to keep links with their country of origin, for example with peers in the school they attended. Once children have mastered literacy skills in their L1, they will be able to maintain and develop their L1 skills through such contact.

Schools should be encouraged to include migrant children’s L1 in school learning from Junior Infants upwards, and to involve parents in their child’s learning and in the school’s approach to teaching and learning. A variety of teaching methods including the Language Experience Approach, an integrated approach and CLIL should be used in order to access all varieties of learning preferences. From the earliest days, an ethos should be cultivated where learning autonomy and self-assessment is encouraged and supported.

Some mainstream Irish schools provide tuition in the L1 for their students. This is a school-based initiative as schools in Ireland are not obliged to provide L1 classes for students whose L1 is not English or Irish. Examples of this at primary level come from the two Dublin-based Muslim schools which have provided Arabic classes for pupils (without State support) since their establishment (one since 1993 and the other since 2001). Also at primary level, Scoil Bhríde Girls’ National School in Dublin 15 teaches modern languages and includes the use of L1(s) in an integrated way during lessons. The school uses every opportunity to promote the importance of the L1, for example, during the pre-registration meeting with parents, Junior Infant Induction meeting, Parent/Teacher meetings, on their website, and as part of their ongoing interactions. The use of the L1 is valued and encouraged in class lessons from the earliest days for both educational and social/cultural reasons. The former helps all learning, while the latter allows children to maintain connections with their family/country/culture of origin. Thus, an environment is created in which language learning is valued. An interactive approach to learning is always used; children spontaneously look for the connections between languages through games,

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<sup>31</sup> DES, 2011, p. 69

discussions, etc. Children are encouraged to write dual language books (L1 and TL) from breakthrough to literacy stage (First Class). The school produces a multilingual book to which all children contribute. The L1 and the TL(s) pervade every aspect of school life. For example, during official school events a variety of languages is included, e.g. at Christmas concerts, art exhibitions, musical sessions, two or three languages are used to introduce acts and a different combination of languages is used for each individual act. The school also actively encourages parental involvement in school life. Finally, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is used as a language learning tool.

At post-primary level, various language classes are offered by schools. These are primarily to help students prepare for their LC exam, e.g. Polish: Arklow CBS (Co. Wicklow), Errigal College (Co. Donegal), Hartstown Community School (Dublin 15), Coláiste Bríde (Dublin 22), and Moyle Park College (Dublin 22). Hartstown Community School also offers LC classes in Russian, Romanian and Lithuanian. A number of other schools offer LC preparation classes for Russian (e.g. Fingal Community College). The Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI) runs Saturday morning classes for Russian LC preparation for students from any school in Dublin and Galway. A pilot scheme is also seeking online or blended learning solutions for students who cannot attend classes in existing centres. If such initiatives were part of a national strategy for languages, Ireland's attractiveness as a truly pluricultural society would be noted in the international community with all the benefits such profiles generate.

Research by the European Centre of Modern Languages (ECML; part of Council of Europe) includes completed project work in the field of heritage languages.<sup>32</sup> Cooperation with the ECML as language experts could be very beneficial for the DES Strategy.

#### **Proposals:**

- 14. Fund research designed to increase our understanding of the psychosocial challenges faced by newcomer pupils and students, and the barriers that stand in the way of their present and future well-being.**
- 15. Facilitate the setting up of online school twinning arrangements so that children can have contact with others who speak the same L1.**
- 16. Resource local libraries with materials in languages other than English and Irish.**
- 17. Multilingual summer camps (some shared English- and Irish-language activities and some activities divided into other language groups).**
- 18. Provision of ongoing L1 support in HEIs. This requires courses for teachers at pre-service and in-service levels so that they gain the requisite understanding and competence to provide this support and create the optimum environment for this learning.**
- 19. Develop support for assessing migrant pupils' integration (including their linguistic, social and cultural development/integration/well-being).**
- 20. Establish a specialist national unit to support the educational integration of immigrant pupils and students.**
- 21. Foster ties between the complementary and mainstream education sectors; and ensure increased awareness in each sector of the educational cultures of**

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.ecml.at/Resources/ECMLPublications/tabid/277/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> and <http://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Overview/tabid/155/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

the other as an integral part of pre- and in-service training.

**22. Promote the idea of post-primary subject teachers availing of CLIL training and certification to better equip them to address the language (literacy) dimension of their subjects for the benefit of EAL students as well as for the benefit of students who have special educational needs (SEN).**

### **3. Learning and Teaching**

*How can foreign language learning be supported for students from post-primary educational settings and thereafter? You may wish to concentrate on one educational sector.*

The recommendations outlined above for migrant learners in relation to their home language and L2 acquisition equally apply here. Furthermore, most of the recommendations are not exclusive to the post-primary sector, but extend from pre-school education to further education. Finally, the curricular and methodological issues set out here attempt to redress the singular focus of the Framework on classroom settings, by including extracurricular language learning and use.

#### **I. Literacy and language learning**

The DES' current preoccupation with literacy appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the nature of language learning and language skills, since it defines literacy in relation to the L1 and not in relation to other languages. However, this fails to recognise research which points to the cumulative and transferable nature of plurilingual (literacy) acquisition. Moreover, the single statement of learning referring to language – of a total of 24 statements specified for Junior Cycle (JC) – fails to reflect the complexity of language acquisition. Literacy is but one (albeit basic and fundamental) element in the development of language skills and the attainment of (basic) reading and writing skills plus oral skills appears to eclipse the importance of developing advanced reading and writing skills plus aural skills. It would therefore seem prudent to review the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people<sup>33</sup> in the context of developing the Strategy for languages. In this regard, we recommend the document on 'Supporting triple literacy' developed by CILT Wales.<sup>34</sup>

#### **Proposal:**

**23. All educational institutions, beginning with pre-school, ought to have a mandatory language policy which integrates all languages present in the school. The language policy should include provisions made for literacy.**

#### **II. Curriculum specifications and resources**

All post-primary schools should be sufficiently resourced to be able to offer students the opportunity to study two modern languages to both JC and LC levels. There

<sup>33</sup> DES (2011) Literacy and numeracy for learning and life. The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people, 2011-2020. Available from:

[https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/.../lit\\_num\\_strategy\\_full.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/.../lit_num_strategy_full.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> See <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/111017literacven.pdf>

should be more flexibility for school management to use the language resources that are available in the school. School management should be encouraged to draw on and make better use of staff resources. This should be encouraged at national level by highlighting these issues through, for example, the NAPD.

We recommend that the CEFR for languages developed by the Council of Europe be used as the reference and guideline for language levels across syllabi. In some languages, it is already possible to obtain CEFR-based certification, for example through several HEI and cultural institutes (e.g. Alliance Française, Instituto Cervantes, Goethe-Institut, Italian Cultural Institute); however, the levels should be used more transparently. There is also a need for CEFR-based online (assessment) tests. Furthermore, in conjunction with the CEFR, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) should be used both as a pedagogical tool to support learner autonomy and engagement and as an assessment tool for JC (at least). The use of the ELP across languages within a school would also encourage the development of cross-linguistic links as well as the development of intercultural awareness and language awareness.

There is also a need to develop cross-curricular links between languages and other subjects within schools, for example, through CLIL (see below). The new JC short courses could offer this possibility, and further examples might be developed by the PPLI to prepare for changes in modern languages for JC.

#### **Proposals:**

- 24. Adopt the CEFR and ELP for syllabus construction and assessment purposes.**
- 25. Increase options for school management to draw on existing language resources.**
- 26. Ensure the implementation of an oral assessment as a mandatory component at JC. Evidence of oral proficiency could easily be made part of the formative assessment component of the JCSA with the use of e-portfolio or e-ELP (see section III below).**
- 27. Increase the number of Whole School Inspections that include a subject inspection in one or more modern languages.**
- 28. Focus explicitly on language provision as part of curriculum planning and teaching and learning aspects of Whole School Inspections.**

### **III. Teaching methodologies – TL use, CLIL and CALL**

Two key issues in supporting language learning are a) the use of the TL as the medium of communication, and b) the use of modern technologies inside and outside of the classroom.

Concerning the former, actual and virtual mobility of staff and students through (online) language exchanges, language assistantships, etc. should be encouraged.<sup>35</sup> For example, students may be able to spend periods of time in the TL country, during transition year, their summer holidays or for an academic term. Students for whom travelling abroad is not an option may be able to attend recognised and recommended residential language courses in Ireland.

An effective way to increase the proportion of TL use in the classroom is through CLIL. In CLIL contexts in particular, but by extension in any learning context, whether within the classroom or independently, students should be

<sup>35</sup> For example, apart from the EU Commission's funding (<http://www.eurireland.ie/>) and [http://www.icosirl.ie/eng/student\\_information/erasmus\\_in\\_ireland](http://www.icosirl.ie/eng/student_information/erasmus_in_ireland), EIL provides excellent opportunities (see [www.eilireland.org](http://www.eilireland.org)).

encouraged to draw on all the languages in their repertoire; teaching should be diversified in order to recognise *all* forms of diversity. This would also go some way towards keeping the curriculum manageable.

The implementation of some element of CLIL is entirely realistic given the untapped plurilingual proficiency of staff in schools, to which we return in Question 4. There are many sound pedagogic arguments concerning CLIL, including the more holistic and active learning this type of approach affords. CLIL may take different forms; however, in essence, it is a language-sensitive approach for ‘learning a subject through another language and learning the language through the subject’.<sup>36</sup> It is in this sense that language learning becomes a powerful instrument for the development of literacies.

CALL<sup>37</sup> and other technological solutions may enhance language learning in a very effective way. Virtual learning environments as promoted by the DES, for example, may make courses accessible to areas in which they would not normally be offered. In the context of JC reform, the inclusion of digital literacy as a statement of learning is recommended across all subjects.<sup>38</sup> Modern technologies, e.g. the use of social media, also play an important part in language maintenance and acquisition by bringing together geographically-dispersed communities of speakers as well as supporting plurilingual knowledge-building. Even so, technologies should not replace the physical classroom, particularly during initial language learning, since the social dimension of language learning is of the utmost importance.

#### **Proposals:**

- 29. Extend the EU Language Assistants scheme to all schools.**
- 30. Promote mobility for staff and students, practically, financially and through providing academic credit for periods spent on language courses.**
- 31. Provide an e-portfolio which will document student’s modern foreign language (MFL) proficiency as well as encourage the development of their digital literacy alongside their MFL skills and their opportunities to engage in real online communication opportunities. This should ideally be structured as an e-ELP tool/app.**
- 32. Promote and support the concept of the ‘flipped classroom’ for MFL among teachers, i.e. encouraging students to avail of existing or purpose-designed online resources to develop MFL knowledge and skills at their pace and according to their preferred learning style and strategies in order to maximise classroom time for interaction and individualised mentoring/teacher support.**
- 33. Support and promote a cross-language association of language teachers’ associations which would ensure cross-fertilisation, a focus on sharing of expertise and good practice across languages, and the rationalisation of promotion of CPD opportunities. This would follow the inclusive model of the**

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<sup>36</sup> For references, see David Marsch publications, papers and YouTube clips. See also the UK FLAME project as well as the document on the European Framework for CLIL teacher education: [http://www.unifg.it/sites/default/files/allegatiparagrafo/20-01-2014/european\\_framework\\_for\\_clil\\_teacher\\_education.pdf](http://www.unifg.it/sites/default/files/allegatiparagrafo/20-01-2014/european_framework_for_clil_teacher_education.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Report by the 2014 EU Commission’s working group ‘Languages in Education and Training’ on ICT and language learning and teaching:

[http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=97](http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=97)

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g. PPLI short courses for MFL:

[http://languagesinitiative.ie/images/MFL\\_Gen\\_SC\\_incl\\_Assess\\_March\\_2014.pdf](http://languagesinitiative.ie/images/MFL_Gen_SC_incl_Assess_March_2014.pdf)

dynamic Association for Language Learning (ALL)<sup>39</sup> in the UK as opposed to the present model of language-specific subject associations (FTA, ATS, ATI, GDI, etc.)

**34. Introduce the latest innovations in language learning and teaching in pre-and in-service teacher education, as promoted by the European Council and the ECML, to include CLIL, CALL and plurilingual approaches.**

#### **4. Teacher Education**

*How can we ensure an adequate and ongoing supply of highly-skilled, professional teachers/trainers of foreign language at all educational levels to meet ongoing and emerging needs?*

Teacher Education represents an area of great opportunity and growth. However, in order to address the dramatic skills deficit regarding MFLs in Ireland, we need to start teaching MFLs from early primary level, increase our capacity in a wider variety of languages, offer short courses in those languages in the JC cycle, and provide CPD to ensure future availability of linguistically-competent language teachers at all levels.

##### **I. Primary**

There are currently only two B.Ed. programmes in Ireland that include an opportunity for students to choose elective modules in a modern European language as well as modules on language teaching methodologies and an Erasmus placement (French at St. Patrick's College; German at Mary Immaculate College). Given that all student teachers entering the Colleges of Education must have attained an honours grade in a modern language at LC level, it should be mandatory that they continue the study of that language, or another language, as part of their teacher training.

By including the study of a modern language and modern language teaching pedagogy in the B.Ed. programmes, the system would ensure a consistent supply of trained primary teachers who are in a position to introduce modern languages as part of the primary school curriculum. This progressive step should have been taken when the B.Ed. programmes were extended (as of 2012) by a year to become a four-year programme. Indeed, it is our experience that many of the Colleges of Education expected this to happen and had plans in place to this effect.

##### **Proposal:**

**35. Include modern languages, L2 pedagogy and linguistics in all B.Ed. programmes.**<sup>40</sup>

The DES Framework document mentions that the MLPSI was ended in 2012 due to 'concerns about curriculum overload at primary level' (p. 8) – even though almost 550 schools were actively engaged in and implementing the teaching of a modern

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.all-languages.org.uk/>

<sup>40</sup> See Bullock, A. (Lord Bullock) (Chairman) (1975) A language for life: Report of the Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. HMSO.

language at the time, surely indicating a capacity to include this in the curriculum. Furthermore, we should like to highlight that research clearly indicates that:

- Children learning modern languages from pre-school onwards (according to the European guidelines of mother tongue + 2 further languages) subsequently become more proficient language users;
- The introduction of other languages in addition to Irish and English at primary level has a positive impact on the development of children's L1 literacy.

The Framework states that a further reason for the closure of the MLPSI was DES concern about the 'capacity to extend the MLPSI language-competence model of provision' (p. 8). The timing of the closure of the MLPSI, coinciding as it did with the decision to extend the B.Ed. programme and not include modern languages, was, we feel, most regrettable. We would encourage the DES to show vision and to support those teachers (and parents) who are ready and waiting to introduce languages in schools, thus taking advantage of the language skills already present in the system.

There is no doubt that learning languages at an early stage is important. Foreign languages have been reintroduced at primary level in the UK due to the deterioration of modern language skills in the country in recent years. Ireland is now the only EU country where foreign languages are not taught in the primary school sector. Children in Ireland need to be provided with the opportunity to learn English, Irish and another modern language from primary and throughout second level in order to excel in their literacy and language skills. We hope that the new Languages in Education Strategy will offer an opportunity to address these linked issues in a cohesive and coherent manner.

## **II. Post-Primary**

It is encouraging to note the increasing numbers of students sitting non-curricular EU languages at LC level. Year on year, the number of students taking these exams has risen. In 2005, seventy-one students sat an exam in a non-curricular language; in 2014, this figure was 1,485. It is also reassuring to hear the recent discussions around the introduction of new foreign languages as short courses in the revised Junior cycle. The benefits of the introduction of these languages earlier in the education cycle cannot be overstated. These include the development and maintenance of literacy skills (for example, for those who will take the short course in Polish as a heritage language) at an earlier age as well as the gains to be had from institutional recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity and the concomitant social, psychological and economic benefits.

In this regard, however, there is an issue around the recognition of teaching qualifications at the post-primary level. This needs to be addressed if qualified L1 teachers are to be employed to teach, for example, short courses in MFLs at JC level. Currently, a teacher qualified to teach a non-curricular language at post-primary level is unable to register under Teaching Council Regulation 4 (which refers to post-primary level) because that language is not a curricular subject.<sup>41</sup>

In view of the fact that there is currently no guidance from the DES on how teachers may build and capitalise on already existing capacities and skills in the L1, we suggest that ongoing teacher training is vital both at the pre- and in-service stages. Teachers, and indeed school management at primary and post-primary levels, need training to enable schools to build strongly on the language gains pupils may have

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<sup>41</sup> See Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations (2009: 13–15).

made from their prior experiences at home or elsewhere.

Given that the B.Ed. and Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) have been recently restructured as a Master's level postgraduate qualification, it seems timely for all stakeholders to give consideration to the needs of pre-service teachers of all subjects in the current demographic context. It is especially important that all primary and post-primary teachers realise their role as language teachers and that this brief is not assigned solely to language and EAL teachers. Work by the Council of Europe on 'Language as Subject' and 'Language in Subject' clearly sets out this inclusive language role for teachers.<sup>42</sup>

The rationale for the changes being brought in by the Teaching Council for undergraduate degrees was so that their graduates can go on to postgraduate teaching qualifications. However, 60 ECTS credits in each language with 15 credits in literature modules potentially constitute quite an obstacle and just taking a language on a degree level programme will not ensure a sufficient corps of teachers given the Teaching Council's requirements.

The DES should consider incentivising both secondary school children and third level student teachers to take a language as part of their degree programme, thereby ensuring a consistent supply of teaching graduates in the future. The importance of permanent, full-time teaching positions cannot be overstated to ensure an ongoing supply of highly skilled teachers and trainers of foreign languages. Finally, in order to safeguard the continuing provision of language teaching both in traditional and non-traditional languages, we should provide modules which would qualify native speakers of non-Irish/English background, who are qualified teachers of a language, to teach their L1 in the Irish post-primary sector.

Clear CEFR-benchmarked attainment level guidelines are needed at the end of (1) Junior Cycle (full-time compulsory general education), and (2) Senior Cycle (end of general upper-secondary education). It is recommended that these levels be B1 for the end of Junior Cycle and B2 for the end of Senior Cycle. These would place Ireland in line with the majority of EU countries. It is, however, recognised that these targets are ambitious and that they imply early MFL learning. If the introduction of MFL at primary level is not considered, Ireland may have to adopt more realistic targets, such as those unofficially in existence presently, and much below the rest of Europe, at level A2 for Junior Cycle and B1 for Senior Cycle. For comparison purposes, the Eurydice 2012 report (on key data on languages at school) shows that among the twenty countries that state a target level, fourteen place the end of general education at B2 (or C1 for Luxembourg) and six at level B1. However, all those countries (except for Poland and the German-speaking part of Belgium) also provide a benchmark indication for the second MFL at between A2 and B2. Regarding the end of compulsory education, twenty-two countries specify the level of attainment: eleven at B1 (or C1 for Luxembourg), the remaining countries at A2. Eighteen specify the level for the second MFL (at between A1 and B1).

#### **Proposals:**

**36. If the teaching of home languages is to be given official recognition and validation – be it in mainstream education (short course in the JC or examination subject for the LC) or in the complementary education sector – consideration might to be given to re-conceptualising the terms 'curricular' and non-curricular' such as they are defined by the Teaching Council.**

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<sup>42</sup> See Section 2.II proposals concerning CLIL for all subject teachers.

37. Teachers of all subjects need pre- and in-service training focused exclusively on their role as transmitters of a language which is quite specific to their discipline, as per the recommendations of the OECD (2011) report.
38. Incentivise current and future third-level students to take a language as part of their higher education programme of study.
39. Equip language learners with Language Learning Skills at all education levels. Such a module would include a focus on language learning strategies, language learning styles, training in the use of language web tools, dictionary skills, e-portfolio, as well as grammatical and lexical plurilingual awareness.<sup>43</sup>
40. Offer permanent, full-time teaching positions.
41. Recognise the qualifications of L1 language teachers of non-Irish/English-speaking background who have trained in another jurisdiction in order to enable them to teach their own L1 in an Irish context (The Teaching Council could play an important role in achieving this).
42. Reintroduce the Grad. Diploma in order to tap into existing language skills.
43. Specify clear CEFR-benchmarked attainment level guidelines at the end of full-time compulsory general education and at the end of general upper-secondary education.
44. Re-examine the training and career structure for teachers of English to speakers of other languages; with specific focus on the regulation and professional standards in teaching.

### **III. In-service training**

Despite the importance of initial and ongoing (life-long) learning, there has been very little continuing professional development (CPD) for language teachers in Ireland in recent years, despite the Teaching Council's recommendation that CPD be made compulsory. It is essential that CPD support for language is provided in preparation for the new JC. The focus for this CPD should be specifically on the language and facilitating its use within the classroom in order to achieve JC aims. Subject associations should be contacted with a view to identifying the specific needs of teachers in relation to CPD.

In general terms we would recommend the inclusion of the following:

#### **Proposals:**

45. Linguistics and L2 pedagogy are missing from most BA language programmes and PMEs. This needs to be rectified and CPD in this area is vital.
46. In-service training in foreign-language immersion contexts should be provided, as well as CPD with a focus on the use of technology for the language learning classroom and emphasising computer-mediated communication with other language users (i.e. providing opportunities for students to use language meaningfully in the classroom). There is great scope and appetite for twinning schools in Ireland and abroad using skype, email, and social media as a medium of communication. This can and should be harnessed.

<sup>43</sup> Such a module exists at Waterford Institute of Technology and is taken by first year students of Irish, French, German, Spanish and EFL and EAL.

CPD at all levels has to be properly resourced and promoted. There are a number of opportunities available to teachers supported by EU and European Commission funding, e.g. through the drawing up of their school's 'European Development Plan', but these opportunities need to be brought to teachers' attention. We need to encourage teachers who wish to develop their language skills as part of accredited CPD, including the use of ICT. The ECML offers free ICT workshops that could be included in the CPD schedule for language teachers, but closer cooperation between the DES, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and ECML is needed. In this respect, the work of the PDST is a model of best practice in Ireland, and should be further encouraged.

**Proposals:**

**47. CPD should be incentivised, supported and accredited.**

**48. Expertise in ICT in the delivery of teaching languages must be developed and ICT workshops for language teachers of all levels should be made available regularly.**

**49. We need to advertise the language teacher development opportunities available to language teachers, in particular through Léargas and Erasmus+.**

We need to increase teachers' awareness and understanding of the role of the ELP, both as a pedagogical and as an assessment tool, and ensure that teachers and student teachers are aware of the role of the CEFR in language-learning assessment.

Mobility for student teachers is very important. A period of residence abroad should be made a mandatory component and students should be given credit for completing this. Student should be fully aware of the benefits to fluency and the development of cultural knowledge of the target country of a period spent abroad. In Professional Master of Education (PME) courses, there already exists a requirement that student teachers have spent at least 2 months in the L2 country. We would query whether two months is a sufficient period of time and we recommend that students should spend at least one semester abroad.

With regard to PME courses, in order to produce teachers who are convinced of the value of teaching through the L2, it is of the utmost importance to offer instruction in those languages (i.e. to teach both language and literature and methodology through the L2 at all levels, thus equipping Irish graduates to teach through the L2 at post-primary level).

As an export-oriented economy aiming at multilingualism, Ireland needs capacity in a wider variety of languages. Therefore, HEI must provide instruction in lesser-taught languages as well as in the languages which have traditionally been taught here. This, in turn, will serve as a source of teachers for short courses being introduced at JC level.

With regard to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the imminent shortage of qualified language teachers is of concern. The cycle of supply from post-primary through third level and on to ITE is very short; therefore, reductions in numbers taking specific languages (e.g. currently, German) at post-primary has a significant impact on availability of supply into ITE and onwards into supply of qualified teachers. Languages where there is or may be a short supply of entrants to ITE should be identified and specific measures taken to incentivise or at the very least inform degree students in relation to career opportunities in teaching.

The areas of ITE and CPD should include: teaching through the L2, formative assessment and MFL, language awareness principles and methodologies, digital literacy and MFL, and intercultural awareness and MFL.

In order to increase language proficiency among student teachers, the development of Erasmus links in ITE should be encouraged in order to enable and encourage language student teachers to carry out placements in the L2 country. In addition, aspects of the ITE course which could be assessed through the L2 (for example, planning and reflection) should be identified as a mechanism for developing proficiency.

Finally, we would recommend that interviews for admission to a PME course are held to ensure that the language level of entrants is sufficiently high and will allow student teachers to teach through the L2 in the classroom. The Teaching Council subject specific requirements indicate a B2 level as minimum for a language teacher.

**Proposals:**

**50. Encourage mobility for teachers.**

**51. Increase the length of time that language student teachers are required to spend in the L2 country.**

**52. Broaden the provisions made for training opportunities as part of ITE and CPD.**

**53. HEIs should teach lesser used languages.**

**54. Early identification of potential shortages in teacher supply in specific language areas.**

**55. Admission interviews for students wishing to study on a PME course in order to determine language level.**

## **5. Assessment and Qualifications**

*How can enhanced flexibility, choice and continuity in foreign language learning programmes, their assessment and accreditation be provided, particularly at Further and Higher Education?*

It is essential to continue training highly qualified language specialists in a range of languages in the university sector. This is very (human and finance) resource intensive and while new technologies can be harnessed to support language teaching, this is an area where human interaction is essential. Some economies of scale might be achieved through long-term planning initiatives across the sector. Furthermore, as mentioned previously in relation to the entire educational system, all HEIs and Institutes of Further Education should be required to have a language policy. Without policy, decision makers (e.g. in the IoTs)<sup>44</sup> may decide not to offer language courses in Business and Tourism departments, as is the case at the moment, owing to autonomy and a lack of transparency as to why certain decisions are taken.

Assessment of language skills should also be reflected in the assessment of subjects/disciplines other than just language subjects. This can be achieved through rubric-driven assessment which is transparent to teachers and learners, and which,

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<sup>44</sup> [www.languagesinireland.ie](http://www.languagesinireland.ie)

most importantly, helps to place language at the centre of the learning of the subject, thereby emphasising a focus on literacy. Knowledge of the subject is assessed both in terms of its content and of the language relevant to the subject. For example, mathematicians, e.g. McMurry (2010), Jamison (2000), call for a specific focus on the language of learning mathematics, using modern languages teaching methodologies.<sup>45</sup>

Certificates, diplomas and degrees should be benchmarked to the CEFR;<sup>46</sup> this will ensure greater comparability across the sector (nationally and internationally) and will facilitate the inclusion of a language component in non-language courses or programmes (e.g. STEM subjects, health sciences, humanities, etc.). The adoption of the CEFR and of the ELP/Europass<sup>47</sup> will also ensure that language skills at various levels, from literacy (A1) through to educated, native-speaker level (C2), are valued.

#### **Proposals:**

**56. Benchmark all language qualifications to the CEFR.**

**57. In education and training, promote the adoption of the CEFR-based language skills descriptors by employers and the transparency of these for all sectors (education, training and industry).**

**58. Provide credit for student and staff mobility.**

**59. Offer credit to secondary-school students (e.g. in transition year) who would deliver taster courses in languages at primary level and to third-level students who would do the same at secondary level.**

**60. Informal learning must be given greater credit. See the LINCQ ECML project for further information.<sup>48</sup>**

**61. Avail of OLS (Online Linguistic Support) by the EU Commission that includes the online assessment of language skills.<sup>49</sup>**

## **6. Assuring Quality**

*What measures should be in place to support quality assurance measures, evaluation processes and research projects and to provide a knowledge and evidence base for policy making in the area of foreign languages?*

Research in this area needs to be supported and encouraged, especially since the closure and subsequent loss of expertise of Institúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (ITÉ) in 2004, an institution that was never replaced and the loss of which continues to be keenly felt in this area. The DES should cooperate closely with the ECML and EU Commission in order to define research projects of national relevance as well as to benefit from research being conducted at international level. Current relevant ECML

<sup>45</sup> S. McMurry, 2010, Mathematics as a language, Understanding and Using Maths, Vienna: Living Edition; Jamison, R.E. (2000). Learning the language of mathematics. *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 4 (1), 45–54.

<sup>46</sup> A lot of work has been done by the ECML on the CEFR: <http://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Overview/tabid/155/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.europass.ie/europass/>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.ecml.at/11/tabid/790/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=97](http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=97)

projects include, for example, PlurCur (Plurilingual whole school curricula) and an action on ‘Innovative methodologies and assessment in language learning’.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the DES should set up a dedicated group of experts that considers all the languages of Ireland as part of their brief: English, Irish and all ‘foreign’ and minority languages.

**Proposals:**

- 62. Establish a board of experts/a language policy division within the DES.**
- 63. Establish an ‘All-party Oireachtas Committee’ whose special interest is the state of languages in Ireland.<sup>51</sup>**
- 64. Organise an annual conference for stakeholders across all sectors, languages and disciplines.**
- 65. Develop collaborations with European and other international partners.**
- 66. Adopt the CEFR across the board.**

The mainstream and community-led (complementary) education sectors in Ireland work in parallel. Although both systems share the same clients (children and parents) and have shared interests, actors within each system remain unaware of the activities of the other. This absence of interconnectedness creates a system which is less efficient, less productive, and, ultimately, less beneficial for the children it purports to serve. As a result, the DES, and indeed all other educational agencies, play no part in providing teacher training for this sector, in regulating what is taught, or how it is taught, in establishing bridges between the complementary and mainstream sectors — the only bridges are, in fact, the children — in vetting who is teaching, in ensuring that they are, for instance, Garda-vetted, and that the children are in a safe environment. The consequences are that teachers in the complementary education sector have no status, no standing in Irish society, no opportunity for professional advancement, and no career path. If this remains the case, the complementary education sector will remain marginal and probably under-resourced. In terms of quality control, the current standing of services in the complementary education sector is reminiscent of that of education services in the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme.

The complementary education sector is fragmented into languages and ethnic groups. As a result of this, each particular group, and the sector as a whole is, in effect, invisible and voiceless. Similarly, the development of English- and Irish-language curricula and policies are fragmented. Additionally, though the teaching of foreign languages in schools does contribute to the multilingual and multicultural fabric of society, it needs to be acknowledged that the languages which are validated by being taught are elite languages in a complex hierarchical stratification of languages. Children are quick to internalise the varying degrees of cultural capital accorded to languages within the educational process and in society at large.

**Proposals:**

- 67. Develop a workforce: phase in the professionalisation of the complementary education sector in which the same regulations would pertain as in the mainstream sector. That means the same rights, the same training, and the**

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.ecml.at/F1/tabid/756/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> and <http://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/CooperationECECML/tabid/1461/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

<sup>51</sup> Similar activities occur in the UK.

same responsibilities.

**68. Ensure oversight of child protection.**

**69. Develop and fund research projects on the complementary school sector in Ireland and on the funding and structural mechanisms used elsewhere in Europe to support the transmission of home languages in order to inform best practice here.**

## **7. Supporting Multilingualism in Business and Society**

*How can we promote a multilingual society and support service providers, both public and private, in meeting emerging needs?*

### *1. What role can the education system play?*

The education system should offer more opportunities for second- and third-level students to engage with business. Existing initiatives, such as graduate fairs, roadshows and the Schools' Business Programme, are very valuable, but they need to be promoted and extended so as to reach a greater number of students. Another example of good practice in this area (as mentioned in Section 1) is the Skills@Work Programme which partners disadvantaged post-primary schools with local companies.

A national strategy from the Institutes of Higher Education to help raise awareness of the benefits and importance of learning languages would be very important as Ireland is often overly monolingual in its approach and overly focused on English-speaking markets. Angela Byrne (Enterprise Ireland) has pointed out that Europe represents a much better emigration package for young Irish people.<sup>52</sup> This type of approach would benefit not only students' career opportunities but also their personal and cultural development.

#### **Proposals:**

**70. Encourage mobility of staff and students, including increased opportunities for work placements.**

**71. Create a national database of language graduates and their employment experiences.**

**72. Create a national database of profiles of successful language learners across all sectors.**

**73. Support initiatives that already exist to promote a multilingual society, e.g. the proposed language strategy for the HEA by gradireland should be taken into consideration.<sup>53</sup>**

The education sector should also be responsible for the language and literacy needs of migrant workers and their spouse/partner as a pre-requisite to social integration and effective participation in civic society in Ireland. Adult immigrants need to be able to communicate effectively with individuals and institutions (work, school, social welfare) in the host society for integration to be unproblematic. Over the past decade,

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ie/en/dub/lrn/ger.html>.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/ireland.html>

immigrants to Ireland have been afforded relatively widespread access to basic EAL support through the VEC/Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) sector. This has provided them with the language skills necessary to function in the workforce and in the community. It is imperative that we continue to enable adult migrants to avail of training in order to better their employment prospects or to regain pre-migration levels of occupational status, to negotiate the services and systems in their new cultural environment (health system, banking, insurance, welfare, legal), and to develop personal friendships and integrate socially. Though the inward flow of migration is relatively low at present, this job is far from complete.

**Proposals:**

**74. Increase EAL support for adult migrant learners.**

**75. Ensure that courses are available at times and in places appropriate for adult learners.**

**76. Programmes for adult learners should cover the following curricular areas: language courses at all levels up to FETAC level 6; courses on understanding Irish society and developing intercultural understanding; basic computer skills; legal and employment framework; family learning.<sup>54</sup>**

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

Employers need to play an active role in raising awareness of their need for Irish graduates with language skills. For example, some employers lose a lot of money by training native speakers who do not stay with the company. More cooperation between the business and the educational sectors is needed, e.g. in designing language courses that equip future professionals with the required language and cultural skills. It would be beneficial to survey companies in Ireland in relation to their language-related needs and vacancies; this could be conducted by Solas.<sup>55</sup> It is also important that the myth of having to be 'fluent' in a language in order to secure employment is clarified. Not all jobs in Ireland that require language graduates require native speaker fluency.

An important opportunity for cooperation between national and international companies and institutions of education is the organisation of work placements. The vocational aspect of learning a language and a taster of a future career could be provided to the language learner at an early stage in their education. The work placement could be in companies in Ireland which have language requirements for their employees, but could also provide opportunities for working abroad; e.g. short period in transition year for secondary students and longer ones during third level. This initiative is being advertised by the Erasmus division of the HEA.

The 'language fair' by gradireland provides a good model of cooperation between the Irish business community and language graduates.<sup>56</sup> The EU Commission website on 'Languages for Growth and Jobs' provides some good examples that could be included in a languages strategy.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See IVEA (2005).

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.solas.ie/>

<sup>56</sup> <http://gradireland.com/career-sectors/languages-and-culture>

<sup>57</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/languages-growth-jobs\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/languages-growth-jobs_en.htm)

**Proposals:**

- 77. Create a national database of employment and work placement opportunities for language graduates in Ireland and abroad.**
- 78. Ensure that the main recommendations in relation to the role that Irish employers may play of the Expert group's report<sup>58</sup> and the 'Languages for Jobs' report<sup>59</sup> are taken into consideration when designing the Strategy.**
- 79. Ensure that the statements from the Irish business community in the Goethe Institut's report brochure 'German – A Language of Opportunity' are taken into consideration.<sup>60</sup>**

## 8. Other Comments

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

While the consultation on the long-awaited Languages in Education Strategy is very welcome, it is most disheartening that the Strategy excludes from the outset both the pre-school and primary sectors. This is despite several references in the Framework document itself to Ireland's policy commitments as a member state of the European Union to the Lisbon Strategy and the Barcelona Agreement as well as to the many indigenous Irish reports, including the Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the RIA<sup>61</sup> report on the subject of language learning in Ireland, and the DES' own report published on this topic in conjunction with the Council of Europe in 2008, all of which refer explicitly to the need to foster language mastery in at least two additional languages in children from a very young age.<sup>62</sup>

The approximately 550 schools involved in MLPSI prior to its closure in 2012 all offered Irish and migrant children alike the opportunity to learn a modern language as part of their primary education. This has been and can be done. We simply need the political vision and commitment now to ensure that another generation of children does not miss out on this vital opportunity to acquire an interest in and love of languages and cultures from an early age. Fundamentally, this is eminently compatible with the DES' priorities of promoting literacy in our own national languages.

It is also most regrettable that this Framework does not consider English and Irish in a context where, for many children, these languages are in fact foreign languages. This, combined with the cumulative nature of language acquisition, calls for an integrated approach to language provision in Ireland under the proposed Strategy. As pointed out above, language skills build on one another; developing literacy in one's L1(s), be that English, Irish or (an)other language(s), is a crucial first

<sup>58</sup> Forfás, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally, accessible on [www.skillsireland.ie](http://www.skillsireland.ie)

<sup>59</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/languages-growth-jobs\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/languages-growth-jobs_en.htm)

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ie/en/dub/lrn/ger.html>

<sup>61</sup> [http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=92](http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=92)

<sup>62</sup> Link to more Irish reports:

[http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=80](http://www.languagesinireland.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=80)

step, but not sufficient to achieve plurilingualism and the multilingual Ireland the Framework document envisions, for all of the reasons outlined in the Introductory section. An inclusive language strategy is thus required not only at national, but also at local school level and throughout the entire education sector, from pre-school to further education. In fact, a language strategy cannot be confined to the education sector but must be implemented in the wider society. We attach particular importance to the adoption of the CEFR for describing/assessing language skills, and of the ELP/Europass components for a reevaluation of language skills away from the normative, monolingual, native-speaker view.

The recommendations from the ‘Languages for Jobs’ report, the ‘Forfás Expert’ report and the EU Commission website on language policy<sup>63</sup> should be taken into consideration in the forthcoming languages strategy.

Finally, while we wish to stress that we find the development of a language strategy a positive step by the DES, we have a number of concerns. We found that the consultation process was not sufficiently or clearly outlined. We wish to enquire as to what the next stage of consultation will be. We expect that there may be a second consultation process, including, for example, the opportunity to meet with policymakers in order to further discuss our submission. In addition, we believe that the consultation was not advertised widely enough. From anecdotal evidence, it has become clear that several colleagues across various sectors have not been made aware of this consultation process. It behoves the DES to advertise any follow-up consultation far more broadly than to date.

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
AHECS	Association of Higher Education Careers Services
CALL	Computer Aided Language Learning
CILT	National Centre for Languages (UK)
CLIL	Content Language Integrated Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECML	European Centre of Modern Languages
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EDL	European Day of Languages
EFL	English as a foreign Language
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Forfás	Ireland’s Policy Advisory Board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation.
FTA, ATS, ATI, GDI	Subject Associations for French, Spanish, Italian and German teachers respectively
GTI Ireland	Official careers publishing partner of the

<sup>63</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/language-policy/index_en.htm)

	Association of Higher Education Careers Services
HEA	Higher Educational Authority
HEI	Higher Educational Institutes
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IoTs	Institutes of Technology
ITÉ	Institúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
JCSA	Junior Cycle Student Award
L1	Native language(s)
L2	Second and foreign language(s)
LC	Leaving Certificate
LLAIS	Language Awareness Infrastructure Support Service
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NDLP	Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OVFL	One Voice for Languages
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SAP	Systems, Applications & Products in Data Processing – a German multinational software corporation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Thank you for taking the time to complete this template. Your feedback will help to inform the development of the Foreign Languages in Education Strategy

Please email this template to [foreignlanguages@education.gov.ie](mailto:foreignlanguages@education.gov.ie) , or post it to: Tim O’Keeffe, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1