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Lárionad Taighde DCU  
um Fhoghlaim agus Teagasc  
na Gaeilge



# Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools

## *Literature Review and Perspectives of National Stakeholders*

### REPORT 1

*Towards an Action Plan for Irish in English-Medium Schools*

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### **Note for the Reader**

Both Report 1 and Report 2 aim to present and summarise the views of a variety of different perspectives on the teaching and learning of Irish expressed during the national consultation. The views presented in the relevant sections do not necessarily represent the views of the SEALBHÚ research team, individually or collectively.



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# Introduction

This report has been prepared by SEALBHÚ, the DCU Research Centre for the Learning and Teaching of Irish, as part of a consultation process to support the development of an Action Plan for Irish in English-medium schools. It is the first of two reports commissioned by An tAonad Gaeilge um Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla (AGSMB), Department of Education and Youth, in support of the development of an Action Plan for Irish in English-medium schools.

The research for this report was informed by the three main principles that will guide the Action Plan for Irish, set out by the AGSMB:

- I. the importance of fostering a positive mind-set towards Irish,
- II. a commitment to increasing the use of Irish and,
- III. the integration of policies, actions, structures, and resources.

The report is arranged in three main parts:

- **Part A: Literature Review;** this details high-level findings from previous research, theory and policy that are relevant to the current consultation.
- **Part B: Findings from the Initial Stakeholder Event;** this part details the main findings from the first consultation event, held in Croke Park in January 2025.
- **Part C: Recommendations from Bi-/Multi-lateral meetings with Stakeholders;** this part details the main recommendations expressed by stakeholders during a series of bi-/multi-lateral meetings held at the conclusion of the consultation in April/May 2025.

The report should be read in consultation with the findings from Report 2 (Burke et al., 2025), which explores the perspectives of school-based stakeholders, i.e. children, young people, teachers, student teachers, principals and parents/guardians.

# PART A

## *Literature Review*



## Part A: Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the teaching and learning of Irish since the foundation of the State to support readers' understanding of the past and present context in English-medium schools. Relevant national and international literature is reviewed in order to provide a foundation for evidence-informed, actionable and measurable goals. Particular attention is afforded to the minority language context. Readers should note that this is an abridged literature review to support the consultation, rather than an extensive review of all relevant literature and research.

This literature review is laid out in the following parts: (i) The current context, (ii) Teaching and Learning of Irish from past to present, (iii) Research on the Teaching and Learning of Irish - Classroom Practice and Language Use/Competence, (iv) Research on the Teaching and Learning of Irish - Attitudes and Motivation, (v) Language Learning Theories, (vi) Teacher Education and (vii) Pedagogical Approaches to Support the Teaching and Learning of Irish in English-medium schools.

### Context

Irish is recognised as the first of three official languages of the State, alongside English and Irish Sign Language (Government of Ireland, 2017). English is the majority societal language in an increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse society. Today, Irish is taught in a multilingual country where over 200 languages are spoken daily (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2017; 2023). Polish is the most commonly spoken home language other than Irish or English (CSO, 2023). The Irish language has long been intertwined with Irish heritage, culture, politics and education. Linguistic and cultural diversity presents many new opportunities for the teaching and learning of Irish and language learning in schools more generally (Little & Kirwan, 2019; Murray et al., 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024a).

Irish is a minority language in Ireland, spoken by 1.4% of the population on a daily basis outside of school (CSO, 2023). The Irish education system has continually been relied upon to support the maintenance of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and to revitalise the language outside the Gaeltacht (Government of Ireland, 2010). As intergenerational transmission of Irish continues to decline (Ní Chuaig et al., 2021; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015), the education system remains a critical and vital means to ensure competence in Irish, which is in turn necessary for future use of the language. It is noteworthy that 40.4% of the population self-report as having good or very good competence in Irish (CSO, 2023), which is indicative





of at least some level of success in the education system. However, there is evidence of limited transfer of this ability to use outside of education, with a small increase in the number of 'new speakers' of Irish who have learned Irish in school and who are speaking Irish on a daily basis outside the Gaeltacht (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020). Use of a language outside of school is linked to domains which provide opportunities for language use, as well as a willingness to use the language. It is widely recognised that an education system alone cannot revitalise a minority language (Fishman, 1991; Government of Ireland, 2010). Learning Irish has many potential benefits for all learners, which are associated with the general benefits of bilingualism and plurilingualism, as well as the distinct cultural benefits of learning Irish. Benefits associated with bilingualism have been mapped across cognitive, sociocultural, intercultural and linguistic domains, extending also to increased employment opportunities in certain professions (Baker & Wright, 2017).

Despite challenges in the teaching and learning of Irish, the public has shown positive attitudes towards the language (Darmody & Daly, 2015). The All-Island study *Attitudes Towards Irish* showed that 67% of respondents had a positive attitude towards Irish and that 78% of parents thought it was important for their children to learn Irish (Darmody & Daly, 2015). While the survey was conducted a number of years ago, it is of note that only 1% of respondents at the time were in favour of discontinuing Irish. In its most recently commissioned survey of more than 2700 participants on opinions towards the Irish language North and South, Conradh na Gaeilge (2024) reported that 67% of respondents in the Republic would "like the opportunity to learn more Irish", while 63% would "like the opportunity to speak Irish more often". A recent consultation for the provision of Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024) showed that Irish-medium schools were oversubscribed and that the greater demand for Irish-medium schools outweighs its provision.

Irish is taught as a core subject in all primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. There is a minimum allocated time for teaching Irish at primary level (Department of Education(DE), 2023a) and post-primary level (NCCA, 2023). The recently published *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DE, 2023a) outlines a reduction in discrete teaching time for Irish in English-medium primary schools of 30 minutes per week. Further to the discrete time allocation for Irish at primary level, it is recommended that Irish be used as an informal means of communication throughout the day. It is also recommended that subjects or parts of other subjects be taught through Irish, an approach known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Government of Ireland, 2019). Towards this end, the DE is currently running



a pilot programme on CLIL through Irish in a number of early-years settings, primary schools and post-primary schools (DE, 2023b). In previous generations, CLIL was an integral element of primary schools, with 55% of primary schools teaching all subjects or some subjects through Irish in the 1940s (Harris, 2005). A national assessment of achievement of Irish-language speaking and listening skills in primary-school in 1985 revealed that pupils taught one or two subjects through Irish had considerably higher levels of achievement than other pupils (Harris & Murtagh, 1988a). In more recent years, other than the pilot schools mentioned above, statistics available from the DE show that very few schools teach other subjects through Irish (See Tables 1,2,3). When Irish is used as an informal means of communication in English-medium schools, it has received positive feedback (DE Inspectorate, 2022).

Irish is also taught as a subject in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools where Irish is the communicative language of the school. In these schools all subjects are taught through Irish, with the exception of English and modern foreign languages. The language of instruction reported by schools in 2024/2025<sup>1</sup> can be found in Table 1 (Primary), Table 2 (Post-primary) and Table 3 (Special schools). The vast majority of students at both primary and post-primary level learn Irish as a subject in English-medium schools. Due to the minority status of the language outside of school, for many students, school may be the only contact they have with the language. It is therefore vital that students attending English-medium schools have positive experiences of learning Irish (Dunne, 2020a 2020b; DEY, 2025). The next section looks at the historical background of the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools.

**Table 1:** Language of instruction in Primary Schools (2024/5)

PRIMARY	Schools	Students	% Schools	% Students
No subjects through Irish	2802	493442	90.91%	90.97%
All subjects through Irish	248	43192	8.05%	7.96%
Some subjects through Irish	32	5783	1.04%	1.07%
<b>Total (all)</b>	<b>3082</b>	<b>542,417</b>		

<sup>1</sup> These statistics are drawn from the Department of Education and Youth website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/primary-schools/>; <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/post-primary-schools/>



**Table 2:** Language of instruction in Post-Primary Schools (2024/5)

POST-PRIMARY	Schools	Students	% Schools	% Students
All pupils taught all subjects through Irish	50	14199	6.93%	3.34%
No subjects taught through Irish	648	396486	89.75%	93.20%
Some pupils taught all subjects through Irish	13	8198	1.80%	1.93%
Some pupils taught some subjects through Irish	11	6550	1.52%	1.54%
<b>Total (all)</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>425433</b>		

**Table 3:** Language of instruction in Special Schools (2024/5)

SPECIAL SCHOOLS	Schools	Students	% Schools	% Students
No subjects through Irish	138	9488	95.83%	98.01%
All subjects through Irish	0	0	0.00%	0.00%
Some subjects through Irish	6	193	4.17%	1.99%
<b>Total (all)</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>9681</b>		

## Teaching and learning of Irish from past to present

The teaching of Irish in schools has responded to different State visions for language use and revitalisation. It has also responded to curriculum changes underpinned by emerging understandings of how children learn internationally. For brevity, we consider the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools in four main stages according to language curricula in 1922, 1971, 1999 and 2019. With the foundation of the Free State there was a wave of nationalism, patriotism and idealism. Schools were given a central role in reversing language shift to English (Coolahan, 1981). Where possible, teachers were to teach all subjects through Irish and in infant classes in particular. Dunne (2020a) outlines the very many reasons why the top-down policy of changing to teaching all subjects through Irish was unlikely to succeed at the time, documenting for example, (i) that the change was not gradual and neither was it



resourced, (ii) the insufficient number of teachers competent in the language at the time; (iii) the loss of competent Irish speakers from the teaching profession due to the marriage ban, (iv) challenging teaching and learning conditions, with overcrowded classrooms and many impoverished children, (v) the pressure of assessment on teachers and, (vi) the MacNamara (1966) report which suggested bilingualism was damaging for children (a report which was later disproven). Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg (2019) state that the endeavour to achieve too much too soon, without adequate or coordinated planning and resources may have caused long-term negative effects and that a more carefully planned approach with support from the public and other state institutions may have been more successful. By 1972, only 11 schools were teaching through the medium of Irish (Ó Duibhir & Ní Dhiorbháin, 2025).

By the time of the publication of the 1971 curriculum, there was a shift in government policy away from the vision of an Irish-speaking Ireland to one of societal Irish/English bilingualism. This curriculum was more child-centred, taking into account the whole child and more constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. An audio-visual method to teaching Irish was adopted and resources such as *Buntús Cainte* and *Nuachúrsaí Gaeilge ABC* were designed. While this approach had some positive features, particularly in terms of structured input and the provision of resources, children struggled to progress to the stage of using the language exemplars in free (independent) conversation (Dunne, 2020a).

Communicative teaching approaches had dominated language teaching in Europe since the 1970s. Harris and Murtagh (1999) carried out a rigorous review of the teaching of Irish in the previous 20 years and advocated for a communicative approach to language teaching. This study also noted the importance of parental attitudes. When parents actively encouraged their child to learn Irish, this was positively associated with both pupil achievement and pupil attitude/motivation to learn Irish. Although only a small number of English-medium schools taught other subjects through Irish at that time, it had a positive impact on achievement in Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The 1999 primary curriculum for Irish was based on a communicative approach, with an emphasis on using language to fulfil communicative functions (Flynn, 2021). In 1999, guidelines for teachers were provided along with a curriculum document showing strands, strand units, themes and language functions for all classes. There was some recognition of learning Irish in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools in the Irish language curriculum through the provision of separate learning objectives. It was recommended that Irish be taught through Irish, with an emphasis on enjoyment, games and interactive tasks. A criticism of the curriculum may be that not enough emphasis was placed on developing children's reading skills due to the strong emphasis on speaking



Irish (Hickey & Stenson, 2016). It is recognised that as Irish is a minority language with more limited functional use outside of schools, that the communicative approach would also be extended to include a focus on themes that were relevant to children's lives (Flynn, 2021). The communicative approach continues to be prominent in the current Primary Language Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 2019).

The 2019 Primary Language Curriculum builds on the communicative approach of the 1999 primary curriculum for Irish and now aligns with the State's plurilingual vision for Irish language education (Government of Ireland, 2024). The revised Primary Language Curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2024) places a further emphasis on plurilingual and pluricultural competence. A move from a vision of bilingualism to plurilingualism is warranted to affirm linguistic and cultural diversity in Ireland, and to support the teaching and learning of Irish in a linguistically and culturally diverse society. Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism advocate for learners to use all of their linguistic and cultural knowledge in schools. Within a plurilingual framework, all linguistic knowledge is an asset and is valued (Council of Europe, 2001, 2022). Batardière et al. (2023) recognise the need to move to more pluralistic ways of teaching languages. Through this lens, learning Irish as an additional language can help children develop language learning skills, which they can apply when learning other languages. Learning a second language in primary school can also inspire an interest in language learning (Hawkins, 2005). As the majority of children in Ireland are learning Irish as a second language, Irish may also be a language to connect languages and promote intercultural education, as learners from a diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds learn Irish together (Little & Kirwan, 2019; Murray et al., 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024a).

The Primary Language Curriculum (DE, 2019) aligns with contemporary understandings that language and literacy skills transfer across languages, and that learning an additional language contributes to a common underlying proficiency that supports all language learning (Cummins, 1981, 2021; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). Structurally, the curriculum articulates related learning outcomes for English and Irish, but provides a differentiated set of learning outcomes for Irish-medium/Gaeltacht and English-medium schools. It is expected to be a curriculum for all learners, recognising that children will progress at different rates depending on their linguistic background and the medium of instruction in the school. The curriculum emphasises the transfer of literacy skills across languages and the inclusion of home languages other than Irish and English in primary schools. According to Cummins (1981), this means that children can use literacy skills



acquired in a first language when learning a second language, provided there is adequate exposure to the second language and adequate motivation to learn. In principle, therefore, children's first language can support them when learning Irish, and learning Irish can support them in developing skills to learn other languages. However, Cummins' theory acknowledges that some specific elements of language do not transfer, for example, certain sounds and grammatical structures. Though a formal review has yet to take place, research suggests challenges in the early enactment of the Primary Language Curriculum (Mac Domhnaill & Nic an Bhaird, 2022; DE Inspectorate, 2022), with limited evidence to illustrate its impact on the teaching and learning of Irish to date.

Table 4 shows the changes in curriculum and goals for teaching and learning Irish at primary level.

**Table 4:** Trajectory of Teaching Methods in National Curricula

Curriculum	State Vision	Teaching Methods	Theories of Language Learning
1971	Bilingual Irish/English	Audiovisual Method	Behaviourist/sociocultural
1999	Bilingual Irish/English	Communicative Approach	Sociocultural theory
2019 / 2024	Plurilingual - Irish as part of a plurilingual repertoire	Communicative Approach; Emphasis on Transfer of Skills	Sociocultural Linguistic Interdependence & transfer

Curricula at post-primary level have followed many of the same trends as curricula at primary level in terms of a focus on communicative language in recent decades. In practice, however, research shows that a particular challenge of teaching and learning Irish at second level has been the backwash effect due to the dominance of the summative exams (Nic Eoin, 2017). A differentiated curriculum for Irish-medium, Gaeltacht (T1) and English-medium (T2) was provided at lower post-primary level for Irish in 2017, with a view to building on differentiated provision at primary level. The provision of a differentiated curriculum at Senior Cycle has been postponed awaiting a review of the implementation of Junior Cycle Irish Specifications for T1 and T2 (Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). An early enactment review of Irish language specifications at Junior Cycle T1 and T2 was carried out in 2023 (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023), which led to some revisions of the current specifications. 40% of marks in the Leaving Certificate are currently allocated to an oral Irish examination,



while there is currently no oral Irish examination at Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2023). Junior Cycle specifications emphasise communicative task-based approaches to language learning. Texts in a variety of genres are used at both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle to enrich students' language learning. Research on enactment indicates some evidence of active teaching and learning approaches, but also highlights a range of challenges, including, for example, the role of CBAs and the lack of summative assessment of oral Irish (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó'Grady, 2025).

## **Research on the teaching and learning of Irish: Classroom practice and language use/competence**

Research on the teaching and learning of Irish has drawn on a range of methodological approaches and focused on different aspects of pedagogy, including classroom-based practice, student language use/competence and student attitudes. Two large-scale quantitative studies have examined the teaching and learning of Irish in primary schools. Harris and Murtagh (1988b) reported on research in primary schools in 1978 and 1985, while Harris et al. (2006) reported on a large-scale study carried out in 2002. Together, these studies indicate a decline in Irish competence for children in English-medium schools over time. However, it must be noted that this decline tracks with a corresponding decline in the amount of time allocated to Irish in English-medium schools in this period (Ó Duibhir & Ní Dhiorbháin, 2025). Harris et al. (2006) also found that there was more of a difference in achievement in Irish reading across schools compared with English and Mathematics. This suggests that there was greater variability in the teaching of Irish than other subjects, underlining the important role of individual teachers. Robust quantitative studies of this nature have not been replicated in this past two decades, meaning there is limited information on current competence at the primary level.

In the absence of these studies, Inspectorate reports shed light on current practice. Reports of the Chief Inspector over the past number of years (Department of Education and Science, 2007; Department of Education & Skills (DES) Inspectorate 2013, 2018; DE Inspectorate, 2022) have consistently shown that there are challenges associated with the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools. The reports cite problematic practices such as an overreliance on textbooks, teaching Irish through English, teaching nouns rather than sentence structures, and a lack of opportunities for children to use the language, which in turn is linked to poorer learning outcomes. The use of informal Irish, songs and poems were found to be enjoyable and worthwhile for children at primary level. Concerns have been raised about children's lack of communicative competence in Irish.





In recent research on the implementation of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025), teachers have reported uneven levels of proficiency in incoming First Year students. This suggests that the quality of Irish teaching varies substantially from primary school to primary school. Teachers report that this leads to challenges at Junior Cycle level, as they feel obliged to teach basic Irish skills which should have been acquired in primary school. Teachers also report that the Junior Cycle Irish specifications are too difficult for many students.

Reading and writing in Irish supports the development of Irish language skills and can provide valuable linguistic input and output for learners. Concern has been raised regarding the development of children's literacy skills in Irish at primary level (Department of Education and Science, 2007; Hickey & Stenson, 2016; Parsons & Lyddy, 2009; 2015). Research suggests that Irish reading is not being taught in a systematic way and that many children are not being taught to decode words in Irish (DES, 2007; Hickey & Stenson, 2016; Parsons & Lyddy, 2009, 2016). These studies suggest that children in English-medium schools are reliant on whole-word approaches to reading in Irish (ie. Look and Say) or reliant on the use of English phonics to decode Irish orthography. Stenson and Hickey (2019) argue that teachers need to develop their own understanding of Irish orthography. The negative effects of an over-reliance on textbooks on both achievement and motivation in Irish reading have also been noted (Hickey & Stenson, 2016). Textbooks may provide an unsystematic approach towards sound-symbol correspondence or rely on short texts which are insufficient to develop reading skills. Relatedly, some textbooks emphasise the teaching of spelling based on themes rather than related spelling patterns, which does not support understanding of Irish orthography or morphology. Hickey and Stenson (2016), note that teachers may over rely on textbooks due to: the very limited time allocated to teaching Irish, low confidence, fewer resources in Irish and a lack of preparation to teach Irish reading. Recent initiatives suggest that there are benefits associated with the provision of real children's literature to support reading in Irish. A successful example can be seen in the Children's Books Ireland *Bosca Leabharlainne Project*, which provided 25 Irish books to 1,800 schools (O'Kane Boal, 2023).

There is little research on achievement in Irish at post-primary level (Batardièrre, et al., 2023). In Murtagh's studies (2003, 2007), students attending English-medium schools achieved an average score of 51% on an independent language test, yet she highlighted that the amount of time allocated to the teaching of Irish is below what would be recommended and necessary to achieve better results. Leaving Certificate results have remained stable (Ó Duibhir & Ní Dhiorbháin, 2025), yet it is of note that the system for teaching, learning and





assessment of Irish is not aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which provides standardised language descriptors. Furthermore, the marking system for state examinations adheres to the bell curve, meaning that stable examination results do not necessarily equate to stable levels of language competence. Examinations have significantly impacted the focus of post-primary teaching and learning and it is widely acknowledged that student' experiences involve a high level of rote-learning (Nic Eoin, 2017). This is not conducive to developing independent language users. A large-scale longitudinal study on the enactment of Junior Cycle specifications, carried out by the University of Limerick (McGarr, et al. 2024) indicates that teachers of Irish are more dissatisfied with their job than teachers of other subjects. Ní Dhiorbháin and O'Grady (2025) highlighted difficulties regarding inclusive practice in Irish in English-medium schools at Junior Cycle due to the absence of an oral Irish examination, absence of a foundation level course and a gap in provision for newcomer students. Teachers and school leaders were of the opinion that a summative examination focused mainly on reading and writing skills in Irish was not suitable for all learners. Participants strongly advocated for an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle.

## Research on the teaching and learning of Irish: Attitudes and motivation

Qualitative and quantitative studies provide an insight into children's attitudes towards learning Irish in English-medium primary schools. Drawing on data from a large-scale quantitative study, *Growing up in Ireland*, Devitt et al. (2018) showed that attitudes towards Irish were linked to contact with the language, in other words, children with more exposure to Irish at home and at school have more positive attitudes towards the language. Devitt et al. (2018) and Martinez-Sainz et al. (2024) have shown that children are more negatively disposed towards learning Irish than other subjects. It is of note that this is in contrast with children attending Irish-medium schools who show consistently positive attitudes towards learning and using Irish (Devitt et al., 2018; Kiely et al., 2024; Martinez-Sainz et al., 2024) and who have much greater opportunities to use the language. Martinez-Sainz et al. (2024) showed that although some children are of the opinion that Irish is more difficult and less useful than other subjects, they appreciated the cultural value of learning Irish. Irish and Maths were also found to be subjects where parents were most challenged to support their children's learning. Kiely et al. (2024) also showed challenges in terms of motivation to learn Irish in English-medium schools at primary level. Their study highlighted that children most enjoy pedagogies that are active and learner-centred. As children in English-medium schools



are more negatively disposed towards learning Irish than other subjects, it is imperative to draw on newer pedagogies that encourage positive engagement with the language, as this is a situation that could be improved (Kiely et al., 2024). Nic Fhionnlaoich (2022) found that children in senior classes were more negatively disposed towards learning Irish compared to children in junior classes in primary school. Overreliance on textbooks, lack of opportunities to use Irish, the teaching of isolated nouns in Irish and lack of structured listening activities were reported to have a negative impact on attitudes and use. Together, these studies highlight the need to pay particular attention to affective outcomes when it comes to the teaching and learning of Irish.

Though the preceding research highlights challenges, the literature also illuminates how *positive* attitudes towards Irish can be fostered. Dunne and Ní Aogáin's (2024) explored participants' positive memories of learning Irish. Purposive sampling was employed in the study to recruit participants who had achieved a high standard of Irish, who were, for example, using Irish in their profession. It may be worthwhile to consider these experiences to support other learners to develop confidence and competence in Irish. Positive memories of learning Irish were associated with: (i) learning Irish through the arts (linking Irish with Irish legends, music, songs and drama; (ii) using the language in a fun way outside the lesson (using informal Irish, time in the Gaeltacht, using Irish outside the classroom); and (iii) relationships with teachers and attitudes of individual teachers. It is acknowledged in this study, and in other studies, that individual teachers play an important role in determining learners' attitudes and motivation to learn Irish (Harris et al., 2006; Smyth, 2017).

There are similar trends at post-primary level in terms of learners' motivation to learn Irish in English-medium schools (Murtagh, 2007; Smyth & Darmody, 2016) with learners viewing Irish less favourably than other subjects. Barnes et al. (2024) drew on data from over 7,000 students in the Growing Up in Ireland study to examine attitudes towards learning Irish, showing that these attitudes remain relatively stable from primary to post-primary. In keeping with other research, they found that students attending Irish-medium schools were more motivated to learn Irish, and that the language of instruction of the school was the greatest predictor of positive motivation towards learning the language. More student-centred teaching styles and higher positive interactions with teachers were associated with Irish being seen as less difficult and more interesting. In terms of improving learner motivation to learn Irish, Barnes et al. (2024) emphasise the need to optimise enjoyment and minimise challenges for learners for Irish. This study also emphasised the importance of parents in supporting positive attitudes towards Irish.



Pedagogies such as CLIL have been shown to increase learners' motivation (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2017). There are also Irish language schemes such as Gaelbhratach and Gaeilge 24 which show potential to promote the language in English-medium schools and encourage positive attitudes towards Irish in English-medium schools (Kiely et al., 2024; Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). A plurilingual approach to teaching Irish which includes English and students' home languages has also been shown to result in positive attitudes towards Irish and shows the potential of Irish to promote language learning and affirm linguistic and cultural diversity (Little & Kirwan, 2019; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024a).

## Language learning theories

Language learning theories and research highlight the particular importance of language input and output in order for learners to acquire or learn a language (Flynn, 2021; Muñoz, 2008). Flynn (2021) emphasises that there are many similarities between learning a first and a second language and that the role of input and opportunities to use the language are equally critical for first and second language acquisition. Younger learners have less developed cognitive skills than older learners and therefore require large amounts of input to learn a second language successfully, as in immersion programmes (Muñoz, 2008; Ó Duibhir & Ní Dhiorbháin, 2025). Research shows that immersion education is the most effective way for students to acquire an additional language such as Irish without any detrimental effect to outcomes in the majority language or in subject learning (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024b). This is directly linked to the comparatively greater input and opportunities to use the language, compared to non-immersion settings (Ó Duibhir, 2018). In order for children to maximise their early language learning of Irish in English-medium schools, they need adequate levels of exposure to the language and rich opportunities for input, output and interaction (Ó Duibhir & Harris, 2023). It is of note that McCoy et al.'s (2012) analysis of data from *Growing Up in Ireland* study showed variation in terms of the time allocated to teaching Irish across primary schools. Time allocated to teaching Irish was found to be influenced by the language of instruction of the school and school context. DEIS schools were found to spend less time teaching Irish and to allocate more time teaching English.

It is recognised that learners in traditional 'foreign language teaching' may reach a ceiling effect, whereby it is difficult for them to reach very high levels of proficiency without immersive or intensive experiences in the target language (Muñoz, 2012). It is also suggested that individual learner differences may become more apparent, as some learners will try to break through this ceiling effect (Muñoz, 2012). They may do this by engaging in extra language learning or seeking out activities where there is more exposure to the language.



Intensive language instruction over a shorter period is believed to be more effective than less intensive instruction over longer time periods, referred to as drip-feeding approaches (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011; Muñoz, 2012). Sufficient practice with the language is needed for declarative knowledge to progress to procedural (automatic) language use (Van Patten, 1996). Adequate exposure and opportunities to use a language are crucial to acquire any language.

Flynn (2021) writes “Is gá iarracht a dhéanamh comhthéacs dílis teanga a chruthú sa seomra ranga le go mbeidh deis ag foghlaimeoirí cumarsáid bhríoch a bhfuil cuspóir léi a dhéanamh le chéile” (lch.99). [It is necessary to try to create an authentic language context in the classroom in order to afford learners an opportunity to communicate with each other meaningfully and with purpose” (p.99)]. Theoretical perspectives demonstrate that language learning can be supported by process-based methods such as task-based learning or CLIL, which provide learners with meaningful opportunities to communicate in the target language. Informal language use and CLIL also maximise opportunities for students to learn the minority language outside the subject lesson (Thomas et al., 2018). In the context of a minority language such as Irish, all efforts should be made to optimise linguistic input and use in the school.

A range of theories have been proposed to explain an individual's motivation to learn an additional language. Deci and Ryan's (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020) self-determination theory has proven influential in education more broadly and in the literature on second language learning more specifically (Al-Hoorie et al., 2025). The theory draws a broad distinction between *intrinsic* motivation, which is driven by an individual's own inherent interests and satisfaction, and *extrinsic* motivation, which relies on external validation or reward. According to self-determination theory, motivation is facilitated when learners are supported to develop:

- (i) **autonomy:** a sense of ownership over learning (e.g. having choice in activities completed in Irish lessons or in the focus of their language learning)
- (ii) **competence:** a sense that one can be successful and grow (e.g. being able to chart and reflect on progress in language learning; witnessing growth in language skills)
- (iii) **relatedness:** a sense of connection with others (e.g. making and building relationships with others while using the language)

These three dimensions have important implications for providing motivating contexts for learning Irish in the classroom. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005; 2009) theory



emphasises that motivation to learn a language is driven by the image an individual holds of themselves as a future L2 language user. The theory is underpinned by three components:

- (i) **Ideal L2 Self:** The self they want to be, e.g. an individual imagines themselves as a regular, fluent L2 user in the future, inspired by role models who speak the language
- (ii) **Ought-to L2 Self:** The self they should be to avoid negative outcomes, e.g. an individual imagines what they should be, according to social norms or the expectations of others (“I must do well in Irish to get into the course I want”)
- (iii) **L2 Learning Experience:** The impact of the immediate learning environment on the individual, e.g. the curriculum, teacher, learning materials

Reviews of the research provide strong support for affording careful attention to the factors that support or hinder a student’s motivation to learn a second language (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Yousefi & Mahmoodi, 2022). Caution is warranted in adopting motivational strategies that emphasise short-term gains (e.g. prizes/rewards) rather than focussing on the factors that sustain motivation in the longer term. It is also crucial that students experience success in their learning (Barnes et al., 2024). It is worth considering how the usefulness of Irish can be expanded upon in schools for example to emphasise broader benefits such as cognitive skills and employment opportunities (Murray et al., 2023).

A welcoming, encouraging learning environment is crucial to support learner motivation and avoid language anxiety. Teimouri et al. (2019) provide a meta-analysis of 97 reports of 105 independent samples ( $N = 19,933$ ) across 23 countries exploring the concept of language anxiety. They conclude that language anxiety has a negative impact on achievement in second/foreign language learning, albeit achievement being measured in various ways across contexts. Language anxiety has been shown to be higher for younger learners who may not yet have developed skills to manage anxiety and with older learners when language learning is associated with exams. Language anxiety also has the greatest impact on languages other than English.

## Teacher education

Following the foundation of the Free State, teachers were given a key role in the revitalisation of Irish. While language shift was unsuccessful for many reasons (Dunne, 2020a), teachers continue to have a crucial role in providing input in Irish as well as facilitating meaningful opportunities for students to use the language (Harris et al., 2006; Thomas & Dunne, 2022). Teacher preparation for Irish language education has changed over



time. Gaeltacht courses have continued to play a role in enhancing teacher proficiency, and from the 1970s 10% of places on teacher education courses at primary level have been reserved for Gaeltacht applicants (Dunne, 2020b). Preparatory colleges for primary teachers existed until 1961 (Jones, 1993). From the mid-1970s to 2012, students in initial teacher education at primary level could study education as an academic major (60%) and a humanities subject as an academic minor (40%) (Nic Eoin, 2018). Nic Eoin (2018) estimates that before the dismantling of this model in 2012, approximately 25% of students studied Irish to degree level. Time allocated to the teaching of Irish as a subject was reduced with the introduction of a four-year BEd and two-year PME programme in 2012 (Nic Eoin, 2018).

Although there is an entry level requirement in Irish for initial teacher education at primary level and on some post-primary courses at undergraduate level, this is linked with the Leaving Certificate. A standardised entry or exit language requirement does not exist for primary teacher education courses (Nic Eoin, 2018). Postgraduate applicants for teacher education courses at primary level must achieve a set mark on an oral exam aligned with B1 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Gaeltacht placement - *Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht* - is a compulsory part of teacher education courses at primary level and for post-primary level for teaching Irish (Teaching Council, 2020). Language requirements for initial teacher education mean that exemptions from Irish may exclude students from having the opportunity to consider primary teaching as a career. Burns et al. (2024) document a successful alternative pathway into initial primary teacher education (ITE) which supported students to develop competence in Irish prior to ITE. They highlight the need to provide alternative pathways into teacher education to support diversity within the teaching profession.

Many large-scale studies have shown that the amount of contact with the language and the role of the teacher are more important than the instructional methods used (Concannon-Gibney et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). Teachers need content knowledge of language including proficiency and explicit knowledge of language, along with appropriate pedagogical skills (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2021). Many teachers may lack confidence in their own Irish language skills as Irish is a minority language for them also, leading to limited contact with the language outside of school. Inspectorate evaluations have shown that the teaching of Irish is generally more effective when teachers are competent in the language (Department of Education and Science, 2007). Previous studies have shown that some primary teachers are not confident with regard to their competence in Irish (Dunne, 2019; Department of Education and Science, 2007; Harris et al.,



2006). Teacher education across the continuum of education is very important to support the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools.

In supporting teachers to develop their language knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, it is crucial to pay attention to the research on high quality professional learning. Generally speaking, research has shown that effective professional learning has the following characteristics: (i) is content focused; (ii) incorporates active learning; (iii) supports collaboration; (iv) uses models of effective practice; (v) provides coaching and expert support; (vi) offers feedback and reflection; and (vii) is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Coaching where one on one support is offered to teachers has been found to be successful in some small-scale studies in Irish (Ní Dhiorbháin et al. 2024a; Ní Dhiorbháin et al. 2024c).

## **Pedagogical approaches to support the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools**

This section of the report draws on findings from three large reviews that are relevant to the teaching and learning of Irish (Concannon-Gibney, et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2018). These studies are helpful as they provide an overview of findings from many studies. For example, Concannon-Gibney et al. (2022) reviewed 78 meta-analyses since 2011 as well as 56 studies focused on Irish. Recommendations from other relevant literature are also considered. Research at both national and international levels confirms that improving learning outcomes and motivation requires greater exposure to and use of Irish in English-medium schools (Concannon-Gibney, et al., 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2018). The research on motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005; 2009) underlines that it is also imperative that students enjoy learning the language and experience success (Barnes et al., 2024).

The following pedagogical approaches may be worthy of consideration to support the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools.

### **Maximise exposure to Irish and opportunities for language use**

Research is clear that sufficient time with and exposure to the target language is necessary in order for language learning to be effective (Lightbown & Spada, 2021; Muñoz, 2012, Ó Duibhir & Harris, 2023). Younger learners need significant amounts of input and opportunities to use the language that they are learning. Where there is limited input outside of school, it is crucial to maximise contact with the minority language in school in order for





learners to acquire the language. Time is the most reliable predictor of children's success in early language learning programmes (Edelenbos et al., 2006). There is a strong research base to show that immersive experiences in the language benefit learners (Muñoz, 2012); in the absence of full immersion, approaches such as CLIL can prove successful (see following sections). Intensive Irish language courses inside and outside the Gaeltacht can create further opportunities for learners to develop proficiency in Irish. Both research and theory indicate the time to use a minority language must be maximised in order for learners to achieve a high level of communicative competence.

### A whole-school approach

It is likely that a whole-school approach with support from leadership is necessary to promote the teaching and learning of Irish. Increasing use of Irish inside and outside of school is important to foster positive attitudes. There are some Irish language support schemes (Gaelbhrtach, for example) which focus on increasing language use and positive attitudes towards Irish. Consideration should be given to how parents can become involved in their children's Irish learning, regardless of their knowledge of Irish. Digital resources may be useful for parents in addition to 'translanguaging' practices where students discuss their Irish work at home in the home language.

### The use of informal Irish

Using Irish as an informal means of communication increases contact with the language and opportunities to use the language in a meaningful context in schools. In the context of Welsh in English-medium schools, Thomas et al. (2018) advise that this incidental language use should be planned so that there is a focus on teacher and student talk, a focus on sentence structure, and progression in language from stage-to-stage to ensure consistent and continuous use of the language. This is an effective pedagogy to support implicit learning and may be less daunting for teachers who lack confidence in the L2.

### A plurilingual approach

There is a growing awareness of the potential for providing strong support for the Irish language within a plurilingual approach, as evidenced in recent policy (DE, 2024a) and curriculum (NCCA, 2024) in Ireland. This approach recognises that each individual has their own repertoire of languages and that they can draw on their knowledge of *all* of these languages to communicate and learn (Council of Europe, 2022). Plurilingual competence goes hand in hand with pluricultural competence, in that students are encouraged to draw on all of their linguistic and cultural repertoire in a fluid, integrated and dynamic manner. Within this





framework there is no linguistic hierarchy, and all languages and linguistic and cultural knowledge is valued (Council of Europe, 2022). Little and Kirwan (2024) outline four key principles of a plurilingual approach to language teaching:

1. Language learning will be most successful when it takes in an authentic, spontaneous manner; learners are afforded a level of autonomy.
2. *All* of a learner's linguistic knowledge is brought to bear on the learning of a new language; in other words, languages are not considered as separate entities that should remain isolated from each other; learners are encouraged to share and integrate knowledge of, for example, home languages and additional languages.
3. Though languages are related, they also involve discrete skills; this means individual languages require sufficient input and use *in their own right* in order to develop proficiency, including the teaching of language-specific literacy skills.
4. Learners should be enabled to reflect on, plan, and manage their own language learning as appropriate, given their own linguistic repertoire will need to evolve over the course of their lifetime.

Little and Kirwan's research and guidance (2019; 2024) suggests that Irish can thrive when an affirming plurilingual approach is adopted. More recent research suggests that a plurilingual approach holds particular potential for the teaching of language awareness and Irish grammar in English-medium schools (Ni Dhiorbháin et al., 2024).

### **CLIL, task-based learning, action-oriented learning**

Contemporary approaches to language education emphasise an active role for the learner in using new language in authentic, purposeful contexts.

In **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**, students develop competence in a second or additional language *through* learning experience in another subject (Coyle et al., 2010). CLIL may be beneficial to support contact with the language outside the language lesson and to improve learners' motivation and oral language skills. It is important that subject learning is not compromised for the sake of the language; CLIL requires careful planning and has implications for teacher education (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2017; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). CLIL lessons can be planned using the 4 C's framework, which addresses content, communication, cognition and culture (Coyle, 2008). CLIL is particularly suitable for practical lessons, and it is generally accepted that teachers may use the target language and some



English in the one lesson. Music, Art and PE may be particularly appropriate at primary level (Hood, 2020). Increasing the number of subjects taught through Irish in English-medium schools could be considered as progression of initial CLIL programmes, similar to Wales. Hood (2020) advises that a whole-school approach to using the language informally would be a first step towards CLIL. This could be built on so that parts of lessons are taught through the target language and progress to bilingual or CLIL lessons. In order for CLIL through Irish to be successful, teachers would need adequate resources and professional development (Ní Dhiorbháin & Murphy, 2025). The gradual adoption of CLIL may provide a pathway towards partial immersion programmes which ultimately would provide learners with greater opportunities to use Irish in a meaningful context.

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020), emphasises the **action-oriented approach** to language learning. This approach views learners as active social agents who employ all of their linguistic resources purposively in collaborative tasks that are linked with real-life goals, resulting in a product or outcome other than language. The approach places a particular emphasis on learning language through authentic tasks. **Task-based learning** occurs when students learn and use language to complete a task that is linked to a real-life situation (Bryfonski & Mc Kay, 2019). This happens in the language lesson and may increase learners' motivation to use the target language. Task-based learning lessons follow a sequence of Pre-task, Task and Post-task (Flynn, 2021). It is a way to enact the communicative approach where there is a result other than the **language learning**.

### Focus on form

Along with a focus on communicative language use, it is widely acknowledged that explicit attention should also be paid to grammatical form (Ellis, 2005). Form focused instruction is necessary for learners to develop accurate language skills and this can form part of a communicative approach. A balance between form-focused and meaning-focused instruction is considered best practice in instructed second language acquisition (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011).

### Support children to develop literacy skills in Irish

While it is acknowledged that it is vital to emphasise spoken Irish and that younger children will learn best through oral language activities, it is critical to note the importance of supporting children to develop reading and writing skills in Irish. As noted previously, longstanding research and theory on bilingual and multilingual learners shows that literacy



skills from a child's first language can support literacy in a second language, given the right supports (Cummins 1981; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). International guidance on second language teaching, including CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020), highlights that language development is supported when skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are *integrated*. Developing literacy in Irish has the potential to enrich the learning of Irish and enhance learner motivation, while also supporting the development of bi/pluriliteracy skills. Providing opportunities for learners to read and write in a variety of genres promotes students' language development, promoting exposure to varied and new vocabulary they might not otherwise encounter (Hickey & Stenson, 2016). However, it is critical that texts are at the appropriate level for students and that word recognition skills are not left to chance. As noted previously, the literature suggests that children are not being afforded appropriate support in the development of code-based skills in Irish, i.e. the skills need to read unknown words (Department of Education and Science, 2007; Hickey & Stenson, 2016; Parsons & Lyddy, 2009, 2016). In their review of the literature, Concannon-Gibney et al. (2022) highlight a range of research-supported practices to develop language and literacy in tandem, including shared reading of big books, the use of digital bilingual books, and the scaffolding of the writing process in Irish (see the full report for further recommendations). Teachers can further support the development of reading skills through creating a print-rich environment in Irish. Reading aloud to children has been shown to be very beneficial as children can acquire sentence structure, vocabulary, knowledge of sounds (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). Rereading the same book and linking stories with language used during the day is particularly worthwhile (Mhic Mhathúna, 2009). Parents can be encouraged to participate in their children's learning in Irish through the use of digital books, watching TG4 for example (Dunne, 2020b). An additional advantage of reading suitable texts in Irish is their provision of *accurate* linguistic input, which teachers can build upon to support children's language development.

### Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The CEFR provides a common point of reference for linguistic competencies across linguistic skills and across languages in Europe. The aim of the CEFR was to harmonise and language teaching and learning in Europe so that linguistic competences could be understood in a common and transparent way across contexts. It provides a framework to align language teaching, learning and assessment. There are six levels that range from A1 and A2 (basic level), through B1 and B2 (independent level), to C1 and C2 (proficient level). 'Can do' descriptors indicate the threshold a learner must reach at any particular level. The CEFR



recognises that learners can be at different levels across different language skills and advocates for a strengths-based approach to language teaching. Linking the teaching and learning of Irish with the CEFR may provide a transparent trajectory for learners to advance and reflect on their language learning. Alignment with the CEFR has the potential to establish base levels and to provide continuity and progression in the teaching and learning of Irish across levels of education. An accompaniment to the CEFR, the European Language Portfolio also offers opportunities for learner self-reflection. An Updated Companion Volume of the CEFR was made available in 2020. It is important to note that CEFR focuses not only on assessment, but also on teaching and learning; as noted previously, CEFR advocates for an action-oriented approach to language pedagogy.

The Welsh Language and Education Bill which was passed by the Welsh parliament in 2025, provides a useful case study of how CEFR can be applied at a system level. This bill provides a single measure for assessing Welsh language ability based on the CEFR across three kinds of schooling - primarily Welsh (80% teaching through Welsh), dual language education (50% through Welsh) and primarily English (10 % teaching through Welsh). It is envisaged that language goals based on the CEFR will provide a clear pathway for learning Welsh and close the gap between learners in different kinds of schools. The bill is intended to support the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 set out by Cymraeg 2025 (the Welsh Language Strategy). While the government has set targets, there is a responsibility on local authorities to support schools and a National Institute for Welsh has been founded to support the teaching and learning of Welsh in all schools.

### Digital resources

In an international context there are positive effects for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Digital Game-Based language learning (DGBLL) (see Concannon-Gibney et al., 2022 for further review of meta-analyses). CALL and MALL can enable learners to learn a language outside of class individually or with others, thus promoting learner motivation and independent language learning. The use of technology has the potential to provide learners with linguistic input and opportunities to communicate in an additional language. Digital games have been shown to positively effect vocabulary in particular (Dixon et al., 2022). Games designed for entertainment rather than education can be most beneficial to learners due to their authentic nature; they are of particular benefit to learners when supplementary material is provided by teachers (Dixon et al., 2022).



Digital resources to promote the teaching and learning of Irish are progressing (Ní Dhúbhda, 2023; Nic Réamoinn & Devitt, 2019; Ward et al., 2025). Ward et al. (2025), for example, utilised artificial intelligence technologies, text to speech and virtual reality, to develop a digital game-based learning app for Irish which was trialled by a small number of primary students in an English-medium setting. Ní Dhubhda (2023) supported students to create digital stories in Irish, while Nic Réamoinn and Devitt (2019) used a 3D virtual environment for learning Irish in English-medium primary schools. These small-scale studies could be extended upon. It would be advisable to utilise current digital resources to support the teaching and learning of Irish. The literature highlights the importance of linking the use of CALL with language learning outcomes. Ward et al. (2025) note the challenges of assembling multidisciplinary teams in the context of low resource languages such as Irish. They argue that multidisciplinary teams should include language teachers, linguists, software developers, user interface designers, and natural language processing specialists.

### Assessment

In the broadest sense, assessment involves the gathering of evidence to inform inferences about student learning (NCCA, 2007; Heritage, 2018). Strong classroom assessment should have a clear *purpose*, support the drawing of *valid* inferences about student progress, ensure that judgments made about student learning are *fair* and offer *reliability*, i.e accurate and consistent information (Burke & Lehane, 2023; Murchan & Shiel, 2017). In recent times, there has been a move away from classifying assessment as either *formative* or *summative* (Lysaght et al., 2019), as, in reality, a given assessment method can be used for both purposes. At the primary level, a range of assessment methods are available to support teachers in identifying the next steps in children's learning (see Burke & Lehane, 2023, for a review). It is crucial that teacher's have a high degree of assessment literacy in Irish, so that they can pinpoint children's progress and identify next steps in learning. The remainder of this section focuses, in particular, on assessment at post-primary level.

At post-primary level, the nature of State Examinations in Irish are worthy of particular consideration. As noted above, there is a backwash effect on the teaching and learning of Irish due to the high stakes involved in the Leaving Certificate examination (Nic Eoin, 2017). Negative backwash occurs when the nature of assessment constrains teaching and learning, characterised by teaching to the test, rote learning and inauthentic learning experiences. Positive backwash occurs when the assessment has a constructive impact on learning, by rewarding appropriate skills and knowledge development and supporting clarity in learning outcomes. The Leaving Certificate examination grants status to Irish as a language



and as a subject. The decision to increase the marks awarded to the oral Irish assessment in the Leaving Certificate from 25% to 40% since 2012 reflects an attempt to use the backwash effect to influence classroom practice. Maunsell (2009) cautioned, however, that increasing the marks alone would not guarantee an improvement in standards. He proposed the use of items in the oral examination which would avoid pre-scripting and rehearsal. In practice, the provision of a picture-description task (*sraith pictiúr*) and a poetry reading task in advance of the examination is problematic. Research commissioned by both the NCCA (Nic Eoin, 2017; Ó Curraoin, 2017; Ó Laoire, 2017) and COGG (Ní Mhaonaigh, 2013, 2017) revealed that the increase in marks in the oral element of the Leaving Certificate examination has not led to an improvement in students' spoken proficiency in Irish and the picture description task and poetry reading were leading to rote memorisation. The reader is referred to the comprehensive study of Ní Ghloinn et al. (2024) for potential solutions to these identified weaknesses. Recommendations from the research reports cited above have not been enacted in full, apart from some minor adjustments in the order of items in the oral Irish examination, and a reduction in the number of picture series to be studied. The issues highlighted here point to structural issues in the design, implementation and review of post-primary specifications. In effective curriculum and syllabus design there should be clear and constructive alignment between learning outcomes, subject content, pedagogy and assessment. Some have criticised the broad nature of learning outcomes used in post-primary specifications (Hyland & Kennedy, 2023; Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). An integrated approach to syllabus design would combine content, pedagogy and assessment simultaneously. Arising from this process, clear teacher guidelines, learning resources and professional development for teachers would be available prior to implementation. Research shows that examinations can largely determine what is learned by students. When skilfully designed, they can also determine how the content is learned.

To support the success of all students, assessment should focus on communicative language use. All modes of assessment should be utilised to provide positive feedback and to motivate and support the learning of Irish. It is clear that assessment plays a crucial role in teaching and learning of Irish. Any review of policy, curriculum and pedagogy requires that appropriate attention is afforded to the nature and form of assessment across the education system.

### **Inclusive education**

The research on inclusive education shows that students who are learning a minority language should be supported to access the curriculum in a way that is appropriate for them.



There is a need for curriculum provision for all learners to be supported to learn Irish (Nic Aindriú et al., 2021), including learners with additional learning needs and students who are joining school in Ireland (Ní Dhíorbhain & O'Grady, 2025). The principles of Universal Design for Learning (Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2024) can be utilised so that all learners can learn Irish in a way that suits their talents, needs, interests and personalities (Dunne & Ní Aogáin, 2024; Nic Aindriú et al. 2021). Nic Aindriú et al. (2021) emphasise the need to consider inclusion through proactive planning for differentiation and flexibility in teaching and learning. There is a wealth of ways in which learners can be supported to learn Irish. Dunne and Ní Aogáin (2024) provide examples of how UDL may be enacted to support the participation through multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression.

Internationally, Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) models are typically adopted to support learners who need additional support in mastering particular aspects of the curriculum (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). In Irish primary and post-primary schools, this model is enacted using the Continuum of Support framework (National Educational Psychological Service, 2007). However, there is limited evidence to suggest that the Continuum of Support is applied in the context of Irish as an L2 in English-medium schools. The most recent guidance from the Department of Education on inclusive education makes limited or no reference to how children might be supported with the learning of Irish in English-medium schools (DE, 2024b; 2024c). This gap in guidance warrants further consideration.

## Conclusion

This section provided an overview of literature and research that is relevant to the consultation on Irish in English-medium schools.

# PART B

## *Findings from the Initial Stakeholder Consultation Event*





# Part B: Findings from the Initial Stakeholder Consultation Event

## Methodology

### Participants

This report captures the views of a range of stakeholder participants who contributed to the initial consultation event held in Croke Park on January 22, 2025. Selection of stakeholder participants was organised by the Unit for Irish in English-medium Schools, DEY. The stakeholders represented in the roundtable discussions can be seen in Appendix A.

### Data generation and recording

During the initial consultative event, roundtable discussions were held to address the questions outlined in Appendix B. A detailed record of the discussion at each roundtable was captured using a common template (see Appendix C). To protect the anonymity of participants, contributions were captured in a general sense, rather than being attributed to any individual or the organisation they represented. As well as capturing an accurate record of participants' views on individual questions, each recorder also captured a summary of the overall discussion. The role of the recorder was to accurately minute the views that were discussed and to ensure that all questions were addressed by the facilitator. Recorders did not engage in analysis or interpretation of the views represented, nor did they contribute their own views to the discussion.

Organisations attending the consultative event were provided with an online form through which they could provide additional feedback. Anonymised data from this form were shared with the SEALBHÚ research team and analysed alongside records from the roundtable discussions.

### Data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data can be carried out in multiple ways. Template analysis was employed for the current project as it can be applied flexibly to different textual data sets (Brooks et al., 2015) in a manner that produces a clear audit trail (King & Brooks, 2017). In line with the published guidance on template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015; King & Brooks, 2017), the following steps were followed:



1. **Familiarisation with data:** The principal investigators read through all records in full.
2. **Preliminary coding:** Initial codes were generated based on *a priori* themes (i.e. pre-determined codes that were deductively applied to the data) and inductive codes that were identified during the familiarisation process. King and Brooks (2017) recommend that these codes are applied to a sub-set of data prior to being formalised and applied to the whole data set. For the purpose of the current project, all records generated during round table discussions on the opening consultation day were included in this sub-set of data. In practice, this coding was carried out by tagging relevant codes using the 'comment' function in a shared Google Doc. The relevant transcript units were then transposed into Google Sheet which kept a record of all data units assigned to a given code.
3. **Clustering:** Codes that were conceptually relevant were brought together and arranged hierarchically.
4. **Producing a coding template:** Following application of the codes to the data from the consultative event and after clustering, an overall template was agreed.
5. **Applying and developing the template:** The initial template consisted of a series of related codes/themes against which new transcripts were analysed by the principal investigators. Where necessary, new codes were introduced during the analysis process.
6. **Final interpretation:** The fully coded data set was used to generate a narrative report which reported on the final themes and sub-themes.

A draft report was shared with the full research team (including recorders) to ensure that it captured a balanced and representative account of the discussions held at each table.



## Findings

Following the coding and categorisation of the data, a range of themes were identified. These themes are presented on a cross-sectoral basis; however, where recommendations were specific to a given sector, this is indicated as appropriate. The themes are presented as follows:

- A Vision for Irish: Ambitious and Connected
- Curriculum and Assessment: Ensuring Progression, Prioritising Spoken Language
- Language Pedagogy: Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities
- Beyond the Irish Lesson: Creating Opportunities to Communicate through Irish
- Supporting Teachers and School Leaders
- Involving Parents, Guardians and the Broader Community
- Ensuring Inclusivity

**Note that these thematic findings represent the views of participating stakeholders and not necessarily the views of the report authors.**

### A vision for Irish: Ambitious and connected

*A clear message from most discussions was that there is a need to forge a vision for the Irish language that is driven by a shared purpose, sets high expectations, and ensures continuity across age groups.*

In the view of participants, such a vision requires all stakeholders to work together and for an **overarching Irish language policy to be developed**. Though some participants highlighted examples of inter/intra-departmental coordination, there was a strong sense that different policies and initiatives should be more closely connected. For example, a perceived disconnect between the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy, the Gaeltacht Education Policy and proposals for the new Policy for Irish-medium Education outside of the Gaeltacht was highlighted. Attention was also drawn to perceived conflicts in the system at present including, for example, the number of students who undertake a Modern Foreign Language yet are exempted from Irish. Some participants highlighted the need to ensure that responsibilities are not split between different sections of the DEY or indeed between departments (specifically between the DEY and the Department for Rural, Community



Development and the Gaeltacht). They also emphasised that political will and support was necessary.

Of particular note was the view that the Irish **language-learning journey from early childhood, through primary, post-primary and beyond** required more significant integration. Some participants noted that progress will take time to enact, but that a clear target was needed. Such a target provides an impetus for action, motivation to improve, and a clear yardstick against which to measure progress. Some were of the view that an expert panel should be established to lay out clear language expectations for each level of the education system and that such an action would be achievable within the context of a two-year action plan. The case of Wales was cited by some participants in arguing for an overall aim and a roadmap to achieve it (see section on CEFR below).

Participants also noted that **responsibility for the Irish language cannot lie with the education system alone**. The Irish language is but one of many issues 'du jour' that sits alongside competing educational priorities. While the DEY may play a central role, other government departments should play a supportive role. This must be shared and integrated. A new strategy must, in the view of these participants, acknowledge the role of spaces other than the school for language use and development. Some participants also drew attention to the broader context for the advancement of the Irish language. Specifically, they noted that the historical and social context must be borne in mind. A lack of value placed on the Irish language can be traced to historical factors that continue to have a bearing on the attitudes of parents. Some proposed that the *why* of Irish language learning needed to be explored with children from third class upwards. The broader "ecosystem" provides both affordances and constraints that should be pinpointed and leveraged. Looking at this broader picture would also require that teacher workload and perceived initiative overload in schools would be taken into account, alongside pressures associated with teacher recruitment (particularly at post-primary level).

Participants noted that any new strategy should include an **awareness raising campaign** to highlight the advantages of learning Irish (e.g. employment/economic opportunities, the benefits of bilingualism, value of the Irish language as part of Irish culture within an intercultural context). Some suggested that such a campaign should highlight where further resources can be found for those who wish to advance their own Irish. Such a campaign would balance the tendency for Irish to be appraised negatively in the media (in the view of some participants).



In expounding on a “**revolutionary**” or indeed “**radical**” vision for the Irish language, participants also noted that we do not yet have all the answers. Calls for **further research** and investigation were noted on a number of fronts, including more direct research on the views of teachers and children; research on what is known to be working/not working; further investigation of comparable jurisdictions/minority languages internationally. Others noted the need to move on from consultation and research, noting that it is time for action.

## Curriculum and assessment: Ensuring progression, prioritising spoken language

*Considerable discussion focused on the need to align curriculum expectations throughout the school system, to emphasise the use of spoken language and to ensure that Irish is afforded adequate time in curriculum time recommendations.*

A regular recommendation from stakeholders was that expectations for **Irish should be aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**. Alignment with CEFR would allow for clear, communicable and commonly understood standards in Irish competence to be set out for different points of the education system. Some were of the view that adopting CEFR would also be beneficial for teachers, either in terms of entry/exit requirements from initial teacher education programmes or as a method of self-assessment for teachers who wished to improve their language competence. Other cited benefits of such alignment included the potential to focus on oral/aural competences rather than reading and writing for students with additional needs (e.g. dyslexia). The success of some schools in undertaking Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge (TEG) assessments in Transition Year was noted.

A recurring theme across discussions was the need to orient (or re-orient) the national curriculum at primary and post-primary level towards the **use of spoken Irish**. Though some participants noted that this focus on oral language was already successful to at least some extent at primary level, others cited a waning in interest in upper primary as the focus moved towards the modes of reading and writing. Some noted the need to move beyond the teaching of isolated vocabulary to a focus on vocabulary in the context of sentences linked with communicative language use. Many participants expressed concern that spoken language is not prioritised in the Junior Cycle as an oral examination is not a feature of the state examination (see below). A frequent point of discussion was the perceived over-emphasis on literature at post-primary level. In the view of participants, the need to teach a large amount of literature is putting both teachers and students under pressure, taking time



away from development of language skills and consequently having a negative impact on attitudes to Irish. Some participants expressed the view that literature was not connected to the everyday lives of students.

The theme of **assessment** attracted regular comment. Some expressed the view that terminal assessment may 'loom too large' at post-primary level, in particular, narrowing the focus of the curriculum as a result. This was, in their view, having a negative effect on student engagement with Irish. Others felt the need to work within this system to ensure that the assessment practices prioritise what is valued. Specifically, some recommended that the comparatively low status afforded to Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) needed attention and that a key action from the Action Plan for Irish should be to advance a Junior Cycle oral examination. Concerns were expressed around the use of 'sraith pictiúr' in the Leaving Certificate oral, with some suggesting the approach to orals in Modern Foreign Language subjects should be adopted instead. Though it was noted as being beyond the scope of the current strategy, some participants expressed the view that it was time to have a discussion on the obligatory nature of Irish in the Leaving Certificate. It was proposed that optional Irish with bonus points would elevate the status of the language at Senior Cycle level.

Despite concerns about an over-focus on assessment at post-primary level, there was a perception that there is an **under-assessment of Irish at primary level**. Though English-medium schools are required to conduct and report standardised tests of English reading and mathematics in second, fourth and sixth class, there is no similar obligation for Irish. While it was acknowledged that such tests provide a somewhat narrow focus, some participants felt that there is limited evaluation of progress in Irish in their absence. Some participants expressed the view that reporting standardised test results in Irish (alongside English and Mathematics) would elevate the status of Irish in the eyes of parents. It would be worthwhile to update the existing standardised assessments for Irish in English-medium schools.

The issue of **primary-level time allocations** for Irish attracted primarily negative comment. Specifically, the reduction of 30 minutes in discrete time afforded to Irish as an L2 in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* was noted as a significant concern and one that should be revisited. Participants expressed the view that this would lead to less exposure to the language, less use of the language, and ultimately poorer competence and confidence in the language.

To ensure that curriculum and assessment practices are fit for purpose, participants noted the need to strike a balance between teacher autonomy and the **level of direction offered by curriculum specifications**. For example, some participants stated that the *Primary*



Language Curriculum did not offer enough guidance for teachers on evidence-based approaches.

## Language pedagogy: Strengths, challenges and opportunities

*Participants underscored the need to focus on playful and interactive approaches to language learning, underpinned by an open attitude. Nuanced discussions were held on the communicative/action-oriented approach and the relative prioritisation of literacy skills.*

Stakeholders expressed a recurring view that the teaching of Irish was most effective when it is **interactive and playful**. In their view, this ensures that children and young people are engaged and purposeful in their learning. Participants noted that playful/interactive approaches were widespread in early primary, but became less so as children moved through school and into post-primary. Concern was expressed that teachers need further support in planning for Irish using the current curriculum structures. Many participants indicated that **textbooks** hold too much sway and have a dampening effect on engagement. This is particularly true when the language register of the book is too challenging, or when the focus of the book does not align with student interests, their lives in or out of school and contemporary society in Ireland. In contrast, others noted that some named digital programmes are supportive of continuity in language learning and aid teacher planning.

Relatedly, the overall approach recommended for Irish language teaching at primary level was the subject of discussion and somewhat divergent views. Some expressed the view that the **communicative approach** was not being used widely in primary schools, and that teachers were slow to change. Others noted that the communicative approach has evolved, and that it was time to give further attention to the features of language teaching associated with an **action-oriented approach**, as advocated in CEFR guidelines. The potential for the teaching and learning recommendations from CEFR were deemed worthy of further exploration in the context of the Irish language.

The degree to which **literacy skills in Irish** should be emphasised attracted differing opinions. Speaking about primary level, some participants noted that an over-emphasis on Irish spelling, and spelling tests, in particular, was having a negative impact on student engagement. Others noted that it would be unwise to prioritise oral language without also focusing on the supportive, integrative role of reading and writing in language learning. They indicated that negative views of textbooks were obfuscating views on the important position of reading/writing more generally. Others still noted that the approach to teaching spelling and word recognition in Irish is outdated. Specifically, the view was expressed that the





explicit teaching of Irish phonics was not receiving adequate attention in curriculum or in practice.

The potential for **technology and online resources** to support language pedagogy was noted by participants. A range of resources including teacher resources repositories, podcasts and online newsletters were cited. Some highlighted the potential to further leverage social media to engage students, while also noting the potential challenges in such an endeavour. Others suggested that Artificial Intelligence (AI) may have a role to play in the generation of resources, but that it was too early to detail how.

Setting aside the exact nature of *how* Irish is taught, there was relative consensus on the need for teachers to encourage an **open, 'give it a go' attitude** to Irish learning with students and parents. Many were of the view that an affirming attitude to Irish would go a long way in promoting positive attitudes towards and self-confidence in Irish. They emphasised the idea that language-learning is a lifelong endeavour which, by necessity, requires learners to make mistakes along the way. A 'culture of correction' should be avoided. Some pointed out that this open attitude was already in place, but this view was not universal. Relatedly, some participants underscored the value of activating students' language awareness, i.e. their ability to reflect on and spot patterns in languages including Irish. Emphasising curiosity about language was considered a priority.

## Beyond the Irish lesson: Creating opportunities to communicate through Irish

*To support the vision of a living language, Irish should be used informally and regularly by all throughout the school day. Participants highlighted the value of extending the use of Irish through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), particular programmes (e.g. Gaelbhreach), events (e.g. debates/sport) and Gaeltacht trips.*

Many of the recommendations for broadening the use of Irish were associated with the need to support students in seeing it as a **living language**, not just a school subject. Participants were of the strong view that we need to maximise opportunities to use Irish *outside* the context of Irish lessons. One of the most significant recommendations on this front related to **Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil (informal Irish)**. It was noted that informal Irish is more likely to be adopted in primary than post-primary schools, given the different qualification profile of teachers in each sector. Notwithstanding this difference, participants perceived that informal Irish was used less frequently in primary schools now than previously. More specific recommendations included; that phrases of the week should be shared with





parents and encouraged throughout the school; that greetings, messages and school routines (e.g. roll call) should be conveyed primarily through Irish as a matter of course; and that all members of the community should play a role (including secretaries and caretakers and extending to teachers of other subjects at post-primary level). It was noted that the informal use of Irish should be evaluated by the Inspectorate. The visibility of Irish was also discussed. Participants expressed the view that the **use of Irish should be normalised** and highly visible in all schools, including in the terminology used (e.g. ceann bliana - year head) and in the physical environment (e.g. signage). Creating a timpeallacht Ghaelach (Irish atmosphere) should be a whole-school aim. The crucial support of school leadership was noted in creating this culture.

Participants suggested a range of **informal extracurricular activities and events** that could prove supportive in the promotion of Irish in school. These included Irish clubs, school tours, dramas, dances/fleadhanna, sporting events, pop-up Gaeltachtaí, specific sections of the school grounds being designated as Irish zones, school debates, quizzes and summer/Easter language camps. At post-primary level, it was noted that transition year provides a particular opportunity for involvement in extracurricular Irish activities. Activities associated with Seachtain na Gaeilge were seen to help promote positive attitudes, with some suggesting that laethanta Gaeilge should be extended across the school year. The Gaelbhratach was singled out for particular attention as a method of extending Irish beyond the subject into a living language. Participants noted the positive effects of actions associated with the **Gaelbhratach**, including the practical support of teachers, the ownership afforded to students through a Coiste na Gaeilge (Irish committee), the visibility it promotes for parents, and the sense of whole-school achievement associated with its award. The funding available for the scheme was praised, but it was also highlighted that further resourcing is needed to reduce waiting lists for schools who wish to partake in the scheme. Though the feedback on the Gaelbhratach was largely positive, it was also noted that many of the actions associated with the scheme should form part of regular good practice, regardless of participation in the scheme. Beyond the Gaelbhratach, participants noted that further avenues should be explored to recognise the use of the language (e.g. competitions akin to the *Young Scientist* to showcase learning; awards to recognise school-level efforts in promoting the language; further use of language portfolios; further availability of grants to attend the Gaeltacht; recognition/awards for teachers).

The potential for **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)** to transform student experiences of learning Irish was noted regularly by stakeholders. Many (though not



all) participants were of the view that there were particular benefits to associating language learning with experiential subjects like Physical Education (PE) and visual arts. The expansion of CLIL was considered a reasonable and potentially fruitful target for a new action plan. In noting the potential of CLIL, participants also highlighted the need for ongoing support in its enactment. The supports for teaching PE through Irish, offered by COGG, were singled out, as was in-school support provided by Oide. In the absence of this support, requests or recommendations to increase the use of CLIL were considered unlikely to succeed. Relatedly, some participants indicated that consideration should be given to having more immersive experiences to the teaching of Irish, rather than adopting a 'lesson a day' approach.

There was wide discussion of the largely positive impact that trips to the **Gaeltacht** could have on both teachers' and students' attitudes to Irish. Participants noted that cultural aspects of the Irish language are more authentically experienced in this setting. Some suggested that Gaeltacht trips should be a mandatory part of the curriculum and that every child should be furnished with this opportunity, even if only for a shorter period (e.g. a weekend). It was noted that the strong culture of Gaeltacht attendance varies significantly from school to school. Discussion of the Gaeltacht was accompanied by calls for further funding for student visits, with particular attention drawn to the need to extend the availability of scholarships in DEIS schools. Some participants noted that specific support should be put in place to allow teachers to spend periods of time in the Gaeltacht (e.g. scholarships, sabbaticals). Though there was broad support for spending time in the Gaeltacht, it was not universal. Some participants suggested that these trips did not always have a beneficial impact on language learning. Others noted challenges with sourcing hosts (mná/fir tí). From an inclusion perspective, some noted challenges for particular students (e.g. unavailability of halal food in particular instances).

## Supporting teachers and school leaders

*Participants discussed a wide range of challenges for teachers and school leaders, providing suggestions on how they might be overcome. They are listed under the following sub-headings: teacher competence and confidence in Irish; teacher professional learning; collaboration within and across settings; leadership; resources and; evaluation.*

### Teacher competence and confidence in Irish

In discussing the need to support teachers and school leaders, participants drew attention to **language competence in the system at present**. Many participants noted concerns about primary school teachers' own proficiency in Irish, highlighting that this is



interwoven with their confidence in using the language. Participants pointed to the role that *individual* teachers could play in inspiring children to use Irish; this varied from teacher to teacher. Teachers who were motivated to learn and use Irish themselves were considered more likely to motivate students' love for the language. The inverse was also considered true. For some, a perceived lack of proficiency was one of the main challenges to supporting the learning of Irish in school and helped to explain other challenges such as the perceived over-reliance on textbooks. Teacher competence was also linked with a perceived lowering of standards in children's Irish competence on transfer from primary to post-primary school. It was suggested that further professional learning opportunities need to be provided so that teachers can upskill (see below).

Particular attention was given to the **entry/exit requirements** in initial teacher education programmes, with some calling for more specific TEG/CEFR requirements and others suggesting that the removal of an Irish oral requirement for BEd programmes had led to a decline in standards. Some participants were of the view that Irish needs to be a more central component of ITE programmes. Consequently, further support and time for Irish in Initial Teacher Education was seen as necessary, including supplementary intensive language courses for those who need them. Some suggested that part of every ITE programme at primary level should include an immersive component (e.g. the first year). Participants noted that newly qualified teachers who are confident in speaking Irish may sometimes lose this confidence if they are not regularly using the language in school. They also noted that there can be variation in the Irish competence of newly qualified teachers. There was a divergence of views on whether it was realistic to expect all graduating teachers to have achieved the same level of competence, given the different linguistic backgrounds represented in programmes (e.g. students for whom Irish is a first language versus students who learned Irish in Gaelscoileanna/Gaelcholáistí versus students who attended English-medium schools) and the different language demands of the positions they would later occupy (English versus Irish medium education). In a similar vein, some expressed the view that teachers with the most interest/competence in Irish were likely to teach in Gaelscoileanna/scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht, exaggerating the variation in language proficiency between sectors.

Some participants suggested that there is scope to examine more **specialist teaching** supports for Irish (e.g. teachers with a specialism in Irish or additional personnel to support Irish teachers) but this was not a view expressed by all.



## Teacher professional learning

Suggestions for **professional learning** included the provision of EPV approved summer courses in Irish at primary level and the extension of EPV Days to post-primary teachers. Summer courses that emphasise conversational Irish and enjoyable experience for teachers were praised (e.g. the courses provided by COGG and INTO in 2024). Online courses such as those provided by Gael Linn/Gaelchultúr were suggested as a way of bringing teachers together virtually to develop their Irish language skills. Participants also suggested that specific qualifications in Irish language should be made available, with associated allowances. The provision of such courses could be aligned with TEG/CEFR, so that progress can be measured. As noted previously, opportunities for Gaeltacht courses were also recommended.

## Potential for greater collaboration within and across settings

The importance of **whole-school approaches to Irish learning** was underscored by many participants. At primary level, this was considered crucial to ensure that learning at one class level builds upon the previous. A structured, systematic whole-school plan was recommended as being particularly important for Irish language learning, so that children were not returning to the same language exemplars year after year. At post-primary level, SLAR meetings were pinpointed as examples of good practice, particularly when conducted *as Gaeilge*, as was the regular sharing of practice through departmental meetings. Participants were of the view that teachers should be facilitated to share good practice and helpful resources, for example, during 'Croke Park hours'. Other suggestions for promoting collaboration included peer evaluation, peer teaching and team teaching within schools.

**Linkage between early childhood settings, primary and post-primary schools** was seen as a connection that merited further exploration. Collaboration on *Seachtain na Gaeilge* activities was seen as a way of fostering cohesion and language use. Communities of practice that extend across schools and school levels in a cluster were noted as a potential avenue for sharing good practice. This would also help in coming to a shared understanding of the Irish competence expected across levels. Another potential option cited for sharing good practice across schools included teacher swaps (e.g. between English- and Irish-medium schools).

## Leadership

Participants were strongly of the view that **school leadership has a pivotal role to play** in establishing a culture that supports Irish language learning. Principal teachers set the tone for practices such as the informal use of Irish, while also supporting practical considerations such as the purchase of resources. Consequently, participants expressed the need for



professional learning to support principals in leading Irish. Some participants noted that the Board of Management also had an important role to play, for example, in seeking reports on progress in Irish learning throughout the school. The role of leadership/ management in prioritising Irish during the teacher recruitment process was also noted. Multiple participants also expressed the view that middle leadership positions (AP1, AP2) for Irish required greater support, with some suggesting a specific post should be available for leading CLIL. A concern was expressed that Irish is not afforded a middle leadership role by default; it depends on the school.

### Resources and supports for Irish in English-medium schools

Many participants spoke about the range of resources available to support the teaching of Irish. These included resources provided by bodies under the aegis of the DEY (e.g. COGG, Oide, NCCA) as well as resources provided by organisations such as TG4 and Foras na Gaeilge. While repositories such as Scoilnet and An Tairseach were highlighted, there was a general view that an awareness campaign was needed to highlight the range of resources they bring together and that a **specific hub of resources should be designed for English-medium schools**. A somewhat contrasting view was presented by other participants, who indicated that there were fewer appropriate resources available to suit students learning Irish in English-medium schools. Some called for substantial increases in the funding made available for organisations/schemes that support Irish in English-medium schools.

### Evaluation

The view was expressed that the evaluation processes had a role to improve in advancing Irish. Some participants indicated that external evaluation undertaken by Department Inspectors helps to elevate the language's visibility, particularly when inspectors emphasise Irish in their written reports and interact with the school in the language. They noted that areas of the curriculum that are emphasised by inspectors tend to be afforded greater weight when decisions are made in-school. Others suggested that there is scope for inspectors to provide a more consultative and supportive role, through the provision of advice on resources and modelling lessons. It should be noted that this support is currently available through the Support Services; the Inspectorate does not have a role in this provision. Such an approach would provide affirmation for teachers who need greater support with their approaches to Irish. Participants also called attention to the potential role of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) in bringing whole-school communities together, with a common goal.



## Involving parents, guardians and the broader community

*Seeing Irish as a living language requires its extension into the home and wider community; proactive measures are needed to ensure that this happens in reality.*

Participants regularly expressed the view that **parents/guardians have a significant impact** on students' views towards the Irish language and that, consequently, they require particular attention in any new strategy for Irish in English-medium schools. They acknowledged that parents/guardians' own experiences in could set up expectations for failure or disinterest. They also noted that parents/guardians are sometimes less interested in their children's achievement in Irish than in other subjects, or that they may, in some cases, be more actively *against* the learning of Irish. This being said, it was noted that parents can prove a decisive body when they get behind a school-level campaign. Actions to support parents/guardians included provision of home-school communication in Irish/bilingually, holding whole-school events in Irish, running after-school language classes in the community, supporting parents to establish *ciorcail chomhrá*, openly sharing how and why language is taught and assessed in a given school, providing information for parents on the benefits of language learning (see previous section). As noted previously, a national awareness campaign was deemed important to support the involvement of parents and the broader community. Some participants were of the view that hard-to-reach parents needed further attention on the question of Irish. They also noted that such parents required greater visibility in the current consultation process.

The role for the **broader community** to support Irish was also regularly noted, with participants citing the need for joined-up thinking between different community organisations. These organisations include local GAA clubs, libraries and local businesses. Participants were of the view that this would support students in seeing and using Irish outside the walls of the school. They also suggested that Irish youth clubs should be established. A supportive action would include building a community of Irish speakers through *ciorcail chomhrá*, who could ultimately engage with students of Irish within and outside the school. It was suggested that the challenge of organising whole-community involvement would require the appointment of a local *Oifigeach Gaeilge*.



## Ensuring inclusivity

*In the view of participants, active effort must be made to ensure that Irish is accessible to all. This includes considerations of Universal Design, Irish exemptions and representation in Irish language experiences/resources.*

Some participants were of the view that a **step-change** was needed to ensure that the perspectives of diverse individuals and communities are included in the promotion of the Irish language. Participants noted that students in English-medium schools were increasingly learning Irish as a third or subsequent language, meaning that **plurilingual approaches** to language learning required more attention. They also noted that limited awareness of diverse cultures could prove a challenge to advancing Irish with the whole community. The lack of diversity represented in some textbooks or resources was cited as an example. Furthermore, the incorrect perception that Irish is 'not for' certain minority/minoritised communities can lead to exclusion and ultimately less diversity in the teaching profession. Participants also noted the need to be inclusive of the Irish Traveller community, specifically the need to recognise their multilingual identity and to ensure that challenges with literacy do not lead to unnecessary exclusion from Irish language learning. Others pointed out that learning two different written language codes simultaneously can be challenging for dyslexic students.

Many participants expressed the view that more needs to be done to ensure **flexibility and inclusion in the approaches to teaching Irish**. They cited the lack of learning support for the language, particularly when compared to English and Mathematics. However, it was also noted that current Special Education Teaching (SET) provision does not afford sufficient resources for such prioritisation. Challenges were also noted in scheduling learning support in such a way that it does not always clash with Irish lessons. Participants suggested that far more attention needs to be given to differentiation in Irish lessons, citing the potential for a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach. The latter should ensure that all children are afforded flexibility in achieving appropriate targets in the learning of Irish.

Though it is beyond the scope of the current consultation, participants expressed a range of views on **Irish exemptions**. Some were strongly of the view that the increase in Irish exemptions was devaluing the status of the language in the education system and that some parents were unaware of the long term implications of opting out of Irish. Participants expressed concern that some students who were exempted from Irish opted to study other Modern Foreign Languages. Some were of the view that a more tailored approach is required, i.e. that students could be exempted from reading/writing Irish while still learning spoken





Irish. Others drew attention to the anxiety created for individual students and their families given the current media coverage on exemptions, noting that similar commentary would not be countenanced for physical disabilities and that schools rarely award exemptions when they are not warranted. Practically speaking, the challenge of timetabling support/special classes at post-primary level was considered a contributing factor in the increasing number of exemptions.

Some participants also emphasised that it would be important that a **diversity of voices and opinions** in relation to the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools are represented in the consultation. In particular, participants noted that it was crucial to include the voice of parents and community members who are not aligned with particular organisations and thus not represented in the consultative event.

The next sub-sections present findings directly in relation to each of the research questions.

## Seisiún a hAon: Attitudes and use

### Summary of key themes from analysis of stakeholder consultation

**Table 5** *What is working well to support positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?*

#### Outside the Irish lesson

- Where there is a whole-school approach to the use of Irish, that is supported by leadership and teachers resulting in a positive culture and attitude towards Irish in schools
- When Irish is used informally as a means of communication throughout the day and the use of the language is normalized outside of class
- When other subjects or parts of other subjects are taught through Irish
- When oral language use is emphasised inside and outside the Irish lesson
- When there is a visible presence of Irish in the school e.g. signage, titles
- When there are school events through Irish e.g. debates, plays, Seachtain na Gaeilge, comórtas bÁCála
- Trips to the Gaeltacht and when scholarships are provided





- Irish clubs and committees in schools

#### **Role of individual teachers**

- When teachers have a positive mindset towards Irish and actively use the language and encourage students to use the language, this has a really positive effect

#### **Language pedagogies**

- When oral language use is emphasised rather than an over-emphasis on textbooks
- When playful child-centred and active approaches are adopted at primary level
- Poems, songs and language games, particularly at primary level.
- When other subjects are taught through Irish

#### **Supporting teachers and school leaders**

- Support schemes: Gaelbhratach in particular
- Resources: TG4, resources prepared by COGG, Gaeloideachas & Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), some of the interactive material provided by publishing companies
- Courses for teachers e.g., COGG summer course, Gaelchultúr courses, INTO courses

#### **Links with parents and the wider community**

- When links are made with parents and parents have a positive mindset towards the language
- Links with Irish social media, links with the Irish language in current culture

**Table 6** *What are the challenges to fostering positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?*

#### **Teacher competence, confidence and attitudes**

- Concerns were expressed around teacher competence, teacher confidence and at times teachers' attitudes to Irish in English-medium schools.

#### **Teacher supply**

- Many teachers who are passionate about Gaeilge choosing to teach in T1 schools.



- Teacher supply is a challenge.

#### **Curriculum and assessment**

- Backwash from the summative examination system and rote learning at post-primary to the detriment of oral language development.
- The absence of an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle.
- Overemphasis on literature at post-primary to the detriment of oral language development.
- Time reduction for teaching Irish at primary level will negatively impact the language.
- Different approaches at primary and post-primary level from a more communicative approach in primary to focus on reading and writing at post-primary.

#### **Language pedagogies**

- Where there is an overemphasis on textbooks and insufficient emphasis on spoken Irish.
- Lack of formal teaching of phonics and decoding skills in Irish.
- An overemphasis on teaching vocabulary rather than sentence structures.
- Prioritising reading and writing in Irish over the spoken language.

#### **Supports**

- Lack of awareness of some available resources.
- Supports specific to English-medium schools needed.

#### **Outside the Irish lesson**

- Where there are limited opportunities to use the language outside of the lesson, this negatively impacts motivation and use.
- Where there is not a visible presence of Irish in the school, students may not see Irish as a living language.

#### **Connecting parents and the broader community**

- When parents/guardians have negative or apathetic attitudes, this negatively impacts on students' learning.



## Findings

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- Lack of Irish outside of school impacts on use of Irish and attitudes towards the language in schools.

#### Inclusion

- Exemptions create the impression that Irish is a difficult language & that learning Irish is not suitable for everyone.
- Further provision and support is needed for students with SEN when learning Irish.
- Further provision and support is needed for newcomer students to learn Irish.
- Extra support needed to support minoritised groups learning Irish.
- Some of the texts/resources in use do not support cultural diversity e.g. they do not represent a diversity of cultures.
- Differentiation is a challenge due to varying levels of competence in Irish.

#### Vision for Irish

- There is no coordinated vision for Irish across the different levels of education and curricula are not aligned. A diversity of voices should be included and consulted with in relation to this.

## Seisiún a Dó: Integration and coordination

**Table 7** *What is working well in terms of the integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources to support Irish in English-medium schools?*

#### Support services and cooperation between support services

- Oide in particular, An Gaelaonad in Oide
- An Gréasán do Mhúinteoirí Gaeilge
- Department of Education and Youth, Oide & COGG collaborating, e.g. Professional Development for CLIL
- DEY & Foras na Gaeilge

#### Support schemes

- Gaelbhratach in particular was praised
- Seachtain na Gaeilge



## Findings

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- Gaeilge 24
- Cúrsaí Gaeltachta
- Gaeltacht Scholarships - Scéim na bhFoghlaimeoirí Gaeltachta
- Link with GAA: Fondúireacht Sheosaimh Mhic Dhonncha
- Seó bóthair ag Conradh na Gaeilge, Gluaiseacht
- Slógadh - Díospóireachtaí
- Library Scheme - Mo mhála beag
- Links between Schools - Conradh na Gaeilge

#### Resources

- From COGG: An Tairseach, Padlets.
- TG4 Foghlaim, Scoilnet.
- Resources from Gaelbhhratach, CCEA, GAA
- Resources CLIL as Gaeilge for PE

#### In-school practices

- Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings at post-primary level
- Teachers sharing resources in schools - shared folders
- When there is a whole-school approach supported by leadership
- When there is a coordination of efforts - Coiste na Gaeilge
- When some subjects are taught through Irish
- When there are measurable goals

**Table 8** *What isn't working well in terms of the integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources to support Irish in English-medium schools?*

#### Vision for Irish

- Need for integrated policies and vision, links between school

#### Continuity in the education system



## Findings

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- When there is a lack of progression in primary e.g. repetition of curriculum themes.
- A perceived gap between sixth class and first year of post-primary.
- Lack of continuity in terms of language skills – the courses are not linked to CEFR.
- Teachers are burdened by curriculum changes which take time to enact.

#### Need for a greater focus on oral Irish

- Teaching from textbooks and spelling tests at primary level to the detriment of oral Irish skills.
- Strong advocacy for the need for an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle – CBAs are not enough.
- Concerns regarding sraith pictiúr at post-primary level.

#### Resources

- A strong sense that there is a lack of awareness about available resources and how to access them.
- Need for greater resources for English-medium schools, resources for T1 schools may not be suitable.

#### Supports

- Teachers may not be aware of courses available.
- Responsibilities are split between organisations – need for coordinated approach and awareness as to who is responsible for what.
- Responsibility for Irish is split between DEY and Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

#### Inclusion

- A concern that learning support is organised during the periods when Irish is taught in some schools.
- There is no SET allocation for Irish.
- Absence of SET guidelines for teaching Irish in English-medium schools.
- Irish exemptions and associated media coverage; concerns of students/parents need to be taken into account; best methods for including all learners require attention.



## Findings

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- Some textbooks are unsuitable due to their lack of diversity or portrayal of certain values/cultures only.
- Resources should reflect a diverse society.
- Teacher education needed to support inclusive pedagogies – also plurilingual teaching.

#### Teachers

- Teacher supply is an issue – link needed between HEA and schools.
- Teachers in English-medium schools did not receive professional support for teaching Irish when curriculum was implemented in schools.
- Greater connection is needed between teacher education courses and schools
- Greater preparation needed for teacher planning linked to curricula.
- Teacher competence in language and teaching of Irish as a second language can be a concern – lack of competence level at exit level of teacher education courses.

#### Funding

- Need for funding for support schemes e.g. Gaelbhratach & support organisations, e.g. An Gréasán.

# PART C

## *Recommendations from Bi/Multi-Lateral Meetings with National Stakeholders*



## Part C: Bi/Multi-lateral Consultative Meetings in the Department of Education and Youth

This section outlines the main contributions from representatives of a range of organisations during bi-/multi-lateral meetings held in the Department of Education and Youth in April and May, 2025. During each meeting, members of the AGSMB presented findings of the school-based strands of the consultation (see Report 2, Burke et al., 2025) to representatives of the various groups. Representatives then took the opportunity to share their own insights, contributions and recommendations. Note that all recommendations or comments expressed during a given meeting were recorded. However, this does not mean that all individuals/organisations represented in a given meeting proposed or agreed with each individual recommendation. Following an overall summary, the recommendations of each group are presented in the order in which the meetings occurred in the Department of Education and Youth. All contributions are recorded in the form of recommendations, grouped under related themes.

### Summary of main recommendations from stakeholders

A summary of the main recommendations from stakeholders is presented here:

#### Strategic planning and vision for the teaching and learning of Irish

- Provide a strategic, developmental policy for Irish that shows a clear and joined up vision for the teaching and learning of Irish across all levels of education.
- Align an overarching policy for the teaching and learning of Irish with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to support progression and inclusion.
- Have an awareness campaign to communicate the potential benefits of learning Irish for *all* students which include cultural, cognitive, linguistic, sociocultural and employment benefits.

#### Maximise opportunities to use Irish for all students

- Increase opportunities for all students to use Irish in a meaningful and active way.
- Ensure that there is sufficient designated time for teaching Irish lessons, use





informal Irish in all classes and teach subjects or parts of other subjects through Irish (CLIL).

- Ensure that there is a whole-school approach to Irish that is supported by leadership and management in all schools.
- Encourage the use of Irish as an informal means of communication in all schools, increase participation in school events through Irish and build on the positivity of Seachtain na Gaeilge throughout the year.
- Use distributed leadership in schools so that teachers are given roles of responsibility to promote Irish across the school; consider having *seaimpíní Gaeilge* (Irish Language Champions) in all schools.
- Support participation in support schemes for Irish - Gaelbhratach, Gaeilge 24
- Provide a rich and positive learning environment for using Irish in all schools through creating a print rich environment and a visible presence of Irish that is inclusive of all members of the school community, including non-teaching staff and parents/guardians.
- Link the learning of Irish in school with parental participation in Irish at home.
- Increase opportunities for students to use Irish outside of school - increase opportunities for students to visit the Gaeltacht; link with community, sports and cultural events through Irish; link with other schools; support youth organisations through Irish.
- Maximise opportunities to engage with Irish at third level through a wide variety of activities.

### Speaking the language and interactive approaches

- Prioritise the development of students' communicative competence in Irish at all levels of education.
- Ensure that all students are supported to speak Irish in Irish lessons.
- Teach Irish using interactive pedagogies and consider what can be learned from the teaching of other languages that can be applied to Irish; use songs, poems, games



and active tasks that support language use.

- Avoid teaching that is textbook driven and rather provide students to engage with listening, speaking, reading, writing and interacting in Irish in a meaningful way.
- Provide students with opportunities to engage with a variety of texts and genres in a meaningful way that enriches their language learning.

### Inclusion and access

- Review the system of exemptions from Irish.
- Draw on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure that there are multiple pathways and response modes for all students learning Irish.
- Adopt a strengths-based approach whereby all students experience a level of success and are supported to learn Irish.
- Provide learning support in Irish for students.
- Provide support for newcomer students at primary level and provide provision in Irish for newcomer students at post-primary level.
- Consider the provision for Irish at post-primary level and how this can be differentiated to support all students –provide a course for newcomer students; consider introducing a foundation level course at Junior Cycle; consider provision at Senior Cycle - for example, by offering different levels of courses (foundation, ordinary, higher and sárleibhéal) or a course focused on applied Irish and another course based on Irish literature.
- Provide a structured programme for the teaching of literacy skills in Irish; ensure that children are taught how to decode and spell words in Irish.
- Link teaching, learning and assessment with the CEFR to support an inclusive approach to teaching Irish.
- Introduce an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle.
- Develop resources that are culturally responsive through the representation of minority groups and cultural diversity.



### Assessment

- Align teaching, learning and assessment with the CEFR to support progression, transparency and inclusion.
- Utilise assessment to create a positive washback effect through emphasising communicative competence in Irish.
- Introduce an oral Irish examination at Junior Cycle and review the oral Irish examination at Senior Cycle.
- Consider administering standardised assessment tests in Irish at primary level.

### Teacher education

- Provide professional development and professional learning opportunities for teachers to support their competence and confidence in Irish.
- Consider providing funded courses, additional qualifications and funded Gaeltacht courses for teachers.
- Increase supports for Irish in initial teacher education - provide opportunities for student teachers to socialise through Irish on a regular basis.
- Examine the time allocation for Irish in initial teacher education programmes.
- Ensure that student teachers study how the Irish language works (phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax etc.).
- Ensure there is adequate supply of teachers to teach Irish.
- Provide further supports for teachers who have achieved their qualification outside of Ireland.
- Link what is considered to be best practice in terms of teaching and learning of Irish in teacher education with practice in schools, particularly in terms of supporting student teachers on school placement.

### Supports and resources

- Stage an awareness campaign about the consultation on Irish in English-medium



schools and the benefits of learning Irish.

- Utilise multiple platforms to engage with school communities.
- Develop a repository of resources including exemplars of good practice; provide guidance on how resources should be used and an awareness campaign about what resources are available.
- Ensure that resources are developed by experts in the field.
- Provide a structured programme for developing children's literacy skills in Irish in English-medium schools.
- Provide additional supports for parents/guardians so that they can participate in their children's learning regardless of their knowledge of Irish; consider providing digital resources, such as digital books and apps; inform parents/guardians about their child's learning in school; provide Irish classes for parents.
- Expand successful support schemes for Irish so that more schools can avail of them.
- Develop further digital resources for Irish, for example resources to support digital game-based learning and mobile assisted language learning; explore the use of AI and VR to promote the learning of Irish; increase awareness of current resources; ensure there is adequate funding so that digital resources can be developed.
- Provide scholarships to the Gaeltacht; ensure that Gaeltacht courses are inclusive of students from culturally diverse backgrounds; consider alternatives to Gaeltacht placements where this is not a suitable option for families; increase opportunities for students in DEIS schools in particular to participate in Gaeltacht courses.
- Ensure that the resources that are used and created for the teaching and learning of Irish, affirm cultural diversity in Ireland and that minority groups are represented.
- Provide more courses at third level through Irish.
- Establish cooperation between the State Departments that are concerned with the teaching and learning of Irish, in particular the Department of Education and Youth and Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht



## School management organisations (1)

### Awareness campaign

- Communicate the cultural benefits and the 'usefulness' of learning Irish more broadly.
- Make parents/guardians aware of the advantages of learning Irish in terms of employment.
- Link the benefits of learning Irish with enriching Irish identity for all children

### School culture and a whole-school approach

- Create a positive school culture for Irish that is clearly supported by the Board of Management (BOM) and school leadership.
- Involve all members of the school community in using informal Irish on a whole-school basis.
- Place an emphasis on active language use and communication through Irish.
- Include parents, the BOM and all members of teaching and non-teaching staff in the school in the use of Irish.

### Inclusion

- Ensure that textbooks portray a diversity of cultures.
- Consider the suitability of Gaeltacht placement for students with a diversity of religious beliefs, for example, providing halal food and prayer places.
- Be cognisant that Gaeltacht placement may not be considered culturally appropriate by all families and consider how the opportunities provided through Gaeltacht placement may be offered in alternative ways.

### Teacher supply

- Address the teacher supply issue.
- Ensure that there is an adequate supply of teachers to teach Irish.

### Teaching of Irish

- Focus on using Irish and communicating through Irish, rather than overemphasising grammatical accuracy.
- Focus on building on children's level of Irish rather than teaching from the textbook.

### Oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle

- Introduce an Oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle to motivate students to learn Irish by prioritising spoken Irish.

### Exemptions

- Discontinue the practice of exemptions in Irish and focus on supporting all children to learn Irish.



### Timing

- Be aware of the timing of initiatives; consider linking the initiative to support Irish in English-medium schools with the Primary Education Forum.

## School management organisations (2)

### Whole-school approach

- Create a positive culture and normalise the use of Irish across the whole-school.
- Have a whole-school plan for Irish and include the Student Council in this.
- Involve parents and all members of the school community and provide supports for parents who would like to learn Irish.
- Consider setting out criteria/ targets for schools to achieve, similar to the Scéim Aitheantais do Scoileanna Gaeltachta.
- Consider issuing a directive on bilingual signage in all schools.
- Ensure a designated space for Irish books in school library.
- Emphasise the reasons for learning Irish.
- Create more opportunities and platforms for children to use Irish, for example, sports events, Slógadh, na Gaeil Óga.
- Award bonus points for doing projects through Irish in house exams.

### Teacher supply

- Focus on how to retain teachers and consider why they may be leaving the profession, for example due to dissatisfaction with curriculum change.

### Professional development for teachers

- Provide opportunities for teachers to upskill in Irish, for example, through courses provided by COGG and Gaeltacht courses.
- Support teachers to share good practice and inspire other teachers.
- Provide extra support for teachers who have qualified outside of Ireland.
- Consider offering a Teastas i dTeagasc na Gaeilge as recognition for advanced skills in teaching Irish.
- Consider what can be learned from the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) that is relevant for Irish.

### Resources

- Provide a one-stop shop of resources.
- Increase funding for COGG to support the development of resources.

### Oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle

- Introduce an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle.



- Place more emphasis on listening at Junior Cycle.

### **Oral Irish exam at Senior Cycle**

- Review the current oral Irish exam at Senior Cycle to ensure that the focus is on communication rather than memorisation.

### **Exemptions**

- Review the system of exemptions which is viewed as problematic.

### **Vision for Irish**

- Provide clear structured support for Irish at the level of government and Department of Education and Youth.
- Link the learning of Irish at school with opportunities to use the language outside of school.
- Prioritise the teaching and learning of Irish.
- Support the growth of Irish-medium education which will create a mass of Irish speakers, which will in turn support Irish in English-medium education.
- Provide strong governmental support for Irish by learning from other jurisdictions (e.g. the Basque country).

### **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**

- Link the learning of Irish with the CEFR from primary school.
- Ensure that students experience success; linking Irish with CEFR would support this.

## **Principals' representative organisations**

### **Visibility**

- Create a visible profile for Irish (e.g. ensure Irish is visible and used at education-focused events).

### **Positive attitudes**

- Ensure that a positive mindset is encouraged, in which students understand that it is common to make mistakes when learning a language.

### **Engaging approaches**

- Examine what can be learned from how Modern Foreign Languages are taught
- Expand on the success of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project for primary schools.
- Explore the potential for game/play-based approaches to the teaching of Irish
- Expand opportunities for learning Irish through activities such as sport.



### **Exemptions**

- Examine the current approach to the awarding of Irish exemptions, and in particular, the perception that they are always necessary for children identified as having additional needs.

### **Incentivising Irish**

- Examine the potential for reward-systems/competitions to encourage the use of Irish inside and outside school.
- Ensure that the benefits of events like Seachtain na Gaeilge are capitalised upon throughout the year.

### **Linking schools/communities**

- Explore the potential to connect primary and post-primary school students in the use of Irish, e.g. Peil trí Ghaeilge with local TY students.
- Explore the potential for T1 schools (Irish-medium/Gaeltacht schools) and T2 schools (English-medium schools) to communicate and work together.

### **ITE**

- Ensure appropriate support for student teachers to develop confidence in teaching through Irish and that this is reflective of typical classroom practice; ensure that school placement supervision supports student teachers' confidence in teaching the language.
- Revise the process/assessment for teachers trained abroad to acquire certification in Irish to ensure that it rewards language competence; ensure that the process/assessment cannot be completed through rote learning approaches.

### **Teacher supply**

- Address the shortage of fully qualified Irish teachers at post-primary level.

### **Professional learning/supports for teachers**

- Ensure that there are opportunities for teachers to use Irish regularly.
- Examine the approach to teaching Irish spelling at primary level, due to challenges for learners with more traditional approaches like the Friday spelling test.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to share good practice in the teaching of Irish (e.g. Teachmeets).

### **Time allocation and curriculum**

- Clarify the expectations regarding time allocations in the primary curriculum.
- Clarify how the progression continua can be used to inform assessment.

### **Oral examinations**

- Provide an oral examination at Junior Cycle level.





### **Parental engagement**

- Provide resources for parents to help them support their children's learning of Irish.

## **Providers of initial teacher education (primary)**

### **Develop language and literacy in tandem**

- Ensure that language and literacy development are integrated, i.e. that literacy development in Irish is not underdeveloped; ensure that literacy development is meaningfully linked with communicative competence.

### **Language awareness**

- Ensure that language awareness is integrated into ITE modules, for both Irish and English (and other languages).
- Promote understanding of how the language works.

### **Professional learning**

- Provide greater clarity on expectations for engagement with Irish beyond the ITE degree.
- Consider providing continuing professional learning in Irish beyond the ITE degree (e.g. every 2/3 years).

### **Use of Irish in HEIs**

- Provide support/personnel to create a 'hub' for Irish in each HEI.
- Provide support to teach Irish through CLIL on ITE programmes.
- Ensure that HEIs are supported to provide modules in Irish across each year of the ITE programme.

### **Teaching through the target language**

- Promote a shared understanding between students and practising teachers and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)/schools on the teaching of Irish through Irish, to ensure a smoother experience for students on placement.

### **Teacher supply**

- Address the teacher supply issue.

### **Progression**

- Provide greater clarity on the expectations/benchmarks for language learning at different points of the school system.

### **Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht**

- Consider how to better match the needs of student teachers with the provision during the Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht, i.e provide differentiated provision depending on the needs of learners.



## Providers of initial teacher education (post-primary)

### Supports and resources for teachers

- Provide examples of practice (i.e. videos of teachers teaching Irish) via Oide.
- Provide additional resources/supports for student teachers to upskill in Irish
- Provide a one-stop shop of resources/support available for teaching post-primary Irish.
- Provide targeted support/professional development for newly qualified post-primary Irish teachers.

### Induction

- Consider providing subject-specific induction for Irish as part of the Droichead process.

### Teaching through the target language

- Provide greater clarity/consistency between HEIs/schools on teaching Irish through Irish.

### Gaeltacht

- Provide additional financial support for post-primary student teachers to attend the Gaeltacht.

### Engaging approaches

- Learn from how Modern Foreign Languages are taught.
- Extend the activities associated with Seachtain na Gaeilge throughout the year.

### Time

- Ensure that appropriate time and supports are available on consecutive ITE programmes to develop competence, confidence in both language and pedagogical knowledge.

### Oral examination

- Re-examine how the Irish oral at Leaving Certificate is assessed; learn from Modern Foreign Languages.

## Teacher unions

### Communication/awareness campaign

- Have a communication/awareness campaign about the benefits and importance of learning Irish.
- Focus on the intrinsic values of learning Irish and increased opportunities for employment.



- Ensure that all relevant bodies are informed about the consultation on Irish in English-medium schools.
- Consider the timing of communication with schools as there is a very large number of initiatives in schools at present.
- Use multiple platforms to communicate with schools and teachers.
- Consider contacting teachers through platforms created by teacher unions through newsletters, for example, to inform them of opportunities for professional development.

### **Supporting teachers**

- Support teachers to develop confidence and competence in Irish and make this a focus of professional development/learning.
- Focus on teachers' communicative language use rather than overemphasising grammatical accuracy.
- Consider building on funded Gaeltacht summer courses that are already available and successful.
- Maximise the potential of summer courses to support teachers and consider skills needed by facilitators of these courses.
- Provide more resources and video exemplars of good practice.
- Recruit more teachers from Gaeltacht areas - this could be ex-quota.
- Support teachers who need to earn a qualification in Irish.
- Scrúdú Cáilíochta na Gaeilge should be funded and accessible; it could be rolled out through Education Centres.

### **Links between colleges/institutes of education and schools**

- Links should be made between Colleges of Education and schools, so that schools can support students on professional placement.
- Schools should be informed as to what is considered best practice regarding the teaching of Irish.

### **Allowances for teachers**

- Reintroduce an allowance for teaching through Irish.
- Consider incremental credit for post-primary teachers who have taught abroad.

### **Exemptions**

- Revise the system of exemptions, ensuring different ways to access the curriculum.
- Differentiate teaching and learning to suit learners' needs rather than excluding them from Irish.



### **Oral Irish at Junior Cycle**

- Introduce an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle to place a value on spoken Irish.

## **Organisations representing parents and youth (1)**

### **Vision for Irish**

- Provide a clear and coordinated vision for Irish from preschool to third level.
- Link learning Irish with the CEFR.

### **Irish at third level**

- Provide more third level courses through Irish and link this to increased employment opportunities.
- Embed Irish into university life.
- Provide students with opportunities to use Irish in all activities, clubs and societies, not just in the Cumann Gaelach.

### **Irish outside of school**

- Provide more Gaeltacht scholarships.
- Utilise youth groups to support communicative use of Irish.

### **Exemptions**

- Exemptions should be from exams rather than from learning Irish.

### **Supports for teachers**

- Provide more supports for teachers to develop confidence and competence in Irish.

## **Organisations representing parents and youth (2)**

### **Prioritise spoken Irish**

- Prioritise and emphasise spoken Irish (lack of confidence emerges when the primary focus is put on reading/writing).
- Consider creating two courses: one focused on language and communication, the other focused on literature.

### **Support community and youth initiatives**

- Support the successful community engagement initiatives that promote the use of Irish outside school, e.g. Muineachán le Gaeilge.
- Provide specific resources/funding and supports to ensure that youth organisations can provide services through Irish.

### **Support/professional learning for teachers**

- Provide supports to ensure that all teachers achieve a high level of competence/accuracy in Irish - primary and post-primary.



### **Revise approaches to oral examinations**

- Provide an oral examination at Junior Cycle level.
- Revise the focus of the Leaving Certificate Oral so that it incentivises and assesses communicative language competence rather than memorised contributions.

### **CEFR**

- Align expectations at different points of the education system with the CEFR benchmarks.

### **Engaging teaching approaches**

- Support the teaching of other subjects and other activities (e.g. sports) through Irish in primary schools (CLIL).

### **Exemptions**

- Return the decision-making power to grant an exemption to the Department of Education and Youth rather than having the exemption granted by the School Principal.

## **University departments of Irish**

### **Share good practice**

- Increase opportunities for teachers to share good practice, for example, through conferences dedicated to the teaching and learning of Irish.
- Identify samples of good practice and build on this.

### **Advantages of literature**

- Emphasise and develop the benefits of studying Irish literature through a variety of texts and genres, including songs and poetry.
- Utilise a variety of texts to support learner motivation to learn Irish, and to provide additional input for students.
- Draw on literature to enrich students' language and to promote grammatical accuracy.
- Make explicit links between the language in texts/literature and the development of productive skills (speaking and writing) in Irish.

### **Development of resources**

- Develop attractive structured resources to teach Irish phonics that have been designed by experts in curriculum development and phonology.
- Invest in Irish resources and ensure that they are comparable to resources available for teaching phonics in English.

### **Motivation and use of Irish outside of school/ university**



- Link the use of Irish with communicating through the language.
- Support motivation to use Irish through social occasions, drama clubs, trips to the Gaeltacht etc.
- Consider a buddy system where students in later years of an Irish degree are paired with first year students to support their attendance at Irish language events.
- Link Irish with sports clubs and create domains for language use outside of school.
- Consider the cost of Gaeltacht courses.

#### **Communication awareness campaign**

- Conduct an awareness campaign regarding the benefits and importance of learning Irish.
- Ensure that cultural reasons to learn Irish are inclusive.

#### **Exemptions**

- Support all learners to learn Irish, rather than excluding learners.
- Ensure that teaching, learning and assessment is differentiated to meet learners' needs and is inclusive of all students.
- Give recognition to varying levels of competence across language skills.
- Promote oral language skills in Irish through teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that learners are supported to learn Irish rather than being excluded through exemptions.

#### **Awareness of available supports**

- Ensure that relevant parties are aware of supports available, e.g. the funded semester in the Gaeltacht supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht for students in post-primary teacher education.

## **Irish language organisations**

#### **A coordinated clear vision for Irish across all levels of education**

- Establish a coordinated, clear vision and policy for Irish across all levels of education, including early years education.
- Provide a clear policy and vision to support the teaching and learning of Irish; an expert group should be established immediately to work towards this goal.

#### **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**

- During the two-year period of the action plan for Irish, establish an expert group to work on the introduction of a coordinated approach to the teaching and learning of Irish that is based on the CEFR; this would be in keeping with the current Programme for Government and should happen immediately as part of the Action Plan for Irish in



English-medium schools; this time period could be used to draft the policy (including actions, timeline and resources) and allow for a period of consultation and research; revised curricula could be enacted after this period and professional development offered to teachers; various stakeholders would have responsibility for the enactment of the policy.

- Align the teaching and learning of Irish with CEFR to provide transparency and clear learning goals for learners and promote an approach to the teaching and learning of Irish that is inclusive of all learners.

#### **Allocated time for the teaching and learning of Irish at primary level**

- Ensure that sufficient time is allocated to Irish so that students can acquire the language in line with what is considered best practice internationally in the teaching of minority languages. Revise the reduction in designated time for teaching Irish at primary level.

#### **Exemptions**

- Ensure that all learners are supported to learn Irish and that recognition is given to all language skills.
- Use the CEFR as a roadmap as it has the potential to support all learners to learn Irish.
- Discontinue the current system of exemptions which creates a negative mindset against the learning of Irish.

#### **Oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle**

- Introduce an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle to motivate students to learn Irish and to give recognition to students' spoken Irish.

#### **Learning support in Irish**

- Provide learning support in Irish as is the case for English and Maths.
- Encourage and support all learners to learn Irish.

#### **T1/T2 at Junior Cycle**

- Ensure that language experts are involved in all curriculum change.
- Review aspects of current T1/T2 specification which places T1 students at a perceived disadvantage.

#### **Standardised assessment tests**

- Consider making standardised testing in Irish compulsory at primary level to support teaching and learning and the status of the language.

#### **Differentiated provision**

- Provide more options for learning Irish that would support a diversity of learners to engage with Irish and experience success.



- Consider a course based on Applied Irish and a separate course based on Irish literature.
- Consider having four levels of Irish at post-primary level and bonus points for 'sárleibhéal' (four levels could include foundation, ordinary, higher and sárleibhéal).
- Focus on Irish as a living language rather than a school subject.

#### **Support teachers**

- Support teachers' confidence and competence in using Irish and promote effective pedagogies, promoting positive attitudes towards Irish in ITE.
- Extend Gaeltacht placement as it is important.

#### **Support schemes for Irish**

- Ensure adequate funding for current support schemes e.g. Léargas, Gaelbhrtach.
- Increase awareness of available support schemes, for example, Gaeltacht scholarships.

#### **Irish as part of language awareness approaches**

- Ensure that Irish is central to language awareness approaches for example in the teaching of MFL.

## **Organisations addressing inclusion/additional needs**

#### **Literacy in Irish**

- Provide greater guidance on the teaching of spelling/phonics in Irish to ensure that Irish orthography/code-based knowledge is systematically taught.
- Provide a structured decodable reading programme for Irish that aligns with the scope and sequence of a structured phonics programme.
- Develop a systematic and structured phonics programme for Irish that draws on the principles of UDL and employs AI/technology to support teachers, students and parents.
- Provide ready-to-use resources to support the teaching of phonics in Irish.
- Provide greater guidance to schools/teachers to ensure that they are aware of the negative and potentially harmful effects of spelling tests on the wellbeing of students, neurodivergent learners in particular.

#### **Inclusion and UDL**

- Draw on the principles of Universal Design to ensure that there are multiple pathways and response modes for all students (including neurodivergent students) when learning Irish.





- Provide greater guidance/resources for inclusive teaching of Irish at Tier 1 (Whole-school and Classroom Support) and Tier 2 (School Support for Some) of the Continuum of Support, including specific learning support for Irish.
- Consider how best to promote a safe and inclusive classroom climate to promote confidence in Irish and encourage students to give it a go, make mistakes etc.
- Ensure a positive mindset to the teaching and learning of Irish; emphasise that it is okay to make mistakes.

#### **Supports for school staff**

- Provide additional supports for SNAs/Caretakers/Secretaries to engage with professional learning in Irish, as members of the school community.

#### **Specialist teachers**

- Consider having specialist Irish teachers that would have the potential benefit of allowing greater access for teachers who do not qualify through the traditional route.

## **Department support services for teachers**

#### **Vision and progression**

- Provide an over-arching policy for Irish extending from pre-school to higher education, inclusive of curriculum and assessment.
- Provide a joined-up vision and plan for Irish in the education system at all levels, addressing curriculum and assessment.
- Conduct a needs analysis to support forward planning for Irish inside and outside the education system.
- Establish an expert group to review learning outcomes and expectations for Irish throughout the system, including curriculum and assessment; this group should consider alignment with CEFR.
- Ensure that a vision/policy for Irish demonstrates how Irish can be supported outside of school, ensuring a clear role/reason for learning the language.

#### **Prioritise communication**

- Afford greater attention to communicative proficiency rather than an excessive focus on literature.
- Ensure an appropriate balance of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) in designing and enacting curricula.

#### **Positive attitudes**

- Address the sense that there can be embarrassment or fear in using Irish.



### Engaging approaches

- Learn from the positive experience and focus of the MFL curriculum; students report greater proficiency and enjoyable experiences in learning languages like German and French.
- Ensure that fun, engaging opportunities for learning Irish are provided, such as youth clubs, Seó Bóthair.

### Examinations and assessment

- Use a backward design process to ensure that curriculum specifications are closely aligned with appropriate assessment tasks.
- Ensure that examinations appropriately reward the development of communicative skills in Irish.
- Provide an oral examination at Junior Cycle level.
- Revise the use of Sraith Pictiúr at Leaving Certificate level.
- Examine the manner in which Irish is assessed and reported at primary level, including the potential for more widespread use of standardised tests in Irish.

### Gaeltacht

- Address the shortfall in funding for Gaeltacht scholarships; ensure greater awareness of available supports.
- Explore potential for Gaeltacht-type experiences to be brought to schools, for students who cannot/will not attend the Gaeltacht.
- Consider how Gaeltacht scholarships can be extended to students in non-DEIS schools that require financial support.

### Supports for teachers

- Provide greater opportunities for teachers to develop and practise their Irish skills in welcoming, non-threatening environments.
- Address the lack of information about teachers' own competence in Irish to enable forward planning and provision of professional learning.
- Consider the available incentives for post-primary teachers to engage in CPD (akin to the Extra Personal Vacation days available at primary level).
- Enable teachers to be positive role models for the use of Irish outside the education system.

### Curriculum

- Provide appropriate Irish language literature for students.
- Examine the types and levels of difficulty of the texts studied at Ordinary and Higher Level at Leaving Certificate.



- Consider the re-introduction of foundation level Irish to include all learners.

## Irish language services for young people

### Initial teacher education

- Examine the volume of input/number of hours afforded to Irish in Initial Teacher Education programmes, in response to concerns about student teachers' competence in Irish.
- Examine the possibility of restoring a specific Irish oral for entry to Initial Teacher Education at primary level; provide additional support/courses for those who do not meet the required competence.

### Gaeltacht supports

- Provide further support for teachers to attend Gaeltacht courses to improve their competence and confidence in Irish.
- Increase the amount of time spent by student teachers on the Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht.
- Examine the manner in which Gaeltacht scholarships are awarded to students in DEIS schools to ensure that the shortfall in funding does not become an obstacle and to ensure increased knowledge about the available supports.
- Ensure that Gaeltacht scholarships are awarded to students who have an interest in the language; afford Irish teachers a key role in deciding to whom scholarships are awarded.
- Examine the manner in which Departmental approval is afforded to short-term Gaeltacht courses, to ensure that 3-5 day stays are a possibility (e.g. for primary schools/DEIS schools).
- Encourage Transition Year students to spend a period of time in the Gaeltacht in addition to/instead of overseas trips.

### Supports for youth organisations

- Provide funding to support the provision of materials/resources for young people through Irish; support collaboration between youth organisations.
- Provide support/funding for schemes that promote youth leadership in the use of the Irish language, e.g. youth-led Irish clubs.
- Ensure equitable funding for youth organisations that focus on the Irish language.
- Provide investment in schemes that support the development of Irish language leaders in the community.



- Provide additional supports for organisations to recruit candidates with Irish, e.g. third level courses focused on youth work through Irish.

#### **Time allocation for Irish**

- Examine the potential contradiction between the aspirations of the Action Plan and the planned reduction in time for Irish at primary level, i.e. re-examine the decision to reduce the time allocation for Irish at primary level.

#### **Exemptions**

- Remove the responsibility for granting exemptions from principals to avoid conflict with parents at a local level.

#### **Engaging approaches**

- Examine and learn from the manner in which Modern Foreign Languages are taught.
- Keep the focus on enjoyable, playful approaches, recognising that Irish is a living language.

#### **School leadership**

- Recognise the key role played by school principals in involving youth organisations/clubs in Irish (and the promotion of Irish more broadly).

## **Experts on the teaching of Irish**

### **Increase time allocated to Irish, increase opportunities for language use and move towards partial immersion**

- Ensure that children and young people are allocated sufficient time in school to develop language and literacy skills.
- Increase language contact with Irish in all schools; do not decrease the designated time for Irish; as there is a limited amount of time at school, prioritise time for teaching and learning Irish.
- Consider moving towards partial-immersion programmes.
- Emphasise the use of informal Irish in all schools.

#### **Support teachers**

- Support teachers to develop confidence in Irish.
- Prioritise promoting confidence in Irish during initial teacher education.
- Create opportunities for student teachers to socialise through Irish so that they can develop positive associations with the language.
- Prioritise upskilling in Irish through allocating time for teachers to engage in professional learning during school time.



- Consider having ‘ambasadóirí’ Gaeilge in schools; one or two teachers for every school could be considered for this recognised role.
- Utilise education centres to provide support for teachers regionally and locally; links could also be made between the education centres and the nearest Gaeltacht region.
- Consider how good practice can be shared.

#### **Supporting parental participation**

- Support parents/guardians’ participation in children’s learning in Irish; this can be facilitated in many ways, for example, through using digital books in Irish, watching Irish language television, listening to poems/songs, and using some Irish at home.
- Use digital resources to support parents without competence in Irish.
- Share information about the benefits of bilingualism/ plurilingualism with parents and how they can support their children’s learning.
- Share suitable Irish resources with parents to support a positive home/school link.
- Ensure that all Irish activities at home are enjoyable.

#### **Increase opportunities to use Irish outside of school**

- Form links between learning Irish at school and the use of Irish in the local community.
- Fund Irish language officers in all towns to plan for and coordinate the use of Irish in the community in an integrated way.
- Create links with the Gaeltacht; even day trips may be beneficial.

#### **Vision for Irish**

- Ensure a clear vision for Irish across the education system.
- Consider links with CEFR and TEG.
- Clarify expectations, learning standards and goals.

#### **Assessment**

- Consider how the teaching of literature in Irish at post-primary level can be linked to developing spoken language.
- Support the development of spoken Irish through summative assessment.

#### **Motivation**

- Ensure there is a focus on Stair na Gaeilge as part of learning Irish.
- Emphasise learning Irish with cultural reasons for learning Irish.



### Support the development of literacy skills in Irish

- Ensure that reading and writing is used to support children's language development in an integrated way.
- Teach literacy skills in Irish in a systematic manner so that children develop explicit knowledge of Irish phonics and learn how to decode words in Irish.
- Use a variety of texts rather than solely relying on textbooks for reading material.
- Choose a variety of texts at an appropriate level to provide additional input in Irish; to develop knowledge of vocabulary, phonics, grammar and syntax, and to enrich learners' language and increase motivation.
- Emphasise the transfer of skills across languages and encourage learners to focus on linguistic patterns in words and to explore patterns across languages.
- Provide a structured reading programme along with teacher support materials for Irish reading in English-medium schools.
- Ensure that all children are exposed to a print-rich environment in Irish and that they are given ample opportunities to read and write in a variety of genres in Irish.
- Provide children with opportunities to engage in shared reading in Junior classes.
- Encourage repeated reading of suitable texts to support reading fluency.
- Consider providing further digital books and bilingual/plurilingual texts which can support parental participation in Irish reading.
- Consider how parents without Irish can participate in their child's learning in an active way, for example, reading a digital book together, watching an Irish language television programme.
- Focus on the orthography of Irish and the development of literacy skills in Irish as part of teacher education qualifications.
- Use a variety of texts across genres to support teacher input in Irish.

## Experts on teacher education

### Informal Irish

- Ensure that a specific focus is placed on everyday spoken Irish (gnáthchaint an lae); provide appropriate scaffolding (e.g. charts/displays) that allow for children to produce multiple sentence structures from the same basic structure (e.g. an bhfuil cead agam \_\_\_\_\_)

### Professional learning

- Support teachers to achieve competence and confidence in their own Irish.



- Provide professional learning to support teachers with awareness of linguistic structure and form in Irish (e.g. grammar structures in Irish).
- Disseminate accurate information about good practice in teaching and learning Irish; provide supports for teachers in how to use helpful resources in Irish.

### **Engaging teaching approaches and resources**

- Engage all learners and build confidence by employing enjoyable methods that encourage interactive language use (e.g. short movies, raps).
- Learn from the approaches used in teaching Modern Foreign Languages.
- Use literature to stimulate conversation, e.g. roleplays, raps, short movies, rather than learning material by heart.
- Use technology and digital resources to support the learning of Irish (e.g. abair.ie; gaois.ie).
- Examine the potential for books with scaffolding material (e.g. what to do before/during/after reading) to support language development.

### **Build confidence**

- Ensure that the teaching of Irish supports the building of self-confidence and supportive relationships between teachers and students.
- Ensure that an open attitude to Irish prevails and that students are not afraid of making mistakes and forgetting what they have learned (which is a normal part of language acquisition).
- Teach students to be proud of the Irish language and those who have contributed to it; pride begets interest, interest begets learning, learning begets fluency (spreagann bród suim, spreagann suim foghlaim, spreagann foghlaim líofacht).
- Ensure that a positive culture develops around the use of Irish.

### **Language input**

- Ensure that the teaching of Irish includes appropriate language input, extending beyond the use of individual words and avoiding rote learning of isolated vocabulary; this would support expanded language output on behalf of the children.
- Ensure that the focus is on spoken Irish.
- Teach about how Irish influences the use of English in Ireland.
- Ensure that Irish is taught regularly, ideally every day, at primary/post-primary.

### **Progress and transitions**

- Ensure progression between Irish learning in primary and post-primary school.
- Ensure that clear language exemplars are taught and developed from class level to class level at primary level.



- Ensure that the resources/schemes and whole-school plans provide progression from one class/year-level to the next.
- Keep a record of the Irish that has been learned (not just the Irish that has been taught) using appropriate assessment methods.

### **Inclusion**

- Adopt Universal Design for Learning as a framework to support the teaching and learning of Irish in an inclusive manner.
- Be realistic about the effect of the mother language (e.g. English) on the learning of second and subsequent languages.

## **Experts on assessment**

### **Develop language and literacy in tandem**

- Ensure that the integrated nature of language and literacy development is recognised (e.g. how reading builds vocabulary).

### **Parental engagement**

- Ensure that resources/schemes are available to involve parents in the learning of Irish alongside their children; ensure coordination and engagement.
- Adopt a strengths-based approach in reminding children/adults of the amount of Irish they have acquired, to build a sense of self-confidence.
- Explore the potential for homework to be used as a means to connect parents with their children's Irish learning.

### **Engaging approaches**

- Use singing/amhránaíocht as a pedagogy to support the learning of Irish.
- Explore the potential of technologies like VR and AI to support the learning of Irish.

### **Assessment to support learning**

- Ensure that the teaching/assessment of Irish enables transfer to other contexts outside of formal academic settings.
- Ensure that means of assessment recognise the variability in language/vocabulary that is to be expected in early language acquisition (particularly in the minority language context).
- Ensure that any form of testing for early learners of Irish is responsive and encourages rather than discourages learners.
- Involve teacher judgment in the assessment of early language learners, e.g. I can.... Statements.





### Oral examinations

- Revise the approach to the Leaving Certificate oral so that it discourages learning by heart; ensure that native speakers do not feel the need to learn sentences by heart in order to do well in the oral.
- Revise the approach to the Sraith Pictiúr so that they are not pre-prepared and learned by heart in advance by students.

### CEFR

- Realise the potential of CEFR to help students pinpoint and track their progress in language learning in Irish.
- Adopt a pilot scheme to establish and map the CEFR levels achieved by learners at different levels of the education system (e.g. end of primary/junior cycle/leaving certificate/degree level/initial teacher education) and identify the next steps in language learning and key priorities at a system level.
- Adopt the assessment and teaching/learning approaches (i.e action-oriented approach) of CEFR to inform progress throughout the system; use assessment as a starting point and backwards map the teaching and learning approaches.

### Research

- Ensure that any plan for research on the teaching/learning of Irish adopts a realistic and shared timeline, avoiding short turnaround times on requests for tender/partnerships with researchers in higher education institutions.

## Organisations representing minority groups

### Ensure alignment in vision and policy

- Align the Action Plan for Irish with other supports and policies within the system to ensure consistency and responsiveness, e.g. National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

### Understanding and representation of learners from minority groups

- In supporting the teaching and learning of Irish for minorities, keep obstacles and challenges arising from intersectionality in mind (e.g. individuals who are a member of a minority ethnic group who may *also* have a disability).
- Make a sustained effort to ensure that texts and instructional materials are culturally responsive, ensuring that minority groups are represented appropriately in the materials that young people see.
- Ensure every effort is made to engage with minority communities by, for example, using networks and representative organisations.



- Ensure that Irish is framed as one of many languages that make up our diverse linguistic community; ensure that Traveller language (Cant) and other home languages are given recognition.

### High expectations

- Support teachers to ensure that they hold high expectations for *all* learners in their classrooms (inclusive of expectations for the Irish language).
- Do not consider exemptions as the first or primary 'support' for children/young people who encounter barriers to learning Irish.

### Additional supports

- Provide additional learning support for Irish (as provided in English), in recognition of the fact that, like English, it is an additional language for many young people and may be one of many challenges they encounter in school.
- Provide more proactive supports to ensure that minority groups can attend the Gaeltacht, ensuring that financial support is available beforehand while providing inclusive experiences during their stay.

### Engaging teaching approaches

- Ensure that the curriculum and teaching are relevant by keeping the focus on interaction, communication and oral language with an authentic purpose and connection with young peoples' lives (e.g. CLIL).

## State organisations

### Resources

- Collate resources and create a central hub of available resources.
- Ensure that teachers are aware of the available resources.

### Supporting teachers

- Encourage positive attitudes towards Irish amongst teachers.
- Provide further professional development for teachers.

### Link class and curriculum

- Have an integrated structured approach at system and at class level.
- Link classwork with curricula.

### Focus on language use

- Support learners to use the language as soon as possible.
- Ensure that learners experience success in their learning to motivate them to continue to learn and speak Irish.



### Language awareness

- Ensure that Irish is central to language awareness in schools.

### Coordinate support across government departments

- Have a coordinated approach to supporting Irish across government departments.

### Standardised testing

- Ensure that standardised testing is meaningful, beneficial and relevant for teachers and learners.
- Be cognisant that standardised tests results will also reflect to some extent the teaching and learning of Irish in particular schools.

## Technology experts

### Resources

- Collate current digital resources; make teachers aware of available resources and support them in how to use them.
- Ensure there is adequate funding for digital resources to be fully developed as often funding is inadequate.
- Ensure that Irish language experts are involved in the creation of Irish language resources.
- Publicise the need for technical experts e.g. engineers, to work through the medium of Irish and consider providing bursaries.

### Maximise use of technology

- Harness technology to support the teaching and learning of Irish.
- Adopt a game-based approach.
- Utilise current resources that have been developed, for example, *An Scéalaí*, *Meall an Óige*.
- Support parental/guardians' participation in their children's learning in Irish through the use of digital resources including newcomer parents.
- Use technology to support linking sounds with reading (phonics) and to support pronunciation in all dialects.
- Link the Action Plan for Irish with goals set out in the Strategy for Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 2024-2033.

### Support teachers

- Have a technology-support teacher in every school; this should be a recognised role that would entitle a teacher to a reduction in other duties.



- Consider how the professional support services for teachers Oide, can support the use of digital resources in the teaching and learning of Irish.

**Coordination between departments**

- Consider how the Department of Education and Youth and Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht can collaborate to support the development of digital resources in Irish.



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## Appendix A: Organisations represented at the initial consultation event

The following list of participating organisations was provided by An tAonad Gaeilge um Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla (Unit for Irish in English-Medium Schools), Department of Education and Youth.

- Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Catholic Primary School Manager's Association (CPSMA)
- Educate Together
- Church of Ireland Board of Education
- Muslim Primary Education Board
- An Foras Pátrúnachta
- National Association of Boards of Management of Special Schools (NABMSE)
- Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
- Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
- Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools (APTCS)
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
- Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)
- An Gréasán do Mhúinteoirí Gaeilge
- Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
- Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
- National Parents Council (NPC)
- Irish Second level Student's Union (ISSU)
- National Youth Council of Ireland



## Appendix A: Organisations represented at the initial consultation event

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Feachtas
- Ógras
- Gaeloideachas
- Glór na nGael
- Conradh na Gaeilge
- Gael Linn
- Cumann na bhFiann
- Comhchoiste Náisiúnta na gColáistí Samhraidh (CONCOS)
- Coláiste na Tríonóide - Scoil an Oideachais
- Institiúid Oideachais Marino
- Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh
- Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh
- Dublin City University Institute of Education
- Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Maynooth University
- Ollscoil na hÉireann, Luimneach
- University College Dublin
- Hibernia College
- Pavee Point
- National Traveller and Women's Forum
- Dyslexia Ireland
- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI)
- Gaelchultúr
- Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI)





## Appendix A: Organisations represented at the initial consultation event

### Teaching and Learning Irish in English-Medium Schools - Report 1

- Oide - Gaelaonad
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Department of Children, Disability and Equality
- Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
- State Examinations Commission
- Teaching Council
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
- Educational Research Centre (ERC)
- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- Department of Education and Youth Inspectorate
- Department of Education and Youth



## Appendix B: Questions discussed at roundtables

### Seisiúin 1: Meon agus Úsáid/ Mindset and usage

**Ceist 1:** Cad atá ag obair go maith chun tacú le dearcthaí dearfacha i leith na Gaeilge agus le húsáid na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? What is working well to support positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?

**Ceist 2:** Cad iad na dúshláin a bhaineann le dearcthaí dearfacha i leith na Gaeilge agus le húsáid na Gaeilge a chothú i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? What are the challenges to fostering positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?

**Ceist 3:** Luaigh gníomh amháin a mholfá a d'fhéadfaí a chur i bhfeidhm laistigh de thréimhse dhá bhliain chun tacú le dearcthaí dearfacha i leith na Gaeilge agus le húsáid na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla i measc:

- Múinteoirí
- Leanaí agus Daoine Óga
- Tuismitheoirí

Give one action you would recommend that could be implemented within a two-year time frame to support positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools among;

- Teachers
- Child and Young People
- Parents



## Seisiúin 2: Comhtháthú agus comhordú ar iarrachtaí/Integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources

**Ceist 1:** Cad atá ag déanamh go maith maidir le comhtháthú agus comhordú iarrachtaí agus acmhainní chun tacú leis an nGaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? What is working well in terms of the integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources to support Irish in English-medium schools?

**Ceist 2:** Cad nach bhfuil ag éirí go maith leis? What isn't working well?

**Ceist 3:** An bhfuil aon rud nua ar cheart smaoineamh air chun feabhas a chur ar an tionchar atá ag na hiarrachtaí go léir ar thacú leis an nGaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? Anything new that should be considered to improve the impact of all efforts to support Irish in English-medium schools?

**Ceist 4:** Aon ghníomhartha eile ar chóir breathnú air chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? Any other actions that should be considered to support the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools?



## Appendix C: Recording template used by all recorders

### Teimpléid taifeadóra

Uimh. an Bhoird:	
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#### Seisiún 1: Meon agus Úsáid/ Mindset and usage

Ceist 1: Cad atá ag obair go maith chun tacú le **dearcthaí dearfacha** i leith na Gaeilge agus le **húsáid** na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? *What is working well to support positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?* (15 nóim)

**Samplaí a bhaineann le dearcadh/ samplaí a bhaineann le húsáid/ samplaí a bhaineann le dearcadh & úsáid de dhíth. \*Mura bhfuil samplaí a bhaineann le dea-chleachtas ag teacht chun cinn, d'fhéadfadh an t-éascaitheoir leid a thabhairt - An féidir libh samplaí den dea-chleachtas a roinnt?**

Ceist 2: Cad iad na dúshláin a bhaineann le **dearcthaí dearfacha** i leith na Gaeilge agus le **húsáid** na Gaeilge a chothú i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? *What are the challenges to fostering positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools?* (15 nóim)

**Samplaí a bhaineann le dearcadh/ samplaí a bhaineann le húsáid/ samplaí a bhaineann le dearcadh & úsáid de dhíth.**

Ceist 3: Luaigh gníomh amháin a mholfá a d'fhéadfaí a chur i bhfeidhm laistigh de thréimhse dhá bhliain chun tacú le **dearcthaí dearfacha** i leith na Gaeilge agus le **húsáid** na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla i measc:

- Múinteoirí
- Leanaí agus Daoine Óga
- Tuismitheoirí

*Give one action you would recommend that could be implemented within a two-year time frame to support positive attitudes and use of Irish in English-medium schools among;*

- Teachers
- Child and Young People
- Parents



Bíodh moladh amháin (ar a laghad) bainteach le gach rannóg - múinteoirí, Leanaí agus Daoine Óga, Tuismitheoirí

## Seisiún 2: Comhtháthú agus comhordú ar iarrachtaí/Integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources

Ceist 1. Cad atá ag déanamh go maith maidir le comhtháthú agus comhordú iarrachtaí agus acmhainní chun tacú leis an nGaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? *What is working well in terms of the integration and co-ordination of efforts and resources to support Irish in English-medium schools?* (10 nóim)

**Samplaí dearfacha le clárú.**

Ceist 2: Cad nach bhfuil ag éirí go maith leis? *What isn't working well?* (10 nóim)

**Samplaí de na dúshláin le clárú**

Ceist 3: An bhfuil aon rud nua ar cheart smaoineamh air chun feabhas a chur ar an tionchar atá ag na hiarrachtaí go léir ar thacú leis an nGaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? *Anything new that should be considered to improve the impact of all efforts to support Irish in English-medium schools?* (10 nóim)

**Moltaí le clárú**

Ceist 4: Aon ghníomhartha eile ar choir breathnú air chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge i scoileanna meán-Bhéarla? *Any other actions that should be considered to support the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools?* (15 nóim)

**Moltaí ar bhonn níos leithne a bheidh le clárú anseo.**



**Suimiú (déan tagairt do na príomhthéamaí maidir le meon, úsáid, comhtháthú)**

