

## Feedback by OVFL on Seán's proposals [language policy and LC results]

June 2015

- OVFL would caution against the proposed classification and associated ranking of particular languages as "higher" priority than others since it conveys the idea that community languages are of lesser status. Unfortunately, this idea is often shared by speakers of these languages. Instead, we would argue for an inclusive approach that values **all** languages, **all** language learning, and **all** levels of language proficiency.
- The Government's educational and economic strategy is only one place for languages; industry certainly does need languages and one of our goals should be to make Irish graduates employable while staying in Europe, but we also have to acknowledge that there are further-reaching cognitive, social and humanist benefits for supporting language learning across the lifespan.
- Thus, it is important to see the wider picture for language in society and education: language learning should be "normal" for everybody and it needs to be considered at all stages of the lifespan, in education and beyond (early language learning - we are the only EU country without the opportunity to learn modern languages at primary level; continuous learning of languages; benefits of plurilingualism).
- In education in particular, there is a need for a better understanding of language teaching and learning, and the benefits of plurilingualism.
- Consequently, the DES should consider a cross-curriculum approach for languages. This means an approach that includes **all** curricular languages.
- In order to implement this approach, these elements need to be embedded both in teacher training at pre-service level, and the continual professional development of in-service teachers.
- We agree with the urgent need to raise awareness about the CEFR, with the Government, the education sector, industry and the general public. For example, disappointingly, the recent "Employer Survey" used an American grading system. OVFL have already highlighted the need for CEFR awareness in the submission to the DES' call on Language Strategy.
- In this endeavour, it needs to be borne in mind that the CEFR is not an accreditation but a descriptive system allowing the "benchmarking" of language proficiency.
- Therefore, there is no need, nor would it be practically possible, for an ETB to "convert" LC qualifications to CEFR levels. However, the LC, and the grades within it, need to be benchmarked to the CEFR.
- Concerning a joint awareness-raising bid by OVFL/IBEC, we agreed that suggestions by two voices to the DES would be stronger than one. But OVFL will provide its support for a document issuing from IBEC.

- In relation to the common first year, OVFL is not against the initiative per se (though it is seen with some concern in many circles), but feels that language learning should be supported wherever possible, and in whichever way. Currently, there are already other ways in which the learning of languages at third level has been broadened, for example through broad curriculum modules.
- Regarding the Gaeltacht proposal, we do welcome the inclusion of L1 learners in the consideration of language learning. The rigid classification into L1 and L2 is becoming increasingly problematic, as more children learn two languages during childhood (some from birth), and as migrant/heritage children acquire the language of the host community, and possibly don't develop further or attrite in their L1(s). In other words, L1 proficiency is far from being a homogenous entity. There are also systematic differences between mono- and bi-/multilinguals in the way they use a particular language. But language learning should be normal and fun for everyone, whether it's L1, L1.5, L2 etc. With particular regard to the Gaeltacht, this aim could be achieved by offering combined summer camps/school exchanges for children with L1 and L2 Irish, which would also support the idea that high proficiency in an endangered language is possible.
- To return to our early points, the economic benefits of Irish do need to continue to be highlighted, but also those of a second language as a stepping stone for plurilingualism.