

WISH LIST FROM PANELISTS



Tony Donohoe

Head of Education and Social Policy, IBEC

Agree a strategy that emphasises an **integrated approach to language acquisition** extending to all levels of the education system and across all modern languages, including Irish.



Tanya Flanagan

One Voice for Languages (OVFL) Communications Officer and Second Level Representative, Languages Teacher in St. Farnan's Post-Primary School

Strategy can be provided cost efficiently due to the supply of excellent linguists and educators, and past experience of pilots. **Awareness raising** (e.g. YES approach, media campaign) would help reinforce the message **that language learning matters**.



Philippe Milloux

Director of Alliance française de Dublin and Chief Representative of Alliance française in Ireland

Aim higher and deliver better. Language is for life, not just for classrooms! Ireland's strategy must be premised on a **recognition of Ireland's strengths**, notably Irish people's love and experience of travel, capacity to 'bounce back' and communicate well. A political framework can help capitalise on these strengths with the **necessary leadership**.



Karen Ruddock

National Coordinator at Post Primary Languages Initiative

Run a **media campaign** that emphasises the value of a multilingual society for all sectors since the key to sustaining change is for **people to deem it necessary**. **Parents need to know they can bring about change** whether at school board, Parents Council or political lobbying levels. There is some great work already being done in the area of foreign languages in education and going forward, this can be built on.



Joanna Tuffy, T.D.

Chairperson of Dáil Committee on Education and Social Protection

Link the consultations and NCCA work on teaching modern languages. To be successful, **include all stakeholders** and identify **realistic goals** and **better methods** for effective teaching. **Sparking students' interest** and sustaining motivation is key to sustainable change.



Seánai Kiely

LL.B (ling. Germ) Candidate, Trinity College Dublin, Past participant on an EIL Study Abroad programme

Active learning and **experiential learning** are key to appreciating a language as both reflective of and a means of understanding that society and yourself. Three months in another country can facilitate more learning and personal development than 3 years in class. Language should never be divorced from its **cultural, practical context**.



TOUGH QUESTIONS WERE RAISED

- ▶ Such was the consensus at the Panel Discussion that the real question became: **Why the lack of political will on implementing a Strategy before this?**
- ▶ **Why the exclusion of the pre-school and primary sector** from the framework, given the insistence at European level that these formative years are critical to language development and given the government's commitment to an Early Years Strategy, a new Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs, and concern over declining numbers taking languages at second-level?
- ▶ **Why the reference to resources and curriculum overload** when previous initiatives proved cost effective, and when implementation of this Strategy ought to be seen as an investment anyway? Could school networks help to facilitate choice through pooling resources or young graduates?
- ▶ **Should the Department of Education specify core languages** that should be offered or is this to be governed by demand and supply at a school level? If Chinese, Brazilian, Russian and Indian are deemed the new languages of commerce, then what of the rise of Africa and its associated use of French? And what of the importance of Arabic for inter-cultural understanding?
- ▶ **How can a level playing field be attained between private and DEIS schools?** Or between Educate Together/VEC schools and denominational schools when it comes to language provision and curriculum overload concerns, given the different approaches to religious instruction?
- ▶ **Is Ireland no different to other Anglophone countries or is it unique** in having politically sensitive or costly implications? What can be learned from other jurisdictions? Is it controversial to include Irish in a Languages Strategy or to exclude it? And why, who decides?
- ▶ **How can an integrated approach to literacy and language be achieved** and a duplication of resources avoided, if Irish and English are to be considered in separate, parallel processes and strategies? How can joined up thinking be facilitated?
- ▶ **Should a further layer of bi-lingual schooling be offered** as one of the panelists suggested (Karen Ruddock) or would this contribute to further elitism and segregation in an already segregated system (Joanna Tuffy, TD queried)?
- ▶ **How can immersion and short courses be adequately accommodated** in DEIS schools or smaller rural schools that have resource and socioeconomic challenges?
- ▶ **How is the final Strategy and Action Plan to be monitored?** Which Department will drive it? How will the educational and business imperatives be reconciled?

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Responding to the 'Framework for Consultation on a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy for Ireland'

A Strategy and Action Plan are priceless in providing strategic vision and realistic targets to incentivise learning and sustain motivation. The success of both will depend on their effective and timely implementation. The time is now, lest Ireland fall further behind with all its costs.



THE FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION ON A FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION STRATEGY RESPONSE FROM PARTICIPANTS AT THE EIL PANEL DISCUSSION, HELD ON 22 October 2014 AT ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IRELAND



Both the Framework Document and Consultation process were warmly welcomed in principle and considered timely. Numerous reasons were cited as to why this matters, notably the **intrinsic value of education** for the individual and society; the **cultural understanding** fostered; the **socio-economic benefits** that accrue; and the **capacity of people** to better compete, adapt to change, exert influence, **be empowered** and **sustain success and development** in a globalised world.

Language acquisition is not merely a means of educating citizens or future employees for opportunities abroad or within the multinational sector. Rather it is **a vital skill-set** required to enhance the cultural and educational opportunities of all communities, affording the individual and businesses, disadvantaged or advantaged, SME or MNC, **increased opportunities to trade, travel and interact** with those beyond our borders and within, facilitating **life-long learning** and **personal development**, and providing a **strong social justice dividend** also, if facilitated thoughtfully. (Kevin Humphreys TD Minister of State, 2014; Kevin Hickey Director of EIL, 2014).

Irish companies will only gain a competitive edge and successfully enter new markets with the help of other languages. Better language skills are needed wherever companies interact with service providers and suppliers, as well as in sales and marketing. This is a key issue in attracting foreign direct investment and building an indigenous exporting sector. (Tony Donohoe, IBEC, 2014)

Active methodologies and experiential learning were highly recommended anecdotally and empirically, as these serve to spark the students' interests and imaginations, convincing them of the

relevance of the language to 'real life' situations and providing them with useful vocabulary with which to build their confidence at communicating. Language is learned best within its appropriate cultural and literary heritage (Edward DeBúrca, Google, 2014) and through policy-makers, parents and teachers supporting the **desirability** to learn the language and the **necessity** to continue to learn beyond the classroom. (Seánaí Kiely, EIL & TCD Student, 2014)

The three core themes to emerge could be summarised as follows:



Overall the framework offers a **"golden opportunity to re-evaluate this key aspect of education and sustainable development"** and to do so within the context of a European framework that deems the primary years critical (T. Flanagan, 2014) and incorporates the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) benchmarking system** with its six levels of proficiency to aid evaluation. (F.Rantz & K.Ruddock, Post Primary Languages Initiative, 2014)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by compelling evidence, the EIL Panel Discussion recommended the following:

- ▶ A **clear strategy**, complemented by a detailed **Action Plan** with short, medium and long-term goals, assessed regularly and informed by a holistic understanding of the role of language in cultural and identity formation as well as core skills development.
 - ▶ **Drop the term 'foreign'** in the framework. It is superfluous and counterproductive to efforts aimed at encouraging more citizens to learn languages as normal and doable.
 - ▶ Include the Pre-School and Primary Sectors in the Strategy. **Early intervention** offers the best opportunity to embed language skills and opportunities as evidenced in numerous studies and backed by neuroscience (plasticity of the brain) and parental demand. Pre-schools should be encouraged to offer 'tasters' of different languages, capitalising on the 'heritage' languages now present in Ireland via the *Aistear* and *Síolta* guidelines.
 - ▶ Many hundreds of primary schools have shown through their involvement in the MLPSI that not only can they provide dedicated modern language time but they can also **embed language acquisition in other subjects**, thus reducing the very resource and curriculum constraints cited in the Framework document as reasons for their exclusion and supporting the work of the NCCA to shift the education system from content obsession to skills focus (5 core skills being: information processing, critical thinking, communication, working together and personal effectiveness/development).
 - ▶ Build on the lessons learned from the pilot language programmes with a view to facilitating **inter-school and inter-country collaboration**. (Harris & O'Leary, MLPSI, 2014)
 - ▶ Combine short language courses of the type envisaged in the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA) reforms with **opportunities for immersion** in summer camps, trips abroad and access to Third Level.
 - ▶ Provide targeted language supports to DEIS schools for students acquiring additional
- languages e.g. subsidised school trips, summer language camps.
- ▶ Incorporate the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**, a language benchmarking system, based on a communicative definition of language which is defined through 'can-do descriptors', (i.e. 'what I can do with/in the language') with its six levels of proficiency for each language skill (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and realistic targets for exit points from the education system (e.g. Level B2 for 14 countries, Level C for Luxembourg). (See the Eurydice 2012 report, recommended by K Ruddock & F Rantz, 2014)
 - ▶ **Avoid exam dominance** and instead learn from the CEFR benchmarking system for assessing competences at entry and exit points: Primary, JCSA, Leaving Cert and Third Level.
 - ▶ At Third Level, **upskill all language teachers in active methodologies and ICT**, and offer practical language modules to achieve so-called 'partial competences' for students in different disciplines, particularly for students in Tourism, Business and Service courses. (Chris Mulhall, P. Milloux, One Voice for Languages, Frederique Rantz, PPLI)
 - ▶ Draw on the **wealth of talent and skills** among teachers, existence of school networks (e.g. global in case of some), and value of investing in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at all levels e.g. affording opportunities to young graduates to aid schools with their language support.
 - ▶ Consider a **credit system** for students and public servants to incentivise such learning.
 - ▶ Mount a multi-platform **media campaign** to inspire citizens to learn languages.
 - ▶ Consider including the teaching of **Irish and English in this Strategy** or at least facilitate cross-fertilisation of ideas at joint consultation conferences, implementation phase and evaluation stages at Oireachtas (avoid Luas disjointed lines fiasco: C. Mulhall 2014).



SNAPSHOT SOLUTIONS

Facilitating Necessity – the mother of language acquisition:

- Early intervention key to investment
- Life-long learning ideal outcome (2002 Barcelona)
- Upskill teachers through CPD
- ICT learning and active methods vital
- Incentivise language learning via credits
- Target DEIS for immersion opportunities
- Fund/Co-sponsor secondary school exchange programme, such as a Junior Erasmus (EIL)
- Encourage extra-curricular activities (e.g. debates)
- Support inter-cultural links with Alliance française, Goethe Institute etc.
- Embed schools in language communities
- Reward/credit key sectors who learn languages (e.g. tourism)

Facilitating Desirability:

- Expose students to culture at a young age
- Focus on skills, active, real world scenarios
- Mount multi-platform media campaign
- Public broadcast Baby Einstein/Sesame Street
- Avoid exam dominance
- Enhance Career Guidance
- Empower parents through joint learning sessions
- Generate political will



EIL Intercultural Learning Offers:

- Study Abroad
- Volunteer Abroad
- Language Training
- Travel Awards
- Group Educational Programmes
- Cultural Immersion Activities