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## **IRISH**

**The Irish language in education in the Republic of Ireland**

| 2nd Edition |

| Regional dossiers series |





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## Glossary

<b>BEd</b>	Bachelor of Education (similarly <b>M</b> Master)
<b>CLIL</b>	Content and Language Integrated Learning
<b>CNNG</b>	Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta (partnership of Gaeltacht Irish Medium playgroups)
<b>DCYA</b>	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<b>DCU</b>	Dublin City University
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>EM</b>	English-medium
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>HEA</b>	The Higher Education Authority
<b>IoT</b>	Institute of Technology
<b>IM</b>	Irish-medium
<b>ITE</b>	Initial Teacher Education
<b>JC</b>	Junior Cycle
<b>JCE</b>	Junior Certificate Examination
<b>LC</b>	Leaving Certificate
<b>LCVP</b>	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
<b>NCCA</b>	The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta)
<b>NUI</b>	National University of Ireland
<b>NUIG</b>	National University of Ireland Galway
<b>NUIM</b>	National University of Ireland Maynooth
<b>SC</b>	Senior Cycle
<b>TC</b>	The Teaching Council
<b>TY</b>	Transition Year
<b>TCD</b>	Trinity College Dublin
<b>VEC(s)</b>	Vocational Education Committee(s)

## Foreword

**background** The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning aims at the acquisition, circulation and application of knowledge in the field of regional and minority language education. Regional or minority languages are languages that differ from the official language of the state where they are spoken and that are traditionally used within a given territory by nationals of that state forming a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population. For several years an important means for the Mercator Research Centre to achieve the goal of knowledge acquisition and circulation has been the Regional dossiers series. The success of this series illustrates a need for documents stating briefly the most essential features of the education system of regions with an autochthonous lesser used language.

**aim** Regional dossiers aim at providing a concise description of and basic statistics on minority language education in a specific region of Europe. Aspects that are addressed include features of the education system, recent educational policies, main actors, legal arrangements and support structures, as well as quantitative aspects, such as the number of schools, teachers, pupils and financial investments. This kind of information can serve several purposes and can be relevant for different target groups.

**target group** Policymakers, researchers, teachers, students and journalists may use the information provided to assess developments in European minority language schooling. They can also use a Regional dossier as a first orientation towards further research or as a source of ideas for improving educational provisions in their own region.

**link with Eurydice** In order to link these regional descriptions with those of national education systems, the format of the Regional dossiers follows the format used by Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe. Eurydice provides information on the

administration and structure of national education systems in the member states of the European Union.

**contents**

The remainder of this dossier consists of an introduction to the region concerned, followed by six sections each dealing with a specific level of the education system. These brief descriptions contain factual information presented in a readily accessible way. Sections eight to ten cover research, prospects and summary statistics. For detailed information and political discussions about language use at the various levels of education, the reader is referred to other sources with a list of publications.

## 1 Introduction

### language

Irish, or Gaeilge, is an autochthonous language spoken in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (which is part of the United Kingdom with a devolved assembly). It is a Celtic language that is closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx and more distantly related to Welsh, Breton and Cornish. It is an official language in the Republic of Ireland and in the European Union.

With regard to political and social history, the cumulative effect of colonisation, plantation and suppression, particularly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, led to the elimination of the Irish-speaking aristocracy and their institutions. Additionally, catastrophic famine, emigration and epidemics decimated the Irish-speaking rural indigenous population during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all factors which led to a language shift to English. Language restoration efforts by voluntary organisations began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These efforts developed into an official policy by the native government after political settlements. Nevertheless, Irish is still a lesser used language in a dominantly English bilingual context.

Inscriptions in Ogham from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries are the earliest known forms of the Irish language, pre-dating Old Irish. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Gaelic alphabet containing 17 letters was developed from Latin. This remained in use until the 1960s when the Roman script was introduced into the school system. A new spelling norm had been set down from 1945 and a grammar norm in the 1950s. This standardisation policy continues together with the development of terminology and lexicology.

The period between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century saw the flourishing of Ireland's Golden Age. This early period also provided a variety of literature in Old Irish which is considered the earliest vernacular example in Europe. Despite the vicissitudes of history, writing in Irish continued over the centuries even in exile and down to the present where it has influenced much of Anglo-Irish literature (literature in English by writers in Ireland).

**Population**

The majority of primary Irish speakers who use the language on a daily basis are located in the regions known as Gaeltacht areas (to which the language receded during the language shift that occurred). Additionally, there are Irish speakers outside those regions, these are often people who have made Irish their language of choice. The latter may be of Gaeltacht origin, or may have learned the language in school to the level of native speaker proficiency. While the majority of children in Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht are from English-speaking homes, they may be considered as part of the language community now.

Five-year census population results from the Central Statistics Office are the usual basis for actual figures. The interpretation of census information has four aspects: (1) figures for the state as a whole including Gaeltacht regions and (2) figures for the Gaeltacht heartland only, (3) self-reported ability and (4) self-reported frequency of use of that ability. The 2011 Census provides the following information on the language: across the State overall, some 1,774,437 persons, 41.4% of the total population, returned themselves as Irish speakers. This figure includes 66,238 Gaeltacht residents representing 69.6% of the total Gaeltacht population of 96,628 persons.

While the overall assessment appears to be that little significant change in language terms has occurred since the 2006 Census, the issue remains whether current figures are sufficient to maintain the status of the Gaeltacht regions as a distinct language community.

**language status**

A cultural revolution at the end of the nineteenth century preceded the political revolution of the twentieth. The restoration and development of the Irish language has been a significant issue for the native government from its inception onwards. Article 4 of the 1922 Constitution designated Irish as the national language of the Free State. Since English was equally recognised as an official language, the official status for Irish was understood. Article 10 of this first Constitution gave citizens



## THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

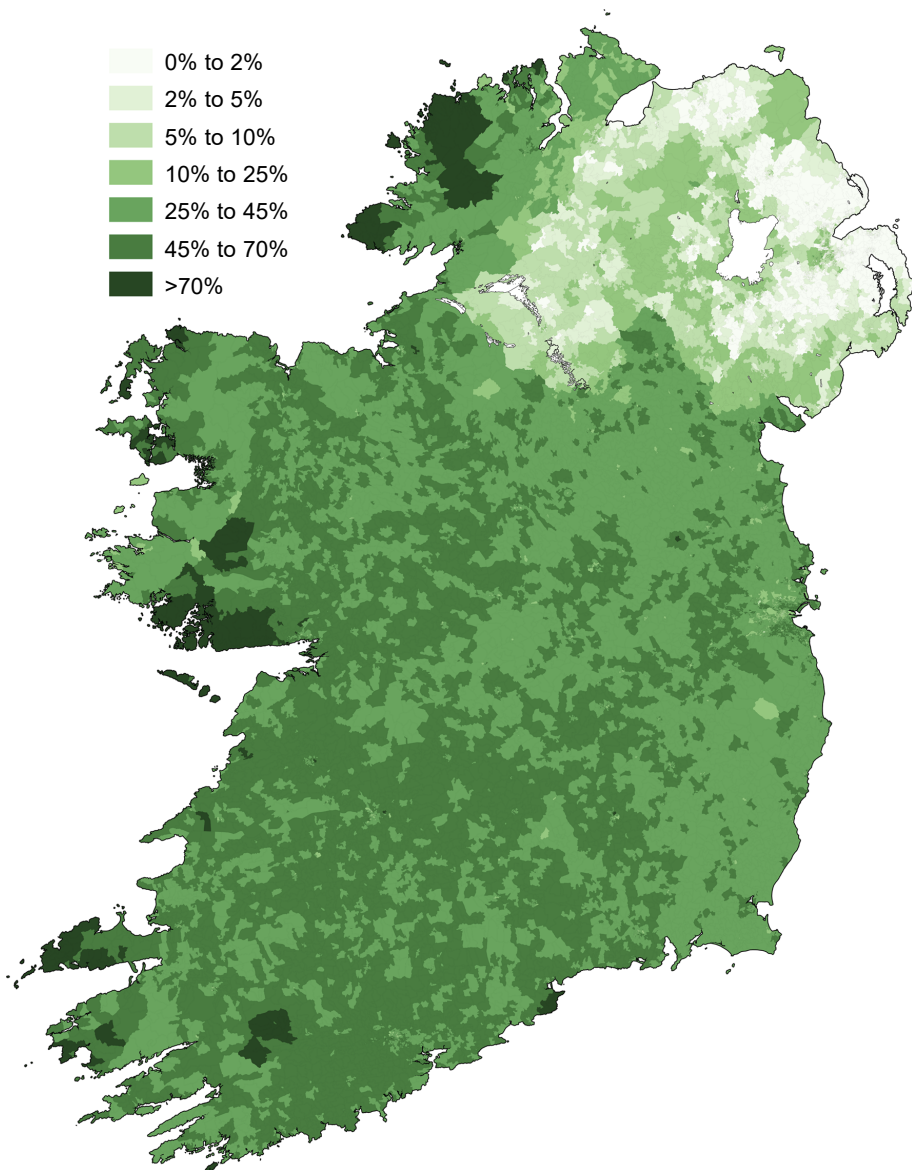


Figure 1: Irish speakers in 2011 (Source: All-Island Research Observatory/CSO, National Census Mapping, based on the 2011 Census, Available at: <http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/mapping-resources/airo-census-mapping/national-viewers/nationalcensusviewer>)

the right to free elementary education. Article 8 of the current 1937 Constitution designates Irish as the first official language by virtue of being the national language. Article 25 states that in case of conflict between the text of a law that is enrolled in both official languages and the texts of any copy of this Constitution, the text in the national language shall prevail. The interpretation of these articles has been largely left to the courts. For example in 2001, the Supreme Court (April 2001) upheld the demand of a citizen to relevant legislation being provided in Irish. Several publications detail the various court cases from the beginning (listed in references). Much of the official attention to Irish over the years consisted of reports from officially commissioned committees and ministerial regulations which resulted in policy changes in certain areas.

Structures for the language include a separate and distinct Government department established in 1956, this department is called Roinn na Gaeltachta (Department of the Gaeltacht) and was created under the *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act*. It is currently designated Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Other structures include Rannóg an Aistriúcháin (1919) or translation section; Údarás na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Authority), 1980; an agency to promote Irish (1978), now titled Foras na Gaeilge, an all-island body (1999). The general context in which language and official policy for language, including in education, operates underwent rapid change since the millennium.

Official policy measures include commissions and reports on the Gaeltacht (1926 and 2002) and on the restoration of Irish (1964-1965). In 1969, the government established the Comhairle na Gaeilge (Council on Irish) to review language policy and make recommendations on future development of the language. A suite of documents in bilingual format followed on all aspects of policy, ending with the comprehensive *Irish in Education* (1974). The year 2007 saw the publication of the ominous findings of the commissioned Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Gaeltacht with its recommendations on

Categories of Gaeltacht, A, B, C, in respect of the percentage of daily speakers, and the possibility of a Category D to cover urban areas outside the Gaeltacht. These factors finally led to the Government Statement on the Irish Language (December 2006) and the eventual publication of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*. The statement on Vision in the Strategy may provide an indication of the current government position on the language which echoes past statements:

“The objective of Government policy in relation to Irish is to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. Specifically, the Government aim is to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English”. (*20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*, 21.12.2010, p. 3).

While the *20-Year Strategy* constitutes a statement of the official position, actions in relation to Irish however, are indicative of political intent. The two do therefore not appear entirely compatible in all cases. In relation to enacted legislation, An Coimisinéir Teanga (Language Commissioner) pointed out in an address at the Tralee Institute of Technology in late November 2010 that the Irish language is mentioned in 140 Acts of the Oireachtas or Parliament. The *Official Languages Act* of 2003 was and still is of direct importance to the Irish language. This Act placed the general provision of services through Irish by the state system on a statutory footing and established the Language Commissioner as an independent statutory office operating as an ombudsman’s service and a compliance agency. With regard to the heartland regions, the *Acht na Gaeltachta* (Gaeltacht Act, 2012), is radical. The objectives of this Act comprise a new definition for the Gaeltacht on linguistic rather than geographic criteria. The act is based on community language planning and could include statutory recognition for areas outside the traditional Gaeltacht as well as for Gaeltacht service towns.

The *Education Act* of 1998 contains several articles referencing the Irish language in education. They include a general obligation (Objects of the Act - (6)) on every person concerned in the implementation of the Act to contribute to:

- The realisation of national policy and objectives in relation to the extension of bilingualism in Irish society and in particular the achievement of a greater use of the Irish language at school and in the community
- To contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas
- To promote the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents.

With regard to Functions in the Act, the Minister is to provide support services through Irish to recognised schools which provide teaching through Irish and to any other recognised school which requests such provision. Additionally, recognised schools shall use their available resources to promote the development of the Irish language and traditions, Irish literature, the arts and other cultural matters and contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in the case of schools located in the Gaeltacht. Inspectors are to evaluate Irish in schools and centres of education and report thereon to the Minister, whilst school boards have duties in relation to the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by its cultural and linguistic values and traditions, *inter alia*, a matter in which boards are accountable to the patron.

In external matters, Ireland is not a signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. This decision is based on the argument that Irish is neither a regional nor minority language.

**status of  
language  
education**

The primary system that emerged from the colonial National Education system established in 1831 became denominational. The curriculum took no account of the Irish language, culture or literature. Arising, however, from the continuing political pressure exerted in particular by the prestigious voluntary Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language as given in the account

by Máirtín Ó Murchú (2001), Irish gradually became part of the education system and prevailed at all levels during the nineteenth century before independence was achieved in the twentieth century. By 1908, this society and other organisations, including the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the Gaelic League, were also involved in the successful attempt to have Irish made an obligatory subject for matriculation to the National University of Ireland (NUI). Currently (2015) the NUI requires at least grade D at Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate (LC) in Irish for entry to all degrees. Exemptions from Irish apply in some cases. The Irish requirement of the NUI for matriculation has come under attack over the years particularly since the newer technological sector does not generally require it. Trinity College Dublin has a language requirement for incoming students which Irish, among other languages, may fulfil.

In 1997 the *Universities Act* granted formal university status to the three colleges of the National University, Dublin, Cork, Galway, and also to the separate secular section of the Pontifical College, Maynooth, which is now called the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). All continue to have chairs in Irish as has Trinity College Dublin. The Queen's University of Belfast still has its Celtic Studies Department.

A binary system of third-level education began with the establishment of Regional Technical Colleges in 1968. While some of these Institutes offer courses which include Irish, Irish is not a general entry requirement. With regard to teaching through Irish, in 2006 the *Acht Choláiste Phríomh-scoile na Gaillimhe (University College Galway Act, 1929)* was amended, but it still guarantees that the governing authority ensures that one of its principal aims is the provision of education through Irish. In 1989, university status was granted to two National Institutes of Higher Education established in 1980, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. (DCU) The Business School of Dublin City University hosts an IM section, which is called Fiontar.

Following the 1916 Rising and subsequent events, the Irish National Teachers Organisation convened a Conference in 1921. The report issued in 1922 contained several proposals relating to Irish in the primary curriculum. Against this background, on 1 February 1922, the day the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State assumed responsibility for national education, a Public Notice was issued on regulations in relation to the teaching of Irish to come into force on the following national holiday, St. Patrick's Day 1922. Irish henceforth was to be taught for one hour each day or used as medium of instruction in all 5,696 national primary schools in the jurisdiction. The use of Irish as medium of instruction was gradually extended and reached its apex in the 1940s. Reaction from teachers and segments of the public, together with a negative piece of research in 1967 eventually led to Irish being reduced to subject matter only in the majority of primary schools outside the Gaeltacht.

At second level (the second stage of education, a sector where privately-controlled secondary schools tend to predominate), it became obligatory to obtain an overall pass in Irish in the examinations towards the award of the Intermediate Certificate and the Leaving Certificate (LC). This condition remained until 1973. The current Department of Education and Science (DES) Rules document stipulates a list of subjects, including Irish, all of which must be offered to pupils in schools recognised for State funding who are following the Junior Certificate (JC) course. In the case of the established LC, the approved course offered by recognised schools must include not less than five of the specified subjects, one of which shall be Irish. The same stipulation holds for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

In 1924, the native Department of Education took over the existing technical Instruction system. The *Vocational Education Act* 1930 created 38 vocational education committees (VECs), which was later reduced to 33, to oversee a new type of continuation (from primary school for those aged 14-16) and technical education (age 16-18). Vocational schools were established by the VECs in many parts of the country. Such

education in Gaeltacht areas received specific mention but the Act was silent on Irish, either as subject or medium. However, the general course drawn up included Irish. A Memorandum of 1942 urged that continuation education should foster interest in the Irish language. A Group Certificate Examination after two years was conducted for the first time in 1947 and a school-based oral test in Irish was included.

In a new departure in the 1960s, a small number of comprehensive and community schools (the first in 1963) were established directly by the DES. These schools were established based on a new model of management at second level. The 1930 *Vocational Education Act* was first amended in 1970 to allow for co-operation between the (privately controlled but State funded) secondary and the (State) vocational sectors under a system of shared control. Changes eventually led to the introduction of a common Intermediate Certification examination, which included Irish, after three years for all second-level schools and students. The Group Certificate programmes also continued in vocational schools in tandem. The advent of free second level education in 1967 with accompanying travel arrangements also widened access to Irish for even more of the teenage population. By 1989, a common programme and examination were announced for all second-level students, titled the Junior Certificate Examination. This prevailed for the Junior Cycle 1989-1992 across all four types of second level schools, a factor which ensured access to common curricula in Irish for all students.

The 1922 Conference on Primary Instruction had urgently sought measures to assist teachers to acquire proficiency in Irish. By 1926, the State had established a scheme of seven residential Irish Medium (IM) Preparatory Colleges, three for Catholic boys, three for Catholic girls and a co-educational Protestant college, all of which gave preference to Gaeltacht candidates. These colleges provided four years of secondary education through Irish to students who intended to enter Training Colleges. The remaining Preparatory Colleges were closed in 1961, although the Protestant college lasted until

1995. Annual Inspectorate reports from the DES in the early 1930s showed that a gradual increase occurred in the numbers competent to teach Irish or through the medium of Irish. However, by the 1980s Irish was only taught as a subject in Colleges of Education. This is under policy review by the Teaching Council (TC).

Until the *Education Act* of 1998, it was largely the regulatory power of the Minister that governed the education sector. This act is the first legislation of general application on the organisation of education in the State and covers primary, post-primary, vocational education and training, adult and continuing education and the inspectorate. Several articles reference the Irish language. Article 31 can be regarded as highly useful as it enabled the establishment of a supportive agency for education in the Gaeltacht and in the IM sector, the organisation An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta is Gaelscolaíochta (statutory support body for Irish-medium education, COGG). Since its inception this body has proved an invaluable source and resource, providing research, teaching materials and training. Irish as a curricular subject also falls within its remit. Examples of Government education policy in recent years have been numerous and far-reaching. From the Irish language viewpoint, attention was given to acquisition planning through education in the *20-Year Strategy*, to include pre-school, school, extra-curricular and adult aspects. Some reforms reverse previous supportive policy. These latter include, in 2012, (i) revoking the existing Gaeltacht visits and other grants for teachers, a decision which drew a reply from the TC; (ii) abolishing scholarships which allowed IM and Gaeltacht students to attend university and receive allowances for teaching through Irish and in island schools; (iii) reduced funding for courses through Irish at third level and for Irish courses abroad. Additionally, Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge (a small monetary grant to encourage speaking Irish) for Gaeltacht families was replaced in 2012 by Clár Tacaíochta Teaghlaigh (a Family Support Programme) which necessitated application by families who are raising their children through Irish, whether in



the Gaeltacht or outside, for advice and materials on language acquisition.

Reform of curricula include the revision of the syllabi for Irish with more emphasis and increased weighting of marks on the oral component at examination. However, the reduction in the Higher LC literature course to accommodate the new marking scheme led to outcry from the IM sector on the educational standard of an examination attempting to simultaneously accommodate both English medium (EM) and IM sectors. An additional short optional course is now (2015) planned for IM schools.

**education  
system**

The education system in Ireland comprises early childhood, primary, post-primary, continuing education, further education and training and higher education including teacher education. In principle, education is free in the State system (up to primary degree level, for citizens of the European Union). At post-primary level, in addition to 373 secondary schools (almost 52% of the level serving 56.7% of the cohort) there are 256 vocational schools (35% serving 26.5% of students) and 94 Community/Comprehensive schools (13% serving 16.8% of the total cohort). The State pays for the bulk of capital and current costs, as well as teachers' salaries, while retaining control of curriculum and assessment. Issues of patronage and management of schools are laid down in the 1998 *Education Act*. Third level institutions are autonomous and self-governing but come under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) since they are substantially funded by the State.

Attendance at school is obligatory between the ages of 6 and 16, or to completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later. Children may begin school from the September following their 4th birthday. Over 50% of 4-year olds and almost all 5-year-olds are in school. Primary school consists of Junior and Senior Infants followed by Classes 1 to 6. There are three years in the Junior Cycle of second level towards the Junior (previously Intermediate) Certificate followed by an optional Transition Year and then two years towards the LC.

Overall, the system is under expansion and change. Demographic factors, allied with the changing ethnic composition of the school population, together with reductions in State expenditure until 2014/2015, led to an increased emphasis on policy in education. The departmental approach is evidence-based planning. Concerning school accommodation policies, IM schools were being established after the basic criteria were met, on the basis of application to the DES, until 2008. Following review, the location of all new schools, including IM, are now decided by the Department, and based on DES assessment of demography and parental demand, in order to ensure choice. Subsequent to several reports, the overall third level sector is being re-organised by reduction and clustering of institutions, including those for teacher education. Examples of very recent curricular reform policy include the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020. This clearly identifies the differing settings which exist for IM education and the differing linguistic backgrounds which children and families bring to IM education, whether in the Gaeltacht or in gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools). It also refers to the weaknesses identified in various studies of the learning and teaching of Irish in parts of the EM system. All IM schools will now be required to administer standardised tests of Irish reading, English reading and mathematics to all eligible students at the end of second, fourth and sixth class in primary schools, and at the end of second year in post-primary schools. Tests of Irish reading are optional in the requirements for EM schools at both levels. The DES has ensured the provision of tests standardised on the relevant populations for IM education. The standardised tests in the three subject areas, including Irish, to be taken in the second year of post-primary education, will be commissioned by the DES.

**private  
and public**

Only a very small number of educational institutions are really privately owned as well as funded. These operate at all levels and a significant number may follow the prescribed curriculum at primary level, including Irish as subject, and at second level towards State examinations. Both the Irish language and/or IM provision may be found across all categories of educational

institutions but are linked more specifically with 'State-funded' education at all levels

Pre-primary provision is largely privately funded by parents although community and voluntary groups may be funded in part or entirely by various government social schemes. Largely for historical reasons, Irish education at primary, second and teacher training levels has a unique pattern of ownership and management; private ownership and control is combined with substantial public funding. The dominant pattern is one of church ownership and management but with the State responsible for the bulk of capital and current costs. The State also retains ultimate policy control of curriculum and assessment through State agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the State Examinations Commission and the TC. The State curriculum, which includes Irish, is offered in all State-aided institutions.

At second level, secondary schools are privately owned and managed. In most cases the trustees are religious communities, lay trusts or boards of governors. Some are fee-paying but still receive some State funding. Vocational schools were established by the State and administered by VECs, now Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Community and comprehensive schools are managed by boards of management of differing compositions. All schools, whether private or State origin, if State-funded, will follow the prescribed curriculum including Irish.

**bilingual  
education forms**

In the State-aided education system of the Republic of Ireland, English is generally the medium of instruction. Irish as a subject is an integral part of the curriculum at primary and second levels. With regard to Irish, there are several possible interpretations of bilingual education. At the pre-primary level, totally IM education is found as well as some instances of both the incidental and the more targeted use of the language in the EM sector. An IM sector also exists at primary level. In addition, for the EM primary sector the use of Irish as language of classroom interaction and as occasional medium

for certain segments of the curriculum is encouraged and provided for in the published curriculum as an obvious path to the communicative approach. However, this practice is 'rare in schools' according to the DES in its 2013/2014 Progress Report on implementation of the *20-Year Strategy*. At the request of DES, the NCCA is including a partial immersion or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in its current (2015) development of a language curriculum for primary level. Both the NCCA and the Professional Development Service for Teachers are collaborating on an initiative in seven schools, teaching visual arts through Irish as an aid towards the elaboration of CLIL to support the teaching and learning of Irish in primary schools in the context of the revised curriculum. The new curriculum is implemented in the EM sector in schools in September 2016 from Infant classes up to Second Class. These revised primary curricula for Irish and English will stipulate the learning outcomes to be expected although these will differ for EM and IM schools. At post-primary level, there is also an IM sector which includes stand-alone schools under secondary and ETB administration as well as some units attached to EM schools.

English is taught as a subject in the IM immersion sector, both primary and post-primary. ('IM immersion school' is the term used to describe IM education outside the Gaeltacht for mostly English-speaking pupils). The same situation pertains in Gaeltacht schools where a proportion of pupils have Irish as first language. All schools follow the same prescribed curriculum for their sector and are subject to the same assessment criteria. In light of criticism from the IM sector on the educational loss that a reduction in literature at Senior Cycle entails, together with an increased emphasis on oral skills, the DES requested the NCCA to develop a short course to meet the specific needs of the sector. Given the mixed linguistic intake *inter alia*, the DES is currently elaborating a policy for Gaeltacht schools, based on recent DES research.

The success of the State education policy has been a significant factor in generating levels of competence in Irish, as is the ongoing development of the parent-led IM sector of education. Both contribute to the high societal recognition of Irish as an ethnic marker and to the support for policies for the language, particularly for effective teaching, as attested in social surveys. Mac Gréil et al. (*The Irish Language and the Irish People*, 2009) found that 93.2% of their sample, of whom 15% were not Irish-born, exhibited positive attitudes towards Irish.

**administration**

The title of the Department of Education (from 1921) was changed to Department of Education and Science in 1997. It remained unchanged until mid-2010 when it became the Department of Education and Skills. These differing emphases were to some extent reflected in mission, goals and policy contained in the three year Statements of Strategy of which the latest is 2015-2017. Irish language and culture do not receive mention here but in the Department's response to the 20-Year Strategy for Irish 2010-2030. The Department currently has a Minister and a Minister of State (Junior Minister) for Skills, Research and Innovation. There is also a list of statutory agencies which are central to the aims of the department. Special needs, social inclusion and diversity are other areas of policy and action by the DES.

Overall responsibility for State-aided education ultimately lies with the DES whether directly or indirectly through the 18 agencies and 7 bodies/committees listed on the DES website. In matters of curriculum and modes of assessment, including Irish, the NCCA has a development and an advisory role. COGG has this role as well, in relation to the teaching of Irish and to factors affecting IM education in or outside the Gaeltacht. Similarly, the HEA may develop policy for third level, including teacher education, and function as a funding agency but the ultimate decisions will rest with the Minister. The TC has a role in teacher education policy and the State Examinations Commission has responsibility for the operational administration of State examinations.

The administration of recognised State-aided primary and secondary schools, including those in private ownership, is delineated in the 1998 *Education Act*. The *Education and Training Boards Act* established the Further Education and Training Authority, which is titled SOLAS. A new integrated agency, Quality and Qualifications in Ireland, was established in late 2012 to replace three existing bodies. It also incorporates the functions of the Irish Universities Quality Board. Under the *Child and Family Agency Act 2013*, a new body was set up from 1 January 2014. It incorporates and administers all existing services for children, with 4,000 staff and an operational budget of over €600 million. Christened TUSLA, from the Irish 'tús' + 'lá' (beginning + day), this body also has responsibility for regulation of preschool services also, from birth to 6, including IM services.

**inspection**

20

The Inspectorate of DES includes a Chief Inspector, inspectors and psychologists or persons with expertise in special needs education. Statutory functions include evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching, development, promotion and use of Irish in schools and centres for education and reporting to the Minister on those matters. As a division of the DES, the Inspectorate, within its normal functions and responsibilities, includes promotion of the Irish language.

The DES and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) have complementary roles in the inspection of preschool facilities. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, through the Child and Family Agency or TUSLA, has responsibility for all regulatory and registration aspects of services for children from 0-6 years. The DES has responsibility for education and inspection of education for pre-schoolers in the DES Early Start programme. It also has responsibility for those children participating in the Free Pre-school Year, particularly in respect of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy, as well as for children in the Junior and Senior Infant classes of primary school.

At primary and second level the DES is responsible for inspection. Whole school evaluations of management, leadership and learning were introduced in 2008 and reports were published on-line. Specific subject evaluations also take place, including Irish. The same general approach is planned for the inspection at the pre-school level. Third-level institutions, which are State-funded but autonomous institutions, may conduct peer group external reviews of different aspects of their operation, academic or otherwise. They may be requested to do so by their Governing Authorities, by HEA or by DES.

**support  
structure**

Early support structures included An Gúm (1925) which published literature and educational material in Irish, and transferred in 1999 to Foras na Gaeilge and An Coimisiún Logainmneacha, (a Placenames Commission for correct definition of placenames, 1946-2012) with the complementary Placenames Branch within the Civil Service. The School of Celtic Studies (Scoil an Léighinn Cheiltigh), a constituent school of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, began in 1940. Gaeleagras, an agency established in 1972 for language training of public sector personnel, was put 'in orderly wind down' by the coalition in late 2011. In October 2013, the Government instead proposed a 6% quota of new entrants with Irish language skills in order to replace the existing system of extra marks for proficiency in Irish at entry and promotion competitions. Any action on behalf of the language in education is reported in the DES annual response to the demands of the official *20-Year Strategy* for Irish.

Irish may sometimes benefit from the network of Education Support Centres (*Education Act 1998*). It is, however, COGG which has had most impact on the language in education, particularly as medium of instruction, whether through policy documents, materials, courses for teachers, research or planning for remedial education, speech therapy or psychological assessments.

In the area of Continuing Professional Development, support systems for primary and post-primary teachers on the delivery

of curricula for Irish are funded by the DES. Support for the 2015/2016 Junior Cycle curriculum for Irish is differentiated for the IM and EM sectors.

The DES provides a special grant allocation to national schools to help buy equipment and materials for infant classes in primary schools including Irish language materials. Other forms of institutional support at third-level include special student accommodation and designated Irish language officers.

The organisation Coláiste na bhFiann provides youth clubs and residential courses for schoolgoers. A range of groups, including Gael Linn, provide summer courses for schoolgoers in the different Gaeltacht areas. These cater for up to 23,000 students annually. There is additionally a patron body in the field of IM education. This body is called An Foras Pátrúnachta (1993) and is recognised by the DES. In 2015, there were 62 primary schools and 5 post-primary schools under its patronage.

The official agencies, Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta, offer support to specific initiatives and also fund some voluntary support organisations. Arising out of a rationalisation policy, the organisation for IM pre-schools outside the Gaeltacht, Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (1978), were merged with Gaelscoileanna in 2015. Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge (1964), the organisation for teachers of Irish, was dissolved. Another funded body Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge (1943) which collaborated in the production of resources and careers in Irish seminars was dissolved in 2014.

Other forms of support lie in the online resources from the IM section Fiontar at Dublin City University. Various programmes and apps are also available from differing sources, e.g. spell-checkers, grammar checkers, vocabulary, or social-interactive resources.



## 2 Pre-school education

**target group** In general, the target group for IM and Gaeltacht education in pre-school are children between the ages of 3-4. However, some childcare centres, Mother and Toddler groups and instances of afterschool services provide services for children until the age of 6.

**structure** Two forms of pre-school education can be distinguished. Firstly, there is the informal private or community day nursery and crèche facilities together with play groups and pre-schools (involving more than three children). This form also includes Montessori provision, catering to age groups from birth to around 4. The other form of pre-school provision comprises formal but non-compulsory Infant classes in the primary school (age 4-6).

Private or community facilities come under the regulations of the Child and Family Agency, while Infants' classes come under the DES. Informal pre-school education is mainly provided by privately-funded but State-regulated facilities. Over 4,000 pre-school services, including IM, are registered, either with TUSLA or with the Irish Montessori Educational Board. The IM Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector was initially developed by two organisations. On the one hand there was the organisation called Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (Development of Naíonraí Limited), which was begun by the voluntary agency Na Naíonraí Gaelacha (Irish Naíonraí) outside of the Gaeltacht. On the other, there was the Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta (CNNG, Partnership of Gaeltacht Naíonraí) a company founded by Údarás na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Authority) in 2004, to provide the infrastructure for ECCE provision to Gaeltacht children.

The Naíonraí (Irish-medium playgroups) are largely self-funded and Irish is the language of communication. The organisation Development of Naíonraí Limited has been functioning very successfully since 1978. It oversaw progressive development in the number of Irish-medium playgroups outside the Gaeltacht

and provided, or ensured the provision of support services, training and learning materials. For several years it has been caught up in the rationalisation process of the initial funder, Bord/Foras na Gaeilge (agency for Irish), and in July 2014 it was earmarked for merger with the organisation Gaelscoileanna.

The Early Years Education Policy Unit of the DES is co-located with the DCYA. The DCYA has a new Quality Development initiative which is called Better Start. For this project, the DCYA is collaborating with DES in order to establish a cohesive approach towards quality across the ECCE sector. As a national service it works in collaboration with City and County Childcare Committees and voluntary childcare organisations, including the IM sector, on the basis of the guidelines SÍOLTA for quality and AISTEAR for curriculum. The Free Pre-school Year is funded by and administered through DCYA.

In addition to primary school Infant classes for 4 to 6-year-olds, formal pre-school education for children under the age of 4 with particular needs, administered by DES, is provided in the long-running Early Start programme located in certain primary schools.

**legislation**

The DES White Paper (1999) on Early Childhood Education “Ready to Learn” is concerned with children from birth to 6 years, with a particular focus on the disadvantaged and those with special needs. The *Child Care Act* 1991 as amended by the later *Child and Family Agency Act* 2013 provides for the regulation and inspection of pre-school childcare services. Under the 2013 Act, the newly established Child and Family Agency is charged with ensuring the education and welfare of pre-school children. A range of regulations (2006) cover all aspects of the provision of services. Pre-school childcare services are regulated by the Child and Family Agency through policy, inspection and research although overall responsibility rests with the DCYA (2011). The IM sector is required to be compliant. The legislation does not cover the Irish language.

**language use** Since pre-primary provision is largely privately funded, the introduction of Irish depends entirely on the provider, whether pre-school, Montessori or other. No stipulation on Irish is attached to the recently introduced DCYA free pre-school year. However, some EM services will introduce incidental use of Irish, particularly in playschool contexts for children from age 3. Irish is listed on the curriculum of Montessori provision. The IM and Gaeltacht sectors of Naíonraí (age usually 3+) or any other provision for younger children provided by these sectors will generally be conducted through Irish as medium. The Early Start programme may be regarded as public provision since it is entirely an initiative of the DES. Irish is included in this programme.

**teaching material** As part of its remit, the NCCA developed AISTEAR (Journey) in 2009, which is the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, for children from birth to 6 years of age. It is based on four themes and is directed at practitioners and parents. Resources and a toolkit are available and can be downloaded in Irish or in English. Inspectors of both DES and DCYA assess its application.

Age appropriate teaching/learning materials were developed by the IM ECCE sector for the pre-school age group. CNNG in collaboration with the Dublin Institute of Technology, has developed a specific curriculum for language enrichment and development with Gaeltacht children, entitled Loinnir (Radiance/Brightness), and has published a number of books and CDs featuring rhymes and songs from local traditions. A survey of 2012/2013 revealed that, in the home situation, Irish was only spoken to the Gaeltacht pre-schooler in 17% of cases, both Irish and English were spoken in 62% of homes, solely English was spoken in 20% of families and another language was spoken at home in 1% of cases. Given this mixed linguistic background, CNNG considers language planning central to its task. This led to collaboration with the Dublin Institute of Technology and the theme-based curriculum entitled Borrath (Development/Expansion), which is differentiated for the differing linguistic groups.

**statistics**

The DES annual statistical report of 2013/2014 states that the Early Start programme was run in 39 centres with a staff of 54 teachers, plus 54 childcare assistants, serving 1,230 children. The DCYA reports that the total number of children registered on the ECCE Free Pre-school Year programme in the 2014/2015 school year was 65,182. Total participation of the Irish language sector in this programme, including Gaeltacht and outside of the Gaeltacht, was reported to be 3,038 children in 183 services in 2013 and 2,780 children in 181 services in 2014. Participation in ECCE conditions does not equate with the total number of students attending IM provision.

CNNG and Údarás na Gaeltachta report that up to 1,000 pre-schoolers attend Irish-medium playgroups in the Gaeltacht across 74 daily sessions in approximately 55 centres, staffed by 132 personnel. Development of Naíonraí Limited reported 182 Naíonraí with 424 staff outside the Gaeltacht in 2011/2012 offering 249 sessions to 4,339 pre-schoolers. The majority of the latter are English speakers on entry. Development of Naíonraí Limited merged in July 2014 with Gaelscoileanna and collation of statistics is ongoing among up to 200 Naíonraí outside the Gaeltacht.

### 3 Primary education

**target group** Children may begin primary school from the September following their fourth birthday. Although compulsory education does not begin until the age of 6, over 50% of 4-year olds and almost all 5-year-olds are in school. Primary school consists of Junior and Senior Infants followed by Classes 1 to 6. Most schools are local, co-educational (mixed-sex education), with the Infant classes integrated rather than separate. However, there are also single sex schools, especially in the cities.

**structure** The majority of schools are private under denominational patronage but State-funded. The quite small non-denominational sector includes some IM schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta and schools under the patronage of Educate Together. The divestment of denominational schools is a DES policy although slow in implementation. The Minister is patron of some (historical) 'model schools' which are mostly now IM schools.

The eight years of primary school are usually considered as four consecutive stages. The NCCA curriculum, including that for Irish, reflects this consideration.

**legislation** Article 42.1 of the 1937 *Constitution* makes clear that 'The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family'. Article 42.4 states that 'The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions'. The responsibility of the State is to 'provide for' not 'to provide' primary education.

Article 8 proclaims Irish the first national language by virtue of being the national language. In a judgment delivered in the High Court on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1999, Ms Justice Laffoy interpreted this to mean that "an obligation to provide for the education of the children of the State at their first stage of formal teaching and

instruction must involve an obligation to provide for education in the constitutionally recognised first official language of the State. It follows that the requirement of the rules that teachers teaching in recognised primary schools should have proficiency in Irish is a valid provision under the constitution...also a valid requirement under European Community law...it is neither disproportionate nor discriminatory.”

Matters of school location, entry policy and curriculum are subject to ministerial regulation.

**language use**

All recognised (funded) schools follow the national curriculum, including Irish, unless individual exemption is granted on specific grounds. In IM schools, Irish is the medium of instruction. Across the system, language use varies from Irish as a subject only, to Irish as a subject in addition to Irish as language of instruction for other segments of the curriculum to total education through Irish with the introduction of English from the end of the first term of Senior Infants. A DES circular (0056/2011) increased the time allocation for both languages from January 2012 by one hour overall per week, with emphasis on the first language of the school. Since every class is a language class, as language is the medium, more focused integration was required. In 2006, DES policy became a matter of contention with regard to beginning literacy in English in the IM school. To ensure the integrity of the total immersion approach in the sector, a delay in the teaching of English up to the end of the first term of Senior Infants was permitted. This delay was subject to approval of the school board and following consultation with parents’ associations, patron and teachers. This clarification of DES policy on immersion is included in the new/revised prescription of the primary school curriculum regulatory instrument in 2015/2016.

Following consultation, an Interim Report on the Primary Language Curriculum was published by the NCCA in September 2014. Overall the approach is one of integration of language teaching and learning and of differentiation of approach for pupils with Irish as their first language (Gaeltacht and IM sector) or

their second language. Partial immersion, or CLIL, is being considered as part of the ongoing review. NCCA and Professional Development Service for Teachers are jointly implementing a pilot in seven EM primary schools on visual arts through Irish. IM education in the Gaeltacht has been the subject of reports from example DES and COGG, for many years. Comparable sociolinguistic situations in other jurisdictions formed part of these studies. The reports focus on the difficulties of coping with an increasingly mixed linguistic intake and of providing appropriate school solutions for pupils.

Since 2012, standardised Irish reading tests are mandatory in IM primary schools. These tests are taken by the students at the end of second class, fourth class and sixth class and are offered as optional tests in the EM sector. Assessment results must be reported to parents, to the school board of management and to the DES.

Overall, within the primary system, the IM immersion sector is very successful on a continuing upward growth pattern with good results in language and mathematics according to independent research (see Section 8). Use of Irish in Gaeltacht education varies in response to the linguistic profile of the students and the local context. Research by COGG published in 2011 showed that just 1,000 (10.5%) of 9,500 primary pupils were native speakers. Similarly, the use of Irish in the EM system is mainly constrained by the self-confessed lack of confidence and competence of teachers. Therefore Irish language skills of pupils have not been universally good (see Section 8). This is, to some extent, the background to renewed emphasis on the use of Irish through new curricula and standardised tests and through changes in teacher training.

**teaching  
material**

Irish and the primary curriculum in general are reasonably well-served through output from An Gúm, COGG, voluntary organisations and commercial publishers. Some materials prepared for the Northern Ireland system are also utilisable in the Republic of Ireland. Digitisation of Séideán Sí, the integrated

reading scheme for use in IM and Gaeltacht primary schools is a joint initiative supported by bodies in both jurisdictions.

**statistics**

The DES statistical report 2014/2015 (table 1) provides the following information on medium of instruction in mainstream primary schools.

medium of instruction	IM schools in the Gaeltacht	IM schools outside the Gaeltacht	partially IM schools	schools where in some class groups at least one other subject is taught through Irish	schools with Irish as a subject only	total
schools	106	141	2	874	2,014	3,137
pupils	7,485	34,476	256	143,112	347,602	532,931

*Table 1: Number of (state-aided) primary schools, categorized by medium of instruction in 2014/2015 (source: DES Annual Statistical Report, 2014/2015).*



## 4 Secondary education

**target group** Under the *Education (Welfare) Act 2000*, attendance at school is obligatory until the age of 16 (or until completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later). Students usually begin second level at age 12-13 and most of them remain until the age of 18.

**structure** There are four types of post-primary school. All types follow the central curriculum although schools may make their own selection of subjects from it. School titles or categories refer to the mode of administration, not necessarily to content or bias of curriculum offered. State-aided second level for 2014/2015 included 375 secondary, 262 vocational and 95 community and comprehensive schools. The total 732 was an increase of 9 on the previous year to cater for an increase to 372,296 students, including 33,089 students attending Post-LC courses. Established IM immersion schools are in the secondary sector while the newer schools tend to be Gaelcholáistí (second-level IM schools) under the administration of ETBs (see statistics). Second-level education consists of two cycles: the statutory three-year Junior Cycle (JC, lower secondary) followed by a Senior Cycle (SC, upper secondary) of three years, which includes the optional Transition Year (TY) immediately after the JC, or of two years without the TY. The TY provides a varied programme for transition to SC which is prepared by each participating school without formal examinations and may include work experience. Up to 75% of schools offer TY. Students may opt not to follow this transitional year-long programme.

Both JC and SC end in formal State examinations, the Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) and the Leaving Certificate (LC). For JC, curricular subjects are generally offered at two levels, Higher or Ordinary. In the case of the three core subjects, Irish, English, mathematics, a third Foundation level may be taken. Interestingly, the number of teachers choosing the optional school-based JCE oral assessment in Irish increased when the weighting changed from 20% to 40% of the total marks.

The JCE is taken by most students at the end of the three-year JC, usually at age 15-16. To ensure that all students have this opportunity, an alternative Junior Certificate School Programme is offered to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds or to students who may be at risk of early leaving. At a minimum for the Junior Certificate School Programme, English and mathematics must be followed at Foundation Level together with an appropriate course in Irish.

Again in order to provide for all students, three different programmes are available in the two-year SC leading to State examination and certification: the Established LC; the LC Vocational Programme (LCVP); and the Leaving Certificate Applied. In general, depending on the school, students take seven exam subjects. At SC level, there are 34 subjects for the Established LC and the LCVP for which curricula are available to schools. Apart from some practical elements, all components of these examinations are externally examined, which is a task for the State Examinations Commission each year. The Established LC and the LCVP provide the basis for allocation of available places in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. Results for each subject taken are calculated on a system of points which are then aggregated. As a system it has been under review for many years. The Leaving Certificate Applied is a different two-year programme and consists of general modules and vocational specialisms. Assessment is continuous but also includes a final examination.

All qualifications are aligned to the levels 1-10 and are set out in the National Framework of Qualifications. Both the JC and LC are currently under review. For the JC, there was opposition to proposed elements of continuous teacher assessment. Confidence in external assessment is high among the public in Ireland.

Students following the Established LC and LCVP programmes are required to study a minimum of five subjects (at whichever level), one of which must be Irish. This is generally referred

to as 'compulsory Irish'. Two thirds of schools offer the LCVP. For LCVP students, subject choice has both academic and vocational dimensions. For those who are not progressing directly to third level, the Leaving Certificate Applied provides an alternative route to eventually do so. The Leaving Certificate Applied is based on three elements: general education, vocational preparation and vocational education. A course in Communicative Irish has been devised for the Leaving Certificate Applied. Although the Leaving Certificate Applied is not recognised for direct entry to third level, after receiving it students may progress to Post Leaving Certificate courses and then onwards perhaps to an Institute of Technology (IoT).

**legislation**

The 1988 *Education Act* is of general application with regard to Irish in education and education in the Gaeltacht as detailed above. Matters of school admission, curriculum and examinations are introduced by ministerial regulation. The 2013 *Education and Training Boards Act* has administrative effect on schools in the vocational sector.

**language use**

While Irish is one of the core subjects in the majority of schools and must be included among the subjects chosen for the Leaving Certificate, two problems remain. One is the variable quality of teaching as DES surveys show (Chapter 8 below). The second is the increasing trend towards seeking exemptions from Irish. This sometimes begins in primary school so that the exemption will remain for second level if it is granted. Exemption is granted on specific grounds: for Irish nationals who have received education for a certain period outside Ireland, for foreign incomers, or for students with attested learning difficulties (M10/94 post-primary; M12/96 primary). Despite the latter, some exempted students apparently go on to study other languages. Unintended consequences of the policy and the need for deeper consideration of all issues, including special needs pupils, have been cited by the Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge (Association of Teachers of Irish) and Irish language media.

Examination results in Irish continue to show success for many. For students, the crux often is the lack of opportunity to use the language in contexts other than school, although many teachers show great initiative in creating such social contexts. Coláiste na bhFiann is a youth organisation which runs summer courses but also organises clubs around the country during the year. Gael Linn operates Coláistí Samhraidh (summer colleges) in addition to school-based initiatives and inter-school debates. Summer colleges are organised by many groups during the summer months in all the Gaeltacht areas, usually for three weeks and with students staying with local Irish-speaking families. For most, it is their first encounter with social inter-personal use of Irish. Up to 25,000 young people attend these summer colleges annually. While parents pay a fee, the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, also provides subsidies.

New weightings for the allocation of marks at JC and LC across skills in Irish were announced in 2007 for the cohort who entered second level in that year. In 2010, the optional oral component in the JC examination increased from 20% of the total mark to 40% and schools have therefore placed more emphasis on this skill. At LC level, a review by the Language Centre NUIM for COGG on the changed allocations, including the increase for the existing oral test from 25% to 40% and resulting reduced marks for literature, was published in 2013. The review was based on examinations in the three skills of listening, speaking and writing among two samples of first year university students; a sample who had sat the unrevised LC in 2011 and a second sample from 2012 on the revised syllabus. Statistical results showed that the sample of 2011 performed better on listening comprehension and writing skills while there was little difference in speaking skills between the two samples. In the Gaeltacht, the use of Irish as medium of instruction fluctuates from school to school and from subject to subject depending on local circumstances. All these schools encounter several problems: they have a lack of teachers trained to teach subject matter through Irish; a lack of some official documents

pertaining to curriculum or examinations through Irish and the predominant use of English for peer interaction. In IM schools outside the Gaeltacht, Irish is the medium of communication and of instruction for practically all subjects.

**teaching material** Irish as a subject is relatively well catered for particularly by commercial companies. For the IM and Gaeltacht sectors, there still exist gaps in provision for appropriate materials across a range of subjects. However, An Gúm and COGG work on this. The challenge is to move away from the traditional textbook and move towards more flexible resources to meet changing curricula and student expectations. COGG maintains an online database of resources and offers bursaries for preparation of teaching/learning resources. This database also includes resources from Northern Ireland.

**statistics** In the school year 2014/2015, a total of 68 second-level schools taught fully or partially through Irish. Of these, 18 in the Gaeltacht taught 2,642 students while 50 schools outside the Gaeltacht taught 21,126 students. The summary tables below give details. All other 664 schools offered Irish as a subject only.

school category	all pupils taught all subjects through Irish		some pupils taught all subjects through Irish	some pupils taught some subjects through Irish
	in the Gaeltacht	outside the Gaeltacht	outside the Gaeltacht	outside the Gaeltacht
<b>Secondary</b>	465 (3)	3,643 (12)	571 (1)	1,238 (2)
<b>Vocational</b>	1,451(12)	4,865 (16)	5,304 (10)	3,748 (6)
<b>Community</b>	432 (2)	435 (1)	869 (1)	453 (1)
<b>Comprehensive</b>	294 (1)	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	2,642 (18)	8,943 (29)	6,744 (12)	5,439 (9)

Table 2: Number of pupils at second-level schools (number of schools in brackets), categorized by medium of instruction in 2014/2015 (source: DES Statistical Report 2014/2015)

The next tables show the number of candidates sitting the core subjects in the public examinations of 2015 and their results in Irish. Honours grades are in the bands A – C.

Level/Subject	Irish	English	Mathematics
<i>Ard</i> (Higher)	29,100	44,332	32,535
<i>Bonn</i> (Foundation)	1,217	1,060	3,485
<i>Gnáth</i> (Ordinary)	21,678	13,627	22,854
Total	51,995	59,019	58,874

*Table 3: Candidates and Core Subjects: Junior Certificate Examination 2015 (source: State Examinations Commission statistics 2015).*

Of the students taking the JC public examinations in 2015, 84.5% of Higher level students achieved honours. 74% of the Ordinary level students achieved this and 79.33% of Foundation level students. On average 79.3% of students sitting the JC in Irish thus achieved honours.

Level/Subject	Irish	English	Mathematics
<i>Ard</i> (Higher)	19,460	36,059	14,691
<i>Bonn</i> (Foundation)	3,543		5,613
<i>Gnáth</i> (Ordinary)	23,562	17,064	33,266
Total	46,565	53,123	53,570

*Table 4: Candidates and Core Subjects: Leaving Certificate Examination 2015 (source: State Examinations Commission statistics 2015).*

Of the students taking the LC public examinations in 2015, 88.3% of Higher level students achieved honours. 74% of the Ordinary level students achieved this and 74.3% of Foundation level students. On average 78.9% of students sitting the LC public examinations in Irish thus achieved honours.

These figures include 14,924 LCVP candidates but not the 2,884 Leaving Certificate Applied students who follow a different Irish course. The table also includes any external candidates or candidates from other programmes. IM and Gaeltacht schools are also included as all candidates sit the same examination. There was an increase of 1,326 candidates taking Higher Level in 2015 in regard to 2014. Ordinary Level figures also showed an increase while the numbers at Foundation Level decreased.

## 5 Vocational education

**target group** The target groups for focused vocational education in Ireland are generally adults from the age of 16/18 and up. The ETB-based Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme is for adults over 21. Other agencies, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, provide targeted initial vocational training for adults in specific areas, e.g. management, construction, tourism and catering; fishing and aquaculture; forestry; agriculture.

**structure** As described in the previous section, vocational elements are integrated into second level, both curriculum and certification, in order to cater for all students. Subsequently, vocational education is a very diverse field and more of a series of programmes/courses rather than an easily defined system. It also comprises many differing pathways (e.g. skills for the economy), for different age groups, (e.g. long-term unemployed). The ETBs are the main providers through a wide selection of courses offered across 19 Training Centres and 27 Colleges/Institutes of Further Education; through second level Community Colleges, or through local community classes/courses.

At third level, the IoTs continue to provide specifically vocational courses. There is also a pathway from Post Leaving Certificate to IoT. Apprenticeship is an area currently under review. Specific statutory bodies in tourism, fishing, forestry, farming and horticulture, crafts and design may provide, or ensure the provision of vocational courses specifically for their industry, as does Údarás na Gaeltachta. Certificates and diplomas may be awarded at levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

**legislation** Significant change occurred in the governance, administration, funding and validation aspects of the vocational/further education and training sector during 2012/2013. These changes included the *Further Education and Training Act 2012*, the subsequent establishment of SOLAS (meaning 'light') as the new Further Education and Training Authority in 2013, and the abolition of the

existing training body FÁS (Growth). The changes also entailed the dissolution of the 33 existing VECs under the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013* and their replacement by 16 ETBs having the same functions. Additionally, the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* was put in place. This act established the integrated body with responsibility for quality assurance of further and higher education institutions, validation of educational programmes and making awards to students.

**language use**

In IM schools, all subjects, including practical subjects, on the school curriculum are generally conducted through Irish. In general, however, the Irish language has a fairly minimal presence as a medium of instruction in vocational education. At Further Education level, there is little evidence of designated vocational education through Irish except in some Gaeltacht Training Centres where the presence of Irish is more likely in the case of Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme courses or in courses designed for personnel in Irish medium childcare and playgroups (Naíonraí). The Gaeltacht Authority Údarás na Gaeltachta, also offers certain initial and continuing vocational training opportunities through Irish to companies, to adults, and occasionally to apprentices, in Gaeltacht areas.

**teaching material**

Údarás na Gaeltachta will ensure appropriate materials for any vocational education or training with which it engages. Organisations which promote training for Naíonraí personnel do likewise (see chapter 6 on teacher training).

**statistics**

There are no statistics available regarding Irish in vocational education as described.



## 6 Higher education

### structure

In general terms, State-aided higher education institutions currently comprise seven universities, fourteen institutes in the technology sector, six teacher education colleges and four other institutions. Additionally, a government-accredited eLearning college, specialises in postgraduate and Continuing Professional Development. Its teacher education programmes include Irish.

The HEA is the statutory development, research, funding and advisory body for higher education and research. It also allocates funding under the *Advanced Irish Language Skills Initiative* to meet recruitment needs arising from both the official status of Irish in the EU and the requirements of the *Official Languages Act*.

Following several commissioned reports, the higher education sector including teacher education was put under re-organisation. The more radical recommendations were in the new collaborative structures, based on clusters of institutions coming together on a geographic basis, for the provision both of higher education and of teacher education.

### legislation

The *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* applies to the Higher Education sector particularly through the state agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

In relation to the Irish language, the *Higher Education Authority Act (1971)* places a general duty on the Authority to constantly bear in mind the restoration of the Irish language. Article 10 of the *University of Limerick (Dissolution of Thomond College of Physical Education) Act 1991* refers to 'the teaching of the Irish language' for teachers. The *Universities Act 1997* contains several supportive references to Irish language and culture. Reference has also been made to a recent amendment on teaching through Irish at National University Ireland Galway

(NUIG) in *Acht Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh (Leasú)* 2006. The *An tAcht um Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta* 2001 (on the Teaching Council) has had a significant effect on Irish in teacher education most notably through TC policy (below).

**language use**

In this rapidly changing environment, the position of Irish in higher education has not received much particular attention. However there has been some positive attention towards teacher education and more negative attention with regard to comments on NUI matriculation requirements.

As a discipline, Irish is offered in all seven universities: the four colleges of the National University of Ireland, in Trinity College Dublin, and also - arising out of formal association with teacher training - in the University of Limerick and DCU. Irish is also taught in all primary teacher training institutions and in some of those engaged in concurrent or consecutive second level teacher training. A specific common syllabus in Irish for use at third level (2008-2012) has been devised and is accompanied by appropriate materials directed at teaching/learning of Irish towards Bachelor or Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees.

Irish as medium of instruction is found across a spectrum of areas of study offered by Higher Education Institutes, particularly in applied areas. The number and type of courses offered with Irish as the language of instruction in higher education tends to change from time to time and from institution to institution. They may be offered at undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate level. Some may be provided off-campus or be supported by external funding to the institution or through bursaries for students. Taken together, these courses comprise what may be described as an IM university, particularly when concentrated in a particular unit within an institution, as in the case of Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge (Irish University Academy) in NUIG, or of Fiontar in DCU. Strategic planning by the relevant authority (HEA) and funding for provision on a national scale is absent.

There is a shortage of scientific journals in Irish although books are produced on a range of academic material. There is no clear central ongoing policy to fill need, whether intellectual or practical academic, across the range of subject matter available through the medium of Irish at higher education level. The HEA had a publication policy for some time which ensured the reissue of textbooks and a publication (in Irish) on sociolinguistics.

**teacher training** Reorganisation of the higher education landscape resulted in an amalgamation of providers, including providers for primary and post-primary school training in the same institution. Two of such clusters are already in place.

The response of the TC to the increased focus on teacher formation at all levels in the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020 included, *inter alia*, the situation of Irish in accredited courses of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and in curricula. Irish is both an integral part of teacher education entry at primary level and in the content of primary programmes. Education for teaching through the medium of Irish at primary level has some modules in a few institutions. The necessity for all teachers to be competent to teach Irish at primary level, including those incoming from abroad, is recognised through the provision of specific compulsory arrangements and courses for incomers.

**pre-school training**

Over recent years Early Childhood has received more attention, both in Colleges of Education and in official policy. The two IM pre-school providers have ensured the provision of the appropriate training and qualification through Irish, for Level 5 and 6 Certificates in Childcare. The Gaeltacht provider, CNNG, has included two additional mandatory modules: *Saibhriú na Gaeilge* (Enriching the Irish Language) and *Sochtheangeolaíocht agus an Páiste* (Sociolinguistics and the Child). Informal courses both in Irish language skills and in the skills required for the job are also available.

**primary training**

Aspiring Irish language teachers at the primary level, can follow an undergraduate concurrent or a postgraduate consecutive program; the former leading to a BEd degree, the latter to a Professional Master of Education. Entry to the Professional Master of Education is open to graduates in different disciplines but numbers are capped. The TC has ensured the duration of concurrent undergraduate ITE programmes to four years from September 2012 and of all consecutive programmes to two years from September 2014.

For entry to the primary BEd programme, applicants through the Central Applications Office must, *inter alia*, have at least grade C in Higher Irish at LC. On general entry criteria, up to 10% of places may be retained for Gaeltacht applicants who may be offered places even on slightly lower points. Eligible mature applicants for the primary BEd programme initially undergo an oral Irish test in addition to a general interview. Recent changes by the TC include (i) more emphasis on Irish language competencies at entry and in course design (for both primary and post-primary teachers) with a focus on oral Irish. One of the existing weaknesses had been the expectation that all primary teacher graduates were competent not only to teach Irish but also to teach through Irish. (ii) Irish is among the mandatory course elements listed. Student teachers must also pass the school placement element in order to receive qualification. (iii) Within the new four-year programme, the three-week Gaeltacht Placement has been extended to two two-week sessions over two years; renaming the programme to Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht (Learning Period in the Gaeltacht). The recommended design of a common course content for these sessions across all higher education institutes with specific provision made for the needs of native and of other highly competent speakers has been accomplished.

Reviews conducted by the TC revealed that there was an elective course on immersion teaching in one college and one course on teaching through Irish in another.

For primary teachers who qualified outside of Ireland, two routes are offered towards fulfilling the Irish Language Requirement for registration: an Aptitude Test or an Adaptation Period (since December 2009). All applicants must spend time in a recognised Gaeltacht area.

**secondary training**

At post-primary level, the ITE situation tends to change as higher education institutes offer courses to meet professional need. In the concurrent model of teacher training no course exists through the medium of Irish but Irish is offered as subject in conjunction with other disciplines, e.g. home economics, physical education, religious studies and business studies.

The consecutive model of ITE at post-primary level now requires the qualification Professional Master of Education following the possession of a recognised degree. This Professional Master of Education is called Máistreacht Ghairmiúil san Oideachas and can be followed through the medium of Irish at NUIG. The DES reports that NUIG wishes to expand the numbers of students (40 in 2015) in this programme. COGG, the agency established under the 1998 *Education Act*, supports this programme through bursaries and also supports a pilot Professional Master of Education initiative in one teacher training college over a two-year course for subject teachers in medium schools. From time to time, COGG also conducts Continuing Professional Development courses for teachers in post-primary medium schools.

The TC has also issued specific degree criteria for registration of subject teachers at post-primary level including criteria for Irish as a curricular subject. Verifiable residential experience in a Gaeltacht area is required in addition to evidence of competence in the language. A programme of appropriate post-primary ITE must also have been completed.

**in-service training**

In-service training is provided by the DES through An tSeirbhís Tacaíochta (Support Service) for teachers of Irish. The DES also organises a regular month-long course on methodology and the State Examinations Commission conducts examinations for the Certificate in Irish for Post-Primary Teachers. Some higher education institutes also conduct occasional in-service training as may some Irish-language voluntary organisations. The TC has recognised the need for a national framework for Continuing Professional Development that is subject to ongoing review.

**statistics**

In 2015, 22 higher education institutes operated teacher training courses approved by the Teaching Council towards either undergraduate, postgraduate degrees, or both. However, statistics on Irish are not available for all of these courses. More reliable figures are available for primary teacher education in which Irish is mandatory. Figures from the 2013/2014 annual statistical report from the DES for four State-aided primary teacher training colleges show that 5,701 fulltime and 580 part-time students were enrolled, which in total makes 6,281. In addition, HEA statistics for that year show that 62 students were studying in the new Froebel Department of NUIM, reaching an overall total of 6,343 students. Some of these students may have been following courses not requiring Irish.

In the case of students who are taking post-primary teacher training on concurrent courses in the three State-aided colleges, a proportion of students will combine studying Irish with their main area of study. However, this proportion changes with the annual student intake. St. Patrick's College, Thurles, in affiliation with the University of Limerick, offers Irish and education in combination with either religious or business studies. The two other post-primary teacher education colleges (St. Angela's, Sligo: home economics and Mater Dei: religious studies) had a total of 1,002 fulltime and 761 part-time students enrolled for 2013/2014. In the previous year, HEA statistics (below) reported 61 home economics students taking Irish courses.

It is difficult to find comprehensive statistics in the public domain for courses where instruction is through Irish. Statistics supplied by the DES/HEA give a partial account of students taking third level courses in Irish or through the medium of Irish for the academic year 2012/2013. These statistics showed: (i) a total of 659 students across 8 higher education institutes (not teacher training), 331 of whom were studying Irish combined with other subjects, 30 Irish alone, and 298 studying a subject through Irish. The latter included 50 at Fiontar DCU, and 173 at NUIG. In three IoTs, 24 students were studying Irish as subject and 62 a subject through Irish.

## 7 Adult education

### **structure and language courses**

In the Irish context, it is not always easy to make clear distinctions between formal vocational, continuing, further and adult education in various contexts for differing age and socio-economic groups. The DES provides no definition beyond that for Further Education.

With regard to courses that are taught through the medium of Irish, many of the extracurricular courses (offered by NUIG in particular) can be defined as adult education. Additionally, people attending the Back to Education Initiative or Community Education courses may request Irish language courses towards State examinations certification. Other providers of Irish language courses are self-funded evening adult programmes in second-level schools, ETB centres, IM institutions and other locations which offer Irish classes for adults. Some are general, others are for specific purposes, for parents or for club leaders or for those interested in aspects of Irish culture, e.g. literature, folklore and music. The best-known residential Irish summer courses for adults are operated by Oideas Gael.

Some higher education institutes have established an internal support body called Bord na Gaeilge (Board for Irish), which conducts courses and events that are open to all staff and students. At NUI Cork, Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha (Centre for Spoken Irish) runs a suite of flexible courses and successful results in one specific course counts for the first year of the university's degree course in Irish. Many higher education institutes conduct flexible diploma courses in Irish language skills.

The Language Centre at NUIM has developed a Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (European Certificate in Irish), a progressive structured graded course that is specifically designed for adults and based on the Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (Council of Europe, 2001). Examinations are offered regularly and recognised by



the Association of Language Testers in Europe. Courses are conducted for tutors as well. The European Certificate in Irish is being used both in Ireland and in many places outside of Ireland where Irish classes are taught. The DES has accepted the European Certificate in Irish Level B2 as meeting the Irish language entry requirement for primary education programmes. The European Certificate in Irish is recognised as the sole system of certification for adult learners of Irish and is widely used by both central and local authorities for staff language proficiency. Examinations are held not only in Ireland but in many centres abroad, for example in New York, London, Prague and Paris. Irish language classes for adults, and for third level students, are found all over Ireland and around the world, including at for example Beijing Foreign Studies University.

In the Gaeltacht, the group Breacadh (meaning: Dawn), in collaboration with the ETBs, provides (since 2000) services through Irish to adults in literacy in Irish, communication skills, computer skills and family learning. They also produce appropriate resources for the literacy classes in the three main dialects, commission research, and publish vocabulary lists in areas of work integral to Gaeltacht life. They have endowed a doctoral fellowship at Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge on literacy levels among native Irish speakers.

**language use** The predominant pattern in these Irish language classes is that the target language is used, perhaps with the use of English to ensure understanding of any explanation.

**statistics** ETB information is that the Back to Education Initiative offers flexible part-time education to 32,066 learners with qualifications less than Leaving Certificate level. Among other courses provided by ETBs, Community Education meets the education needs of local groups catering to some 53,415 people. No account is available on the precise number of students taking Irish. Nevertheless, a number returning to education may take Irish while many ETB centres advertise and provide Irish language classes through Community Education.

The Irish language situation in adult education tends to be fluid and there is no access to reliable statistics for informal classes. However, with regard to the structured European Certificate in Irish course, from 350 to 450 students undertake examinations yearly (not all in Ireland). Additionally, up to 3,500 candidates have sat the European Certificate in Irish examinations in the period 2005-2014.

## 8 Educational research

Research on aspects of education in Ireland is comprehensively varied and undertaken by many bodies including the DES, higher education institutes, COGG, NCCA, TC and the Irish Research Council (now under HEA). There has never been a coordinating body to ensure ongoing research although COGG publishes regularly. This section will be confined largely to recent research which has been conducted mainly by the statutory agencies DES and COGG on three specific areas: Irish as a subject in mainstream schools; Irish in IM immersion schools (gaelscoileanna) and education in and for the Gaeltacht.

### **Irish in mainstream schools – Primary**

An Inspectorate survey (2005) of newly qualified teachers found that the majority of new graduates were satisfied with their training as was the Inspectorate with their teaching of Irish. However, the teaching of Irish as a communicative language, and the accuracy of newly qualified teachers' spoken Irish, was a matter requiring further attention. Neither did Irish always receive its allocated space on the timetable.

A study by Harris et al. (2006) was based on pupils at two stages of primary schooling in 2002. The results were that the language skills in Irish among the study's sample of pupils in Ordinary mainstream school were low. This was particularly the case in comparison with earlier testing (1985). More planning, more use of CLIL and more support for teachers were among the recommendations. IM and Gaeltacht schools fared well however, given their mixed linguistic intake.

An Inspectorate study (2007) on the teaching and learning of the four language skills in the primary school seemed to pinpoint some of the causes of reported non-success in pupils. It revealed that, despite being qualified to teach Irish, up to 25% of teachers in the sample had weaknesses in their language skills and 9% had major weaknesses in their ability to teach the language. No more than 50% of classes surveyed

showed good levels of teaching and learning while an excellent standard was observed in just 6% of classes. In the latter, teachers had both good language and methodology skills. Apparently almost 50% of classes were of middling to weak standard, despite teachers' evident application. In one third of classes surveyed, Irish was being taught through English. In up to 8% of classes there were significant difficulties with teaching and learning. Pupils, however, enjoyed learning Irish through the 1999 revised communicative curriculum.

**Irish in (mostly) mainstream schools – Post-Primary**

In 2007, the Inspectorate published a 2004/2005 survey on Irish at Junior Cycle in 10% of schools, across the different administrative categories (e.g. secondary and vocational etc.), some 15 years after the introduction of the new communicative syllabus. The sample comprised 75% mainstream EM schools and 24% IM schools - 16% of the sample were Gaeltacht schools and 8% gaelscoileanna. Results noted the numbers exempted from Irish and the gap in candidate numbers taking English and Irish at JC state examinations. The range of recommendations for improvement required was significant. However, much effective teaching and learning were also noted. The main recommendations in this report generally echo those in the Primary report.

Much research is assisted by COGG in collaboration with other institutions. A 2013 study that was conducted by the Language Centre of the NUIM, on the benefits of summer colleges showed clear differences in language competence and attitudes between students who attended colleges and those who did not.

**General Overview of Irish in mainstream and Gaeltacht schools**

The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 echoes existing findings and gives a concise overview of teaching and learning in general across the different levels of the system. Comments from the report are given below in answer to the question, 'How good is the teaching and learning of Irish?' The results are not entirely encouraging. At primary level "Inspectors' findings with

regard to Irish are significantly less positive than those for English or Mathematics. During the years 2010-2012, inspectors reported that the quality of Irish teaching was problematic in one fifth of the lessons inspected during incidental inspections and the quality of pupils' learning of the language was problematic in approximately one quarter of those lessons" (op.cit. 49-51). Interestingly, at post-primary level, in contrast with the 2007 report (above), improvement was noted from the previous use of English as the medium of instruction to the increased use of the target language (Irish), most likely as a result of the increase to 40% of total marks for the oral component of the Leaving Certificate examination. Nevertheless, "inspectors found that the quality of students' learning in Irish was problematic in almost one in three (32%) of Irish subject inspections and deficiencies in how the subject was taught were evident in 28% of the Irish lessons inspected." (op.cit. 83-85). On the issue of literacy (Irish/English) at both levels they were more positive, "in all Gaeltacht schools, literacy standards in Irish and English ranged from good to very good" (op. cit. 57).

#### **Irish in IM primary schools - immersion gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht**

The inter-related issues of literacy and early immersion dominated the agenda for IM education from 2006. The most dominant issue was the publication of Circular 0044/2007 (DES, 2007) which required IM schools (gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht) to teach 2.5 hours of English every week, from the second term of Junior Infants. The circular was finally withdrawn by the Department of Education and Skills in January, 2010. Schools are now permitted to postpone formal English language instruction until the end of term 1 of Senior Infants. Several research surveys were published on the issue by COGG. The 2004 study presented a comprehensive overview of teacher and school practices on beginning literacy in bilingual and immersion contexts both in Ireland and internationally. The 2009 comparative study on learning to read in Irish and in English produced interesting results. The authors concluded that "children in the IM and Gaeltacht schools were found to acquire higher levels

of Irish decoding skill, Irish vocabulary and knowledge of Irish orthographic patterns than age-matched children attending an EM school. These advantages were without cost to their later English word reading/ decoding skill as measured” in the study (Parsons & Lyddy: 2).

Similar results came from the Educational Research Centre's comprehensive study on second and sixth Class pupils in IM primary schools carried out for the DES in 2010. In gaelscoileanna, pupils in both second (267 points) and sixth (266 points) Class achieved significantly higher mean scores on English reading than pupils did in the general national assessment of 2009 across all schools (250 points). In the Gaeltacht, sixth Class pupils achieved significantly higher mean scores (257) on English reading than pupils in the general national assessment (250). Pupils had the choice of taking the Mathematics test in either Irish or English. No significant differences emerged in the results as in 6th class, gaelscoileanna pupils taking the test in Irish had slightly higher scores while the opposite was true for Gaeltacht pupils, where those taking the test in English scored slightly higher than those taking it in Irish. In second class, all pupils taking the test in English scored slightly higher (Educational Research Centre 2010: 11-13).

#### **Education in and for the Gaeltacht**

COGG has ensured several research studies on education in the Gaeltacht. In general, the main themes identified towards policy recommendations were: the reality of mixed linguistic intake, the number of small schools attempting to cope with this, the difficulty in recruiting teachers and the differing sociolinguistic characteristics from area to area (Mac Donncha *et al.*, 2005). To reflect these characteristics, categories were devised on the basis of daily speakers (from Census data) for the location of schools: A = 70%+ daily speakers; B = 40-69% daily speakers; C = less than 39% daily speakers. The majority of primary and post-primary schools were located in Category C areas. A significant proportion of pupils at both levels were born or lived or were living outside the Gaeltacht. The language of

instruction, particularly in Category C primary schools, was influenced by school policy in favour of Irish as much as by pupils' competence. The study found that teaching through Irish at post-primary level was in crisis. Limited resources, lack of ancillary supports and difficulty in recruiting teachers were problems at both levels. Given the realities, the authors proposed a redefinition of Gaeltacht education in terms of three options for schools: an L1 model with Irish as medium of instruction, an immersion model with Irish as medium and an L1 model with English as medium of instruction. Other proposals included (i) a collaborative review of the future of primary schools, many of which were small; (ii) a review of teacher training for both levels towards specific ongoing provision of personnel; (iii) a needs analysis towards the provision of resources and integration of both educational and (iv) the full range of support services. Several studies followed from COGG which looked at specific aspects of the problems identified (see bibliography).

A 2014 report (Pétevráry *et al.*) commissioned by COGG examined the acquisition of Irish and of English among children aged 7-12 whose home language was exclusively Irish and who live in one of the strongest Irish speaking Gaeltacht areas. Recommendations on societal support for education in the Gaeltacht were proposed on the basis of the general conclusions. These showed a lower level of ability in Irish than in English among the bilingual children. While they were more fluent in Irish, accuracy and competence were higher in English on the variables of vocabulary, functional codeswitching, most examples of grammatical accuracy in morphology and syntax, in phonetic accuracy and in semantic and pragmatic usage and in disfluency pauses (op.cit. 236-237).

Arising from all this evidence, commitments on the 20-Year Strategy for Irish, and the place of education in the new language planning areas (*Gaeltacht Act 2012*), the DES is engaged on continuing research and policy towards getting "the policy for Gaeltacht schools right" (Minister's address at launch of Proposals, May 2015).

## 9 Prospects

The prospects for a lesser used language depend on twin factors: the numbers of people committing themselves to use the language and the policy commitments of Government. Similarly, the ability to speak a lesser used language derives from two sources, home and/or school. Policy in education may ensure various degrees of language competence but active use of that competence is a much wider socio-political and sociocultural issue which is dependent on both top-down and bottom-up commitment.

Over the years official education policy has had results, some more positive than others. The latest Census figures (2011) appear to show an encouraging upward trend with 1,774,437 persons (41.4% of the population) who possess self-professed competence in the language in 2011. Almost 520,000 students are in daily contact with Irish. Outside of education however, only about 77,185 (4.4%) persons actually use the language daily, while almost 25% never use their competence in Irish. Nevertheless, there still remains a substantial number of potential daily speakers among the 40.8% who use Irish on a weekly or occasional basis constituting a substantial base of three-quarters of a million persons. In the enormous gap between competence and use lies the real policy crux, a vacuum which can really only be filled from the bottom-up with concomitant enabling State support.

Despite the reported strength of favourable societal attitudes towards Irish across the State, intergenerational transmission of the language is largely a conscious parental choice rather than a natural progression. It is also a continuing uphill struggle to maintain Irish language sources of socialisation for children although some slight degree of normalisation of the language in domains other than education is evident, in the media in particular. The continuing convergence of Gaeltacht and the rest of the State is apparent.



The language heartland in the Gaeltacht continues to decrease (Ó Giollagáin *et al*, 2007; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015) and the numbers of daily speakers show little increase despite an overall increase in population. This is being offset to some slight extent by the continuing success of the immersion IM sector outside the Gaeltacht although development may now be more dependent on official policy.

On the teaching and learning of Irish in EM schools, an Inspectorate study of 2007 concluded that significant challenges faced those attempting to improve the standard of Irish in the education system. In the absence of change, people would not acquire natural communication skills nor the ability to engage with the rich literary tradition of Irish. They advised that a collaborative approach was required in order to ensure that the population would continue to have understanding, knowledge and pride in a basic element of their heritage and culture. The DES, NCCA and the TC have introduced changes (as enumerated in the sections on curriculum and teacher training) but it is too early to gauge results.

Recent emphases have occurred on strengthening Irish in the education system and on new approaches to language planning among Gaeltacht communities. However, the latter process appeared to place the obligation for language maintenance squarely on speakers and communities themselves with more inspection and assistive roles for State agencies although with a degree of legislative legitimacy given to the concept of local language planning. Education and the language are integral in this community planning and to its success.

The An Coimisinéir (Language Commissioner) resigned in February 2014, citing official failure to implement language legislation designed to ensure the rights of citizens to use Irish with State organs. On the other hand, at official level, publication of the final version of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* in the Republic appeared to indicate

a more structured and co-ordinated approach to language planning, in which education has a central but not sole role.

The stated aim of this Strategy is to reach a critical mass of 250,000 daily speakers by 2030, of a kind that would ensure the future of Irish. The tone of the Strategy, however, would indicate that this critical mass, if reached, would most likely comprise networks of speakers even in Gaeltacht areas, rather than communities in the traditionally accepted sense of that term. A certain lack of urgency and loss of momentum in the task of implementation of the Strategy comprehensively across all domains has been noted, particularly in Irish language media (e.g. magazines *Comhar*, September 2015; *Feasta*, November 2015). The reality is that Irish remains still 'on the verge of vitality' (European Commission: *Euromosaic*, 1996).

## 10 Summary Statistics

Type of Education	Number of pupils (number of schools in brackets)			
	All pupils are taught all subjects through Irish ----- In the Gaeltacht	All pupils are taught all subjects through Irish ----- Outside the Gaeltacht	Some pupils are taught all subjects through Irish (Irish Stream) ----- Outside the Gaeltacht	Some pupils are taught some subjects through Irish ----- Outside the Gaeltacht
Primary	7,485 (106)	34,476 (141)	256 (2)	143,112 (874)
Secondary	465 (3)	3,643 (12)	571 (1)	1,238 (2)
Vocational	1,451(12)	4,865 (16)	5,304 (10)	3,748 (6)
Community	432 (2)	435 (1)	869 (1)	453 (1)
Comprehensive	294 (1)	0	0	0
<b>Total 209,097 (174)</b>	10,127 (124)	43,419 (170)	7,000 (14)	148,551 (883)

Table 5: Number of pupils at schools (number of schools in brackets), categorized by medium of instruction in 2014/2015 (source: DES Annual Statistical Report, 2014/2015).

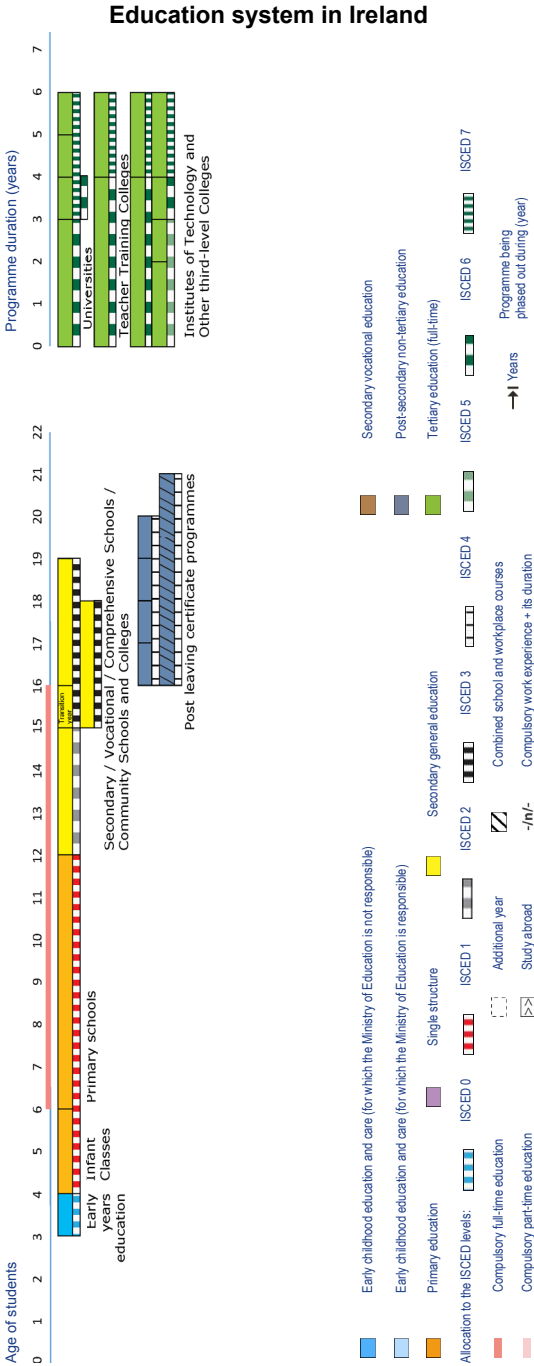
**teacher training** Figures from the 2013/2014 annual statistical report from the DES for four State-aided primary teacher training colleges show that 5,701 fulltime and 580 part-time students were enrolled, which in total makes 6,281. In addition, HEA statistics for that year show that 62 students were studying in the new Froebel Department of NUIM, reaching an overall total of 6,343 students. Some of these students may have been following courses not requiring Irish. In the case of students who are taking post-primary teacher training on concurrent courses in the three State-aided colleges, a proportion of students will combine studying Irish with their main area of study. St. Patrick's College, Thurles, in affiliation with the University of Limerick, offers Irish and education in combination with either religious or business studies. The two other post-primary teacher education

colleges (St. Angela's, Sligo: home economics and Mater Dei: religious studies) had a total of 1,002 fulltime and 761 part-time students enrolled for 2013/2014. In the previous year, HEA statistics (below) reported 61 home economics students taking Irish courses.

**higher  
education**

Statistics supplied by the DES/HEA give a partial account of students taking third level courses in Irish or through the medium of Irish for the academic year 2012/2013. These statistics showed: (i) a total of 659 students across 8 higher education institutes (not teacher training), 331 of whom were studying Irish combined with other subjects, 30 Irish alone, and 298 studying a subject through Irish. The latter included 50 at *Fiontar* DCU, and 173 at NUIG. In three IoTs, 24 students were studying Irish as subject and 62 a subject through Irish.

The structure of the education system in Ireland 2015/2016



Source: Eurydice (2015/2016)

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## Other websites on minority languages

- Mercator Research Centre** [www.mercator-research.eu](http://www.mercator-research.eu)  
Homepage of the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. The website contains the series of Regional dossiers, a database with organisations, a bibliography, information on current activities, and many links to relevant websites.
- Mercator Network** [www.mercator-network.eu](http://www.mercator-network.eu)  
General site of the Mercator European Network of Language Diversity Centres. It gives information about the network and leads you to the homepages of the network partners.
- European Commission** <http://ec.europa.eu/languages>  
The website of the European Commission gives information about the EU's support for language diversity.
- Council of Europe** <http://conventions.coe.int>  
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995). European Treaty Series 148 and 157, Strasbourg.
- Eurydice** <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>  
Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The site provides information on all European education systems and education policies.

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**partners** In 1987 Mercator Education started cooperation with two partners in a network structure: Mercator Media hosted at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth and Mercator Legislation hosted at the Ciemen Foundation in Barcelona. This network has developed into the Mercator European Network of Language Diversity Centres, which consists of the three aforementioned partners as well Stockholm University in Sweden and the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Hungary. Besides, the Mercator Research Centre, the successor of Mercator Education, expands its network in close cooperation with a number of other partner organisations working in the same field. This cooperation includes partners in Fryslân, as well as partners in the Netherlands and in Europe. The provincial government of Fryslân is the main funding body of the Mercator Research Centre. Projects and activities are funded by the EU as well as by the authorities of other regions in Europe with an active policy to support their regional or minority language and its culture.



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