

**International Mother Language Day Celebration 2015
Inclusion in and through education: Language counts**

Promotion of Non-Curricular Languages Leaving Certificate Examinations in Ireland

February 21st 2015

For Immediate Release

In recognition of UNESCO International Mother Language Day 2015 "Inclusion in and through education: Language counts" several diplomatic missions to Ireland would like to use celebration of this day as an opportunity to promote their languages and mother tongue education in Ireland.

The International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999 (30C/62). International Mother Language Day has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism

According to standards set by UNESCO "appropriate language education" is fundamental to enable learners to benefit from quality education, learn throughout life, and have access to information. This is possible if there is an approach to language education that promotes the use of at least three languages: one of which should be a mother tongue or first language. As underlined by **Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO** in her message on the occasion of IMLD 2015: *"International Mother Language Day is a moment for all of us to raise the flag for the importance of mother tongue to all educational efforts, to enhance the quality of learning and to reach the unreached."*

In Europe, in particular within the European Union, policy developments in the area of language learning have moved at a significant rate in the last two decades. Member states of the EU has expressed their commitment in this regard in Article 149 of the Treaty of Nice, which states that "Community action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States."

Those developments has been also introduced in Ireland, where linguistic landscape has changed radically in recent years. According to Census 2011 a total of 514,068 people (11% of the total population) stated that they do not speak Irish or English at home. In schools, there are pupils from over 160 countries and up to 200 languages are spoken. For approximately 70-75% pupils English is not their first language (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan, TD said: *"It is timely that my Department is developing a modern foreign languages strategy and I would like to thank the embassies for their contribution to this process. Our education system is hugely enriched by the presence of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and they are an asset to society in general"*.

On the occasion of IMLD 2015 several **Embassies in Dublin took initiative to celebrate mother tongue education in Ireland with special recognition for the Non-Curricular EU Language examination at the Leaving Certificate (LC)**. Native speakers of all European countries may request to sit an examination in the Leaving Certificate in their mother tongue. The model for the non-curricular language examination papers is based on the First Foreign Language final written paper of the European Baccalaureate.

It is encouraging to note the increasing numbers sitting non-curricular EU languages, since its introduction in 2005, which reached in 2014 more than 1500 students participating.

This year exam will be open for students speaking one of the 16 mother tongues: **Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, Modern Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian and Swedish**. Those languages are being referred to as non-curricular languages because they do not appear as part of the normal school curriculum thus alternative means of learning need to be employed in preparation for the LC exam.

In this regard we would like to recognize **the role of complementary schools** established by our communities in Ireland. The complementary schools, for the main part, run at weekends and provide tuition in subjects such as the mother tongue, history or geography. These schools play an important role in supporting students in linguistic skills and serve the whole community as point of integration being important partner in different projects.

Nevertheless complementary schools are limited to primary level. Thus it is very important to find solutions to include non-curricular languages in secondary level program. There are new possibilities in this regard such as a **short course** which can be introduced as part of Junior Cycle curriculum. One of the most active organization in this area is **The Post-Primary Languages Initiative**, which works on the maintenance and development of the multilingual abilities of young people through the Irish mainstream education system. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative is collaborating with embassies of languages that are widely spoken in Ireland to create new courses which will form part of the new Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA).

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Notes to the editor:

The International Mother Language Day - <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/international-mother-language-day-2015>

Message from Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of International Mother Language Day - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002316/231624E.pdf>

State Examinations Commission - Non-Curricular EU Language Subjects
<https://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=ex&sc=eu>

Leaving Certificate 2015 timetable

https://www.examinations.ie/exam/Leaving_Certificate_Examination_Leaving_Certificate_Applied_Timetable_2015.pdf