

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT



Review of Languages
in Post-Primary Education

Report of the First Phase of the Review

APRIL 2005

Section 1: Introduction

Language is so central to social, economic and political structures and to how they are sustained, that its very centrality can go unnoticed. It is so connected to all aspects of life and life chances in society that it can seem a difficult task to disentangle it from its context. Consequently, we can tend towards the view that language as it manifests itself in education, in our social lives and in our economic relations has not been subject to construction or predetermination in any way. It has fallen the way it has naturally because it is such an intrinsic, natural part of our lives.

This is a naïve view. In education, as in wider society, languages do not simply throw up questions of the when, where and how variety. They give rise to the questions of *why* have languages in the curriculum and to what level? What purposes should language curricula serve? These questions should be posed because in education, as in wider society, language policy and planning (or the lack of these) can result in language being a significant determinant of who has access to political power and economic resources and life chances and who does not: in other words who experiences the full meaning of citizenship and who does not.

Fifteen or so years ago the NCCA began work on the preparation of revised syllabuses for Irish and a number of modern languages. These syllabuses have been implemented at different stages and at intervening points since, both in the junior and senior cycles of post primary education. From the late 1980's onwards, syllabuses for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Irish were introduced; with a common syllabus framework being adopted in French, German, Italian and Spanish. More recently, syllabuses have also been prepared in Arabic, Japanese and Russian.

The central feature of these developments was a movement to a communicative approach to the teaching of languages that emphasised language usage over the analytical dimension of language learning. It was envisaged that this would lead to a

broadening of the methods and learning materials deployed, aimed at maximising opportunities for learners to use the target language for meaningful purposes both inside and outside the classroom. This shift was evident across all languages, including English, where a re-evaluation took place of the ideal balance to be achieved between creating language through communication and receiving language through literature.

In the case of Irish, the communicative approach to language teaching emphasised the linguistic norms of the Irish language speech community. This was an important development in forging a vital link between the language as taught in schools and the language as used in the Gaeltachtaí and Irish-using networks. The Irish syllabus while built on a communicative approach continued to incorporate elements of the more traditional syllabus with an emphasis on prescribed and unprescribed literary texts.

But while the revised language curricula have been the subject of continuing discussion and monitoring since their introduction, an overarching review of languages in the curriculum has not taken place since the early 1980s. During the intervening period concerns arose both within the committees and working groups of the NCCA and in more formal evaluations of language teaching (DES 2004) about the extent to which the aims of the syllabus revisions have been realised in modern languages and in English. Concerns also arose about the situation of Irish in schools and in society. Generally speaking, Irish has been treated in isolation from the debate on other languages. Notwithstanding sociolinguistic factors at play, the role, nature and outcome of learning of Irish has to be re-examined in the light of calls for a more integrated language curriculum (CEB 1987, Little 2003) and of the particular place of Irish in The Constitution and in the cultural life of Ireland. These concerns pointed to the need for an extensive review of languages in post-primary education.

The ever-increasing pace and influence of globalisation, Ireland's membership of the European Union and rising levels of immigration of EU and non-EU nationals

provided further reasons for a review of languages. Globalisation is the defining movement of the early 21st century. It is only beginning to have an impact on education. In schooling, its impact is most acutely felt in the discussion of what languages and whose language is included in curricula. Further and related areas to be considered as part of the review included: the question of plurilingualism; of European policy and its implications for national policy on languages; of consumer demand, vocational demands and trends. Plurilingualism, in particular, is seen not only as a means of developing better communication, but also as a means of developing intercultural sensitivity and as an intrinsic component of democratic citizenship.

Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education

The first phase of the review of languages commenced in late 2003. It was agreed that the review should incorporate all languages – English, Irish and modern languages, as an important dimension of the review is the question of integration and the extent to which languages are linked and can be viewed as sharing a common space in the curriculum. The first phase included the following elements:

- Publication of a background discussion paper
- A survey on languages in the curriculum
- A number of invitational seminars
- Consultation with NCCA course committees for languages
- A series of meetings with schools in the Gaeltachtaí
- A call for submissions.

It commenced with the launch of the publication *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a Discussion Paper* (2003)¹. The paper was commissioned by the NCCA and was written by Professor David Little of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies in Trinity College, Dublin. In general terms, the paper addressed overarching issues related to language provision and provided a basis for debate about the situation of language policy, language provision and language

¹ Hereinafter referred to as the discussion paper.

teaching and learning, within schools and within the education system. In more specific terms, the paper reviewed the current provision for languages in the post-primary curriculum and addressed the challenges posed for languages in education by the changing language situation in Ireland, by internationalisation and Ireland's membership of Europe, by the provision of tools for the development of language education from the Council of Europe and by current trends emerging from evaluation of and research into language teaching.

The paper was critical of the lack of an overarching language policy in Ireland. It was supportive of the idea of an integrated language curriculum and suggested that it had yet to be realised in post-primary education. It voiced concern at the levels of proficiency being achieved in Irish and suggested that the introduction of separate syllabuses aimed at native and non-native speakers of the language might represent a starting point for improving proficiency. It suggested that current assessment of languages in the certificate examinations was having a negative impact on teaching and learning in language classrooms, particularly in terms of limiting use of the target language and encouraging pre-scripted rehearsal for oral assessments. Finally, it offered the view that the lack of policy and an integrated language curriculum rendered decision taking in relation to managing the diversification of language curricula impossible.

The first phase of the review presented a range of opportunities for those with an interest in languages in post-primary schools to consider and respond to the discussion paper. The discussion paper was issued to all post-primary schools in early 2004. A *Survey on Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum* was developed and circulated with the paper. Principals and language teachers were invited to respond to the survey. They were also asked to bring it to the attention of the wider school community, from whom responses were also welcome. The survey was also available for completion on-line via the NCCA website. There were approximately 280 responses to the survey. A majority of the respondents were teachers (44%) but

parents (24%) and school principals (17%) were also well represented. A report of the findings of the survey was prepared and is available on the NCCA website.

The survey focused on the issues presented by the discussion paper and sought the views of respondents in relation to proposals for addressing these issues. Section One of the survey was open for completion by all. Section Two was completed by Principals and post-primary teachers only, drawing on their experience of languages in post-primary education. The survey was generalised in nature, its purpose being to provide an informal snapshot of the views of those who responded. For this reason, the findings have been treated with due caution and do not carry weight beyond their worth in this report of the first phase of the review.

The discussion paper was considered at two invitational seminars held in late 2003 and early 2004. Representatives of students, parents, teachers, school management, subject associations, further and higher education, the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission were involved in addition to representatives of language agencies and experts in the field of language education. At the first seminar, inputs on the issues presented by the paper were offered by Professor David Little, by Mr. Joe Sheils, Head of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, by Dr. Pádraig Ó Riagáin (ITÉ) and Ms. Caroline Nash of IBEC. The second seminar was discussion based. Those participating were issued with questions arising from the discussion paper and the first seminar in advance. The questions were grouped around four themes: Policy; An Integrated Language Curriculum; Irish; The European Dimension. A brief record of the seminars was prepared and is available on the NCCA website.

In September 2004 a further seminar involving the NCCA course committees for Irish, English and modern languages was convened. This seminar considered the discussion paper, the findings of the survey, the discussions that had taken place at the invitational seminars and the findings of a recently published report of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science *Inspection of Modern*

Languages: Observations and Issues (2004). A record of this seminar was also prepared and is available on the NCCA website. In addition, as part of the review, the discussion paper and the review of languages have been discussed at Council meetings, at meetings of the overarching NCCA Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle Committees and at meetings of Gaeltacht schools convened by the NCCA in collaboration with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

Finally, submissions from individuals and organisations on the issues raised in the review were sought. To date, seven submissions have been received from a variety of sources including school management bodies, Irish Language organisations, language agencies and projects.

Report of the First Phase of the Review

As envisaged at the outset, the various elements of the first phase of the review have given rise to significant discussion on:

- The need for a language policy and what it would comprise
- An integrated language curriculum
- Irish as a mother tongue and as a second language
- Ways of achieving greater diversity in the languages curriculum
- Patterns and practices in language teaching and learning
- Assessment of learning and proficiency in languages
- The extent of engagement with the Common European Framework for Languages and the European Languages Portfolio.

This report offers a synthesis of the views and observations that emerged during the first phase of the review. The various elements of the first phase of review were undertaken with a view to:

- Initiating discussion on languages in post-primary education
- Eliciting views and observations from across the full spectrum of those involved in language education

- Identifying a range of issues to be addressed.

As a consequence, this report does not contain ‘findings’ of the review of languages in post-primary education but an account of the discourse associated with the first phase of review. It synthesises views, observations and perspectives from the areas of English, Irish and modern languages rather than arriving at definitive findings. Nonetheless the issues that the discourse gave rise to are of a magnitude that requires addressing and the final section of the report suggests ways in which these issues could be addressed in a second phase of review.

The report cannot be read in isolation from the original discussion paper: the latter should be viewed as a companion paper to the report. This is reflective of the fact that throughout the first phase of the review broad agreement emerged with the general thrust of the discussion paper. While particular views expressed in the discussion paper were contested and the solutions to the issues raised by the paper were not universally agreed, there was little contestation surrounding the naming of the issues themselves and the need to see those issues addressed through the development of policy and related initiatives.

Commencing with this introduction, the report proceeds in Section 2 to set out the views and observations that emerged on the question of a policy for languages in education. This section of the report is framed within the context of an emerging initiative of the Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, to develop a Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland as a potential precursor to a fully-fledged policy on languages in education. Section 3 outlines, in subdivisions for English, Irish and modern languages, the main views and observations of the first phase of review on the central issues of integration, diversification and teaching and learning. Section 4 considers the extent to which the observations made and issues identified can be addressed through engagement with developments surrounding two tools developed by the Council of Europe to support teaching and learning in languages: the Common European Framework for

Languages and the European Languages Portfolio. The final section of the report summarises important aspects of the first phase of the review and sets out recommendations for the second phase.

Section 2: Language Policy

The discussion paper adopted a clear starting point in relation to the question of language policy in Ireland. It argued that if a policy on languages in education and society currently existed, it was an implicit rather than explicit policy. There was widespread support for this view in the review. The particular modern languages that have recently been included as Leaving Certificate subjects, the uptake of language subjects to meet matriculation requirements, the compulsory status of Irish within the post-primary curriculum, the bonus marks awarded for answering examination questions through Irish, the regulations surrounding exemptions from the study of Irish, the relative absence of English from discussions about languages in the curriculum: all these factors seem to indicate that there is an implicit policy at play. But there was strong support in the review for a policy to be made explicit: for the development and agreement of a policy on languages in education. There was also recognition that the remit of the NCCA in curriculum and assessment generally and in reviewing languages in post-primary education more specifically, did not extend to this task. Nonetheless, it was felt that the review could highlight some of the areas which a policy on languages in education should be concerned with.

In the course of the review the first steps towards the development of such a policy were taken. The Department of Education and Science has decided to commence the process of developing a policy on languages in education by drawing on the language expertise of the Council of Europe to provide a country profile of languages in education in Ireland. The latter, to be completed in 2005, will form the basis for the development of a policy on languages in education. As a consequence, this section of the report presents a brief commentary on some of the elements or areas that a future policy on languages in education would need to address.

Languages in society and languages in education

The opening paragraph of this section makes a distinction between policy on languages in education and policy on languages in society. The distinction is made

with a view to establishing that, at the very least, a policy on languages in education will be framed and influenced by the wider (implicit or explicit) policy on languages in society. The most obvious example of this is the Irish language. Its status as the national language is enshrined in the Irish Constitution. It follows that a policy on languages in education must take account of this. Recently adopted equality legislation in Ireland would also seem to have implications, for example, for the recognition of Irish Sign Language. But there is less clarity surrounding the implications of other aspects of languages in society and the influence they would have on the development of a policy on languages in education. Examples of these, cited at the invitational seminars convened as part of the review, include the obligation our increasing integration with Europe carries in terms of the inclusion and uptake of modern European languages in the curriculum and the extent to which, with increasing levels of immigration, the languages of newcomers will be accommodated by the State.

For the reasons outlined above, a policy on languages in education cannot be confined to matters strictly educational and will at least be influenced by wider developments in relation to language in society. This is an important point as many of the ‘solutions’ to certain ‘problems’ of languages in education are not internal to education. They relate to broader issues of languages in society.

Diversification of languages

A policy on languages in education must establish a clear view on diversification. The views emerging from the review point to the strong case, in the context of the recent enactment of education and equality-related legislation, for establishing provision, on an optional basis, for Irish Sign Language in the curriculum. A similar case can be made for the language of the Traveller community, Cant/Shelta, but here the nature of the language and its role in that community may argue for a phase of further consultation on how best the language can be catered for in education.

As suggested earlier, the issue of the recognition and provision of languages of newcomers must be determined in the broader context of a policy on languages in society. However, the identification and establishment of a range of criteria for the inclusion/exclusion of the study of any language on the curriculum represents an important starting point in this matter. In the course of the review, many participants expressed frustration with the lack of clarity surrounding the rationale for including some languages on the curriculum and excluding others. Why was Russian introduced and not Polish? Why was Japanese included when Chinese was not? Participants suggested that criteria should be identified and agreed. Some criteria that might be considered in this context include

- The contribution inclusion of the language makes to social inclusion
- The contribution it makes to a general education, to broader cultural awareness and diversification
- The contribution to economic development
- The obligations and responsibilities that can arise, for example, from Ireland's membership of the European Union or from its status as a signatory to international agreements and conventions
- The demand (number of people/requests) for the inclusion of a language
- The practicalities and logistical factors involved, including costs, availability of teachers, capacity of schools etc.

There may also be other criteria. In addition, an important question is the order of priority to be placed on such criteria and the weighting to be attached to such criteria in decision-making processes. However, on the basis of views emerging in the review, what appears to be incontrovertible is the need for such criteria to be agreed as part of a larger policy on languages in education. This need is drawn into sharp relief by the scale of requests received by the NCCA over the past year for the inclusion of Chinese (Mandarin) as an optional subject in the Leaving Certificate.

Plurilingualism

Such a policy should also establish a position on plurilingualism as it is defined and advocated in language policies and developments associated with the European Union and the Council of Europe. Plurilingualism acknowledges that a learner may have different competences and be able to perform tasks at different levels (related to the Common European Framework) in different languages. In other words, advocacy of plurilingualism involves promoting the idea that learners can study different languages to different levels of competence at different points in their lives. This approach to languages contributes towards linguistic tolerance and intercultural competence. Creating a culture of plurilingualism can assist in addressing the public perception of values/stereotypes about different languages and what constitutes successful learning. A policy on languages in education should clarify its stance on plurilingualism and the extent to which it should underpin provision of opportunities to learn languages at different stages of the learner's life.

Agreeing a position in relation to plurilingualism involves, at least in part, reiterating the unique contribution that learning languages makes to the education and lives of learners. The latter should also be a feature of a policy on languages in education.

Integration, proficiency and policy development

There are at least three other areas that should feature in a policy on languages in education. First, the policy should offer some insights, at a general level, as to how integrated a language curriculum should be. It should provide the tramlines that establish the connections to be made between Irish, English and modern languages in the curriculum. Should the approach towards teaching and learning within these subjects be fully integrated, adopting a common framework, or should the relative status of a language determine the extent to which it can be integrated?

Second, the policy should also articulate how achievement and proficiency in the area of languages is to be monitored and evaluated. The views from participants in the course of the review varied in this context. Some felt that the existing State

examinations offered a reliable assessment of achievement while others felt that in addition, a more objective test would provide a more reliable indication of learner proficiency. Attention was also drawn to the potential uses of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the context of establishing levels of proficiency in learning achievement.

The process for developing a policy on languages in education should be a transparent one, clarifying how policy on languages and provision of languages in education will be progressed. For example, it should offer its views on the development of policies in relation to languages in education, its approach to consultation on those ideas and the testing of those ideas through vehicles such as pilot projects. In this context, the policy would also identify the roles and remits of the various State agencies involved in different aspects of languages in education: curriculum development, monitoring, research and evaluation, implementation etc.

Summary / Recommendations

An explicit policy on languages in education should be developed that takes account of the interaction between languages in education and language in society. It should establish policy on diversification of languages, in particular identifying the criteria for including or discontinuing languages in the curriculum. It should clarify how Irish Sign Language is to be provided for and how further consultation on provision for Cant/Shelta should be progressed. In addition it should establish policy on plurilingualism, integration and assessing attainment in languages. The recent initiative of the Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, to develop a Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland should be informed by the observations on language policy emerging from the first phase of the review.

Section 3: Languages – Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy

This section outlines the main findings of the first phase of the review. The findings cover issues related to the areas of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, with particular attention paid to questions of integration, diversification and teaching and learning in language classrooms. The section is divided into three sub-sections for English, Irish and modern languages. Although the areas under discussion are common to each and some of the findings and recommendations similar, it was considered useful that a clear account of the findings related to the various languages was offered.

English

This part of the report looks at the place of English in a general policy on language teaching in schools, the role of English in an integrated language curriculum, and recommendations for a more explicit focus on language awareness and grammar in teaching and assessment. It recommends a pilot study to examine these issues. In addition, it touches on some other issues relating to English, which were raised during the course of the review to date.

Languages in the curriculum

The discussion paper takes as its starting point the definition of language in the *Report of the Board of Studies for Languages*

Language is

- *The chief means by which we think – all language activities, in whatever language, are exercises in thinking*
- *The vehicle through which knowledge is acquired and organised*
- *The chief means of interpersonal communication*
- *A central factor in the growth of the learner's personality*
- *One of the chief means by which societies and cultures define and organise themselves and by which culture is transmitted within and across societies and cultures.*

(CEB 1987)

The discussion paper notes that this definition is

the basis for the report's argument that as a matter of policy 'language' should constitute a key curriculum area, and that the relationship between first, second and foreign language learning should be made explicit not just in the curriculum but in classroom practice. (Little 2003)

That is to say that the language curriculum should be an integrated one. The idea of an integrated language curriculum rests essentially on two arguments

- That education systems have a responsibility to develop learners' skills in their mother tongue and to teach at least one additional language as a means of gaining access to other cultures, and to give an awareness of language in general as a rule-governed system of communication.
- That languages, including mother tongue, should be taught in relation to one another so that learners develop a sense of their plurilingual identity.

In its executive summary the discussion paper asserts, "we do not have an integrated language curriculum, but a series of language curricula that are largely independent of one another. Arguably this leads to an impoverished educational experience; it certainly means that curriculum planning is haphazard and piecemeal." Essentially, the discussion paper advocates the following

- That there would be a general policy on language teaching in schools
- That this policy would reflect a greater level of integration between languages, including English
- That language awareness would be explicitly taught and formally assessed in all languages, including English.

General policy on language teaching in schools

A general policy on language teaching in schools would address itself to matters such as the languages offered by each school, decisions on teacher allocation, the language options to be made available to students, and how integrated the languages

curriculum should be. In this context the discussion paper proposes that an integrated language curriculum would foster greater levels of language awareness in learners through emphasis on the multiple points of contact between the languages they learn. Likewise, some contributors to the invitational seminars expressed the view that explicit teaching of language awareness and common approaches to the teaching of grammar across the languages are, in themselves, significant indicators of the presence of an integrated language curriculum.

As outlined in Section 2 of this report, the view that has been supported in the review to date is that the policy on languages in education is an implicit one. This is reflected in the responses of language teachers to questions on this area in the survey. A majority of teacher respondents (55%) were of the view that there was a general policy on language teaching in their schools. When the question was whether teachers of English would have discussed language teaching with teachers of modern or 'other' languages the rate of positive response dropped to 38%. A similar response was given when teachers were asked whether 'non-language' teachers took some responsibility for the teaching of languages. When the question posed was whether language teaching was essentially the responsibility of 'the individual language teacher' responses indicated a considerable level of agreement (65%). This pattern of response suggests that the general policy on language teaching and learning in schools could be viewed as extending merely to decisions about the languages offered and the associated timetable implications. Teachers of the various languages then work independently of each other. Just 40% of respondents agree that students in junior cycle would be able to make links across the languages they study. In general, this is reflective of a somewhat fragmented language space within the post-primary curriculum, which is at variance with the recommendation in the discussion document. Two respondents to the survey offered suggestions as to how a perceived lack in this area might be remedied:

There should be a department of Language, as in English High-Schools.

I would prefer there to be more interdisciplinary communication about this. I would like there to be some module on meta-linguistics or language awareness for junior/senior students. Any links they make are arbitrary and not always recognised/ encouraged by the teachers.

Currently, then, the language policy that can be said to apply in schools concerns itself with decisions taken about the languages offered to students and the consequent teacher deployment and timetabling implications of those decisions. English, in this context, emerges as a subject which is largely studied without explicit reference to other languages.

An integrated language curriculum

There is some integration in the work of the NCCA in this area where an overarching committee for modern languages implemented agreed approaches to syllabus, pedagogy, and assessment. There is a common syllabus framework for all modern languages, but this is not inclusive of English and Irish. The discussion paper called for a fundamental reconfiguring of curricular arrangements for languages so as to provide a context in which ‘language’ is allocated a fixed amount of ‘curriculum space’ that may be divided up in a variety of different ways, according to the different and developing needs and interests of students. Possible benefits of such a reorientation include the following:

- Learners are engaged in making explicit cross-language links, which supports all language learning
- There is greater consistency of practice in an area where different teachers make use of related terminology (grammatical terms and so on)
- L1 teaching provides learners with building blocks needed for learning other languages by paying more explicit attention to language awareness in the L1 classroom

- The integrated languages curriculum links with the Council of Europe language strategy, the aim of which is to promote a coherent, learner-centred approach to language teaching, integrating aims, content, learning experiences and assessment.

Respondents to the survey indicated a preference for the development of learner strategies and support for students in making links across the languages they study as measures to be considered in the promotion of a more fully integrated languages curriculum. The desirability of an integrated language curriculum was also discussed at the second invitational seminar, at which it was suggested that there was a need for an explicit language awareness dimension in the teaching and learning of all languages, including Irish and English, and that students should have a more detailed awareness of the workings of their mother tongue. The issue was highlighted again in the seminar for NCCA course committees when one committee report noted an observation by language teachers that students do not have an understanding of the grammar of their mother tongue, which poses a problem when another language and its associated grammar is introduced. The reports of other committees highlighted the likely benefits to all language learning of a clearer focus on language awareness in mother tongue although one committee felt that the term ‘integration’ might in itself be problematic and indicated a preference for ‘harmonisation’. The report of the committee for English on this occasion also drew attention to the desirability of greater harmonisation across the languages, while noting the demands that formal integration would make upon time and resources. Respondents to the survey indicated a preference for the development of learner strategies (59%) and support for students in making links across the languages they study (51%) as measures to be considered in the promotion of a more fully integrated languages curriculum.

The development of an integrated curriculum for languages and an increased emphasis on the teaching and assessment of language awareness would not, however, be without its challenges for teachers of all languages. These might include the following:

- The need to establish clarity as to the precise outcomes expected from integration across the languages curriculum
- The demands upon time and resources involved in managing the change
- Reservations which might exist about the formal teaching and assessment of grammar in the L1 context
- The absence of a formal department structure in Irish schools, which might facilitate integration across the languages
- The need for a clear plan as to how such integration might be managed.

This report recommends that, as a first step in the exploration of fuller integration of the languages curriculum, a pilot study should be carried out to test the impact of an integrated approach to language learning in English, Irish and modern languages. Virtually all learners will have received instruction in each of these languages throughout their primary and post-primary schooling. Consequently, relatively high levels of intuitive competence in either or both of these languages exist for the majority of Irish students. Similar studies have taken place in Wales following the launch of the Welsh Assembly Government's National Foreign Languages Strategy in 2002, which aims "to celebrate Wales as a bilingual country...and to raise awareness of the importance of modern foreign languages in general." In the context of a language environment not dissimilar to Ireland, the ACCAC publication, *Making the Link* (2003), highlights opportunities to develop language skills across languages, and shows how language links can be made.

Language awareness explicitly taught and assessed

Language awareness refers to the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language. Among other things, language awareness focuses on:

- How a language is learned (including strategies for learning language)
- Language as a linguistic system, and the functions of language
- Language growth and change, and language as communication.

Language awareness can be viewed as:

- A general good in all language acquisition (Carter 2003)
- A foundation for other language learning (White et al 2000)
- A way of bringing about consistency in pedagogy (Little 2003)
- A remedy against deteriorating literacy levels (Hawkins 1999)
- A means of enriching all language learning experiences. (Little 2003)

In its review of current provision of languages in post-primary schools, the discussion paper is critical not only of the lack of an integrated language curriculum in schools but also of the absence of explicit language awareness components in the syllabuses and examinations for English. It notes that the Junior Certificate syllabus for English is “oriented more to rhetoric than to grammar” and falls short of the “full-blooded language study envisaged” by the *Report of the Board of Studies for Languages* (CEB 1987). Regarding English in senior cycle, the discussion paper argues that while claiming to develop students’ “knowledge about the nature and uses of language and the variety of functions and genres in which it operates” (DES 1998), the Leaving Certificate syllabus for English “does not require students to be able to describe or analyse those textual features... linguistic analysis is neither stipulated nor examined (Little 2003).”

Language teachers responding to the online survey were strongly of the view (70% in agreement) that there should be a greater emphasis on grammar in the English classroom, qualified by strong agreement (85%) that the teaching of grammar should be embedded in a communicative context. In this sense the respondents indicate agreement with the view articulated in the revised Leaving Certificate English *Draft Guidelines for Teachers* that a focus on language awareness does not equate with what it terms a ‘traditional’ approach to the teaching of grammar.

The raising of language awareness does not imply a study of grammar in the traditional prescriptive way. The traditional ‘dry-as-dust’ approach to grammar, the decontextualised study of the rules of syntax and punctuation, sentence construction, parsing and analysis, has been shown to be detrimental to the development of fluency in the writing of composition and clearly would be equally so in an oral context. (NCCA 1998)

There would appear, then, to be little or no support for a ‘back to basics’ approach to the teaching of grammar. However, 78% of language teachers responding to the online survey felt that language awareness should be formally assessed in the State examinations, pointing to a conviction that this is currently not the case. Members of the course committee for junior cycle English, attending the seminar for course committees, made the following points:

- Shared approaches to the teaching of grammar across the language community in schools are to be welcomed
- While a review of the teaching of grammar would be welcomed in the context of greater integration in the language curriculum, pedagogy should not promote decontextualised grammar exercises but a graduated, integrated approach in which the teaching of grammar emerges through broadly communicative contexts.

The *Report of the Chief Examiner for Junior Certificate English* notes:

fundamental conventions of English - grammar, spelling, punctuation and syntax - are a cause for serious ongoing concern. Urgent attention needs to be directed to teaching and practising these basic elements of the language.

(DES 2003)

In the section of the report that offers advice to students, the importance of grammar is highlighted in the following manner:

Grammar matters. Take time to learn the rules of the language. Ask your teacher to explain points of grammar which puzzle you. English is a complex

and sophisticated language. Its grammar is extensive. For example, tenses can be used to great effect to add subtle clarity to your writing.” (DES 2003)

Although language awareness and critical literacy are central to the English syllabuses for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, the discussion paper views this aspect of the Junior Certificate syllabus as being closer to rhetoric than grammar, and notes that linguistic analysis is stipulated or examined in neither case. The syllabuses for English focus on the development of intuitive literacy in and for itself, as it were, although the Leaving Certificate guidelines for teachers contains a section entitled ‘Language Awareness/Knowledge About Language’ which states its purpose as follows:

developing in students a reflective capability about their own use of language and the language use of others. It is common for mother-tongue users to have little awareness of how they make meaning in their own language. In general they instinctively respond to a communicative need. This shows that they have internalised the rules and processes of making meaning in words. These rules and processes can be described as grammar; learning a mother tongue involves unconsciously internalising the grammar of a language. Developing language awareness means helping students to become conscious of what they already know about language and then attempting to build on that. (NCCA 1998)

The current pedagogical orientation and the assessment instruments pay attention almost exclusively to this instinctive and unconsciously internalised grammar of the language. Candidates in examinations are expected to demonstrate appropriate levels of fluency in usage but are rarely required to provide detailed reflective analysis of their own output, or that of others. Recent research conducted in the UK would suggest that formal teaching of grammar to L1 learners is likely to have a minimal impact where the intention is to improve the quality of the students’ written output. This research, however, did not seek to determine the benefits to learners of second

and other languages of a more explicit awareness of the grammar of their mother tongue.²

Respondents to the survey consistently expressed the desire for a stronger emphasis on grammar in language teaching, but at all times embedded in a communicative context. Similarly, participants in the invitational seminars recommended something of a re-appraisal of the place of grammar and language awareness in all language classrooms. At the seminar for NCCA course committees, members of the junior cycle course committee for English recommended that in a context where language teaching were to be integrated more fully, the approach to grammar as outlined in the Junior Certificate syllabus for English would need to be re-examined. This recommendation might be explored as part of the pilot study to investigate the relationships between the teaching of English, Irish and modern languages proposed earlier in this section.

Further issues of relevance to English

In the course of the review a number of other issues arose which, although they were not the subject of detailed discussion, merit inclusion in this report.

Some 65% of respondents to the survey expressed a preference for the existence of a separate syllabus for English as a second language. This figure resonates with support for the view that future language policy in Ireland should address “the language needs of newcomers to Ireland” (85%) and reflect Ireland’s “membership of the European Union” (95%). Consequently, this report recommends that the development of additional modules and resource materials to support access to the existing syllabuses for English should be considered.

² Research study conducted by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (2004) found that with regard to students’ accuracy and written composition the teaching of formal grammar (and its derivatives) are ineffective; and the teaching of sentence combining is one (of probably a number of) method(s) that is effective. See: http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?page=/reel/review_groups/english/review_seven_abstract.htm

Some 86% of respondents to the survey were broadly supportive of the view that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) should be exploited more in the teaching and learning of English.

Regarding the assessment of English in the State examinations, the view of approximately 70% of respondents to the survey was that the development of oral competence was not supported by the assessment arrangements. Significantly, the level of dissatisfaction was less pronounced in relation to the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Summary / Recommendations

Currently, English in the post-primary curriculum reflects an implicit languages policy in which languages are taught in isolation from each other. No formal structures exist to ensure further integration of language teaching. This report recommends that a pilot study be carried out to test the impact of an integrated approach to language learning in English and Irish and modern languages.

Language awareness, though recommended in the syllabus documentation for English, is neither formally taught nor examined for Junior or Leaving Certificate. It is recommended that exploration of this issue would be a feature of the pilot study mentioned above.

Finally, it is recommended that the development of additional modules and resource materials to support non-native speakers of English in accessing the existing L1 English syllabuses should be considered.

Irish

Introduction

In recent years there has been a greater alignment between Irish and the other modern languages at primary and at post-primary level. Now Irish as an L1 or L2 and the modern languages as L3 appear to have common pedagogic goals. Prior to curricular reform in the 1980s, Irish had been treated more or less in isolation from the other modern languages. In the past ten years, however, certain linkages and pathways have been forged.

The revision of the modern language syllabuses in the 1990s resulted in the adoption of a common syllabus framework for French, German, Spanish and Italian based on the pillars of basic communicative proficiency, language awareness and cultural awareness. A new syllabus for Irish was developed in the mid 1990s with similar components, but with an extra component of prescribed or unprescribed literary texts. This literature component was designed to expose students to different prose genres and to poetry texts. The study of literature has traditionally been accorded important emphasis in the Irish language curriculum for reasons of cultural and aesthetic enrichment. Within the communicative approach, literature provides an important opportunity to promote cultural awareness and to access examples of authentic language use.

Communicative language teaching in modern languages appeared to pave the way for a 'newer' approach to the teaching of Irish. The modes of assessment in Irish and modern languages comprise similar-type aural and oral components with substantial differentiation in writing tasks demanded in the case of Irish. There are areas of overlap, conceptually in the language learning experiences of learners, which could be exploited in a more integrated and more coherent pedagogical approach and in a more coherent delivery of curriculum.

Irish in the curriculum

For the majority of students learning Irish is their first experience of learning a second language. It is important, therefore, for subsequent language learning that this experience be a positive and empowering one. Students in Ireland who are exposed to learning a second language at an early stage in their education may have an advantage over students in predominantly monolingual contexts in acquisition of transferable metalinguistic knowledge and language learning skills. Such an advantage is not always exploited, however, with concern being expressed at the invitational seminars that a growing number of students are seeking exemptions from presenting in Irish in the State examinations³.

The study of Irish in the post-primary curriculum is associated with general educational aims that are valid in themselves independent of reference to learning the language for the utilitarian purposes of communication and for extending and developing bilingualism. Apart from the pragmatic dimension of learning language for the purpose of using it in the speech community (in the Gaeltacht or among networks of users or neo-speakers outside the Gaeltacht), the Irish language, according to the aims of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Irish syllabuses, is an important vehicle through which the cultural and linguistic heritage of students is mediated.

At present Irish is taught and studied in different contexts:

- Irish as an L1 to students, principally in the Gaeltachtaí, who have acquired it as a native language within the context of balanced bilingualism
- Irish as an L2/L1 within immersion or semi-immersion contexts, for example in Gaelcholáistí or Aonaid Ghaeilge
- Irish as an L2 in English-medium schools. The vast majority of students study Irish within this context.

³ The circular governing such exemptions is currently the subject of review within the Department of Education and Science.

It is worthy of note that within each of these contexts, common syllabuses for all learners are used.

In all contexts the teaching and learning of Irish builds on the dispositions towards the Irish language established in the home and in primary schooling and on the language acquired by students in primary school, with the important aim of preparing students both linguistically and culturally for participation in a bilingual society. The Irish language speech community represents active bilingualism in contemporary society. The Irish language speech communities as well as including the territorially defined Gaeltachtaí, refers significantly to a growing number of networks of Irish outside the Gaeltachtaí both at home and abroad. Unlike the Gaeltacht student or the native speaker of Irish who may have the support mechanism and neighbourhood domains to draw upon in sustaining proficiency through use, the school alone, for the learner of Irish as L2 outside the Gaeltacht, notwithstanding the availability of Irish TV etc., may be the only source of language learning and interlanguage development for many students.

The CEB report on languages which preceded syllabus development argued, therefore, that the classroom itself must be used to motivate learners at least in the short term by creating a need to use Irish in the accomplishment of meaningful activities which appeal to their interests and imagination. The report states

the classroom is therefore a valid communicative situation, which can in itself be exploited as a valuable resource for learning. To view it merely as a rehearsal studio for the world outside is an approach unlikely to sustain the motivation of many learners of Irish. (CEB 1987)

Using the Irish language for real communicative purposes, as distinct from language practice or scaffolding, can fuel language acquisition in the Irish language classroom. This principle underpinned the development of a communicative-type curriculum through both the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate syllabuses.

Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy

A recent report of the Inspectorate on modern languages (DES 2004), discussed in detail later in this section, drew attention to a range of issues associated with teaching and learning in the modern languages classroom, including over-reliance on translation, on textbooks and on past examination papers as a teaching methodology. Similar issues may arise in the teaching of Irish⁴. A recent ESRI report on progression from primary to post-primary education, commissioned by the NCCA, uncovered considerable dissatisfaction with regard to Irish. The report found that Irish was perceived to be the most difficult and the least enjoyable subject among first year post-primary students (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody 2004). The discussion paper echoed this finding, referring to unsatisfactory practice in Irish language pedagogy including the widespread practice of teaching Irish through English and to generally low standards. It suggested that rehearsal for the examination rather than language acquisition appears to be the dominant activity in the Irish language classroom. On the basis of observations made by participants during the seminars held as part of the review of languages, it is at least questionable whether the emphasis that the Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus places on communicating in Irish, on integrated development of language skills, on development of knowledge of language and on cultural awareness is being fully realised. Indeed, students may be unable to construct the language they have learned to convey messages that they themselves wish to communicate.

The quality of interaction in the Irish language classroom was often raised during the course of the review. The survey, for example, indicated that students do not appear to be highly motivated when it comes to Irish language learning. Students tend to rote learn for the examination rather than spend time acquiring Irish to construct their own voice, their thinking, and identities through the language. Students are incapable of using the language, which they practice for and exhibit in the examination, in new and unrehearsed contexts, thus crucially indicating that the

⁴ The Inspectorate of the DES is conducting an inspection of Irish in 10% of post primary schools in 2005, similar in nature to that conducted in the area of modern languages.

language has not been acquired. The time spent on literature and literary texts was seen as inappropriate and to the detriment of the development of good communication skills and language awareness. Expert opinion in the course of the review underlined the inability of current provision and practice to enable fluency or even partial fluency in the language (Ó Riagáin 2003). While the record of the seminars showed that the teaching and learning of Irish appear to have gained some ground in that students' receptive competences in the living language of communication have improved; a true measurement of learners' communicative skills and their ability to integrate into the speech community and engage in different discourses has not been undertaken. One cannot infer this crucial competence of integration with the speech community from examination grades, which generally tend to point to the achievement of satisfactory levels of summative proficiency.

In the course of the review, particularly at the invitational seminars, concerns were expressed too about the assessment arrangements currently in place and the backwash effect they have on teaching and learning in the Irish classroom. While the Irish syllabuses, in general, were viewed as appropriate, it was felt that the examinations could be improved in that the present examination format does not encourage the development of communicative competence sufficiently but tends rather to promote rehearsal-type activities in the classroom. There were concerns expressed in particular about the absence of an oral assessment in Junior Certificate Irish. Students presently are able to deploy rehearsed strategies that ensure success in the examination. Such success may not in fact be a reliable indicator of general communicative proficiency. This may be the case, even with the considerably high ratio of ABC grade awards in Irish.

As well as exposure to language, students also need to be equipped with skills in activating metalinguistic awareness, in how to learn language in general and how to seek out opportunities to use it outside the classroom. Studying language in a bilingual country would appear to be amenable to and facilitative of fostering this awareness.

Irish and an integrated approach to the teaching of languages

The discussion paper called for consideration of an integrated approach to enrich the experience of studying and learning languages. It argued that this could be achieved by explicitly establishing multiple points of contact and cross-fertilisation across English or Irish as L1 or L2 and the modern language (L3 or L4).

The review found that there has often been a separation and compartmentalised disconnection between English, Irish and modern languages in the perspective on language learning at a public and curricular level. This is regrettable since English *as well as* Irish has an important role in defining Irish collective identity. Study of a modern language likewise helps to redefine this identity in the light of pan-European identity and the study in turn of non-European language paves the way for the articulation of a multicultural identity. Languages have in common the fact that their place on the curriculum is justified principally in terms of fairly broad educational goals; indeed the same broad educational goals of personal and social development, heightened linguistic awareness and cultural and intercultural enrichment

As a result of exposure to different language learning experiences (learning English and Irish), students potentially have a range of parallel and previous learning backgrounds that can equip them with certain skills and abilities as they approach subsequent language learning at L3 and L4. The component of ‘language awareness’, now emphasised in English, Irish and modern language syllabuses derives from the concept of theoretical and linguistic overlap in students’ learning experiences. The degree of parallelism that exists between English, Irish and modern languages can be exploited to the benefit of the language learner, leading to complementarity across language learning and syllabuses.

There may be a need, however to construct a pedagogical framework, initially on a pilot basis, where students are facilitated to make the links between languages and the learning of languages. As discussed earlier, such an approach is already being developed on a pilot basis through the Welsh *Making the Link* project where

students reflect and act on common approaches to the learning of English or Welsh as L1/ Welsh as L2 and French as L3.

The beneficial effects of metalinguistic awareness are increased if systematic or deliberate linkages are forged between learners' previous language learning experiences and their experience of learning the target language. This is in line with what the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages calls "... the prospect of a sort of general language education" (COE 2001). This approach could be developed pedagogically in order to stimulate curiosity for languages and cultures, to develop learners' confidence and strategies in learning languages and their skills in observing and analysing languages.

Separate syllabus for Irish as L1

Considerable support for a separate syllabus in the case of Irish as L1 learners emerged in the course of the review, with suggestions that such a syllabus should be available in all-Irish immersion schools/programmes/units.

As stated in the introduction to this report, any policy on languages in education must take account of the constitutional status of Irish. The fact, however, that Irish constitutes both a first language and a second language for citizens of this State has given rise to a polarisation of the debate surrounding its place in the curriculum. The historically enduring and constitutional position of Irish as mother tongue of approximately five per cent of the population ensures that a considerable proportion of the population (1.43 million persons in 1996 and 1.57 million in 2002) professes to have some competence in the language.

The discussion paper, reiterating the CEB report (1987) makes a cogent argument for the development of a separate curriculum for learners of Irish as L1. At present there is no recognition of any linguistic differences between learners of Irish as L1 and L2. The tradition of using the same syllabus for native speakers of Irish and native speakers of English, in Irish-medium schools and in English-medium schools

may have been to the detriment of Irish speakers with the current syllabus failing to extend the linguistic repertoire and stretch Irish speakers' competency as much as it should.

Special attention may be required, therefore, for learners of Irish as L1 in terms of content, materials and assessment. Among the areas that need to be addressed are:

- How differentiation between Irish L1 and Irish L2 is to be achieved in terms of content and approach
- How Irish is best approached pedagogically in post-primary Gaeltacht classrooms
- The role of Irish language teaching in language maintenance in the Gaeltacht
- The needs of the speech community and how they can be met by an effective curriculum
- Ongoing pedagogical and resource materials for teachers of Irish as L1.

The administrative issues regarding assessment will also require attention. In the course of the review, it was pointed out, for example, that the provision of a separate syllabus might lead to a complex multiplicity of levels in examinations. The introduction of a separate syllabus would have considerable knock-on effects on the current syllabus in terms of proposed objectives, content and assessment and would require administrative planning and adjustments. In the context of the recognition of the different linguistic skill development and needs of the L1 and L2 language learner, the question of how students can be facilitated in accessing the existing syllabuses for English also needs to be considered.

During the course of the review it emerged that the present syllabus may suit immersion students. However, learners in these situations still need further language enrichment that would be a *sine qua non* of a syllabus for L1 learners. Students at present are not being given sufficient opportunity to develop their writing skills in the language. Further consideration should also be given to the role that Irish-

medium schools can play in forging methodological links between CLIL (curriculum content) and the teaching of other languages

Learners have different needs. In the case of the Irish language, the greatest need would appear to be that of domain support so that learners' interlanguage can be extended and develop in interaction with the speech community, thus facilitating acquisition. This is where Irish differs from the modern languages. In the case of Irish as an L1, in the Gaeltacht, students have immediate access to domain support. In the case of Irish as an L2, the domain support is reasonably proximate to the classroom, although learners may not always be able or willing to seek out such support actively. This is not possible in the short term in the case of the modern languages.

Students in all-Irish medium schools have different linguistic support needs from students in Gaeltacht areas. Unlike the student in the Gaeltacht, who has immediate and full access to domain support and the speech community, this is not generally the case for the student in all-Irish medium education. Thus, greater domain support is needed in the case of the all-Irish medium schools to avoid the present situation where pupils' linguistic experience in the school domain is fractured because the cultural consensus of the wider community is expressed predominantly in English.

It must also be borne in mind, in this context of interlanguage development fuelling acquisition, that the school on its own can only be responsible for bestowing language competence in a very broad sense. The most effective and efficient learning tends to be located permanently outside the school, in settings closer to the natural language domain or work place.

Further issues of relevance to Irish

In the course of the review a number of other issues arose which merit inclusion in this report.

The record of the seminars includes the observation that the current provision in relation to **pre-service and in-service education for teachers** is inadequate. The implementation of educational change depends to some extent on how teachers perceive themselves and their teaching in the context of implementation. Those participating in the seminars felt that often teachers are disconnected from the rationale and the energies that underpin proposed educational change in the classroom. It follows that teacher education in the area of languages should involve a greater emphasis on the use of successful language teaching and language learning strategies. Teachers should also be supported in developing good practice and in their involvement in school development planning. During the course of the review, a wide range of views emerged on the question of the proficiency of all teachers of Irish in the language itself. All agreed, however, that attention to pre-service and in-career education needs would ensure that all teachers reach and sustain a level of proficiency in the Irish language that will enable them to engage with the most effective teaching and learning methods.

There was a general consensus in the survey that **language and cultural awareness** should be promoted to a greater extent in the Irish language classroom. The potential to exploit literary texts which students study for the Leaving Certificate to foster and promote cultural awareness and insights should be capitalised upon. It was felt that language awareness, the importance of which is made explicit in the introductory section of the Leaving Certificate syllabus, should be formally assessed. The teaching and assessment of literature could include a deliberate promotion and measurement of cultural awareness. Assessment arrangements currently tend to emphasise knowledge, understanding and literary criticism at the expense of developing cultural awareness.

The difference between cultural awareness in Irish and cultural awareness in modern languages reflects an important difference in orientation between a communicative syllabus in Irish and in modern languages. Culture enrichment more than utilitarian communication may constitute the main rationale for learning Irish. Unlike the target

language speech community in the modern language context, the distribution of Irish-speaking networks pose a serious problem for the learner of Irish, particularly within a communicative framework where the relevance of learning a language is wholly targeted at and identified with societal use. There is no readily identifiable speech community where such communication might be meaningful other than in communicational transactions in the Gaeltacht and in networks of users and neo-speakers outside the Gaeltacht. Thus the main rationale proposed for learning Irish concerns reasons that have more to do with culture than with coping with the exigencies of communication.

There was strong support at the seminars and beyond for greater attention to be paid to the contribution **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** could make to enhancing the learning experience in Irish. This is a particularly pertinent view at a time when Irish language TV and digital media are expanding. Learners can now be in virtual synchronous contact with the Irish language speech community, which has considerable implications for the development of communicative competence, language and cultural awareness. As indicated in the case of the modern languages, ICT could also be used to foster and develop collaborative learning and learner autonomy. The importance of exploiting ICT in these ways should underpin developments in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Summary / Recommendations

Currently many students do not appear to be motivated when it comes to learning Irish. There is a need for greater consistency of practice in teaching and learning with emphasis being placed on genuine communication in Irish, integrated development of language skills, language awareness and cultural awareness.

It is recommended that a pilot study aiming to investigate the potential of further integration between English, Irish and modern languages should be established. This pilot would share common ground with the proposal outlined in the section on

English and might give rise to a pedagogical framework for an integrated view of languages as a curriculum area where students are facilitated to make the links between all the languages they study.

A separate syllabus for learners of Irish as L1 should be developed and implemented with due regard to curricular implications. This should be accompanied by the development of modules and materials to support the implementation of Irish as L1. The importance of exploiting ICT should underpin developments in curriculum and assessment related to the Irish language and pre-service and in-service teacher education.

The present assessment arrangements do not encourage communicative competence to a sufficient degree. In particular, Irish examinations must encourage and foster language acquisition rather than language practice and rote learning by targeting the ability to use language spontaneously in previously unrehearsed contexts.

Finally, as stressed in the discussion paper, pilot and evaluation activity should precede widespread implementation of the kinds of changes envisaged here.

Modern Languages

This part of the report describes the main issues that have arisen in the course of the review concerning the teaching and learning of modern languages. The issues relate in particular to points raised in chapter six of the discussion paper on “Trends in Language Teaching”. Many of the points discussed are also relevant to the teaching and learning of Irish, and to a lesser extent English and have been considered earlier in this section of the report. While the focus is mainly on issues identified in the review process as being of concern, it should be stated from the outset that the review also gave rise to comments emphasising good practice in the teaching and learning of modern languages in post-primary schools. These comments related to teachers’ commitment to continuous professional development, planning, purposeful, well-structured lessons and use of active learning strategies. The seminar discussions also frequently returned to the point that in many cases teachers and students work in conditions that are not ideal for language teaching and learning.

The purpose here is to address issues that arose in the discussion paper and subsequently in the review and to facilitate further improvement in language curricula, teaching and learning. At the end of this section on modern languages a number of recommendations for the next phase of the review are set out. The issues that give rise to these recommendations are firstly discussed in some detail, including the assumptions upon which the modern language common curriculum syllabus framework is based.

One outcome of the review has been the identification of a range of interrelated issues related to the implementation of the communicative approach in language teaching and learning in post-primary schools. Classroom observation in modern languages has suggested that, in many cases, a narrow range of teaching strategies based largely on examination rehearsal techniques are being adopted (DES 2004). This is related to the wider issue of the backwash effect of assessment methods and arrangements, including the examination of oral skills, on teaching and learning

practices. The following sections draw together the ways in which a range of factors in curriculum implementation including syllabuses and assessment, teaching and learning practices and the conditions in which teaching and learning take place combine to determine what happens in the classroom. Assumptions underlying syllabuses and projected learning outcomes as well as the interplay between syllabuses and assessment practices are discussed. Analysis is provided of potential causes of the perceived problems and potential avenues for remedial action are suggested

The ‘communicative revolution’: rationale and projected learning outcomes

The content and learning outcomes of language syllabuses have an impact on the teaching and learning in classrooms. It is therefore opportune to restate the rationale and assumptions underpinning language syllabuses and to consider to what extent classroom practices evolves from the assumptions that underpin language syllabuses and their associated examinations. In the course of the review, the communicative approach both in terms of its implementation in the classroom and its associated learning outcomes has emerged as an issue itself. Many of the issues discussed in this part of the report were the subjects of discussion at the seminar for NCCA course committees. The underpinning of all language programmes by the communicative paradigm since the early 1980s means that it is assumed that fluency can be acquired in the formal learning environment of the language classroom. Language learning based on the use of language for real communication rather than the study of language itself is widely accepted as promoting language acquisition: learners are motivated by using the language for communicative purposes. This perspective and further evidence from research studies, that first language acquisition arises from intuitive use of language for communication, have been taken to suggest that message-oriented activities should form the basis of classroom methodology. This however, at the same time, raises questions about what levels of second language fluency are achievable in the classroom and what standards are being reached. This issue is further discussed below.

Grammar and communicative pedagogy

The issue of the teaching and learning of grammar has also arisen as an area of concern in the review – 70% of respondents to the survey expressed support for a stronger emphasis on grammar (embedded in a communicative context⁵) in language classrooms. This view was also supported in a submission made by IRAAL (Irish Association of Applied Linguists) to the review.

The communicative paradigm advocates a balanced approach that involves both experiential learning (language learning through language use) and analytical learning (learning through acquiring knowledge about how the linguistic systems of the target language functions). It is believed that second language learners pass through a series of interim languages, or ‘inter-languages’⁶ as they progress towards fluency in this language. The thinking is that this interlanguage development is driven as much by the learner’s own natural language acquisition ability as by any explicitly taught grammar rules in a classroom. This in turn raises the question of how effective formal instruction can be in promoting language acquisition. At the same time studies have shown that drawing learners’ attention to aspects of the linguistic system can promote acquisition by encouraging them to make comparison between what they have observed in the target language input and what they themselves are typically producing (Ellis 1994). This is the theoretical basis for the ‘focus on form’ approaches to teaching grammar within a communicative context, as described in the discussion paper. These types of learning activities can be developed through formal instruction. Conversely, requiring learners to produce language without going through the necessary interlanguage development sequence may force them to bypass this syntactic development needed to develop their own linguistic system.

⁵ Focus is drawn to the meaning realised by the particular grammatical structure.

⁶ Described as mental grammars constructed by learners that are perceived as dynamic and subject to rapid change as they repeatedly compare and revise their existing “rules” or “hypotheses” about the target language. (Ellis, R. *The Study of Second language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press. 1994, p.352.

Current Modern Language Syllabuses

Syllabus development if it is to be consistent with the theory of the communicative approach must reflect both types of learning described above. The modern language syllabuses addressed the need to base content and methodology on a balanced integrated approach to classroom methodology. The 'Basic Communicative Proficiency' component contains content for experiential learning or learning-through-use activities and the 'Language Awareness' component provides activities aimed at developing the learner's knowledge of how the target language linguistic system works, in other words analytical learning. While the 'Basic Communicative Proficiency' component specifies activities involving the use of language for communicative purposes, the 'Language Awareness' section of the syllabus contains the following focus-on-language performance targets and topics:

- Learning about language from target language material
 - Exploring target language literary texts as sources of linguistic information and illustration
- Exploring meaning
 - Guessing intelligently at the meaning of target language forms on the basis of related forms in the target language
 - Exploring the workings of the target language through (specified) activities
- Consulting reference materials (dictionaries and grammars) relating to the vocabulary and grammar of the target language
 - Learning to cope with simple grammatical terminology ...
 - Using target language forms correctly on the basis of explanations in grammars ...

A balanced approach to methodology is also outlined in the *Leaving Certificate Modern Language Teacher Guidelines*:

Second language learning in the formal context of the classroom necessitates a judicious mixture of activities aimed at providing learners with knowledge about the target language and activities involving use of the target language

for communicative purposes.

(NCCA 1995)

and:

If learners are required to engage exclusively with communicative activities based on language use they may not acquire knowledge of the language inferentially that would allow them to use language creatively in new situations.

(NCCA 1995)

The guidelines advocate variety in relation to the teaching and learning of grammar with students being encouraged to engage in discovery learning techniques focusing on the target language system.

The experience of implementing a balanced curriculum

It would appear, however, from the findings of a recent inspection report *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues* (DES 2004), that such a balanced approach is not a feature of classroom practice. It should be reiterated, that the report highlights several examples of good practice in post-primary second language classrooms. It is evident, however, that there are problems pertaining to the implementation of both the communicative dimension of the syllabus as well as the focus-on-form components. The report is the product of an analysis and synthesis of 45 modern language inspection reports by seven specialist language inspectors in 12 counties. A total of 164 classes, taught by 112 individual teachers were visited. The report quotes extensively from the *Leaving Certificate Modern Languages Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA 1995) as the criterion for good practice and contrasts some of its findings with what the Guidelines advised.

Firstly, in relation to the 'Basic Communicative Proficiency' content of the syllabus, the concerns expressed in the discussion paper and the survey responses mirror those highlighted in the inspection report (DES 2004). These include:

- Considerable scope for greater use of the target language by teachers and students alike
- Over-reliance on translation as a teaching methodology

- Tendency towards over reliance on textbooks and past examination papers
- Use of a narrow range of teaching strategies
- Imbalance between teacher-directed learning and independent learning.

The responses to the NCCA survey also reflected concern in relation to these issues with 45% of all respondents believing that there is an over-reliance on textbooks in the language class and 75% viewing rehearsal for examinations as the dominant classroom activity. In relation to the analytical dimension of the syllabus content, there is also a perception expressed in the survey data that this aspect is being neglected both in classroom practice and in assessment.

This trend would seem to go back to the introduction of the communicative approach, not just in Ireland but elsewhere too. Applied linguists have found it necessary to restate the importance of grammar within a communicative approach:

This, however, does not constitute an argument against explicit grammar teaching. Explicitly taught grammar is, at the very least, of considerable importance both in planned production (speaking and writing) and in planned and spontaneous comprehension (listening and reading).

(Johnstone 1994)

Acknowledging the many gains in terms of pupil confidence in using the target language for communication, a 1992 Department of Education report on the teaching of French in post-primary schools in Ireland expresses concern about “the lack of accuracy even among Higher Level Leaving Certificate students” and suggests that

“those pupils who have a sense of pattern in language must be exposed from the early stages to some systemic grammar teaching.” (DES 1992)

Similar concerns were expressed in the Hurman Report by oral examiners in the GCSE examinations the UK (Hurman 1992).

The inspection report is also critical of the fact that students are not encouraged to engage in independent learning:

There is need to encourage greater autonomy and to redress the imbalance between teacher-directed learning and independent learning. (DES 2004)

Chief Examiners' reports of performance by Leaving Certificate candidates in French, while also highlighting many examples of positive learning outcomes, continue to refer to problems relating to candidates' ability to write accurately in the target language:

While many examiners detected a slight improvement in this section, it was, still, the part of the examination which showed greatest weakness and where the widest range of performance was obvious. (DES 2000)

Candidates are reported to engage in “reproduction of learned-off material” and examiners point to the need for improvement in:

- Verb tenses and endings, especially the present, imperfect and *passé composé*
- Pronouns, especially direct object, relative and disjunctive pronouns
- Gender of common nouns; agreement of adjectives.

Setting achievable objectives

The inspection report (DES 2004) and the responses to the NCCA survey suggest that a narrow range of teaching strategies are often being used and that these strategies often consist of examination rehearsal. This is an issue that needs to be addressed at various levels, including both the syllabus and its associated assessment arrangements. If the projected learning outcomes of the syllabus are too demanding it could have the backwash effect of pressurising teaching and learning into focusing on product rather than process.

The prioritisation of communicative objectives based on fluency must be realistic and take into account the conditions for language acquisition that pertain in the average classroom. The conditions with which teachers and pupils have to contend in language classrooms are far from ideal in terms of replicating those conditions that promote language learning in the ‘naturalistic’ environment. The inspection report (DES 2004) makes a number of points that highlight these differences and the difficulty of replicating an optimum environment for acquisition in the classroom:

- Lack of a base classroom or designated language room, making it difficult for teachers to create an authentic learning environment
- Lack of contact with the target language community
- Lack of opportunities for oral participation by students
- Insufficient student-student interaction
- The tendency to teach the four language skills in isolation.

As a consequence of these aspects of the formal learning environment the question as to what extent language acquisition is teachable is a matter of considerable debate in applied linguistics (Pienemann 1994). These conditions include several limitations that do not exist in the ‘naturalistic’ learning environment. One of these is the length of exposure time to the target language – some 50/60 hours over a year compared to the constant reinforcement provided when a language is learned in the target language community. Also the richness of the stimulus provided by the naturalistic context including the quality of interactions, is very difficult to replicate in the classroom.

Another important consideration is that post-primary schooling does not mark the end of formal learning for the vast majority of students. It is important therefore in setting objectives to factor in the reality that many continue to study a language after post-primary education. Consequently, learning outcomes should be viewed in terms of a continuum within which different levels of fluency might be defined.

In relation to the effects of assessment on classroom practice, if the modes and techniques of assessment are very limited in the public examinations this can have the effect of discouraging teachers from engaging in a more elaborate range of assessment practices themselves as part of teaching. According to the inspection report

There is a need to employ a wider range of assessment modes, and to test all language skills. (DES 2004)

Summary and Recommendations

Syllabuses

In the case of syllabuses, the issues for consideration concern both the assumptions pertaining to projected learning outcomes based on learner fluency and the need for a balanced approach that promotes the learner's syntactic and interlanguage development.

Achievable objectives and learning outcomes should be set. Assumptions about the acquisition of fluency in the learning environment of the classroom need to be balanced by taking into account the constraints that pertain in the learning context. Expectations based on achievement levels where English is the target language need to take into account the point made in this regard in the evaluation report of the national pilot project on modern languages in primary schools. The report states that the pervasiveness of English as a second language in Europe means that pupils learning it are not totally dependent on the school setting for exposure to the language (Harris and Conway 2004). Therefore much of the learning actually takes place outside the classroom setting. This suggests that there exists a need to state clearly what is understood by 'fluency' in the Irish context, since this is one of the fundamental constructs underpinning our language syllabuses.

There is also a need to address the issues of **standards** and make clear what standard the majority of students is actually achieving. The NCCA guidelines for teachers

(1995) offers descriptors of attainment at different levels based upon scales developed by the Council of Europe. The following chapter on the Council of Europe's Framework for Languages and Language Portfolio is also relevant to this aspect of the discussion. Further consideration should be given to how the actual attainment levels being reached by Leaving Certificate candidates could be made more transparent and objective. This would in turn inform the syllabus and assessment development processes. This might be done initially through a pilot project involving independent measurement of learning outcomes based on more varied modes and techniques of assessment than may be possible in the terminal examination. Another possibility would be to use the Common European Framework levels for comparative purposes.

Assessment

The assessment methods employed in the public examinations tend by necessity to focus on the end products or outcomes of learning rather than the learning process itself. Consideration should be given to how assessment methods might incorporate a process dimension; some evaluation of the strategies that the learners have developed as well as their ability to deploy these strategies to solve problems and engage in self-directed learning practices. In particular the format of the oral examinations as well as the criteria upon which marks are awarded, should be analysed. The objective would be to see how the negative backwash effects on teaching could be minimised in order to discourage rote learning and reproduction of memorised knowledge. The incorporation of more elements involving spontaneity and unpredictability should be considered as well as an additional focus on testing grammar.

Definitions of language fluency are generally based upon the **ability to cope with unpredictability and to use language spontaneously**. Assessment arrangements where the candidates have prepared on the basis of a predefined list of topics cannot adequately measure how a candidate can cope linguistically with unpredictability. In this context, the discussion paper is critical of the type of pre-scripted scenarios upon

which it states oral assessment in the Leaving Certificate is largely based. Chief Examiners' reports for Leaving Certificate modern languages suggest that in the case of written answers also candidates engage in the practice of reproducing learned-off answers (DES 2000). If learners are being required to produce language, without at the same time going through the interlanguage developmental process, they may then be pressurised into rote learning practices in order to reach the performance targets set as learning outcomes.

Effective implementation of the communicative approach requires that this **balanced approach** is maintained in assessment as well as in teaching. Consideration should be given, not just to *how* the curriculum is assessed but also to *what* is assessed. Current examination content tends to focus mostly on the 'Basic Communicative Proficiency' content of the syllabus. While criteria based on grammar are used in the evaluation of candidate performance in Leaving Certificate oral and written tests, there is minimal explicit testing of grammar, with one or two questions confined to identification of simple grammatical elements in a text. It is clear that what happens in the examinations greatly determines what happens in the classroom. Therefore if grammar is not assessed overtly it is unlikely to receive sufficient attention in teaching and learning. This is not to propose a return to the days of grammar-translation methodology. Grammar teaching and learning should, as far as possible, be embedded in a communicative context. However, explicit testing of grammatical competence is not inconsistent within a broadly communicative approach. The issues of language awareness and grammar also need to be considered in the context of the broader language curriculum including English and Irish.

Support for teachers and learners

Implementation of curriculum change involves not just the issuing of a syllabus but also development and support for teachers in making the change happen. Aspects of pre-service and in-service teacher education need to be addressed in relation to the issues raised by both the NCCA review and the Department of Education and

Science's inspection report (DES 2004). The review has given support to the perception that there is over-reliance on textbooks. Innovation in curriculum can be greatly facilitated by provision of teaching learning materials specifically designed for the programme in question. This issue also relates to the need for consideration of a strategy for the pedagogical integration of ICT.

Language and Cultural awareness

There is general agreement in the responses to the survey that both language awareness and cultural awareness should be assessed in examinations. While the modern languages common syllabus framework contains substantial content in both of these components, neither is assessed in the public examinations to any great extent: there is some minimal testing of language awareness. This issue is related to the points already made about the lack of clarity of the role of grammar in a communicative approach.

While the syllabuses do contain a section on cultural awareness, the prioritisation of communicative proficiency reduces the classroom time available for this. Ways of achieving a better integration of both components should be a feature of further curriculum development.

Information and Communication Technology

ICT has tremendous potential to augment learning with current modern language syllabuses. In recent years, the role of ICT in language learning has progressed from that of tutor to resource, as teachers combine their use of drill and practice reinforcement software with multimedia communications and information resources. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides students and teachers with opportunities to use electronic communications for synchronous or real time communication (e.g., instant messaging, Internet relay chat); asynchronous or delayed communication (e.g., email, web-based bulletin boards); and hypermedia authoring (e.g., creation and publication of World Wide Web pages). By enabling learners to communicate with their counterparts in the target language community in

these ways, CMC can help to overcome the limitations of language learning outside of the target language community. When students participate in and manage effective online communications in a variety of genres and formats, their skills in both collaborative learning and learner autonomy are enhanced. However, despite these tangible benefits for students, a recent inspection report noted:

The relatively low level of utilisation [of ICT] for language learning and teaching is a matter of some concern (DES 2004)

Since the launch of the government's first ICT policy, *Schools IT2000, A Policy Framework for the New Millennium* (DES, 1998) substantial resources have been invested in increasing the availability of ICT hardware in schools. In 2004, the government's Broadband Strategy projected that by the end of 2006 most schools will be equipped with broadband connectivity.

However, issues concerning the design, development, implementation and evaluation of digital content to ensure that students and teachers can benefit fully from the advantages of broadband connectivity in teaching and learning with the curriculum, have not been adequately addressed to date. There is little incentive for commercial developers to develop multimedia and elearning products for Irish schools.

Consideration should be given to undertaking a specific initiative where content providers/subject matter experts and technical experts in a range of settings would be involved in developing curriculum-aligned digital content related to the language subjects for Irish schools. A programme of support for both pre-service and in-service teachers would also need to be provided to ensure that the potential of broadband connectivity and digital content to significantly enhance teaching and learning, is realised in Irish schools.

Recommendations

The next phase of the review of languages should involve specific curriculum review and development activity in a number of areas. As discussed above, there are issues that need to be addressed in relation to assessment.

It is recommended that, as part of phase two of the review, work is undertaken to improve existing assessment methods and arrangements with particular attention to areas such as the focus of assessment (e.g. assessment of grammar), improving questioning in examinations and alternative approaches to oral examinations, including assessment of candidates' ability to use language spontaneously. The purpose of these improvements would be to address the issues outlined earlier and, in particular, to attempt to counteract the negative backwash effect of examinations on classroom practice. These developments would need to be undertaken in collaboration with the State Examinations Commission.

The potential of ICT to contribute to teaching and learning of modern languages should be actively pursued in the next phase of the review. Developmental activity here should focus on the development and evaluation of digital resources for use with the modern language curriculum. Clearly this activity would have a strong professional development dimension for teachers involved including: awareness-raising of the issues involved in using ICT in teaching and learning; identification of training/skills needs and a strategy to address skill needs; the provision of digital content to support teaching and learning; the identification of existing resources; evaluation of the effectiveness of the digital resources used and the process engaged in.

The potential for using the Council of Europe's Common European Framework to gain insights into current curricula for modern languages and additional information relating to attainment levels in learning languages should be exploited in developmental activity in the second phase of the review. This potential is further explored in the following section.

Finally, in light of developmental activity in the second phase of the review and in the context of broader developments related to the ongoing review of junior and senior cycles, it is likely that the syllabuses for modern language subjects will need to be reviewed and revised in the longer term.

Section 4: Linking with Developments in Europe

Any review of languages in the curriculum needs to take cognisance of broader developments related to languages in education in Europe. Of particular interest are three tools developed by the Council of Europe and by the European Commission to support teaching and learning in languages and its recognition: the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF), the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and Europass.

This section considers the potential that engagement with these wider European developments offers for beginning to address the issues identified in previous sections. This potential relates to areas such as:

- Setting achievable learning outcomes in the development of curricula
- Developments in assessment arrangements and methods
- Improved integration of language skills
- Learning through the medium of the target language
- Enhancing plurilingualism
- Use of authentic materials
- Recognising the student as an independent, lifelong learner.

Each of the tools is described below. This will be followed by consideration of potential links between the tools and developments in languages in post-primary education.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)

The CEF aims to provide a system of detailed level descriptions against which language acquisition may be measured. The discussion paper underlined its importance, and that of the ELP, in the following terms,

The Common Reference Levels of the Common European Framework are set to shape the international assessment of second and foreign language proficiency for many years to come, while the European Language Portfolio

has already served to stimulate the reform of second and foreign language pedagogy in various domains of learning in a number of different countries. Neither the CEF nor the ELP can be ignored; and both have much to offer in terms of setting curriculum goals, managing the language learning process, and assessing learning outcomes. (Little 2003)

The CEF⁷ provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop in order to act effectively in this context. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The framework also defines levels of proficiency, which allows learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

The CEF is intended to overcome the barriers to communication among professionals working in the field of modern languages arising from the different educational systems in Europe. It provides the means for educational administrators, course designers, teachers, teacher trainers and examining bodies to reflect on their current practice, with a view to situating and co-ordinating their efforts and to ensuring that they meet the real needs of the learners for whom they are responsible.

The CEF aspires to provide a system of detailed level descriptions underpinned by an empirical measurement approach. By providing a common basis for the explicit description of objectives, content and methods, the CEF will enhance the transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications, thus promoting international co-operation in the field of modern languages. The provision of objective criteria for describing language proficiency will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid

⁷ <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio//documents/0521803136txt.pdf>. Accessed 6th December 2004

European mobility. Europass, an initiative of the European Commission can also contribute in this regard. A description of Europass is presented later in this section.

The framework includes the description of ‘partial’ qualifications, appropriate when only a more restricted knowledge of a language is required (e.g. for understanding rather than speaking), or when a limited amount of time is available for the learning of a third or fourth language and more useful results can perhaps be attained by aiming at, say, recognition rather than recall skills. Giving formal recognition to such abilities will help to promote plurilingualism through the learning of a wider variety of European languages, as referred to in Section 2.

Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)⁸

ALTE is an association of providers of European foreign language examinations, has devised a framework that provides a descriptive system of levels of language proficiency, which have been developed to promote the trans-national recognition of certification in Europe. These ALTE descriptors have been linked to the CEF. Through the ALTE framework the members of ALTE have classified their examinations within a common system of levels, initially for language proficiency examinations, then in the context of language for a specific purpose. It is currently a five-level system but work is ongoing in an attempt to define lower levels. Appendix 1 provides a more comprehensive description of the ALTE framework.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP)⁹

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language – whether at school or outside school – can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences.

⁸ <http://www.alte.org>

⁹ [http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=\\$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/./&L=E&...](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/./&L=E&...)

The portfolio contains:

- A language passport, which its owner regularly updates. The language competences of the student can be recorded in the passport according to common agreed criteria.
- A detailed language biography describing the student's experiences in each language which can assist the learner in planning and assessing progress.
- A dossier where examples of personal work can be kept to illustrate the student's language competences.

The ELP encourages the learner to be active in their own learning, to review and evaluate what has been achieved, to reflect on the purposes for which he or she will need the language for and to participate in planning for the acquisition of the language. The ELP is a tool through which the student can develop as an independent learner in an age appropriate way in language learning both in primary and in post-primary education.

Europass¹⁰

The introduction of Europass will contribute further to facilitating recognition of language learning and attainment across Europe. Europass provides the means through which people can make their skills and qualifications they have gained in languages clearly understood throughout Europe. It consists of five documents. The Europass curriculum vitae (CV) and the Europass Language Passport which the individual will fill in her/himself. The latter is an adaptation of the Language passport contained in the European Language Portfolio. The other documents are the Europass Certificate Supplement, Europass Diploma Supplement and Europass Mobility. These three documents are filled in by relevant authorities. Europass is supported by National Europass Centres (NEC). The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is the Irish NEC.

¹⁰ <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/europass/home/hornav/Introduction/navigate.action>

The CEF, the ELP and Plurilingualism

One of the most significant aspects of the CEF and the ELP is their promotion of plurilingualism. Plurilingualism is defined by the Council of Europe as,

the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe 2001)

To clarify the practical meaning of plurilingualism, the following description illustrates the linguistic repertoire that an adult European with secondary education might be expected to have at a given point in time:

- A 'national' language spoken and written according to the standard norms of the country acquired in the education system
- A variety of the first language spoken according to the norms of the region and/or generation to which he/she belongs
- A regional or minority language he/she speaks and/or writes where appropriate as well as the national languages
- One or more foreign languages understood, but not necessarily spoken, to a basic level as a consequence of education and/or experience of media and/or tourism
- Another foreign language mastered to a higher level with ability to speak and write. (Beacco and Byram 2003)

Plurilingualism therefore refers to the full linguistic repertoire of the individual, including their home language/s.

Using the CEF and the ELP in an Irish context

The CEF and the ELP were the subject of some discussion during the first phase of the review. Through the responses to the survey and the discussion at seminars it

was clear that many involved in languages in education have not had the opportunity to acquaint themselves sufficiently with these developments and consequently are unclear as to the contribution they might make to the teaching and learning of languages in Ireland. There is a significant information and engagement gap to be bridged in this context as the relevance of these developments to national developments in language education in European countries is indisputable.

A number of recommendations in Section 3 refer to pilot studies that might be initiated as part of a second phase of this review of languages. The potential of the ELP as a teaching and learning tool merits consideration in this context, particularly in terms of the contribution it can make to the development of language awareness, to the identification of points of commonality between languages, to promoting plurilingualism and a multiplicity of levels of language learning, and to promoting learner autonomy. This potential is further explored in the following pages.

The Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools states that the syllabus for languages in the Junior Certificate programme is a communicative one and adds that:

the adolescent learner in the Irish context seldom needs to use the target language in an authentic exchange with a native speaker. His or her real needs centre around using and understanding the target language as a means of communication and instruction in the classroom. However, a pupil brings to the classroom a reasonable expectation that his or her language learning will equip him or her to cope in a country where the language is native. (DES 2004)

Two of the general communicative aims of the Junior Certificate syllabuses for modern languages are:

- *To equip pupils with a competence in the target language which would enable them to provide themselves with basic necessities, to avoid misdemeanours and/or serious embarrassment, and to engage in some*

degree of social interaction in a country/situation where only the target language was in use.

- *To furnish pupils with linguistic skills which will make it possible for them to pursue at least some aspects of their general interests through the medium of the target language.*

These aims establish common ground and purpose, in general terms, with the ELP and have facilitated the development of an ELP in an Irish context by the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) in Trinity College Dublin. This ELP was accredited by the Council of Europe's European Validation Committee in 2001. It was developed with cognisance of both Junior and Leaving Certificate language syllabuses and is based on the implicit and explicit communicative language goals as interpreted from the Rules and Programmes for Schools (DES 2004). The ELP has been developed for use in the context of students whose first language is English. It provides opportunities to record progress in learning other languages. The target skills are presented in Irish, German, French, Italian and Spanish. An English translation of the skills is included for reference. The skills have been aligned to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference. The goal setting and self-assessment checklists restate the communicative goals of the current Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate syllabuses in terms of the Common Reference Levels. These goals are identified in task-type definitions and they are illustrated in scales as descriptors. They have been made age and experience appropriate.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT, under the aegis of CLCS) has also devised an ELP for students in primary and post-primary schools for whom neither English nor Irish is a home language. An ELP has also been developed for the use of students involved in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative. This portfolio is designed to enable primary school pupils to integrate their language learning in other subject areas, thereby promoting cross-curricular learning. Consideration could also be given to exploring ways in which the ELP could be used

in enhancing the teaching and learning experience of students who are engaged in the Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes.

Another potential application of the ELP and the associated CEF in a post-primary context relates to the area of assessment. While it was originally intended that assessment of Junior Certificate modern languages would include an examination of oral proficiency, this assessment component has not materialised. The Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools states that:

The examination in English may include an assessment of Oral proficiency; the examinations in Irish and the modern continental languages may include an optional oral examination. (DES 2004)

Where the option is availed of the student is marked out 400. Where it is not, the student is marked out of 360.

Each year, a small number of schools engage with the optional oral for the Junior Certificate examination in languages. In this context, a pilot study could be initiated in the second phase of the review of languages, which would focus on liaison with teachers in these schools with a view to introducing the ELP and exploring ways in which it may be used in the teaching and learning environment. An emphasis on learner autonomy would be an important component of the pilot. The ELP could be used as the basis for the oral examination, where the student is provided with the opportunity to talk about her/his portfolio and is invited to reflect on the experience of developing the ELP.

In more general terms, the NCCA is conducting ongoing reviews of the junior cycle and the senior cycle of post-primary education. The junior cycle review includes an initiative to rebalance existing subject syllabuses to a common syllabus template with a view to addressing areas of overlap, overload and obsolescence. The language subjects are scheduled for rebalancing in this context. Clearly, the existence of the CEF and ELP offer possibilities for alignment of the learning outcomes of the

syllabuses with, in particular, proficiency levels outlined in the framework, thereby ensuring the setting of achievable learning outcomes and objectives for students.

The current NCCA review of senior cycle education is more extensive, encompassing as it does proposals to restructure the senior cycle curriculum to include more diverse programmes of study involving a wider range of curriculum components (transition units, short courses and subjects), to place a greater emphasis on the development of key skills, and to introduce a greater variety of assessment methods in conjunction with a new inclusive certificate of senior cycle education. Clearly, significant potential exists here for the CEF and ELP to inform those aspects of the developments that pertain to language curricula. The contribution that the CEF can make to the development of the curriculum specifications and assessment arrangements for language-related transition units and short courses is significant. Equally, a new certificate of senior cycle education carries the potential for close association with the ELP.

It is of note that the principles and ideas underpinning these developments at junior and senior cycle are consistent with the emphases within the CEF and ELP on learner autonomy, skill development, plurilingualism and improved access to and transferability of learning in the broad context of lifelong learning.

Section 5: Recommendations for a Second Phase of Review

This report commenced with an introduction outlining the background to the Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education and outlining the various elements that comprised the first phase of that review. Section 2 set out the views and observations that emerged on the question of a policy for languages in education. Section 3 offered an account of the main views and observations of the first phase of review on the central issues of integration, diversification and teaching and learning in English, Irish and modern languages. Section 4 assessed the potential of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEF) and the European Languages Portfolio (ELP) to contribute to addressing issues identified in the first phase of the review.

This final section of the report summarises the most significant views and observations from the review and sets out recommendations for a second phase of the review that would focus on a range of developmental activities associated with the teaching and learning of languages. This focus on developmental activity is consistent with the premise, stated in the introduction to the report, that it does not contain ‘findings’ of the review but an account or synthesis of the views, observations and issues that emerged during the first phase of review. It would seem appropriate that a second phase of review would comprise developmental activity in relation to the clarification and addressing of some of these issues rather, for example, than advising on proposals for system-wide changes to curriculum and assessment provision for languages. This is not to suggest, however, that the areas proposed for developmental activity do not carry major significance for future policy on and provision for languages in post-primary education.

This section draws on the synthesis of views and observations from the first phase of the review that is outlined in sections 2-4 of the report and proceeds to outline the recommendations this synthesis give rise to for the second phase of the review of languages.

Recommendations for a second phase of the Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education

In general terms, the recommendations of the report relate to the areas of:

- A policy on languages in education
- Developments in assessment of current language syllabuses
- Developing a syllabus for native (L1) speakers of Irish
- Pilot studies related to the areas of integration, language awareness and attainment of proficiency in languages
- ICT in teaching and learning of languages
- Alignment of developments in languages in Ireland with similar developments at the European level.

These recommendations are outlined in greater detail below.

A policy on languages in education

It is recommended that an explicit policy on languages in education should be developed that takes account of the interaction between languages in education and language in society. Policy parameters in relation to the following aspects of languages in education are needed:

- Diversification of languages, in particular identifying the criteria for including or discontinuing particular languages in the curriculum
- Clarification of how Irish Sign Language is to be provided for and how further consultation on provision for Cant/Shelta should be progressed
- The promotion of plurilingualism
- Testing of attainment of proficiency in languages.

It is also recommended that the recent initiative of the Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, to develop a Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland should be informed by the observations on language policy emerging from the first phase of the review.

Developments in assessment of languages

Concerns related to current assessment arrangements and approaches were a feature of the commentary emerging from English, Irish and modern languages. In general terms, the concerns surrounded the extent to which the current assessment arrangements were consistent with the aims and objectives of the syllabuses in question, in areas such as those of language awareness, cultural awareness, and using language spontaneously.

It is recommended that, as part of phase two of the review, work is undertaken by the NCCA in collaboration with the State Examinations Commission, to improve existing assessment methods and arrangements with particular attention to areas such as the focus of assessment (e.g. assessment of grammar and awareness of language) and the development of alternative examination questions and approaches to oral examinations, including assessment of candidates' ability in the Junior and Leaving certificates to use language spontaneously. Experiences and assessment materials arising from the ongoing NCCA initiative on Assessment for Learning, particularly its work in Junior Certificate English, may also inform developments in this area.

Developing a syllabus for native (L1) speakers of Irish

The discussion paper and the views and observations emerging from the review drew attention to the need to differentiate curricula for L1 and L2 learners of Irish as the basis upon which they learn the language is fundamentally different and neither is being adequately served by current provision.

It is recommended that, as part of phase two of the review, a separate syllabus for learners of Irish as L1 should be developed. The process of development should take cognisance of and note any implications the implementation of an L1 syllabus might have for other syllabuses. The syllabus should be accompanied by advice on how its implementation should be supported, for example any needs in the areas of

pre-service education, in-career professional development and resource materials that its implementation would give rise to.

The development of an L1 syllabus for native speakers of Irish would also give rise to questions surrounding provision of English as an L2. The introduction of an L2 English syllabus for students for whom English was not their native or home language received little support during the course of the first phase of the review. There was support in the review for the development of additional modules and resource materials to support non-native speakers of English in accessing existing L1 English syllabuses. It is recommended that English as an L2 would be further investigated as part of a second phase of the review.

Pilot studies on languages in education

During the course of the first phase of the review, a number of pilot studies were suggested. These included a study that would focus on the development of an integrated approach to the teaching and learning of languages in post primary education. The purpose of this study would be to promote the integrated development of language skills and an increased emphasis on the development of language awareness and of cultural awareness in English, Irish and modern languages. The experiences of existing language schools in teaching all subjects through a modern language could be drawn upon in this context. The approach taken in the pilot would involve working with teachers at junior cycle initially and subsequently in senior cycle. It is envisaged that the pilot study would involve working with schools and teachers to explore ways in which the ELP may be incorporated in planning for the development of an integrated language programme. The outcomes of the pilot would inform any future changes of emphasis in the review of language pedagogy, curricula and assessment in post-primary education.

In the areas of Irish and modern languages in particular, concerns emerged during the first phase of the review about the actual level of student attainment in language proficiency being achieved. It is recommended that the Department of Education and

Science should consider funding a study that would involve measurement of learning outcomes based on more varied modes and techniques of assessment than are currently possible in the State examinations. The potential uses of the CEF and the ALTE framework could be explored in this context as part of the study.

ICT in teaching and learning of languages

It is recommended that the development of a strategy for the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of languages should be a priority of the second phase of the review. There was widespread support during the first phase for the development of a strategy that would focus on the development and evaluation of digital resources for use with the modern language curriculum and that would involve awareness-raising of the issues involved in using ICT in teaching and learning; identification of training/skills needs and ways to address skill needs; the provision of digital content to support teaching and learning; the identification of existing resources; and evaluation of the effectiveness of the digital resources used and the process engaged in. The development of such a strategy could be undertaken by the NCCA in collaboration with the NCTE.

Alignment of developments in languages in Ireland with similar developments at the European level

The significance and importance of ongoing developments in the Council of Europe's CEF and ELP and the European Commission's Europass was repeatedly emphasised during the first phase of the review. That significance relates to most aspects of the developmental activity proposed for the second phase and to broader ongoing review and curriculum development at junior and senior cycle. The developments related to a policy on languages in education, to improving assessment of current language syllabuses, to developing a syllabus for native (L1) speakers of Irish, to the pilot studies on language integration and attainment of proficiency in languages can all benefit, to a greater or lesser extent, from engagement with the CEF, the ELP and Europass. Therefore it is recommended that such engagement

would be a primary feature of the developmental activity that comprises the second phase of the review.

Moving forward

The recommendations emerging for a second phase of the review focusing on developmental activity on languages in education are extensive. Decisions taken in relation to their implementation will be based on the resources available and on a prioritisation of those areas of activity that are considered most urgent. All developmental activity will be subject to evaluation processes at every stage of the work. The latter will be of particular importance as it is likely that the outcomes of the phase two developmental activity will give rise to the need for subsequent revision of language curricula (comprising a third phase of the review).

In arriving at a prioritisation of the various possibilities for developmental activity in phase two, cognisance will be taken of the ongoing curriculum review taking place in relation to junior cycle and senior cycle education and the degree to which developments in languages are consistent with the emphases of these ongoing reviews. It will also be important to consider developments in the review of the Primary School Curriculum as they relate to language and to the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative.

Appendix 1

Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education

List of sources of submissions during the first phase of the review

1. Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
2. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
3. Japanese Embassy
4. Post-Primary Modern Languages Initiative
5. Ms. Siobhán Supple
6. IRAAL, the Irish Association of Applied Linguistics.
7. University of Limerick

Glossary

The glossary provides brief clarification of some of the more specialised terms used in this document.

Basic communicative proficiency	The ability to communicate with native speakers of the target language in everyday situations involving travel, accommodation, purchasing etc as well as engaging in conversation on various topics. In short, the basic attested ability to communicate.
CEDEFOP CEF	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
Communicative paradigm	Methodological rules for communicative language teaching
Critical literacy	Critical literacy focuses on developing learners' critical thinking skills through language. In practice, it involves the following components and activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and challenging assumptions in texts. • Recognizing the centrality of context and culture in determining the way texts represent and shape experience. • Imagining and exploring alternatives in all contexts. • Developing a reflective scepticism relative to absolute and general statements.

ELP	European Languages Portfolio
Embedding	Placing in context, used here in reference to teaching grammar in the context of communicative tasks and activities
Focus on form	Instruction that seeks to isolate specific linguistic forms and properties in order to teach them one at a time
IILT	Integrate Ireland Language and Training
Interlanguage	<p>A transitional system of knowledge that the learner constructs when learning or exposed to a second language (L2) reflecting his/her current L1 knowledge</p> <p>Described as mental grammars constructed by learners that are perceived as dynamic and subject to rapid change as they repeatedly compare and revise their existing “rules” or “hypotheses” about the target language. (Ellis, R. The Study of Second language Acquisition. Oxford University Press. 1994, p.352.</p>
Language awareness	Language awareness refers to the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language giving rise to explicit knowledge about language.
L1 L2 L3	<p>L1= first language or mother tongue</p> <p>L2= second language</p> <p>L3 = third language</p>

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Useful websites

Association of Language Teachers in Europe (ALTE)

<http://www.alte.org>

Centre for Language and Communication Studies.

http://www.tcd.ie/CLCS/portfolio/irish_models.html

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

<http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documents/0521803136txt.pdf>

Europass

<http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/europass/home/hornav/Introduction/navigate.action>

European Languages Portfolio

[http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=\\$t/208-1-0-](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-)

[1/main_pages/./&L=E&...](http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/inc.asp?L=E&M=$t/208-1-0-1/main_pages/./&L=E&...)

Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre

http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?page=/reel/review_groups/english/review_seven_abstract.htm