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## **IRISH**

**The Irish language in education in Northern Ireland**

| 3rd Edition |

| Regional dossiers series |



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Helga Kuipers-Zandberg has been responsible for the publication of this Mercator regional dossier.

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## Glossary

<b>CEA</b>	The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Formerly CCEA)
<b>CCMS</b>	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
<b>CnaG</b>	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (representative body for Irish-medium Education)
<b>DE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DEL</b>	Department for Employment and Learning
<b>DENI</b>	Department of Education for Northern Ireland
<b>DfC</b>	Department for Communities
<b>DfE</b>	Department for the Economy
<b>DHSSPS</b>	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health (since 9 <sup>th</sup> May 2016)
<b>EA</b>	Education Authority
<b>ELBs</b>	Education and Library Boards
<b>ETI</b>	Education and Training Inspectorate
<b>GCE AS</b>	General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (Refers to first year of Advanced Level (A Level) – can be a stand-alone qualification)
<b>GCE</b>	General Certificate of Education
<b>GCE-A-level</b>	General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>GNVQ</b>	General National Vocational Qualification
<b>NICIE</b>	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
<b>NDPB</b>	Non Departmental Public Body
<b>PEEP</b>	Pre-school Education Expansion Programme
<b>PEG</b>	Pre-school Education Group
<b>PGCE</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in Education

## Foreword

**background** Regional and minority languages are languages that differ from the official state language. The Mercator Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning uses the definition for these languages defined by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML):

“Regional and minority languages are languages traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state’s population; they are different from the official language(s) of that state, and they include neither dialects of the official language(s) of the state nor the languages of migrants”. The Mercator Research Centre aims at the acquisition, application and circulation of knowledge about these regional and minority languages in education. An important means to achieve this goal is the Regional dossiers series: documents that provide the most essential features of the education system of regions with a lesser used regional or minority language.

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**aim** The aim of the Regional dossiers series is to provide a concise description of European minority languages in education. 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. Because of this fixed structure the dossiers in the series are easy to compare.

**target group** The dossiers serve several purposes and are relevant for policy-makers, researchers, teachers, students and journalists who wish to explore developments in minority language schooling in Europe. They can also serve as a first orientation towards further research, or function as a source of ideas for improving educational provisions in their own region.

**link with Eurydice** The format of the Regional dossiers follows the format of Eurydice – the information network on education in Europe – in order

to link the regional descriptions with those of national education systems. Eurydice provides information on the administration and structure of national education systems in the member states of the European Union.

**contents**

Every Regional dossier begins with an introduction about the region concerned, followed by six sections that each deals with a specific level of the education system (e.g. primary education). Sections eight and nine cover the main lines of research into education of the concerned minority language, the prospects for the minority language in general and for education in particular. The tenth section gives a summary of statistics. Lists of regulations, publications and useful addresses concerning the minority language, are given at the end of the dossier.

## 1 Introduction

### language

Irish, or Gaeilge, is an indigenous language spoken in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. It is a Celtic language closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx, and more distantly related to Welsh, Breton and Cornish. Speakers of Irish in Northern Ireland are predominantly second language learners and most people learn the language through the education system or at informal language classes held throughout Northern Ireland. Irish Medium Education is a growing sector in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. Three major dialects of Irish are spoken in Ireland, Ulster, Connacht and Munster. The Ulster dialect is spoken and taught in Northern Ireland.

### population

Irish was used by a number of residual communities of native speakers in Northern Ireland when the state was founded in 1921. These communities are no longer extant; the last native speaker of Tyrone Irish survived until 1970. At present the Irish-speaking community in Northern Ireland consists of those who have learned Irish as a second language at secondary school, university, or at night classes; children who have been brought up with Irish as their first language (often by parents who themselves learned or are learning it as a second language); and an increasing number of children from English-speaking homes who are being educated through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium schools. While this community extends throughout Northern Ireland, it is largely an urban phenomenon with the highest concentration of speakers in Belfast, Derry and in the Newry and Armagh districts. Smaller rural pockets of speakers are also developing such as the Carntogher outside Maghera, County Derry.

According to the 2001 Census, 167,490, or 10.4%, of the total population in Northern Ireland aged three and over reported some knowledge of Irish. In the 2011 Census that figure had risen to 184,898, or 10.7%. (Department of Finance and Personnel, 2013) It has been previously estimated by scholars that between 13-15,000 speakers are 'fluent speakers' and that a further 40-45,000 are 'functional speakers of Irish' who claim better than average ability to speak Irish (MacGiolla

Chríost, 2000). Given the growth of Irish Medium Education a comparative growth is to be expected in the number of fluent and functional speakers. The following table illustrates the results of the Irish language question in the 2011 Census.

*Table 1 Knowledge of Irish of all persons aged 3 years and over Northern Ireland Census 2011*

<b>All persons</b>	<b>1,735, 711</b>
Uses Irish as their home language	4,130
Understands spoken Irish but cannot read, write or speak Irish	70,501
Speaks, reads, writes and understands Irish	64,847
Has some knowledge of Irish	184,898
Has no knowledge of Irish	155,0813

*Source: Department of Finance and Personnel, 2013*

**language status** Prior to the establishment of the Northern Ireland state in 1921, Irish was recognised as a school subject and as “Celtic” in some third level institutions. This policy continued in spite of attempts in the 1930s to restrict it further in the curriculum. Between 1921 and 1972, Northern Ireland had a measure of devolved government. During those years one party, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), which was hostile to the Irish language, was in power in the Northern Ireland Parliament. Northern Ireland was ruled directly from Westminster, London, from 1972 until 1998. During this period the government’s attitude to the Irish language changed somewhat. The first Irish-medium schools were funded in the early 1980s and later that decade a number of Irish language projects received funding from the public purse. However, significant change was to occur only after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Irish is not recognised as an official language in Northern Ireland, but the British Government has committed itself to various measures in support of the language, as specified in the Good Friday Agreement of 10 April 1998 (also known as the Belfast Agreement) (Northern Ireland Office, 1998). The Agreement states that: “All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster- Scots



## THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

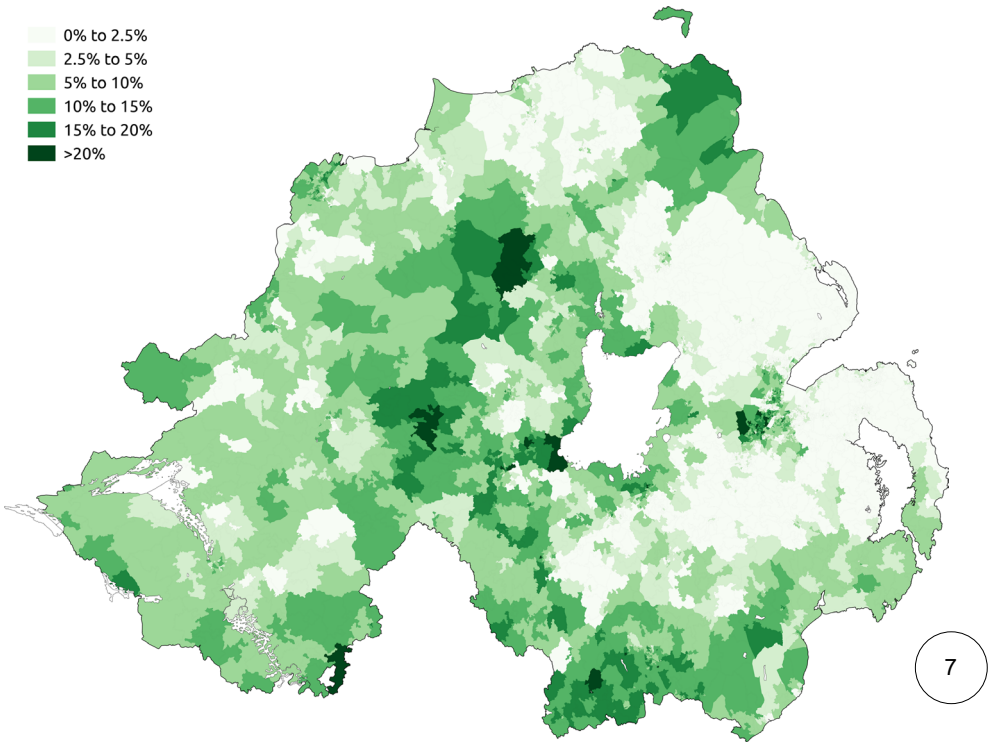


Figure 1: Proportion of respondents to the 2011 Census who stated that they can speak Irish. From SkateTier, 2017.

and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.” Furthermore, the British Government committed itself to taking “resolute action” to promote the Irish language and promised measures to encourage its use in public and private life, in the media and in education. It also provided for the establishment of a North/South Ministerial Council, whose duties include setting up six cross-border implementation bodies funded by the two administrations. One of the bodies is the North/South Language Body which contains two associated agencies, *Foras na Gaeilge* (Foras na Gaeilge, 2018) (dealing with Irish) and *Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch* (dealing with Ulster-Scots). *Foras na Gaeilge* has a role in advising administrations, north and south, as well as public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors in all matters relating to the Irish language.

The British Government ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on 27 March 2001. Welsh, Scots-Gaelic and Irish were given protection under Part 3 of the Charter, the highest level of protection, while Scots and Ulster Scots were given more limited protection under Part 2. The Government thus committed itself and the Northern Ireland Assembly to a wide range of measures to promote the Irish language in public life. Measures relating to education include facilitating Irish-medium education or the opportunity to study Irish at all school levels where requested and, where numbers are sufficient; facilitating Irish-medium education or the teaching of the language at universities and in adult education; ensuring the teaching of the history and culture associated with the language; and providing the necessary teacher training.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, a body created by the Good Friday Agreement, submitted proposals for inclusion in a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The form of a possible Bill of Rights has been debated vigorously but very little progress has been made towards the adoption of the instrument. Its provisional view was “that rather than make provision for ‘official’ or ‘national’ languages and ‘second’ or ‘other’ languages, it is better to guarantee rights for all language users and make the extent of those rights dependent on the extent to which each language is used and understood in the community.” The Commission wishes “to guarantee a measure of recognition and respect to the users of all languages, dialects and other forms of communication because they all contribute to the cultural wealth of the community.” Irish and Ulster Scots are already entitled to a measure of protection under the Good Friday Agreement that other minority languages in Northern Ireland do not. The commission recommends the inclusion of users of sign language, Travellers, and speakers of Chinese and Urdu as well as speakers of Irish and Ulster Scots in the proposed Bill of Rights. The Commission’s proposals guarantee the right to use any language or dialect for private and public purposes, where necessary through an interpreter. They endorse the commitments made under the Good Friday Agreement and

the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. They call for legislation to ensure that, where there is sufficient demand, members of all linguistic communities should have certain rights in respect of their language or dialect, including “the right to learn in it and to be educated in and through it.” St Andrew’s Agreement was signed in October 2006. As part of that agreement, the British government promised to enact an Irish-language act for Northern Ireland in Westminster if it did not come about through the Assembly.

Irish speakers in Northern Ireland are still campaigning for An Irish Language Act to protect their language rights.

Organisations such as Pobal and Conradh na Gaeilge have campaigned for many years for a comprehensive, rights-based Irish-Language Act for the north. An Dream Dearg, a community led campaign group seeking language rights, has organised a series of protest marches in Belfast, Derry and Newry and has gained considerable support among young people. An Dream has used social media effectively to mobilise support. There has long been Welsh language legislation in Wales, Scots Gaelic legislation in Scotland, and Irish language legislation in the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction on these islands that does not have internal legislation to protect the indigenous language. (Conradh na Gaeilge, 2017 & Pobal, 2012)

**status of  
language  
education**

The Department of Education (hereafter DENI) has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education arising out of the Belfast Agreement and the subsequent Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. In 2000, DENI established two new voluntary bodies to deal with Irish Medium Education. Firstly, *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (CnaG), the council for Irish-medium education, (Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta, 2015), which was established in 2000 is a company limited by guarantee, and without share capital. CnaG has charitable status and has been recognised as a charity by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in April 2017. Although CnaG is a non-statutory body and a charity, it receives its core funding through grant-in-aid from DENI under the powers contained within Article 89 (2) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order

1998. CnaG fulfils the duty specified within Article 89 (1) on behalf of Department of Education: 'It shall be the duty of the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education'. This is recognised in the CnaG's Memorandum and Articles as follows: 'To promote for the benefit of the public the development of all aspects of Irish-medium education.' As a result of the fact that CnaG's funding comes wholly from DE, it was designated as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) in 2012. CnaG currently operates within an annual budget of £786,000 to cover salaries, administration costs and the implementation of an annual business plan. It employs twelve staff consisting of a Chief Executive, Senior Education Officer, Senior Development Officer, Senior Finance/Administration/Personnel Officer, Clerical Officer, Clerical Administration Officer and 6 Advisory Officers.

*Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta*, a trust fund for Irish-medium education that was established in February 2001, received an initial payment of £1.25m from Government. This funding was later supplemented by a further grant of half a million pounds. It is administered by a small voluntary board of trustees appointed by the DENI and CnaG. Most of its funding is directed at non-funded schools and preschools.

**education  
system**

The education system in Northern Ireland differs from those of England, Wales and Scotland in some respects, although it shares a few basic principles, including that of compulsory education for all children between the ages of 5 (year 1) and 16 (year 12). In principle, educational provision should be free, but some schools which do not fit the educational or numerical criteria laid down by government are not funded. All state-funded schools in Northern Ireland, including Irish-medium schools, are expected to follow the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum, the most recent documentation was published in 2009. (UK Government).

The 12 years of compulsory schooling are divided into primary level and secondary level. The curriculum is defined in terms of four key stages, two at each level. The key stages are as follows:

*Table 2: Key Stages in Northern Ireland Schools Curriculum*

<b>Key stage</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Class</b>
Foundation	4 yrs – 6 yrs	Class 1 and 2
Key stage 1	6 yrs – 8 yrs	Class 3 and 4
Key stage 2	8 yrs – 11 yrs	Class 5, 6 and 7
Key stage 3	11 yrs – 14 yrs	Class 8, 9 and 10
Key stage 4	14 yrs – 16 yrs	Class 11 and 12

The flexibility of the NI curriculum gives schools and teachers the freedom to use their professional judgment to decide which individual topics to teach in class and which resources to use to deliver the curriculum. The DEN sets the minimum content which schools are required by law to deliver. This provides a framework upon which each school can build to meet the needs of its pupils and to reflect its individual ethos. A copy of The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007 can be accessed on the Department's website. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (hereafter: CCEA) website details the Areas of Learning at each Key Stage, along with the statutory requirements:

Pupils are assessed at the end of each key stage in core curriculum subjects, and also have to study a number of other compulsory subjects. Six cross-curricular educational themes must be provided, two of which are Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage.

The education system in Northern Ireland has in addition a number of distinctive features. Although early attempts were made to create a non-denominational system of education in Northern Ireland, it developed along denominational lines. In the 1930s an agreement was reached with the three main Protestant churches – the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches – under which they eventually transferred their schools to the ownership of the state and in return they received key roles in the management of the education system. These schools are referred to as either “state” or “controlled” schools and educate mainly Protestant children. The Catholic Church retained ownership of their schools but, as a result of a series

of negotiations over school management arrangements, Catholic schools now have both their full recurrent and capital costs met from public funds in the same way as state schools. These schools are referred to as Catholic Maintained schools and educate mainly Catholic children. Voluntary Grammar schools have either Catholic or non-denominational management and educate either Catholic or Protestant children. There are also Independent schools which are not in receipt of government funding and Integrated schools which essentially aim to educate Catholic and Protestant children together. The first integrated school was established in 1981. Secondary education in Northern Ireland retains largely a selective system with pupils going to grammar schools or secondary schools according to academic ability. With the exception of grammar schools, half of which are single-sex, most other secondary schools in Northern Ireland are coeducational.

The Irish-medium education sector also includes a number of different types of school. The term 'free-standing' refers to an Irish -medium primary or secondary school which is not attached to, or part of, an English-medium school. An Irish-medium 'unit' operates as a self-contained provision under the management of a host English-medium school. Independent Irish-medium schools are schools which are not funded by the state: they normally develop into free- standing schools on receipt of funding. Both Irish-medium schools and un its adopt a total immersion approach whereby all teaching is delivered through the medium of Irish. Irish-medium schools are managed by boards of governors which are appointed mainly by the parent bodies, with Educational Authority (EA) representation. Irish-medium units are under the management of the host English-medium school. At present, some Irish -medium units are in Catholic schools under the management of CCMS. This has come to change as in previous times, all Irish-medium schools were under the management of CCMS.

In the following sections, the use and position of Irish in the educational system of Northern Ireland are discussed in more detail.

**private and public** The vast majority of schools are state-funded, and managed by Boards of Governors, all of which have teacher and parent representatives. These schools, which reflect the history of denominational education in Northern Ireland, fall into a wide range of sub-sections, depending on their background, management structure and funding mechanism. Independent or private schools receive no direct aid from public funds.

**bilingual education forms** A few Irish Medium primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland operate what are called units connected to an English Medium Schools but the majority of Irish Medium Schools schools are stand-alone.

**administration** Overall responsibility for all aspects of state-funded (also called grant-aided) education in Northern Ireland lies with the DENI. When the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended in 2002 and again in 2016, DENI became the responsibility of a Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office who is directly appointed by the UK government in London. DENI formulates educational policy in Northern Ireland, and all major funding decisions lie with the Department. At local level, educational provision, involving both capital and running costs, is administered by the Education Authority (EA) which replaced the five Education and Library Boards (hereafter: ELBs) when the EA was established under the Education Act Northern Ireland 2014 and became operational on 01 April 2015. It is a non-departmental body sponsored by the DE. The EA manages some schools, and is the channel for the funding of others. The EA provide a curriculum advisory and support service to schools under their management, and advise government departments (and other agencies) both on the needs of their schools and on the formulation of policy. The language of administration is English. The Board of the EA is made up of 20 members plus the Chair. Only one Board Member represents the Irish Medium Sector (Education Authority, 2018).

**inspection** Within DENI, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for monitoring, inspecting and reporting on the

standard of education and training provided by schools. It administers a programme of inspections which result in reports for publication. It provides relevant advice to the Department of Education, the Department for Communities, and the Department for the Economy.

**support  
structure**

The DENI is responsible for all resource issues relating to schools and the Youth Service; the latter advises DENI and the EA on the personal and social development of children, young people and young adults. DENI funds the expenditure incurred by the EA, who have statutory responsibility for the provision of services. All grant-aided schools have their recurrent costs fully funded by DENI, either directly or through the EA. DENI also provides 100% grant-aid for capital costs for most schools, although a small number of maintained schools and voluntary grammar schools receive up to 85%. Capital funding is paid directly by DENI to all categories of school except controlled or “state” schools. The Department also provides specific grants to many schools, in particular, under the School Improvement Programme, to meet government priorities. These grants are either paid directly, or, for some categories of school, through the EA.

In addition to the Department of Education, several other organisations operate within the sector. Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments (CCEA), established in 1994, provides advice to the Minister of Education on curriculum, assessment and examination matters, conducts key stage assessments, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (hereafter: GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (hereafter: GCE) examinations, and administers the Transfer Procedure Tests (formally called “11+”). It has a regulatory role in relation to standards in GCSE, GCE and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) examinations offered in Northern Ireland, and provides information and produces teaching materials relating to the implementation of curriculum requirements and assessment arrangements in schools.

As has been stated, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is the advocate for the Catholic Maintained schools



sector in Northern Ireland. The CCMS represents trustees, schools and governors on issues such as raising and maintaining standards, the school estate and teacher employment. It also supports trustees in the provision of school buildings, and governors and principals in the effective management and control of schools.<sup>9</sup> All the Irish-medium units in Northern Ireland are within the Catholic maintained schools sector.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) co-ordinates efforts to develop Integrated Education and to assist parent groups in opening new integrated schools. These schools provide for religious balance (Catholic and Protestant) in pupil enrolments, teaching staff and governors. New schools agree to these principles as a prerequisite of NICIE support and assistance. Irish as a subject is an option for some children at secondary level in the integrated sector.

There are also a number of support organisations, which are specific to the Irish-medium sector. CnaG plans for new schools, promotes good practice, represents the sector, and provides advice, assistance and information to groups setting up schools and units. It does not have a funding role.

*Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta* provides financial support to schools at primary and secondary level, which are not yet in receipt of government funding, and to those setting up and developing new preschool, primary or secondary provision. It also provides loans and grants for the development and enhancement of existing educational provision. Until CnaG and *Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta* were established, *Gaeloiliúint* (the council for life-long Gaelic learning), had responsibility for the establishment and development of new Irish-medium primary schools. However, it is now focusing on the development of Irish-medium education at tertiary level.

*Altram* is a regional training and advisory organisation for the Irish-medium early years sector. Founded in 1990, this voluntary organisation supports and advises staff, committees and parents, and develops guidelines, curriculum resources and teaching aids for the sector. It is the only Irish-medium centre in Northern Ireland providing training for the National Vocational

Qualification (NVQ). It provides training courses on a regional and outreach basis. NVQ qualifications are a requirement at preschool level: at least one member of staff should have NVQ Level 3 or equivalent; all other qualified staff should have NVQ Level 2 or equivalent; and 50% of the staff group should be qualified. Institutions of Further and Higher Education provide qualifying training for the English-medium preschool sector. A range of voluntary providers, educational institutions and health trusts and boards provide in-service training. Stranmillis University College offers a BA Honours degree in Early Childhood Studies and a Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Early Years.

The cross-border Irish language agency, *Foras na Gaeilge* (the body for the promotion of the Irish language), was established in 1999. It is charged with promotion of Irish on an all-island basis. One of its functions is to support Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish. It has offices in Dublin and Belfast. In 2014 Foras na Gaeilge appointed six lead organisations. One of these, Gael Linn, was appointed to encourage and promote the Irish language in the education system and in particular Irish in the English medium sector in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Gael Linn has been carrying out this role since it was set up in 1953. Comhar na Múinteoirí, founded in 1964, which had been funded by Bord na Gaeilge and subsequently Foras na Gaeilge to actively promote and support the teaching and learning of Irish in all schools North and South lost its funding under the new arrangements.

*An tÁisaonad* (the Irish-medium Resource Unit) has responsibility for the provision of teaching materials for the Irish-medium sector. The resource is part of St. Mary's University College, Belfast, and is funded by Foras na Gaeilge. It has a small team of editors and translators, who create, adapt and translate texts for use in Irish-medium primary and secondary sectors. An tÁisaonad regularly engages the sector to evaluate the needs of schools and it liaises with teachers in trialling resources before they are published. Training in the best use of resources is also part of An tÁisaonad's remit. It should be noted that all of the

resources produced by An tÁisaonad are tailored for pupils who are attending Irish-medium immersion schools.

While there are differences between the two curriculums north and south, An tÁisaonad has worked closely with other groups such as COGG, based in Dublin, to produce resources which can be sold in all parts of the country. An tÁisaonad works collaboratively with other groups serving the sector such as CCEA, CnaG and C2K.

Over the years, An tÁisaonad has developed a number of large-scale projects, including an Early Reading Programme, a series of maths workbooks, a large number of Big Books, many with accompanying music CDs, a series of books for younger readers as well as reading books for older readers in primary and secondary schools. Most of these resources have accompanying teachers' resource material which can be downloaded from the Áisaonad site.

An tÁisaonad has also produced a number of books for post-primary subjects as well as a number of texts on PDF format. An tÁisaonad is developing an on-line platform where interactive materials for post-primary subjects can be accessed. It is hoped that this will come on-line in 2018.

An tÁisaonad's output increasingly is online. One of its largest projects has been running since 2015, producing daily news stories, fact files and other interactive material on the C2K platform.

## 2 Preschool education

**target group** Preschool education is provided for a child after he/she has reached the age of 2 years and before he/she has attained compulsory school age which is 5 years old. Irish-medium preschool education is in the main directed at children from English-speaking homes, whose parents are considering primary education through the medium of Irish for their children. Children as young as two years may enrol in statutory nursery schools, or units, but a starting age of three is preferred for Irish-medium pre-schools.

**structure** There are five types of preschool provision in Northern Ireland:

- voluntary preschool playgroups, which are outside the state system and not directly funded by the state;
- grant-aided, free-standing, statutory nursery schools, which are independent nurseries in receipt of state funding;
- grant-aided, statutory nursery units, which are part of an existing primary school, and are funded by the state;
- private day nurseries, which are not in receipt of state funding but are paid for primarily by parents; and
- reception classes and groups in primary schools, which are part of the statutory primary education provided by a number of schools (currently being phased out by government).

Preschool playgroups, which include the majority of Irish-medium pre-school provision, are entirely voluntary and fall outside mainstream educational provision. They are funded by the DE through the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme (PEEP). Playgroups may supplement this funding through fundraising and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSPPS) grants. Voluntary preschools have received capital funding from the DE provided they were in the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme. State-funded nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools are financed on a not strictly regulated basis by DE. They are staffed by qualified teachers who have the ongoing support of the local EA and may use their in-service facilities. The

Irish language community has argued for state-funded nursery provision in the Irish-medium sector on the basis that it would enable children from English-speaking homes to deal with the statutory curriculum needs of Irish-medium primary schools. There are currently 44 Irish-medium nursery schools in Northern Ireland. There are currently an estimated 165 staff working in Irish-medium pre-school education..

**legislation**

There is no statutory right to pre-school education. However, under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the Government seeks to provide a childcare place for every child whose parents wish it (UK Government,1998). It provides free pre-school education for children in their pre-school year through the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme. Funding is administered according to Local Management of Schools funding formulae and is allocated to grant-aided nursery schools, units, reception classes and groups, and direct grants are made to voluntary pre-school playgroups and private nurseries. All places available under PEEP are part-time. Discretionary government funding can also be provided for capital projects for statutory nursery school or units and grants are delivered through DHSPPS. Pre-schools must have a single year enrolment of 26 on a consistent annual basis to qualify for nursery-school or unit status. PEEP funding helps many children secure a place in Irish-medium nursery schools.

**language use**

The language used by the practitioners in Irish-medium pre-school is Irish. Through a structured second- language immersion programme, they support children to acquire a level of Irish, which is sufficient to prepare them for entry to Irish-medium primary education. Pre-schools also provide a wide range of relevant learning experiences for the child, through the provision of carefully selected play materials and activities. The majority of pre-school staff are not native speakers of Irish and will have learnt it as a second language. However, some staff begin working in pre-schools with quite low levels of ability in Irish. Practitioners working in an Irish-medium pre-school require additional support to enhance their Irish language skills

as well as a greater understanding of immersion methodology. This additional training requires extra funding, however, due to current budget constraints, the necessary financial support is not in place to significantly address the training needs of practitioners in the Irish-medium pre-school sector.

**teaching  
material**

*Altram* is the regional organisation which supports Irish-medium preschool education and it was founded in 1990. *Altram* is currently funded by DE through CnaG. Like Irish-medium education at primary and secondary level, those involved in preschool education face the same challenges that English-medium pre-schools do but have also to contend with developing the children's linguistic competence in a second language. Many practitioners in Irish-medium pre-school provision have to produce their own teaching and learning materials. *An tÁisaonad* and *Altram* provide excellent support within their budgetary constraints. *An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta* who are based in the Republic of Ireland also share their expertise with the pre-school sector in Northern Ireland.

In a recent State of the Sector report commissioned by *Altram* (Conway, 2017) and published in March 2017, the following were some of the recommendations made to improve Irish-medium preschool provision:

*Altram* should agree and implement a development and training plan for Irish-medium preschool workforce which is fully costed and time bound. This plan should be agreed with stakeholders, relevant statutory bodies and funders;

*Altram* should develop a strategy to tackle the issues of recruitment and conditions of employment;

*Altram* should develop a strategic framework with relevant stakeholders to encourage parents and children into sector;

The Irish-medium preschool sector should develop a communications strategy to raise awareness of statutory authorities, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists regarding benefits of IM immersion education;

*Altram* should consider the necessity for objective research on the positive educational outcomes achieved in Irish-medium preschool education.

*Altram* and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta should reach agreement with regard to their organisational roles and responsibilities to ensure effective co-operation.

**statistics**

The first Irish-medium preschool playgroup was established in Belfast in 1978 with 7 children. In 2015–16, the English-medium sector catered for 24,173 children in all forms of funded pre-school education. Preschool enrolment in Irish-medium for year 2016/17 was 900 children. When SureStart and penultimate preschool provision for Irish-medium education is added, this figure rises to a total of approximately 1200 children. This represents 4.8% of total preschool provision. See figures below:

*Table 3 Numbers attending Pre-school Education in Northern Ireland 2016/2017. Source: Department of Education for figures on English-medium pre-school provision - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk>*

Irish Medium Pre-schools	900
English Medium Pre-schools	
Total Funded Pre-schools	23,825
Nursery Schools/Classes in Primary Schools	15,330
Voluntary Schools & Private Pre-schools	8,271
Reception Classes in Primary Schools	224

*Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for Irish-medium pre-schools - <http://www.comhairle.org/>*

### 3 Primary education

**target group** Compulsory primary education is provided for children between the ages of 5 and 11 years of age, from Primary 1 to Primary 7.

**structure** The compulsory core curriculum subjects in primary schools with English as medium of instruction are English, mathematics, ICT, the Arts and the World Around Us. All state-funded schools have a statutory requirement to offer religion as a non-compulsory subject. Other subjects, such as history and geography, along with a number of cross-curricular themes, are compulsory but not examined at primary level. Irish does not fall within the common curriculum in English-medium primary schools; it can be taught optionally if a competent teacher is available in the time that remains after the other subjects have been covered. Independent (non-state-funded) schools are not required to follow the core curriculum. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has provided Irish-language assessment for Irish-medium schools in Irish, mathematics and science at the end of key stages 1 and 2. An Irish-language transfer test from primary to secondary education has been available since 1984 for those children who wished to apply for places in selective grammar schools. Previously, children from Irish-medium primary schools had to take the transfer test in English.

In Northern Ireland, there are 40 special schools (plus 1 hospital school) and approximately 188 special units attached to around 90 mainstream schools, which cater for a wide range of special educational needs. Units make specialist provision for needs such as autism; speech, language and communication difficulties; hearing impairment; and moderate learning difficulties.

Primary schools with Irish as medium of instruction have one more subject in the curriculum, namely Irish. Irish-medium primary education is delivered in two ways in Northern Ireland. Provision is through immersion programmes in Irish-medium primary schools and in Irish-medium units in English-medium primary schools.



Although the immersion primary school is the most common form of provision, Irish-medium units in English-speaking schools are becoming increasingly common, especially in rural areas where numbers are insufficient to support a freestanding school. All of the units are, at present, developed within existing English-medium schools in the Catholic-maintained sector. However, the CCMS does not have a policy on units within this sector. Historically, the Irish language community has had reservations concerning Irish-medium units, as they frequently do not have autonomy within an English-speaking school to develop their own policy, and the linguistic environment of English-medium schools can undermine attempts to make Irish the language of communication between the children. However, the community now recognises the advantages of setting up such units in order to obtain government funding at an early stage, before numbers are sufficient to establish a separate school.

The EA provides funding to address each school's special educational needs. The DE has also established special educational needs units, but dedicated staff is not available to address the specific needs of special education in the Irish-medium sector. Irish-medium teachers have responded to this deficit by establishing the voluntary organisation *Gaeleagras Um Shainriachtanais Oideachais* (The Irish-language Organisation for Special Needs Education) which seeks to address the special needs of children in Irish-medium education. In 1999, the ETI produced a report on special needs in the Irish-medium sector entitled *A Survey of Provision for Special Needs in Irish Medium Primary Schools*. The organisation Pobal carried out an extended survey in June 2010, which included a survey of Special Needs in IME that also included the Republic of Ireland. This survey concluded that the three most commonly identified special needs in *Gaelscoileanna* in the north of Ireland are; moderate general learning disability, mild general learning disability and social and emotional behavioural difficulties (Pobal, 2010).

**legislation** The responsibility for Irish-medium education lies with the DE. The DE introduced new criteria for the funding of Irish-medium education in 1999. To attain re-current (non-capital) funding, an Irish-medium primary school in Belfast or Derry must have an initial intake of 15 children. Primary schools outside these cities must have an initial intake of 12 children. To attain fully funded status, primary schools must have an intake of 20 children in Belfast and Derry, and 15 children outside these cities. In addition, schools are required to demonstrate a sustainable pattern of enrolment.

**language use** The language of instruction in Irish-medium primary schools and units is Irish. All subjects are being taught in Irish. The language of instruction for all subjects in English-medium schools is English. However, some teachers may use Irish while teaching Irish as a subject.

**teaching material** *An tÁisaonad* is responsible for the provision of teaching materials for the Irish-medium sector. The resource is part of St. Mary's University College, Belfast, and is funded by Foras na Gaeilge (£272,486 for 2018). It has a small team of editors and translators, who create, adapt and translate texts for use in Irish-medium primary and secondary sectors. It should be noted again that all of the resources produced by *An tÁisaonad* are tailored for pupils who are attending Irish-medium immersion schools.

**statistics** The first Irish-medium primary school was established in Belfast in 1971 with an intake of 9 pupils. In the school year 2016/2017, there were 35 Irish-medium primary schools and 7 Irish-medium units. The enrolment at Irish-medium primary level was 3,905. In that same school year, the total enrolment for English-medium primary and preparatory schools (schools that prepare children to proceed to grammar schools) was 171,836.

*Table 4 :Number of children attending Irish-medium and English-medium primary schools in the school year 2016/2017. (Source: Department of Education)*

<b>primary provision 2016/2017</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>
Irish-medium primary schools and units	3,905 pupils
English-medium primary schools	169,908 pupils
English-medium preparatory schools	1,704 pupils

## 4 Secondary education

**target group** Compulsory secondary education is provided for children aged between 11 and 16 years of age. Most children attend a further two years of post-compulsory education

**structure** State-funded secondary schools are required to follow the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Among the compulsory core curriculum subjects at secondary level, students are required to study at least one modern language. Irish is accepted as a modern language for this purpose, along with French, German, Spanish and Italian. Irish is the most commonly taught second language after French and Spanish, and is taught exclusively in Catholic and Integrated English-medium secondary schools. The GCSE is usually taken in year 12 of compulsory education at the age of 16, at the end of Key stage 4. The GCE Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE AS) is taken in the first year of post-compulsory education, and GCE Advanced Level (A-Level) is taken in the second year. A special GCSE examination in Irish/*Gaeilge* was provided for pupils in Irish-medium schools and units in 1993 by the CCEA. In addition, GCSE examinations through the medium of Irish for all subjects in Irish-medium post-primary schools were first provided in 1996. The CCEA is now developing assessment materials in Irish for the Northern Ireland Curriculum at secondary level (Key Stages 3 and 4).

*Table 5: Number of children taking the GCSE in Northern Ireland in summer 2017. (Source CCEA Statistics [http://ccea.org.uk/more/research\\_statistics](http://ccea.org.uk/more/research_statistics))*

GCSE language	no. of children
English Language	20,984
French	3,771
Spanish	2,987
Irish	1,845
German	550
Gaeilge	150

The 11+ transfer test between primary and post-primary school began in Northern Ireland in 1947. For more than 60 years it was

used to decide who qualified for a place at grammar school. On 4 December 2007 the then Education Minister Caitríona Ruane announced that the 11+ test would come to an end in 2008. The last 11+ transfer tests were sat in November 2008. The grammar schools decided to set their own tests. The Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) represents schools using GL assessment as part of the selection criteria, and the Association for Quality Education (AQE) run the Common Entrance Assessment (CEA) used by the rest. The outcome is that around half of grammar schools use each test, and a number of schools use both tests. The DE has no role in the delivery of the current assessments for academic selection purposes. The arrangements are private and the opt-in assessments are held on Saturdays in grammar schools. A new curriculum is also proposed which will include a wider range of vocational subjects. The transfer test, or academic selection, is not used to select pupils for the Irish-medium secondary sector.

**legislation**

The responsibility for Irish-medium secondary education lies with the DE. To qualify for government funding, an Irish-medium secondary school requires a minimum intake of 50 pupils in a single-year intake for a free-standing post-primary school. This enrolment entitles schools to capital and recurrent funding. Less stringent criteria are applied to Irish-medium units in English-medium schools.

**language use**

Irish-medium secondary provision is delivered in three ways: through Irish-medium immersion education in Irish-medium secondary schools; through Irish-medium immersion units in English-medium schools; and Irish is taught as a subject in some English-medium schools, mostly within the Catholic and integrated sectors.

The medium of instruction in Irish-medium secondary schools for all subjects except English is Irish. The medium of instruction in English-medium schools is English for all subjects, except where teachers may use the target language as a means of communication.

A government-funded initiative, organised by *Gael-Linn* (a non-governmental Irish language promotional organisation) to offer an introduction to Irish-language and culture for pupils in Year 13 and 14 (17 to 18 year olds) at secondary level in a number of non-Catholic grammar schools, has been in operation since 1994. More than 500 pupils have availed of this course.

To supplement Irish at school, Irish language summer courses are provided by *Comhaltas Uladh* (a provincial assembly), also a non-governmental Irish language promotional organisation, for secondary school children from both Irish- and English-medium schools. These three-week courses are held in Irish-speaking areas in Donegal, in the Republic of Ireland, and cater for a range of language abilities.

**teaching  
material**

The situation in Irish-medium secondary schools is similar to that in primary schools. *An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge* produces material for both sectors but cannot meet the demand. Therefore, teachers have to produce much of the teaching material themselves. Teaching materials in Irish produced in the Republic of Ireland are often irrelevant to Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland due to significant differences in the curriculum and the different dialects of Irish used. Although some material produced in the Republic of Ireland is used in English-medium schools, teaching material for these schools is also published by the former ELBs. Other publishers, particularly *Preas Ultach* (Ulster Press), have produced a range of textbooks for English-medium secondary schools which include Irish language workbooks and grammar exercises. The CCEA also produces teaching and learning resources and support materials for both Irish- and English-medium schools.

**statistics**

*Coláiste Feirste*, an Irish-medium secondary school located in West Belfast, was established in 1991. The school received government funding in 1996. There is a newly established Irish-medium secondary school based in Dungiven, *Gaelcholáiste Dhoire*. There are also three Irish-medium secondary units: one in Co. Tyrone, one in Co. Down and one in Armagh City. These schools are each under the management of an English-medium

school in the Catholic sector. In school year 20016-17, the post-primary intake for Irish-medium education made a total of 1,049, ranged between units and schools. That same year, there were 235 English-medium post-primary schools with an enrolment of 140,413.

*Table 6: Secondary provision 2016/2017. (Source: Department of Education for figures on English-medium primary provision; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for Irish-medium primary school figures)*

<b>Irish-medium secondary schools and units</b>	<b>no. of children</b>
Irish-medium secondary schools	694
Irish-medium secondary units	355
<b>English-medium secondary schools</b>	<b>no. of children</b>
Non-grammar schools	77,432
Grammar schools	62,981

According to DENI figures, 2,078 sat the Irish GCSE examination in 2013. These figures include a small percentage of adult learners of Irish. 309 students sat the A-Level examination. The figures provided by CCEA in the table below show the decrease in the number of students taking GCSE Irish since 2007. Although there has been a decrease in numbers choosing Irish at GCSE over the previous 10 years, the numbers taking AS and A2 have not decreased but have remained relatively static.

*Table 7: Number of students who sat Irish at the GCSE from 2007 to 2016. (Source: GCSE & GCE AS & A2 CCEA <http://ccea.org.uk/>)*

<b>Bliain</b>	<b>Líon daltaí</b>
<b>2007</b>	2710
<b>2008</b>	2335
<b>2009</b>	2084
<b>2010</b>	2078
<b>2011</b>	1854
<b>2012</b>	1737
<b>2013</b>	1937
<b>2014</b>	1888
<b>2015</b>	1830
<b>2016</b>	1737

*Table 8: Number of students who sat Irish at AS and A2 levels, from 2007 to 2016. (Source: GCSE & GCE AS & A2 CCEA <http://ccea.org.uk/>)*

<b>Bliain</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A2</b>
<b>2007</b>	315	281
<b>2008</b>	383	249
<b>2009</b>	317	339
<b>2010</b>	406	335
<b>2011</b>	385	329
<b>2012</b>	431	304
<b>2013</b>	374	311
<b>2014</b>	462	313
<b>2015</b>	454	330
<b>2016</b>	437	332



## 5 Vocational education

**target group** Vocational qualifications are practical in nature and related to a specific job or career area. They may be based on the national occupational standards. Students who are usually 16 years and over may chose to study for vocational qualifications. Vocational qualifications including apprenticeships provide access to further and higher education and the world of work.

**Structure** Students who have completed their statutory years in education may seek to improve their vocational skills. Vocational courses are nationally recognised competence based qualifications designed to develop and assess skills and knowledge directly related to a job. Vocational education is practice based rather than examination based, and courses can be combined with work.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) launched the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) as the single framework for describing vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

*Forbairt Feirste*, a Belfast-based Irish language economic development group, was established in 1994 to promote their cultural heritage through economic regeneration. The group coordinates Irish-medium courses for clerical assistants, computer skills, business development, language skills, media training and child-care workers. Training for Irish-medium pre-school educator at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level is made available by *Altram* (see section on pre-school education for further information on *Altram*). In 2010, *Forbairt Feirste* established *Gaelchúrsaí* (“*Irish Courses*”), a training academy for those hoping to develop skills for working through the medium of Irish offering courses such as Beauty Therapy, Nutrition, Food Safety and Hygiene, Management and Leadership, Health and Safety, Horticulture. There are currently discussions about establishing an *Acadamh na Gaeilge*, an Irish language academy. This proposal is being developed by the Department for Communities.

As of December 2017, a business case is being developed for this Academy but progress is most likely being hampered by the Northern Ireland Assembly being currently in abeyance. *Gaelchúrsaí* funding is limited and currently provided from year to year.

**legislation** Learning for Life and Work is a statutory part of the revised curriculum being phased in from 2007 to mid-2010. The aim is to ensure that all young people develop the personal qualities, skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes that will give them a strong foundation for life and work. The curriculum consists of statutory minimum content which is supplemented by additional non-statutory guidance. The Careers Service operates a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with schools. CCEA provides advice to the Minister of Education and has a regulatory role in relation to standards in General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ).

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**language use** *Forbairt Feirste* and *Altram* provide their courses through the medium of Irish and English.

**teaching material** Teaching material is developed by *Forbairt Feirste* and *Altram* with limited governmental funding

**statistics** *Forbairt Feirste (Gaelchúrsaí)* has provided the following figures which show a steady increase in enrolment on their vocational courses in Belfast: 2011: 20 students, 2012: 43 students, 2013: 55 students, 2014: 96 students, 2015: 114 students, 2016: 160 students, 2017: 237 students, 2018: 319 students.

*Fobairt Feirste (Gaelchúrsaí)* have plans to set up a centre in Belfast to cater for Irish Medium Vocational Training.

## 6 Higher education

**structure** There are three universities and two university colleges in Northern Ireland, namely The Queen’s University Belfast, Ulster University, the Open University, St Mary’s University College and Stranmillis University College. Further state-funded education courses are provided through the Entitlement Framework for 16 year old school-leavers and those over 16 years of age. The range of courses provided by colleges span essential skills, and a wide range of vocational and academic programmes at levels 2 and 3 and Higher Education programmes.

**legislation** On 1 April 1998, through the Education Act, the further education colleges became free-standing incorporated bodies. Management responsibility now lies with each individual college’s Governing Body. The Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) acts as the representation body for the Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education’s Education and Training Inspectorate provide s for inspections of further education colleges in relation to the quality of teaching and learning.

**language use** The language of instruction for is normally English except when the course is an Irish language course.

Queen’s University Belfast and University of Ulster, at Magee Campus and other centres, offer various pathways to graduating with the Irish language and Irish Studies as minor or major area of study at undergraduate and post-graduate level. Some controversy was incurred in 2015 when the University of Ulster decided to discontinue the popular full-time Irish language undergraduate degree at their Belfast Campus. A new University of Ulster Belfast campus is expected to open in September 2018. This course is to continue at the Magee campus in Derry City. It is reported that some potential undergraduates would prefer to study in Belfast city as it is deemed to be more cosmopolitan than Derry City. The university of Ulster offers their popular part-time Diploma in Irish in various centre throughout Northern

Ireland where demand exists. In the past this diploma has been offered in Armagh, Newry and Cookstown centres.

**teacher training** Teaching qualifications for both primary and secondary level can be gained through the degrees of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), provided by St Mary's and Stranmillis university colleges, or through a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) provided by Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. Graduates of these courses can, and do, teach in Irish-medium primary and secondary schools, even though they have not received specific training for teaching in an immersion situation. As well as providing a B.Ed. qualification for mainstream students, St. Mary's University College, provides the only dedicated training for the Irish-medium sector. It offers two options. Postgraduate students intending to teach in Irish-medium primary schools may take a one-year full-time course, taught substantially through the medium of Irish, to gain a Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). Alternatively, under- graduates may take a four year full-time Bachelor of Education course. Taught bilingually, this course equips students to teach in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools. They obtain a B.Ed. Honours Degree with a teaching certificate in bilingual education.

**pre-school training**

Pre-school training is provided by *Altram*, as mentioned before.

**primary training**

Teaching qualifications for both primary and secondary level can be gained through the degrees of B.Ed. Postgraduate students intending to teach in Irish-medium primary schools may take a one-year full-time course, taught substantially through the medium of Irish, to gain a PGCE. Alternatively undergraduates may take a four year fulltime Bachelor of Education course.

**secondary training**

Teaching qualifications for both primary and secondary level can be gained through the degrees of B.Ed.

**in-service training**

CEA has provided in-service training on curricular changes for teachers in post-primary schools as deemed necessary. They also have provided support for teachers in English-medium schools who wish to include Irish language. *Gael Linn* recently organised an introductory training event to help teachers in English-medium schools incorporate the Irish language into their teaching. This was offered in conjunction with St. Mary's University College, CEA and *Foras na Gaeilge*. The event was attended by 24 primary-school teachers.

**statistics**

At present, there are 16 colleges. These vary in size with Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education being the largest.

Enrolment numbers in higher education in Northern Ireland are illustrated in the table below. These figures do not include students from Northern Ireland who are enrolled on courses in Great Britain or in the Republic of Ireland or on the Open University; a breakdown of figures for the different courses is not available.

*Table 9: number of students at higher education institutions in Northern Ireland in the school year 2015/2016. (Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland)*

<b>enrolment at Higher Education in Northern Ireland 2015/2016</b>	
full-time undergraduate	28,810
part-time undergraduate	2,610
full-time postgraduate	2,960
part-time postgraduate	3,970
<b>total</b>	<b>38,350</b>



## 7 Adult education

### structure and I language courses

In the past, most adult Irish-language education was provided informally by the voluntary sector, but from about the mid-1990s, the statutory sector began to expand its activity in this area. Accurate statistics are not available, but a list of classes in Belfast, compiled by Liz Curtis for 1996-7, shows that over 60 classes were delivered in 37 venues in Belfast city each week. The *Líofa* website lists the following number of venues in each county in Northern Ireland and each venue may have multiple classes catering for beginners, improvers and advanced learners; Antrim - 16 venues, Armagh - 7 venues, Derry - 3 venues, Down - 12 venues, Fermanagh - 3 venues, Tyrone - 11 venues.

*Líofa* was set up by the Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín in 2011. The word *Líofa* means 'fluent' and this is precisely what the *Líofa* campaign strives to achieve – a greater number of fluent Irish speakers. *Líofa* encourages people to make a personal pledge to improve their level of Irish and, in doing so, join a community of people focused on using and learning Irish. By November 2017 20,057 had signed up to the *Líofa* pledge.

The main statutory bodies running courses are the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, Queen 's University, and the University of Ulster, while voluntary organisations include *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League), *Cumann Chluain Ard* (an Irish-only social club in Belfast) and *Glór na nGael* (an organisation which runs an annual competition to assess the most advanced community in terms of language use and cultural development).

The Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education offers GCSE and A-Level Programmes as well as beginner level courses. The "Graded Levels Language Progression Route Programme", with a specified curriculum and validated examination, takes a beginner through four levels and then on to the GCE, to the GCE-AS and finally to the GCE-A-level if the learner so wishes.

Queen's University Belfast offers a BA in Irish and Celtic Studies. The Institute of Lifelong Learning at the university offers Irish language courses as part of its Extra-Mural Programme. The University of Ulster offers a Diploma in Irish Language and a BA Hons Modern Irish degree.

*Gaeloiliúint* is involved in the development of Irish-medium tertiary education. It ultimately proposes to deliver, in partnership with other institutions, new Gaelic-medium academic and vocational courses. The proposed courses include a PGCE; a diploma in Irish; an intensive Irish language course; an advanced grammar and language proficiency course and a number of intensive Irish language summer courses.

Courses for adults are run by several organisations in the Donegal *Gaeltacht* in the Republic of Ireland during Easter and summer school holidays. Courses cater for a range of levels, from total beginners to advanced. The following organisations run courses: *An Chrannóg*, *Comhaltas Uladh*, *Dáil Uladh*, *Gael-Linn*, *Oideas Gael* and *Ulster Council of the GAA (Cúrsa de Faoite, Ros Gill)*. A weeklong summer school, *Scoil Mhic Reachtain*, is run in North Belfast.

There are four self-teaching courses available in the Ulster dialect of Irish. *Now You're Talking*, published by Gill & Macmillian Ltd (1995), is a multimedia Irish-language package for beginners, which includes a 250-page book, five 90-minute audiocassettes, and a weekly television programme which was broadcast on BBC Northern Ireland. *Tús Maith*, by Risteard Mac Gabhann includes a coursebook and CDs and is aimed at adults. Art Hughes, *Cló Bheann Mhadagáin* (Benmadigan Publishing), has produced a further two books: *Trialacha Tuigbheála* (comprehension tests ) for intermediate and advanced learners and *Bunchomhrá Gaeilge* (conversational Irish) which is aimed at beginners. BBC Northern Ireland also published *An Béal Beo*, but it is now out of print. *Turas Teanga*, produced by RTÉ – the national television channel in the Republic of Ireland – is also available. It is a multimedia language course comprising 20 television programmes, a radio series, book, audio CDs, DVDs and website. This course reflects all dialects of Irish.

A two-part guide for teachers of adult night classes is also

available. *Abair Leat!* includes a comprehensive guide for teachers, material for a ten-week course (language games, group work, flash cards, role-play, etc), detailed class plans, and simple explanations of the most central points of grammar. *Abair Leat!* is aimed at teachers of beginners, and is published by the ULTACH Trust and *Údarás na Gaeltachta*.

**language use** A mixture of English and as much Irish as possible is used.

**statistics** Adult classes are currently being offered in over 50 venues across Northern Ireland. Based on surveys carried out by *Líofa* in the DfC, Northern Ireland, it is estimated that there are between 3000 and 3500 adults taking Irish language night classes in Northern Ireland.



## 8 Educational research

As Irish-medium education was, for many years, outside the formal education system, very little pedagogic or linguistic research has been carried out relating to course planning, teaching materials, or the sociolinguistic issues relevant to the Irish language in Northern Ireland. However, since 2000, the DENI has commissioned a number of research projects, three of which are described below.

Immersion Education: A literature review, September 2000. This review focused on how children from an English-speaking background in a predominantly English-speaking country, who are immersed in another language, perform at school relative to other children educated in English. Attainment at both primary and secondary levels is evaluated

Developing Linguistic Accuracy in Irish-Medium Primary Schools, October 2002. The project sought to contribute to good practice in the development of competence in Irish in Irish-medium schools. It identifies norms in relation to grammatical accuracy in speech and writing; identifies recurring errors, and determines which of these persist in the later primary years; and devises and evaluates strategies for improving linguistic accuracy where appropriate.

Outcomes for pupils who receive Irish medium education in Northern Ireland, April 2002. This research analysed the qualifications gained by pupils who have experienced Irish-medium secondary education, their destinations on leaving school, and their career choices. It collected attitudinal information from those who have had an Irish-medium education on the advantages and constraints which they feel have resulted. The research also considered the reasons why pupils who attend an Irish-medium primary school or unit do not opt for Irish-medium secondary education.

Other research papers mentioned elsewhere in this dossier are included in the list of references, websites, publications and further reading at the end.

## 9 Prospects

The Irish-medium sector is now on a much firmer footing as a result of the various measures taken under the Belfast Agreement. It is expected to continue to grow and the priority is to adopt a strategic approach to its growth and development. CnaG has been charged with co-ordinating the efforts of all involved, and is proposing an approach which includes careful advance planning when founding new schools, to ensure that there will be sufficient primary pupils in one area to supply a secondary school, and that new schools meet the criteria for government recognition from day one, and consequently are properly resourced from the outset. It aims to provide continuity of education from pre-school to secondary school.

The number of Irish-medium units in English-medium primary schools continues to increase, particularly outside the large urban population centres. It is likely that units will continue to develop only within the Catholic maintained sector, and it is desirable that the CCMS develop a policy to facilitate their development. Resources and instructional material in this area are at present underfunded and units continue to face problems associated with creating a suitable linguistic environment for children during play time when they become the minority in a majority English-speaking situation.

A number of English-medium secondary schools now offer Irish as a subject, and some non-Catholic secondary schools are making plans to have the language taught. A further increase in those taking examinations in Irish may be expected, although this may also reflect an increase in adult learners of the language.

Vocational training related to the Irish language is a recent phenomenon. An increase in the number and range of courses available will depend on the level of demand. *Forbairt Feirste* continues to develop the range of courses they offer to school leavers from Irish-medium schools in Belfast.

With respect to higher education, St Mary's University College provides two courses for teaching in Irish-medium schools, but

places are very limited. They have also been in danger of losing these courses but are still currently underway.

Over the next ten years, CnaG, in cooperation with other agencies, intends to develop a comprehensive network of high-quality educational provision throughout Northern Ireland. It will concentrate on the provision of Irish-medium education in targeted areas at three levels: pre-school, primary and secondary. It expects to develop up to 65 new schools over that period. The question of resources in terms of funding for pre-school, primary and secondary education remains an issue, as does the provision of adequate teaching resources for the sector. However, one of the profound challenges faces the sector at the moment is a shortage of teachers. CnaG has presented a range of measures which will address this shortage to the DE.

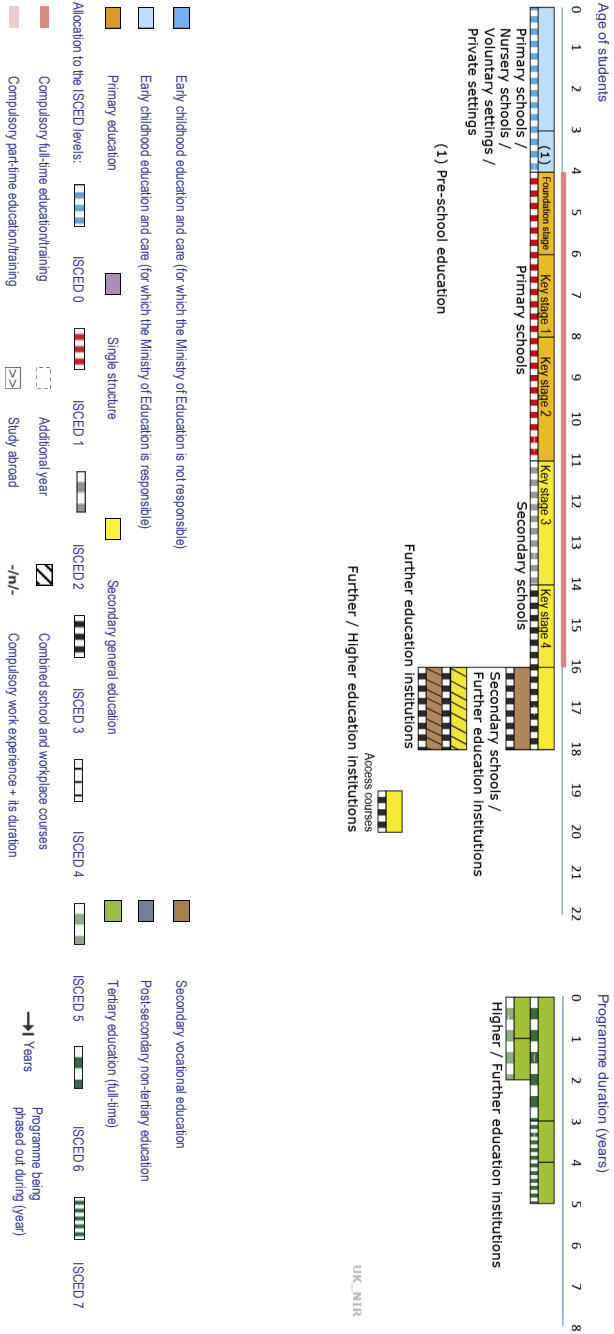
## 10 Summary statistics

Table 10 Number of schools and enrolment in Northern Ireland divided over Irish and English medium education.

type of education	number		enrolment	
	Irish	English	Irish	English
pre-schools	43	899	900	15,594
primary schools and units	35	917	3,905	171,612
secondary schools and units	5	235	1,049	140,413
further education		17		153,817
university Colleges (teacher training)		2		580
universities		2		38,350

Figures: pre-school, primary & post-primary, teacher training for 2016-17; further education, university colleges & universities for 2015-16 9. (Source: DENI and DEL for English-medium figures; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for Irish-medium figures.)

### Education system of Northern Ireland in the UK



Source: Eurydice (2018 / 2019)

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<http://www.gael-linn.ie/>

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Pobal  
<http://www.pobal.org/english/>

Ultach Trust  
<http://www.ultach.org/>



regulations

<b>Structure of the Education System in Northern Ireland</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
	<b>Higher Education</b>
<b>from 18 yrs</b>	This sector includes universities and university colleges where a primary degree is obtained usually after three years. Further study may lead to a Master's Degree (usually one/two years) or a Doctoral Degree (a minimum of three years).
	<b>Vocational and Further Education</b>
<b>from 16 yrs</b>	This sector includes Colleges and Institutes of Higher and Further Education, and Lifelong Learning, focusing largely on vocational qualifications below degree level
	<b>Secondary Education</b>
<b>11–16 (18) yrs</b>	<p>This sector includes a wide range of categories: State, Catholic, Grammar, Irish-medium, Integrated and Independent (private or non-funded) secondary schools.</p> <p>Secondary education is divided into two Key Stages: Key Stage 3 for pupils aged 11 to 14 years; : Key Stage 3 for pupils aged 14 to 16 years.</p> <p>Most secondary school cater for pupils beyond the compulsory school age of 16. Children may attend until the age of eighteen</p>
	<b>Primary Education</b>
<b>5–11 yrs</b>	<p>This sector includes a wide range of categories: State, Catholic, Irish- medium, Integrated and Independent (private or non-funded) primary schools.</p> <p>Primary education is divided into two Key Stages: : Key Stage 1 for pupils aged four to eight years; : Key Stage 2 for pupils aged eight to 11 years.</p>
	<b>Pre-school Education</b>
<b>3–5 yrs</b>	<b>Nursery School and Nursery Classes within primary schools.</b>
<b>2–5 yrs</b>	<b>Pre-school provision in Day nurseries, Nursery Centres, Pre-school Groups or Playgroups</b> <i>(the above may or may not be associated with a particular school and include most Irish-medium pre-school provision)</i>

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## Other websites on minority languages

**Mercator** [www.mercator-research.eu](http://www.mercator-research.eu)

**Research Centre** 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** [www.mercator-network.eu](http://www.mercator-network.eu)

**Network** 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** <http://ec.europa.eu/languages>

**Commission** The website of the European Commission gives information about the EU's support for language diversity.

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**Council of** <http://conventions.coe.int>

**Europe** *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.

**European Parliament Committee – supporting analyses database**

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/supporting-analyses-search.html>.

In this database you will find research papers produced by the European Parliament's research service. A study for the CULT Committee, conducted by Mercator, is published in 2017: *Minority Languages and Education: Best Practices and Pitfalls*.



**NPLD**

**<http://www.npld.eu/>**

The Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is a European wide network working in the field of language policy & planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages (CRSS) across Europe.

**FUEN**

**<https://www.fuen.org/>**

The Federal Union of European Nationalities is the umbrella organisation of the autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic groups in Europe and represents the interests of European minorities on regional, national and European level.

**ELEN**

**<https://elen.ngo/>**

The European Language Equality Network (ELEN) is a non-governmental organisation that has as its goal to promote and protect European lesser-used languages, (RMLs), to work towards linguistic equality for these languages, and multilingualism, under the broader framework of human rights, and to be a voice for the speakers of these languages at all levels

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The research activities of the Mercator Research Centre focus on various aspects of bilingual and trilingual education such as language proficiency in different languages, interaction in the multilingual classroom, and teachers' qualifications for working in a multilingual classroom. Latest developments look at how educational models for minority languages can also cater for

immigrant pupils. Whenever possible, research is carried out in a comparative perspective. Results are disseminated through publications, conferences and publications in collaboration with Mercator's partners.

**conferences**

The Mercator Research Centre organises conferences and seminars on a regular basis. The main target groups are professionals, researchers and policymakers from all member states of the Council of Europe and beyond. Themes for the conferences are: assessment & best practice, educational models, development of minimum standards, teacher training and the application of the Common European Framework of Reference.

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**Udmurt; The Udmurt language in education in the Udmurt Republic in Russia**  
**Ukrainian and Ruthenian; the Ukrainian and Ruthenian language in education in Poland**  
**Võro; the Võro language in education in Estonia (2nd ed.)**  
**Welsh; the Welsh language in education in the UK**

# THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND



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