Irish and Other Languages in Northern Ireland's Education System

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- May 2020 -

Le tacaíocht ó
Foras na Gaeilge

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Irish in Northern Ireland

According to the 2011 Census for Northern Ireland, 10.65% of the population, about 185,000 people, had "some ability in Irish" (CSO/NISRA, 2014). Of these, some 65,000 could "speak, read, write and understand Irish". This figure mostly comprises learners or New Speakers (Walsh), with small revivalist Irish-speaking communities and people originating from the Republic of Ireland, including Gaeltacht areas.

Since Irish has a statutory status as the first official language in the Republic and the language is embedded in the educational, social, political and indeed economic sectors there, learners in the North of Ireland can avail of opportunities such as the summer colleges in the Gaeltacht and access Irish television and radio, as well the Irish language output from BBC Northern Ireland's Irish language service, etc. In addition, Irish has been an official working language of the European Union since 1st January 2007 and the 1st of January 2022 will see an end to the current derogation that restricts the translation of European Union (EU) documentation into Irish (Eur-Lex). This enhanced status in the EU (European Union, 2016) raises the profile of the language and provides employment opportunities. Even if United Kingdom applicants might no longer be eligible for European jobs as a consequence of Brexit, many Northern Irish people hold Irish passports, thus finding themselves in a position to avail of any opportunities arising from the end of derogation.

In Northern Ireland, with its history of division, the Irish language is a particularly sensitive and contentious issue. In very broad terms, while the language is generally supported and valued by the Nationalist ("Irish Catholic") community there is in contrast an enduring suspicion and antipathy surrounding the language among much of the wider Unionist ("British Protestant") community. The Northern Ireland state historically and the Unionist community in general have been negatively disposed to the language, to the extent that the language was dubbed the "green litmus test" of community relations (Cultural Traditions Group, 1994, p. 6). The antipathy to the language is well attested (McKendry, 2001; De Brún, 2010). Opposition to Irish-medium schools and any Irish Language Act are policy and manifesto commitments of Unionist parties and the debate around an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland, promised under the St. Andrews Agreement in October 2006, was one of the main obstacles to restoring a devolved government in Northern Ireland. Arlene Foster, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and first

minister of Northern Ireland, said that Irish road signs, for example, could not be forced “on the majority of Northern Ireland, who frankly do not want to see them and do not want to engage with the Irish language” (Independent Television, 13 February 2018). When devolved government was eventually restored in Northern Ireland after a hiatus of three years, the provisions made under the New Decade New Approach deal fell well short of an Irish Language Act, but were still sufficient to raise “widespread anger in the unionist community” (Ballymena Guardian, 30 January 2020).

Education in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland developed a “step by step” approach with respect to policies and educational changes introduced by central government for England and Wales (Scotland has its own, particular educational, legal systems, etc.). For example, the *Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order* (HMSO, 1989) followed on from the *Education Reform Act* (1988) in England. Nevertheless, its education system has a number of features that distinguish it from Great Britain (McEwen & Salters, 1995, p. 133). One such feature is selection at age 11 according to academic ability which was introduced through the Education Acts of the 1940s and mostly abandoned in Britain in the 1960s in favour of a comprehensive school system but was retained in Northern Ireland. The Transfer Test, popularly called the “Eleven Plus”, divides the pupils between those who are accepted by the selective Grammar Schools and the majority who enrol in the non-selective Secondary schools, formerly called Intermediate schools, and a few Comprehensive schools, as well as the Integrated schools and the small post-primary Irish-medium sector. Academic selection in Northern Ireland was officially abandoned in 2008. However, many schools, parents, and political parties objected to this decision and as a consequence many post-primary grammar schools introduced an entrance examination, independent of the Department of Education (The Transfer Test, 2017). The non-selective Secondary schools are mixed ability and a fairly high percentage of their pupils achieve good results in the state examinations, allowing progress to further and higher education courses. But they cater on the whole for pupils with lesser academic ability and for those from a lower income bracket. This is seen in the Free School Meals statistics (Shuttleworth, 1995) and in the school year 2016/17, 40.6% of pupils in nonselective

schools received free school meals, in comparison with 14.3% in the grammar schools (DENI, 2017c). As well as academic competence, however, parental aspirations and large-scale coaching play their role in pupils' success in the transfer test at age 11. Bernstein's educability theory (1970) and Bourdieu's theory (1984) on social capital are still relevant with regards to success in the transfer process.

Another distinguishing feature is the religious divide in education. Most schools in Northern Ireland are either "Controlled" or "Maintained". Controlled schools operate under state management with Protestant churches represented on the boards of governors and the great majority of their pupils are Protestant, although the lack of places in Catholic schools has resulted in many Controlled grammar schools having a significant percentage of Catholic pupils. Practically every Maintained school is under Catholic Church management and the great majority of their pupils are Catholic. In addition, the Integrated sector was set up in the 1970s with the aim of developing more harmonious intercommunity relations through educating Catholic and Protestant pupils in the same school. The *Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order* (HMSO, 1989) places an obligation upon the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate integrated education. The first purpose-built integrated school, Lagan College, was established in 1981. The post-primary integrated sector was originally nonselective although some schools now have a grammar stream and the sector attracts many pupils who do not succeed in gaining a place in a grammar school, but whose parents do not want them to attend a Secondary school. In the school year 2019/20, there are nearly 24,300 pupils enrolled in integrated schools, 7% of the total school population (349,536) – over 11,000 in primary schools and nearly 13,000 in post-primary schools. The number enrolled has increased by over 600 pupils compared to 2018/19, and by over 2,300 pupils compared to 2014/15. This growth is mainly seen in primary schools and could be explained by the fact that three primary schools transformed to integrated status in the previous two years. (DENI, 2020, Table 2c). It is not uncommon for small schools threatened with closure due to falling enrolment to transform to integrated status in order to remain open (Irish Times, 2020).

Finally, there is the Irish-medium sector which emerged in the 1970s. In the school year 2019/20 some 6,816 pupils participate in funded Irish-medium education, with nearly 5,500 pupils enrolled in dedicated Irish-medium schools and

pre-school settings and more than 1,400 pupils educated in Irish-medium units attached to English-medium schools (DENI, 2020, Table 2b). The total number of pupils in funded Irish-medium education has steadily risen over time, increasing by over 1,500 pupils since 2014/15 and by near 300 pupils since 2018/19. Most of this increase is coming from greater enrolments in Irish-medium schools rather than units.

A policy of Shared Education is also being developed to build cooperation at a local level between neighbouring schools and to "provide opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to learn together" (DENI, 2015, p. 1).

Languages in the education system

The issue of the Irish language itself can also be considered a distinguishing feature. As an indigenous minority language, it has no equivalent in England, although some comparison might be made with the so-called community languages in Britain, Urdu, Chinese, and more recently Polish, etc, a population which has recently become a factor here in Northern Ireland as well. More relevantly, however, one can compare Irish with the indigenous languages Welsh and Gàidhlig in Wales and Scotland respectively. McKendry (2017) provides a comparative discussion of the Celtic languages in education in the United Kingdom's devolved jurisdictions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Irish is included in the Modern Languages area in Northern Ireland's education system. It is a matter of some surprise to many people that before the Education Reform Act introducing the National Curriculum (England and Wales) and the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order (ERNIO) introducing the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) in the late 1980s, the only compulsory subject in schools was Religious Education. Of course, society's expectations and the examination system elicited the subjects we are used to and every post-primary school offered English, Mathematics, Science, and a range of other subjects. But up to the 1960s in the United Kingdom (UK), "the learning of languages had been the preserve of the Grammar Schools" (Moys, 1966). Following the emergence of the policy favouring comprehensive schools in Britain in the 1960s, a 'Languages for All' policy was developed in order to encourage languages across the ability range. Despite this,

most pupils in non-selective schools abandoned language learning. In Britain and Northern Ireland:

> … for many pupils the experience of language learning did not incline them to continue once the subject became optional, and around 70% of all pupils abandoned the learning of a foreign language by the age of fourteen.
>
> (Moys, 1996, p. 84)

So, prior to the Education Reform Act and ERNIO "opportunities for learning languages in British schools compared unfavourably with provision in other EC countries" (Whitehead, 1990, p. 1).

Before the Northern Ireland Curriculum was established in 1989 "only a minority of pupils at Northern Ireland secondary schools studied a foreign language… and they dropped it long before the certificate examinations" (Pritchard, 1991, p. 2). In Northern Ireland, the Grammar School/Secondary School distinction was retained and there were few comprehensive schools with the result that it was mostly the minority of pupils educated in grammar schools who studied a second language before Education Reform in the late 1980s. French was the most commonly taught language. Irish was the most widely taught language after French in non-selective schools, if only in the Catholic schools, and it was provided in every Catholic grammar school. Not one state school offers Irish as an examination subject and it is disappointing to note that the integrated school movement which aims to attract both Catholic and Protestant pupils also ignores it, with a few honourable exceptions. The role of Irish in the Integrated school was considered by Spencer:

> The integrated school certainly aims to transmit the vast secular and religious culture which is held in common by the two major communities and to stress that they do hold it in common. But it has two further aims. It seeks to nurture within each pupil what is specific to the tradition of his own community. And it aims to show each pupil something of the specific tradition of the other community, so that, cognitively, he/she at least knows, understands and at best respects and appreciates it. Thus, the integrated school must offer the Irish language, Gaelic games, Irish dancing and music as options for all pupils.
>
> (Spencer, 1987, p. 108)

These aims for Integrated education are only partially achieved as regards Irish. The language is therefore largely restricted to the maintained Catholic and Irish-medium schools. It would be naïve, however, to believe that the Catholic school system has a policy of promoting Irish. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) supports the management of Catholic maintained schools but in a telephone conversation with the organization some years ago the author was told that CCMS did not concern itself with curriculum content issues. As he also wrote regarding the initial NIC (McKendry 2007a: 399), one could argue a scenario where the language was surviving rather than flourishing in a context where education was recognised by the Catholic minority community of Northern Ireland as the primary vehicle of upward mobility. According to O'Connor:

> The Catholic school system was only ever a channel for Irish culture where teachers had a personal interest in Irish language, music and history and who were encouraged, or at least not hindered, by their clerical management.
>
> (O'Connor, 1993, p. 318)

> In more affluent areas many (parents and teachers) further suggest that when there is any clash between arts and science timetabling, Catholic schools tend to drop Irish first. Several people told me that they found outright hostility among other parents to the teaching of the Irish language in school. It seemed clear to them that the schools were making no counter-effort.
>
> (O'Connor, 1993, p. 319)

Although many post-primary pupils in the North started out to learn a second language in the 1980s, a Northern Ireland Inspectorate report in 1990 revealed a drop-off in language learning. The drop-off was notable in the non-Grammar schools. The report revealed that only a quarter of schools offered a language to every pupil by the time they arrived in Year 3 (DENI, 1990, §4.45*).*

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order (HMSO, 1989) laid the ground for the gradual introduction of a common Northern Ireland Curriculum, following the National Curriculum in England and Wales the previous year (1988). From 1992 a modern language became mandatory for Northern Ireland's pupils at Key Stages 3 (age 11-14) and 4 (age 14-16). While in Britain the subject area was Modern Foreign Languages, in Northern Ireland it was Modern Languages,

recognising the presence of Irish. Pupils were not obliged to sit the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination at age 16, but according to the consultation paper *Proposals for Reform* (DENI, 1988a), a foreign language, chosen from French, German or Spanish (Italian was later added to the list), was to be studied at Key Stages 3 and 4, after which choice Irish could be allowed for study as well. This would have led to the marginalization and eventual disappearance of Irish from the school system, particularly in the non-selective secondary schools where staff and financial pressures and the academic level of many of their pupils would have made the study of two new languages impractical. The rationale behind education reform under Margaret Thatcher was utilitarian and the consultation paper *The Way Forward* (1988) illustrates the utilitarian rationale behind the decision on languages in Northern Ireland:

> ...Northern Ireland pupils, no less than their peers in the rest of the United Kingdom, should be able to compete as equals with their European counterparts in an increasingly international job market.
>
> (DENI, 1988b, §2.14)

Following a determined campaign by Irish language interests, the government was eventually persuaded to move, grudgingly, on the position of Irish, and the then Minister of Education, Dr Mawhinney (1989), announced that the legislation would:

> …require all secondary schools to provide one or more of French, German, Spanish or Italian, so that all pupils will have the opportunity available to them in their own school to acquire competence in one of these major European Community working languages. A school may, if it wishes, offer Irish in addition to these. Where a school offers Irish, pupils…will be free to choose from among the languages offered – whether French, German, Spanish, Italian or Irish – in order to satisfy the requirements of the common curriculum.

While this improved upon the original proposals, it was clearly a lowering of status for Irish, granted reluctantly by Dr. Mawhinney:

> Parents who choose to have their children take Irish instead of one of [the European mainland languages], at a time when the importance of the European dimension is growing, should think carefully about the future consequences of such a decision.

(Mawhinney 1989)

Not surprisingly, this uncertainty had a negative effect upon the position of Irish in schools. Despite the compromise, many secondary schools were forced to stop offering Irish as they could not maintain two languages and there was competition between the different modern languages in the schools that retained it. This gave rise to a range of language provision models in Northern Ireland's post-primary schools as a result of the requirement to offer a language from the age of 11 to 16:

- Sole modern language: Only one modern language is offered to pupils in Year 8 (the first year post-primary).
- Split provision: Two or more languages are offered in Year 8. All pupils learn one language, for instance 50% take French and 50% take Spanish.
- Modular provision: Pupils are given experience of several languages in Year 8 before having to choose one to continue with at Key Stage 3.
- Dual provision: All pupils in Year 8 learn two modern languages.

(Neil et al., 2006)

Examples of each model are still to be found in Northern Ireland's schools. The greatest difference found by Neil et al. between provision in Northern Ireland and Britain was the popularity of the Dual Provision model under which schools offer two languages for all pupils, usually French and Irish. Over 30% of schools in Northern Ireland followed this dual model, compared to 10% in GB. While on the positive side the Dual Provision model allowed exposure to more than one new language, on the negative side they have less exposure to each language. Confusion can arise and it can be a burden for less able pupils. It is notable that all instances of Dual Provision in the Neil et al. study were curricular mechanisms to accommodate Irish as schools were not allowed to offer Irish alone under the requirements of the NIC. Moreover, there are circumstances where Dual Provision acts to the disadvantage of Irish. For example, if streaming applies in a school or if individual pupils were withdrawn for core curriculum support (usually literacy or numeracy), the withdrawal was most often out of the Irish class, as it had a lower curriculum status.

'Diversification' was another languages policy priority around the same time as the introduction of the Northern Ireland and National curricula. The term

‘diversification’ was widely used in the United Kingdom to refer to the offering of alternatives to French as the first modern language in post-primary schools (Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, p. 1). Ironically, a Department of Education Northern Ireland report in 1994 suggested that the introduction of the NIC had perhaps militated against increased diversification as:

> ...at the time of the introduction of the NIC, the fact that so many schools equated language studies with French has inhibited diversification and has contributed to the unhealthy dominance of French over other languages.
>
> (DENI, 1994, §4.5)

> There is evidence, indeed, that French may not be the best choice for some pupils; its continued dominance is not consistent with the language needs of Northern Ireland.
>
> (ibid.)

Interestingly, this begs the question: what are the language needs of Northern Ireland? It is important to recall today that under Thatcherite reform languages were introduced for the sake of the economy, not for cultural or personal interest reasons. This calls into question the current pattern that emerged where German, the language of the most powerful economy in Europe, has disappeared from many schools in Britain and Northern Ireland:

> The Government and School Leadership Teams are not stating clearly enough how important languages are for the future. German, for instance, is the most required language in recruitment for London and internationally in Europe, yet we don’t see parents or pupils being aware of this.
>
> (Independent school respondent. Tinsley, 2018, p. 15)

Furthermore, the surprising use of the word “unhealthy” suggests a competitive view of language choice. Is the current dominance of Spanish in Northern Ireland’s schools ‘unhealthy’? This perspective, rather than a positive multilingualism, has coloured the approach to modern languages in much of the discourse in Northern Ireland. What commonly emerged is not Diversification, but an internecine contest between languages in the curriculum and staffroom – ‘Cogadh na gCarad’ (‘A War of Friends’), ‘Civil War’, rather than multilingual diversification.

The National and Northern Irish Curricula were strictly prescribed. Programmes of Study were devised for each subject. Following the 'Languages for All' approach, the Modern Languages specifications prescribed a common Functional Notional syllabus for all the languages (NICC, 1991; 1992). This Programme of Study was based upon a topic-focused version of Communicative Language Teaching which paid little attention to linguistic form or regard for linguistic particularities. So, for example, beginners in Irish often had to struggle in the first units of learning with questions such as "Cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?" or "Cá mhéad deartháir(-eacha) agus deirfiúr(-acha) atá agat?", using complicated and quite difficult structures for topics which may be straight forward enough in other languages, but which should not be the starting point for Irish. It should be noted that, to a lesser extent, a similar concern could be voiced for other languages where, for example, reflexive verb constructions are required for basic introductions ("Comment vous appellez-vous/ tu t'appelles?"; "¿Como se llama usted?").

Curriculum Review

Between 1996 and 2000, The Curriculum Council for Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) undertook a programme of monitoring and research soon after the introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It was designed to discover the views of Key Stage 3 pupils (age 11-14) and their teachers on the curriculum. In summary, these studies suggested that pupils considered that the curriculum:

- Lacked balance and breadth
- Should be more relevant and enjoyable

The studies suggested that teachers felt that there was:

- Too much emphasis on content
- Too little emphasis on emotional, social, cultural and moral development

(Murphy, 2009)

Languages in general did not come out well. Their perceptions included:

- Modern Languages and the creative arts were consistently seen as the subjects least useful for the future. They were also perceived as the least important for pupils' current needs
- Pupils perceived modern languages to be the most difficult area of the curriculum and its level of difficulty increased year-on-year throughout the Key Stage, especially in grammar schools

(CCEA, 2002a)

The follow-up report on the Key Stage 4 cohort (age 14-16) reported pupils' views that "Languages were thought to be not useful" (CCEA, 2002b), while on continuity and progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, "Irish doesn't, but the rest follow-on" (CCEA, 2002b).

The Revised Curriculum

In addition to the NFER studies (Harland et al., 2002; Harland, 2005), other emerging influences in the early 2000s included studies on thinking skills and neuroscience, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) initiatives, European trends, and advice from the business and employment sector. Taking these perspectives and concerns into consideration, CCEA set about designing the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum. After consultation, proposals for a review of curriculum and assessment at Key Stage 3 were published in 2003 as *Pathways* (CCEA, 2003a). After much debate and amendments, the *Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006* (HMSO, 2006) was published and implementation was eventually phased in from September 2007:

> Detailed programmes of study of the original NIC have been replaced by minimum requirements set within a curriculum and skills framework that moves away from a one-size-fits-all towards greater flexibility to customise learning within an agreed entitlement. The revised Northern Ireland Curriculum focuses more on the learning needs of individuals and the relevance of learning for life, work, society, the economy and environment. It emphasises the development of creativity and the skills to manage information, problem-solve and make decisions and thus to create new knowledge within the knowledge age.

(CCEA, 2007b, §1.1.2)

In the meantime, there had also been a process of curriculum review in Britain which took aboard many of the innovative proposals of *Pathways* but progressed more coherently from the National Curriculum (Appendix 2, QCDA, 2010). In Northern Ireland, the revised curriculum (CCEA, 2007a) aims:

> …to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives as an individual, a contributor to the economy and the environment. This is to be achieved by introducing Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at the top level which at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 comprises Personal Development, Home Economics, Local and Global Citizenship and Employability.
>
> (Murphy, 2009, p. 3)

Traditional Subjects are now arranged into Areas of Learning, one of which is Modern Languages. In contrast to the close specification of the previous 1989 Northern Ireland Curriculum, the revised curriculum is much more open to individual interpretation. The whole curriculum is summarised on one page for each Key Stage, 'The Big Picture' (CCEA 2007a; 2007b, p. ii; 2007c; 2007d) (Appendix 3). *Learning for Life and Work and Cross-Curricular Skills, Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities* are at a higher level than the Areas of Learning such as *Modern Languages*. Each subject strand in the revised curriculum is set out in terms of how it contributes to *Learning for Life and Work* and the objectives in the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum. The statutory curriculum for each subject strand is set out as *Statements of Minimum Requirement* and makes reference to 'Key Elements' of the curriculum such as *Mutual Understanding, Ethical* Awareness and *Education for Sustainable Development.* The Statutory requirements for Modern Languages at Key Stage 3 can be found in *Pathways* (Section 4.2.5, pp. 75-77). *Pathways* states:

> In English-medium schools, Irish is classified as a modern language and will fulfil the statutory requirement in this Learning Area. Where Irish is studied as a modern language the course will follow the statutory requirements set out on the following pages. In Irish-medium schools, pupils must be offered the opportunity to study a modern language other than English or Irish.
>
> (Pathways, p. 75)

The statements of minimum requirement are the compulsory elements of the curriculum in terms of knowledge and understanding, curriculum objectives, key elements and learning outcomes which must be taught. Aside from these statements, teachers can choose the content they feel best suits their teaching context.

Languages in the Education and Examination System after Curriculum Reform

As discussed above, selection at Age 11 is still common practice in Northern Ireland. The pupils who are accepted go to grammar schools which have always had a stronger reputation for supporting languages and these pupils are more likely to have the opportunity to study Irish as a language option. Other pupils go to secondary schools where the language tradition has not been so strong, or to the integrated and Irish-medium sectors which follow a comprehensive school model. Under curriculum review in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Modern Languages lost its compulsory status at Key Stage 4 and languages became optional in Northern Ireland in 2007. Since then there has been an almost calamitous withdrawal from languages in secondary schools at age 14. Indeed, already in Key Stage 3, prior to curriculum review, many schools, particularly in the non-selective sector, used ‘disapplication’ to withdraw pupils from assessment in Modern Languages. Neil and McKendry have suggested that ‘disapplication’ was used beyond its original intent and that “secondary schools are applying for whole classes” to be disapplied (2006, 212). Alarmingly, many grammar schools have also withdrawn from compulsory languages in Key Stage 4, age 14-16.

Despite the initial aspiration of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland and the Northern Ireland Curriculum to embed modern languages into the life and learning experience of pupils, the United Kingdom has not had great success. The 2000 Nuffield Languages Inquiry summarised that as regards linguistic competence, the UK is 'doing badly':

> As each language valiantly fights its own corner, we are losing the greater battle: We talk about communication but don’t always communicate. There is enthusiasm for languages, but it is patchy. Educational provision is

> fragmented, achievement poorly measured, continuity not very evident. In the language of our time, there is a lack of 'joined-up thinking'.
>
> (Nuffield, 2000, p. 5)

It would appear that this can still be said about languages in Northern Ireland and the UK generally, particularly as the compulsory status for languages at Key Stage 4 (14 years old to 16) lasted only about a decade. Not long after Nuffield reported in 2000, following Curriculum Review in England in 2002 and in Northern Ireland since 2007, outside of Wales, United Kingdom pupils including Northern Ireland are now only required to do 3 years of modern language study at Key Stage 3 (age 11-14) in post-primary education – the lowest compulsory language education in Europe. Welsh is compulsory at Key Stage 4 in Wales. The Global Futures strategy and plan (Welsh Government, 2016) aims to build a 'bilingual plus one nation', but a foreign modern language is optional after Key Stage 3. Gaelic is an optional language in Scotland. Another issue of concern is that in a crowded timetable many schools have reduced the time allocated for language teaching in Key Stage 3, particularly if more than one language is offered. Board & Tinsley (2016b: 20) record the concern that pupils are likely to be put off opting for languages at GCSE if they have had only rudimentary experience of language learning in Key Stage 3.

If Nuffield identified a lack of 'joined-up thinking' in 2000, the Curriculum Review process since that date displays policy contradiction. The 1980s and 1990s promoted 'Languages for All' and 'Diversification', but Curriculum Review led to a U-turn. Languages are no longer compulsory at Key Stage 4. The internet in particular and globalisation in general, it seems, have led more people to believe that 'English is Enough' and languages are not universally considered as essential.

There is also the competition among the various language subjects where French, German, Spanish, Irish are joined in competition for a shrinking slice of a crowded timetable. Languages are under pressure with the introduction of new statutory subjects such as Citizenship and Learning for Life and Work. According to the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 (paragraphs 18-22), a post-primary school must offer 24 subjects at Key Stage 4. This was reduced to 21 from September 2017. The STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics) are promoted, to the detriment of Modern Languages (Board & Tinsley 2016, p. 111; 2017a, p. 77).

It would also be naïve to believe that the whole staffroom shares the linguists' concerns about the pressure on languages. The selective/non-selective divide still survives in Northern Ireland. In post-primary school staffrooms there are many teachers, including language teachers, who welcomed the reversion to optional language study at Key Stage 4 since a number of pupils were having difficulty with the subject. GCSE results in languages were often poorer than in other subjects which raised concerns when league tables are taken into account. (Board & Tinsley 2017a, p. 21). It is stressful for many teachers to have to teach unmotivated or lesser-ability students. This may partly be due to the way in which the so-called Communicative Approach to language teaching was implemented. This approach was enshrined in the original NIC modern languages programmes of study (1992) and became boring and burdensome for many pupils across the ability range. The repetition of basic Key Stage 3 topics led Dearing in 2006 to describe the Key Stage 4 Modern Languages content as "stultifying" (2006, p. 4). As we have seen, languages came out badly in the NFER and CCEA longitudinal research, based mostly on pupils' views. Concerns over many of these difficulties are expressed in articles such as by the Teacher Network (2015) in the Guardian newspaper and languages came out badly in the NFER/CCEA studies mentioned above (Harland et al., 2002; Harland, 2005).

Universities have seen numerous departmental closures and a serious decline in Modern Language applicants. As far back as 2003 Watts highlighted the decline in Modern Languages at degree level and commented that the "desertion from the study of MFL at degree level…can be traced backwards through the education system to a general decline in the numbers of students studying languages after GCSE" (2003, p. 2). It is notable that there is no longer the possibility to do a degree in German in Northern Ireland. In 2015, Ulster University announced its intention to close its School of Modern Languages (French, German and Spanish). Irish was retained, albeit at a reduced provision, as it was taught in the School of Arts and Humanities at Ulster, not the School of Modern Languages (Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, 2015). Irish can be studied in combination with other subjects, Law, Music, etc. Ulster University also

offers an Irish Language Diploma in various centres. As well as serving as a possible pathway for entry to a BA degree in Irish, the course can be taken as a free-standing unit in its own right. Queen's University Belfast closed its German Department in 2009 and had earlier dropped Italian and Slavonic Studies. Over the years, Celtic and Irish Studies in Queen's has reduced its academic options (Welsh, Breton are no longer available), although this can also be explained by the ending of the General Degree/Honours distinction and the reduction of the Honours course in QUB from four to three years. The course supports a 3-week summer school in the Donegal Gaeltacht each year and a wide range of joint courses are offered.

Languages in the Examination System

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was introduced in 1988 to replace the Ordinary (O)-Level and the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). The formal state GCSE (age 16), Advanced Subsidiary at age 17 and GCE Advanced Level (age 18) examinations are recognised as reliable barometers to assess achievement, but they are also useful indicators of a subject's health and outcomes in our schools. Once languages were no longer statutory at Key Stage 4, there was a marked drop in language study at secondary and university level throughout the United Kingdom.

The outcomes of the summer GCSE, Advanced Subsidiary and GCE Advanced Level examinations are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) in August each year. These cover entries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland ('The Three Countries'), currently (March 2020) going back to 2004. The Scottish Qualifications Authority provides similar data for Scotland which has its own education system. CCEA primarily provides information on Northern Ireland entrants taking examinations under its specifications. These CCEA figures do not always include entries to other examination boards (Edexcel; AQA; OCR; WJEC) but CCEA does reflect information on all the Irish language entries and for the great majority of Northern Ireland entrants for other modern languages. The CCEA website currently provides results statistics for entries since 2011 to its specifications with further detail on centre classification (Grammar, Non-Grammar, Further Education, Other) which reflects the school sector, and gender. 'Other 'refers to Irish-medium school examination centres. As noted, there are some small differences between the figures and details supplied by CCEA and JCQ. The figures given in the following sections

are sourced from and combine both JCQ and CCEA data and data from earlier years taken from papers written by the author.

Since 2002, the annual Language Trends Survey by the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) in London, and then by Tinsley and Board for the Centre for Better Teaching (CfBT) and the British Council have charted the uptake, or more correctly perhaps, the downturn of language examination entries in England and Wales. A specific survey for Wales was first published in 2015, while Scottish CILT (SCILT) provides similar information for Scotland. A Language Trends Northern Ireland 2019 survey for primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland was produced by Tinsley for the British Council Northern Ireland.

CCEA publishes an annual *Insight* report providing a summary of entry analysis for GCSE, AS and A-Level subjects. Similarities and differences between the entry figures for each year from CCEA and all other Awarding Organisations for all Northern Ireland students are analysed. CCEA also provides results statistics from entries to its specifications with further detail on centre classification (Grammar, Non-Grammar, Further Education, Other), and gender.

GCSE

The percentage of the total cohort sitting a GCSE in a language in England dropped from 76% in 2002 to 40% in 2011 (Board & Tinsley, 2017, p. 16). This increased to 49% in England in 2016 due to the introduction of the English Baccalaureate option introduced in 2010 and first taught in 2012 which included the compulsory study of a language.

The 2019 Language Trends report for England (Tinsley, 2019) shows a 19% reduction in entries for GCSE languages between 2014 and 2018, with French and German each seeing declines of 30% over this period. While Spanish presents a more positive picture, there was nevertheless a 2% decline in Spanish entries over this period. There are particular circumstances as regards Welsh and Gàidhlig in Wales and Scotland respectively, but a similar decrease in foreign modern languages uptake can be seen in both countries (McKendry, 2017). Table 1 shows the overall JCQ figures and percentage changes in entries for England, Wales and Northern Ireland between 2000 and 2019:

[1]***Table 1*** GCSE National Statistics (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

England, Wales and Northern Ireland	**French**	**Spanish**	**German**
2000	341,004	49,973	133,659
2019	130,831	102,242	42,791
Percentage Change	-62%	+105%	-68%

The English Baccalaureate is not available in Northern Ireland, but, as can be seen in Table 2, a trend similar to the rest of the UK can be discerned there, with an overall drop in modern languages uptake despite a marked increase in Spanish. By the time the first cohort to undertake a compulsory modern language after education reform came to sit their GCSEs in 1996, there was a significant increase in modern languages uptake in Northern Ireland since the inception of the GCSE in 1988 (see Table 2). But it was not long before the tide turned as a consequence of the dropping of a compulsory modern language at Key Stage 4 following curriculum review in England in 2002 and in Northern Ireland in 2007 (HMSO, 2006). The total number of modern languages entrants in Britain and Northern Ireland at GCSE and A-Level has been decreasing ever since (Table 2; Table 3).

Table 2 Modern Languages GCSE Entries in Northern Ireland

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
1988	8,747	867	1,518	942
1996	13,838	1,496	2,021	1,561
2002	13,099	1,390	2,638	2,639
2003	12,478	1,244	2,641	3,013

[1] Table data are taken from JCQ, CCEA and archived sources.

2008	9,008	1,204	2,147	3,232
2015	5,533	1,044	1,980	3,734
2016	5,179	1,162	1,901	3,593
2017	4,709	937	1,987	3,877
2018	4,301	1,050	1,991	3,817
2019	4,031	788	1,841	3,359

Table 3 Percentage Changes in Northern Ireland GCSE entrants 1996-2019

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
1996	13,838	1,496	2,021	1,561
2019	4,031	788	1,841	3359
Percentage Change	-71%	-47%	-9%	+115%

The policy of encouraging diversification into languages other than French, to the extent that in 1990s Britain there was an acronym LOTF, *Languages other than French* (Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993, p. 1), led to a decrease in that language and an increase in Spanish in Northern Ireland as in Great Britain. German has also decreased and Italian which once was listed among the curricular languages had sunk to 36 entries in Northern Ireland in 2008 from a high of 207 in 2001 and is now included in the 'Other Modern Languages' category. CCEA's Annual Qualifications Insight for 2018 reports:

> Overall, the number of entries for Languages fell in 2018. However, the overall share of the candidature for Languages has remained steady at 6.6%

> when compared to 2017 (6.7%). French is becoming less popular along with Spanish, while German and Irish have increased in popularity.
>
> (CCEA, 2018, p. 1)

This apparently positive result where German and Irish *'have increased in popularity'* is less rosy when considered over a longer period. So, for example, the 2015 CCEA Insight reports that *'Overall, entries for languages fell in 2015, with the exception of Spanish, which rose by 7%'*. Longer term trends paint a picture of decline for French (-71%) and German (-47%) and, to a lesser extent, Irish (-9%). However, even the figures for Spanish can also waver with a 12% decrease from 3817 GCSE entrants in 2018 to 3359 in 2019 (Table 2; Table 3).

The high point for Irish at GCSE was in 2003 when JCQ listed 2,882 pupils taking Irish (CCEA records 2,641). JCQ does not differentiate between GCSE Irish and the GCSE Gaeilge (Irish-medium) examination. Irish had the second highest number of GCSE entrants after French in 1988 when GCSE was introduced and then up to the year 2002 when Spanish overtook it (Irish 2,638; Spanish 2,639). The number of Irish GCSE candidates fell below 2,000 for the first time in 2015 when JCQ recorded 1,980 entrants. The CCEA figures for the same year 2015 show 1830 entries for Irish and 150 for Gaeilge. One has to go back to 2010 to find entries for Irish exceeding 2,000, with 2,052 recorded by CCEA, when 133 candidates were also entered for Gaeilge. CCEA gives 1,644 entrants for Irish in 2019, 204 for Gaeilge. But the 1,644 figure includes the younger pupils from Irish-medium schools who take GCSE Irish earlier, usually at the end of Key Stage 3 (age 14), and some Irish-medium primary schools who enter pupils for GCSE in Year 7 (age 11).

GCSE Gaeilge was first introduced in 1995 for the Irish-medium immersion students. Entrants for Gaeilge have more than doubled from 100 in 2007 to 204 in 2019. (CCEA website). CCEA provides a breakdown of entries for Gaeilge and centre classification since 2011 (Table 4). Fifty per cent of the entrants are from Irish-medium ('Other') centres. The other 50% are for students in units attached to English-medium schools and students who have transferred from primary Irish-medium into English-medium post primary schools:

Table 4 Entries and Centre Classification for Gaeilge Entries

GAEILGE	Total	Grammar	Non-Grammar	Further Education	Other
2019	204	50	51	0	103
2018	177	46	37	0	94
2017	150	46	33	0	71
2016	168	66	30	0	72
2015	150	40	27	0	83
2014	137	23	34	0	80
2013	144	27	38	0	79
2012	143	27	29	0	87
2011	121	21	30	0	70

JCQ (Table 5) gives an age breakdown for pupils sitting GCSE in 2019 (2018 figures in brackets) which illustrates the marked age distribution difference between Irish with 8.2% aged under 15 and less than 1% for each of the other languages. This difference can be attributed to younger IME entries for GCSE Irish.

Table 5 Pupils Aged 15 and Under in GCSE 2019

Language	Number	Percentage
French	6 (9)	0.2% (0.2%)
German	4 (7)	0.1% (0.1%)
Irish	345 (398)	8.2% (7.9%)
Spanish	21 (16)	0.5% (0.3%)

Another factor to be considered is that of examination centre, with 33.6% of Irish GCSE entrants in 2019 coming from 'Non-Grammar', 10.6% from 'Other' and 55.8% from Grammar schools (Table 6), a marked contrast with the other languages which is discussed later. This again suggests that a significant number of Irish-medium pupils appear twice in the statistics, both for Irish and, some years after, for Gaeilge.

Table 6 Examination Centre.

GCSE 2019	Total	Non-Grammar	Grammar	Further Education	Other
Irish	1644	552 (33.6%)	917 (55.8%)	0	175 (10.6%)

As there are 175 entries from 'Other', that is Irish-medium centres, it would appear that fewer than 1,500 pupils from the English-medium sector took GCSE 'Irish' in 2019, and many of these would have been pupils who transferred from an Irish-medium primary school to an English-medium post-primary school.

IME also appears to have influenced the figures for grade achievement in examinations in Irish. The number of pupils achieving cumulative A*/A and A*/C in both GCSE Irish and Gaeilge is significantly greater than for the other languages (Table 7). As JCQ does not differentiate between Irish and Gaeilge, it gives a figure of 49.6% at Grade 7/A for Irish while CCEA gives separate figures for Irish and Gaeilge. The CCEA Insight report for 2018 says *"Language performance still continues to be positive, with 88.2% of all candidates achieving at least a C/4 grade".* In 2019, 283 students in Northern Ireland (345 in 2018) sat other modern languages ('all languages except French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh'). Although these included many native speakers of these languages, the A*- C figures were 89.4% in 2018, 92.2% in 2019, lower than for Irish.

Table 7 Grades A* to C in Modern Languages

2019	French	German	Irish	Spanish	Gaeilge
A*	**9.1%**	**12.4%**	**19.2%**	**11.6%**	**14.2%**
(A*/A cumulative)	**35.2%**	**41.4%**	**50.3%**	**40.7%**	**45.1%**
A*/C* cumulative	**68%**	**72.8**	**85.5**	**77.7%**	**83.3%**
A*/C cumulative	**83.8%**	**86.1%**	**94.2%**	**91.7%**	**92.6%**

This A* figure for GCSE Irish (19.2%%) was exceeded only by Further Mathematics (20.7%), Chemistry (21.1%), and Physics (20%). Biology (16.4%) also exceeds the highest foreign curricular language (German 12.4%). These higher figures for

science subjects underline the concern that it is more difficult to achieve top grades in modern languages generally (Tinsley, 2019, p. 16) while the higher Irish success rate can also be ascribed to the presence of the Irish-medium pupils. There is a concern that Irish-medium students are skewing the grade boundaries to the detriment of other candidates. This issue is reflected across the UK with native speakers. A respondent to Tinsley 2019 asks:

> "In some languages (e.g. Italian) the number of native speakers taking the GCSE and A-level exams are skewing the grade boundaries hugely - why is this allowed?"
>
> (Tinsley, 2019, p. 16)

For the sake of comparison with the total number of GCSE students in Northern Ireland that year, 22,102 students sat GCSE English and 24,827 took Mathematics in 2016.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS)

Advanced Subsidiary (AS) awards were introduced soon after education reform. They were intended to broaden the range of subjects a student studied post-16 and were to complement a student's A-level studies. AS-Levels could be taken over one or two years, and in a subject the student was not studying at A-Level so that students choosing 3 science subjects would be encouraged to choose a humanities subject, and vice versa. Each AS-level contained half the content of an A-Level, but at the same level of difficulty.

In 2018, Northern Ireland entries in AS for all subjects declined by 3.9% from 2017. In the combined Three Countries (England, Wales, Northern Ireland), AS entry declined by 52.5%, as a result of the policy decision in England to decouple AS qualifications from reformed A-Level qualifications, meaning that the AS no longer counts towards the final mark of the full A-Level there (UCAS, 2015; CCEA, Insight, 2018). This decoupling has led to a very significant move away from AS courses in both state and independent sectors in England. It has caused languages numbers to fall as non-humanities students had previously often chosen a language as their fourth option at AS. Responses to Tinsley (2018, p. 15) include:

"The move from four AS-levels to three A-Levels has impacted on our French numbers. 2017/18 is the first year for a long time we do not have a Year 12 French class."

"If we did offer AS, we might be able to attract STEM students to take languages as an 'extra.'"

An AS course usually comprises two modules, or three for science subjects and Mathematics. A full A-Level usually comprises four modules, or six for sciences and Mathematics. Although there has been a decrease in numbers choosing Irish at GCSE over the previous number of years, the numbers taking Irish at AS and A2 have remained relatively stable. The CCEA figures for AS are as follows, with the 2011 figures for comparison:

Table 8 Northern Ireland Advanced Subsidiary entrants, 2011 to 2019

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
2011	926	211	385	696
2019	616	146	397	779

The numbers and transfer rate of students from GCSE 2018 to AS 2019 were:

Table 9 Transfer from GCSE 2018 to AS 2019

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
GCSE 2018	4,031	1,050	1,991	3,817
AS 2019	616	146	397	779

Transfer Rate: GCSE >AS	15%	14%	20%	20%

The percentage of students achieving an A grade at Irish AS-level (52.4%) is significantly higher than for the other languages, but lower than the highest achieving subjects, Mathematics (52.4%), Further Mathematics (73.2%). There is no Gaeilge examination at GCE AS or Advanced levels.

Table 10 Grade A percentages, AS 2019

	Irish	**French**	**German**	**Spanish**
Grade A	52.4%	33%	37.7%	28%

GCE A-Level

The GCE A-Level figures show that in 2016 Spanish overtook French as the most popular language at A-Level in Northern Ireland. The increase in Irish A-Level shown in Table 11, in a period when French and German showed marked decreases, can be explained by the inclusion of the Irish-medium pupils taking Irish A-Level, some earlier than Year 14 (A-level year).

Table 11 Northern Ireland A-level Entries 1996-2019

N. Ireland	**French**	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**

1996	1,224	198	257	278
2003	834	201	249	418
2016	503	102	331	524
2017	473	100	333	529
2018	429	110	332	434
2019	357	69	291	457
% Change	-71%	-65%	+13%	+64%

Just as at GCSE, languages at A-Level is a high performing subject with the four curricular languages scoring over 90% at A* to C grades. German, with its small number of candidates, all from grammar schools, achieved the highest A* percentage (21.7%), while Irish was lowest (7.9%).

Table 12 2019 A-level A*/C percentages

2019	**French**	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
A*	13.7%	21.7%	7.9%	8.3%
A*/A Cumulative	43.1%	50.7%	51.9%	42.9%
A*/C Cumulative	93.6%	97.1%	94.2%	97.4%

Irish had the lowest percentage (7.9%) at the highest A* grade in 2019. This is probably due to students in IME taking A-level at an earlier age or students with an IME background in other sectors adding Irish to their A-level profile.

The transfer to A level Irish from GCSE (15%) is limited but comparatively healthy, as is the AS to A-level (73%):

Table 13 The transfer from GCSE to A-Level

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
2017 GCSE	4,709	937	1,995	3,877
2019 A-Level	357	69	291	457
Transfer Rate GCSE> A-Level	8%	7%	15%	12%

Table 14 The transfer from AS to A-Level

	French	**German**	**Irish**	**Spanish**
2018 AS	616	146	397	779
2019 A-Level	357	69	291	457
Transfer Rate AS > A-Level	58%	47%	73%	59%

It should be noted that due to tight budgets, schools are imposing minimum numbers for A-Level classes to run and Irish is no longer available post-GCSE in many grammar schools where it would have been offered in past years.

Centre Classification

CCEA provides statistics on entries to its specifications from the different categories of centre (Grammar, Non-Grammar, Further Education, Other). The GCSE, AS and A-level entries all show a striking contrast between Irish and the other languages.

Table 15 GCSE, Centre Classification 2019

GCSE 2019	Total	Non-Grammar	Grammar	Further Education	Other
Irish	1,644	552 (33.6%)	917 (55.8%)	0	175 (10.6%)
French	3,924	964 (24.6%)	2,931 (74.7%)	0	9
German	677	35 (5%)	642 (94.8%)	0	0
Spanish	3,254	533 (16.4%)	2,693 (82.7%)	15	13

GCSE 2019	Total	Non-Grammar	Grammar	Further Education	Other
Gaeilge	204	51 (25%)	50 (24.5)	0	103 (50.5%)

The Advanced Subsidiary (AS) entries also show a striking contrast between Irish and the other languages, Grammar/Non-Grammar/Other.

Table 16 GCE AS, Centre Classification

GCE Advanced Subsidiary 2019	Total	Non-Grammar	Grammar	Further Education	Other
Irish	397	108 (27.2%)	214 (53.9%)	0	75 (18.9%)
French	616	34 (5.5%)	571 (92.7%)	11	0
German	146	0 (0%)	145 (99.3%)	0	1

Spanish	779	81 (10.4%)	678 (87%)	19	1

In 2015, 45% of Irish A-Level entrants came from non-selective schools, in marked contrasts to the other languages (French 9%, Spanish 7%, German 4%). This is due to entrants from non-selective post-primary Irish-medium schools or with Irish-medium backgrounds in English-medium schools. As there is no AS/A-level Gaeilge, A-level Irish is a popular and logical choice for Irish-medium post-primary students.

Table 17 A-Level, GCE AS Centre Classification

GCE Advanced 2019	**Total**	**Non-Grammar**	**Grammar**	**Further Education**	**Other**
Irish	**291**	**78 (26.8%)**	**151 (51.9%)**	**0**	**62 (21.3%)**
French	**357**	**13 (2.2%)**	**340 (95.2%)**	**0**	**4**
German	**69**	**1 (1.4%)**	**67 (97.1%)**	**0**	**1**
Spanish	**457**	**45 (9.8%)**	**401 (87.7%)**	**10**	**1**

Gael Linn (2018) reports the concerns of English-medium schools that it has become more difficult for their students to achieve the highest grades in examinations because they are competing with pupils from an IME background who benefit from their stronger background and experience in the language. Only a certain percentage of candidates are awarded A* and A grades in each subject which leaves the English-medium students at a disadvantage. Teachers report that students are choosing other subjects that are perceived to be easier as well as being encouraged to choose STEM subjects.

Gender

The overall proportion of male candidates studying Arts and Humanities subjects decreased year-on-year between 2013 and 2017. It would appear that for male

candidates the Arts and Humanities are becoming less popular in real terms (CCEA *Insight* 2018). Similarly, boys are under-represented in language study at GCSE and significantly so at A-level. The CCEA *Insight* report for 2017 (page 32) records that the number of male entries for modern languages is falling and that female candidates outperform their male peers.

Irish-Medium Education

Mac Éinrí (2019), Gael Linn (2018) and Mercator (2019) discuss Irish in education in Northern Ireland. These last two give a particular focus to Irish-medium Education in Northern Ireland. They trace the history and achievements of the sector, from preschool to post-primary, but also outline the difficulties and challenges the sector continues to contend with. Irish-Medium Education (Gaeloideachas) developed from a community project which established Bunscoil Phobail Feirste with 9 pupils in Belfast in 1971. The school was granted official recognition in 1994. Coláiste Feirste was established in 1991 as a non-selective post-primary school in West Belfast to provide post-primary Irish-medium education. Gaelscoileanna (Irish-Medium schools) have flourished since then, especially since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (The Belfast Agreement or the Stormont Agreement). The Department of Education established Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta in 2000 'in order to promote, facilitate and encourage Irish-medium Education' (www.comhairle.org) in Northern Ireland.

In the school year 2019/20 a total of 92 schools (Comhairle.org) provided funded Irish-medium education for 6,816 pupils, with nearly 5,500 pupils enrolled in dedicated Irish-medium schools and pre-school settings and more than 1,400 pupils educated in Irish-medium units attached to English-medium schools (DENI, 2020, Table 2b). 983 pupils attended preschool and nursery schools, 4,510 were in primary schools, and 1,323 in two post-primary Gaelcholáiste and three Irish-medium streams in English-medium schools. Coláiste Feirste is the largest post-primary Irish-medium school in Northern Ireland with 650 pupils (Coláiste Feirste, 2019, p. 5). Gaelcholáiste Dhoire in Dungiven opened in September 2015. There are also three post-primary Irish-medium streams: Coláiste Chaitríona, Armagh; Saint Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore, County Tyrone; and Saint Malachy's High School,

Castlewellan, County Down. The Irish-medium stream in St Patrick's, Maghera has closed with the opening of Gaelcholáiste Dhoire.

The post-primary enrolment in IME in 2019/20 (n=1,323) equates to 24% of the preschool and primary IME enrolment (n=5,493). For comparison, the total post-primary enrolment in Northern Ireland (n=145,085) (not including special schools and independent schools) equates to 73% of the combined nursery and primary population (n=197,615) (DENI, 2020, Table 2a). This means that there is a relatively low transfer rate in IME from primary to post-primary education, a third of the overall rate, and that most of the primary Gaelscoil pupils transfer from an Irish-medium primary to an English-medium post-primary school. One can compare with Scotland where the national transition figure from primary to secondary is over 70%, but the transfer for Gaelic Medium Education is about 20% (McKendry, 2017, p. 115). While there is some drop-off in Welsh medium primary to secondary transition, the percentage of pupils continuing to receive full-time education through the medium of Welsh remains fairly constant, 19.8% at end of primary in 2011 and 15.3% by Key Stage 4 in 2013 (McKendry, 2017, p. 113). This low rate of transfer in Scotland and Northern Ireland is most likely due to the pupil's personal choice or that of their parents. Northern Ireland primary IME pupils often accept an offer to transfer to a grammar school. One must also take into account that post-primary Irish-medium education is not widely provided for in Northern Ireland. The effect of this post-primary transfer from Irish-medium to English-medium schools on GCSE, AS and A-Level examination entry figures for Irish has been discussed above.

The importance of Irish within language diversity was recognized in the context of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 (The Belfast Agreement) (See Appendix 2). In Paragraph 3 of the section on Economic, Social and Cultural Issues, the Good Friday Agreement states that:

1. All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

(GFA)

In Paragraph 4, the British Government agrees to 'take resolute action to promote the [Irish] language, but only *'where appropriate and where people so desire it'*. There was also a commitment to *'seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language'*. Despite the apparently positive tone of these statements, the wording is ambiguous (*'where appropriate'; 'where possible'*) and can be used to impede the promotion of Irish. The only mention of Irish and education in the Agreement is in the context of Irish-Medium Education, rather than the language in education in general:

> ...place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with current provision for integrated education.
>
> (GFA)

It could be argued, unfortunately, that Irish was disadvantaged in the far more numerous English-medium schools as a result of this statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. Resources and professional support for Irish in English-medium schools are limited when compared to the other curricular languages. When, in his role as director of the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICILT), this author wrote to the Department of Education to discuss support for Irish in English-medium schools, he received a reply describing how the Department supported Irish-medium education. So, while one can acknowledge the achievements of the Irish-medium sector, there is a need to recognise the significant drop-off in the language in English-medium schools, particularly the non-selective schools.

Primary School Education

Teaching a second language at primary level was not compulsory when the National (1988) and Northern Ireland Curriculum (1989) were introduced, but schools were allowed to teach a second language: '*Primary schools don't have to teach a language other than English, but may do so if they wish*' (HMSO, 1989, p. 10). Although the value of a language being compulsory at Key Stage 4 had come into question (CCEA, 2001), the potential for primary language teaching and learning

was viewed in a more positive light. It was suggested it could give pupils the incentive to continue with a language after Key Stage 3 (age 11-14):

> A positive approach to language learning in the earlier Key Stages is likely to create greater enthusiasm for modern language study beyond fourteen.
>
> (CCEA, 2001, p. 6)

This argument had also been forwarded in England, namely that pupils who had some experience of a second language at primary level and in Key Stage 3 would be motivated to continue with the language at Key Stage 4 where a language was no longer compulsory. However, this was a somewhat naïve assumption as the majority of pupils, and indeed school management and parents as well, may have decided already in Key Stage 3 that languages were not worth the effort as they could be dropped at Key Stage 4. This is clearly illustrated in this quotation from *CILT Languages Trends 2003:*

> Pupils are already saying in Year 8 (second post-primary year in England) that they do not see the point of working hard at languages because they do not intend to opt for them anyway.
>
> (CILT, 2003).

There is however a current movement to promote primary languages in the United Kingdom. The 2014 Primary National Curriculum in England made learning a foreign language compulsory at Key Stage 2. Scotland has a 1+2 approach under which by 2021 every school in Scotland will offer children the opportunity to learn a first additional language from primary one, and a second additional language by primary five. It is expected that this will continue until they reach their third year of secondary education. Wales has core Welsh from primary onwards and aspires to become a 'bilingual plus one country'. In Northern Ireland, the most notable project to support primary languages was the Primary Modern Languages Project.

The Primary Modern Languages Project

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) set up the Primary Languages Pilot in 2005 in order to investigate the possibilities of teaching a

second language at Primary level. Three of the five Education and Library Boards (ELB) embarked upon a pilot scheme. The primary sector was an unfamiliar sector for the Boards' modern languages officers as prior to this they dealt mostly with post-primary languages. The University Colleges of Education, Saint Mary's and Stranmillis, who had responsibility for primary teacher education, and the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICILT) in the School of Education in Queen's University Belfast, who had been cooperating with the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research's (CILT) Early Language Initiative in Great Britain, had minimal input to the pilot scheme. This lack of experience left the CCEA pilot scheme at a disadvantage from the outset. The pilot scheme investigated primary languages under two models, A Teacher Capacity Building model which developed teachers' ability to teach a language and a Peripatetic Teacher model where a tutor would travel around several schools. French and Spanish were the two languages chosen. Irish was not included due to *'unforeseeable circumstances'* (CCEA, 2007e, p. 7), although it was the most commonly taught language in Northern Ireland's primary schools at the time. Despite the pilot project's lack of recognition of, or reference to, international research and practice in early language teaching and learning, the report, *Developing Little Linguist*s (CCEA, 2007e), returned a high level of satisfaction among parents and the pupils themselves.

The Primary Modern Languages Project (PMLP) was set up in 2007 in response to the then Minister for Education, Caitríona Ruane's, wish to make provision for languages in primary school. The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) project was chosen from among the pilot scheme projects. This project developed a network of Spanish travelling tutors at Foundation Level (years 1 & 2) and at Key Stage 1 (years 3 & 4) in primary school. Irish was added later, as was Polish for local pupils. The PMLP was generously funded, but it suffered from fundamental weaknesses. It was launched in haste, ignoring concerns expressed, and was aimed at the early years in primary with no progression or continuity to Key Stage 2. It was delivered by travelling tutors, usually with one lesson per week in a school and with no provision for developing the classroom teacher's second language ability. £900,000 a year was being spent on the project by the time it was ended in 2015, with limited learning outcomes to show for the cost. Four hundred and twenty-five schools participated in 2015, 323 for Spanish, 84 for Irish and 18

offering Polish. Not one state-controlled primary school offered Irish. A 2012 CCEA feasibility study on the PMLP, cited in Gael Linn (2018), says that two-thirds of the 127 primary principals who responded said that they had no interest in offering Irish, that it was irrelevant to their pupils, local parents would object, and many regarded it as 'political'. Despite a respect for Irish culture being fundamental to the ethos of Integrated schools ('*the integrated school must offer the Irish language, Gaelic games, Irish dancing and music as options for all pupils'*, Spencer, 1987, p. 108), only one Integrated school had chosen Irish (personal communication).

The *Language Trends Northern Ireland 2019* report (Tinsley, 2019a) shows that in 2018, 45% of the responding primary schools (25% of total number of schools) had participated in the PMLP. Nine out of ten primary schools that reported teaching a language do so in Key Stage 2; 73% teach a language in Key Stage 1 and 52% do so at Foundation Stage. These Key Stage 1 and Foundation Stage could suggest a legacy from the PMLP although the report says that *'there is no significant relationship between a school having taken part in the PMLP and reporting that they currently teach a language'* (p.9). One can note that *'non-PMLP schools were more likely to focus on French and Key Stage 2'*, probably a legacy from CCEA's 2005 Primary Languages Pilot. As regards languages taught:

> Spanish is the most popular language taught, followed by French. Spanish is taught by more than half (58 per cent) of schools which teach a language, and 45 per cent teach French. Very little German is taught, but 13 per cent of those schools teaching a language teach Mandarin. Other languages mentioned – each by one school – were Italian and Sign Language.
>
> (Tinsley, 2019a, p. 8)

The omission of a mention of Irish here could be an oversight as the language is included elsewhere, but it might also reflect the marginalisation of Irish in much of the discourse and mindset in sections of our education system and society. Another important issue brought to light in the Language Trends Northern Ireland report is that a significant number of primary schools have a large number of English Additional Language (EAL) pupils or/and a significant percentage of Special Needs pupils which leaves them unwilling to offer a modern language.

It is now widely accepted that learning languages in primary is advantageous (Tinsley & Confort, 2012), but since English is now the preferred second language

globally, which language should one choose in a predominantly Anglophone society like Northern Ireland? Despite professing to promote multilingualism, language advocates can often show a lack of flexibility as regards language choice and indeed are often the most hostile towards other languages. This happened in Northern Ireland when Spanish was chosen for the PMLP. This author heard the following utterances from Education and Library Board officers promoting Spanish:

> 'French has had its chance. It's time to do something else'.
>
> 'German is too difficult for Primary'.
>
> 'The problem is Irish. If we could get rid of it'.

Primary education would benefit from being open to language learning skills in general and to language awareness, particularly now when schools are becoming more multilingual with many pupils coming in from abroad. The emphasis on learning skills was discussed in the revised curriculum (ER[NI]O 2006) but the broad concept of learning skills and language awareness are well established in teaching and learning.

As one cannot foresee with much accuracy at primary level which languages will be useful in the future, one can look at language learning in school, indeed at university, as a bridge between English and whichever languages one encounters later in life. Hawkins (1981, p. 22) argued that modern language learning is an apprenticeship in how to learn any language, including the mother tongue and this is how the inspectorate in England viewed learning languages in the period before the national curriculum:

> The language learnt at school… will provide an apprenticeship in foreign language learning, so that those pupils who in later life need or wish to acquire competence in a different language already have confidence, some idea of the objectives to be attained and some of the skills required.
>
> (HMSO, 1987, §10*)*

Irish in Primary Education

One of the main challenges for advocates for Irish is to make the case why it should be chosen as a second language in primary school. Insofar as Irish is an indigenous, native language in the country, the role of Irish is different to that of other languages.

Despite the official qualms about the language, Irish was in the past the only second language taught to a significant extent, if only in the Catholic Maintained schools (Mac Éinrí, 1981). The 1964 UNESCO International Bureau of Education report on *Modern Languages at General Secondary Schools* reports some French in preparatory schools and…

> In many Roman Catholic primary schools Irish (Gaelic) is taught as an optional subject, to a limited extent (two half-hour periods a week) and from the age of 8-9 years, if a sufficient number of Irish speaking teachers are available in the school (p. 174).

The 1964 *Programme for Primary Schools* (Government of Northern Ireland, 1964) discusses Irish as the only second language in Chapter XI and Appendix XI. In 1974, DENI published the Primary Education Teachers' Guide, and in the chapter on 'A Second Language' the advantages of Irish in Northern Ireland's cultural and linguistic environment are emphasised:

> In dealing with the teaching of Irish in the primary school, consideration can be given to certain environmental factors which bear on the subject in Ireland. Unlike other languages, Irish does have immediate historical relevance for school pupils here. Surnames, Christian names, names of towns, counties, rivers, fields and numerous other geographical features are in most cases derived directly from Irish. Indeed, the majority have still preserved the distinct Irish phonetic form to this day, e.g. Shankill, Knock, Belfast, Sean, Nuala, Erne, Lagan, Armagh, Fermanagh, O'Neill, MacShane, Devenney. In everyday conversation in town and country children here make use of words and idioms which are obviously peculiar to our language environment and cannot be overlooked in a consideration of the teaching of Irish. Since children here are in relatively close proximity to Irish-speaking areas they can familiarize themselves with Irish sounds and speech without serious difficulty. These factors are of considerable help in the teaching of Irish and confer certain advantages which no other second language can claim to the same extent in Ireland.
>
> (DENI, 1974, p. 106).

If, as outlined earlier, Irish was a source of contention for the NIC in 1988/89, there was potential for compromise with the introduction of the new Cross-Curricular themes which included *Cultural Heritage* and *Education for Mutual Understanding*:

> Several respondents suggested that there should be opportunities for pupils to gain awareness of aspects of history, culture and traditions which contribute to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland. The government welcomes and accepts this suggestion as a positive measure aimed at lessening the ignorance which many feel contributes to the divisions in our society. The government also believes it to be appropriate and necessary that the curriculum of every child should contain elements in Education for Mutual Understanding which has already helped to foster valuable cross-community contacts among our schools.
>
> (DENI, 1988, §2.13)

It was hoped that these two themes would allow for the introduction of non-contentious content or units of work which would include aspects of Irish in place names, personal names, dialect, music, history, etc. Many Controlled schools welcomed this opportunity to link Irish with a broad intercultural study which included aspects of the English language tradition through the recognition given to the Ulster-Scots tradition. But Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage were soon conjoined within Citizenship under curriculum review and little heed was taken of Irish in that broad perspective which is now contained in Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (Primary) and Learning for Life and Work (Post-Primary). Nevertheless, schools have freedom to develop curricular material within the broad curriculum. The importance of an integrated curriculum is recognised in the policy for shared education introduced under the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016:

> In addition, all subject strands but in particular, religious education, history, geography, English, languages, drama and art and design provide opportunities for teachers to design learning programmes that explore identity, diversity and promote reconciliation, developing the attitudes and dispositions.
>
> (DENI, 2016, p. 14)

In 2016, CCEA launched the *Primary Irish: Aspects of Shared Cultural Heritage* project aiming to *'build capacity within primary schools outside of the Irish-medium sector, so that they can teach elements of Irish and shared cultural heritage using existing staff & resources'* (CCEA 2016). Mention should also be made of projects such as *GaelTrail/Triall na nGael* (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, n.d.), a classroom resource designed *'to enable pupils of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 to discover the origins of the Irish language, its spread, development and its impact'*. As far back as 1997, Gael Linn had provided a cultural heritage programme that was taken up mostly in lower sixth form, the penultimate year in Grammar schools, as an enrichment course in non-Catholic schools and aimed primarily at pupils who had little awareness of their Gaelic heritage. This programme proved to be popular, but unfortunately the introduction in 2001 of the Advanced Subsidiary examination to the lower sixth school year has reduced such opportunities for diversity. A revised and updated edition was published in 2016, subtitled *Essays on linguistic and cultural crossover in Ulster*, with chapters on local varieties of English, Hiberno-English and Ulster-Scots, hoping to attract Controlled and Integrated schools as well. This multilingual, culturally diverse approach can now be extended to recognise the more diverse environment in our schools introduced with newcomer pupils. School projects such as these aspire to lessen the misunderstandings and doubts surrounding Irish, particularly between the two main communities in Northern Ireland.

Teacher Education

Teacher education in Northern Ireland, initial and continuing, is delivered through a competence model, developed by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2007) in the document *Teaching: The Reflective Profession*, *incorporating the Northern Ireland teacher competences*. An Irish version was also produced, *An Mhúinteoireacht: an Ghairm Mhachnamhach* (GTCNI, 2009). All teachers in Northern Ireland must be registered with the Education Authority and be accredited by the GTCNI. The professional competences outlined in the competence model are a cornerstone of teacher education. The model aims to "facilitate the delivery and development of programmes by those providing teacher education at initial and subsequent phases appropriate to the needs of the profession" (GTCNI, p. 6). The phases of the programme are (1) Initial Teacher Education; (2) Induction; (3) Early

Professional Development: (4) Continuing Professional Development, Collaborative Practice and School Improvement. Under the heading 'Professional Knowledge and Understanding', competence 3(ii) says that teachers will have developed:

> In Irish-medium and other bilingual contexts, sufficient linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum.

Professional competence No. 8 requires:

> A knowledge and understanding of the need for teachers to know and take account of the significant features of pupils' cultures, languages and faiths and to address the implications for learning arising from these.

Professional Competence 21 requires that:

> Teachers will employ strategies that motivate and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional needs and for those not learning in their first language.

These references to language learning in the competences have particular relevance to teachers and pupils in Irish-medium education where most pupils are not learning in their first language.

Primary Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland is provided by two constituent colleges of Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis and Saint Mary's University Colleges. Stranmillis serves, on the whole, the Controlled (State, or non-Catholic) sector, while St. Mary's serves the Catholic schools. Both colleges offer a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) with a limited post-primary BEd provision for Business Studies, Mathematics, Religious Studies, Technology and Design. St. Mary's provides a full four-year primary BEd in English and Irish, the latter focusing on Irish-medium immersion education. It also has a primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for Irish-Medium Education and coordinates the post-primary Irish-medium PGCE from QUB and Ulster University. Upon completion of these courses, students are awarded a Diploma in Bilingual Education (Teastas san Oideachas Dátheangach) as well as the BEd or PGCE.

The PGCE in QUB and Ulster University supplies the post-primary sector (Ulster University offers a small Primary PGCE). As can be seen in Table 18, the post-primary curricular subject areas are divided between Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast. The PGCE in Northern Ireland, as in Great Britain,

remains a one-year course, in contrast to the two-year qualification for QTS common elsewhere in Europe.

The ITE phase of the post-primary PGCE in the School of Education in Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University is a 36-week, full-time course commencing in early September. The PGCE is an extremely condensed course with only 12-week university-based tuition, the rest of the time being spent on placement in schools.

Table 18 PGCE Main Course Subject Allocation

QUB offers main course PGCE in:	**Ulster Univ offers main course PGCE in:**
English	Art and Design
Mathematics	English with Drama and Media Studies
Information Technology/Computing	Geography
Modern Languages	History
Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)	Home Economics
Sociology	Music
Politics	Physical Education
Religious Education	Technology and Design

The Modern Languages PGCE in Queen's University Belfast prepares students to teach the Curricular Languages (French, German, Irish [non-Irish-Medium], Spanish), but not the home/newcomer languages. In response to the demand for subject-specific teachers in the growing Irish-medium post-primary sector, four places have been reserved annually since 2007/2008 in both QUB and Ulster University to prepare those applicants who are interested in teaching a curricular subject through the medium of Irish in Irish-Medium post-primary schools. In partnership with St. Mary's University College, these students complete a number of extra elements, including a Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking district) residential delivered by

St. Mary's in County Donegal in the Republic in the August preceding the course. Upon completion of the PGCE, they receive an additional certificate in Irish-Medium Education.

DENI allocates the number of places available overall and for each subject. Due to demographic changes and teacher oversupply, however, there has been a gradual fall in the PGCE places allowed by the Department, so that in the 2017/18 year, and the previous five years, Queen's University Belfast had a total intake of 138, compared to a maximum of 232 in 1993/94, but with an encouragement to make strong efforts to recruit for STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). This fall in intake is not reflected pro rata across the subjects. So, for example, the intake for mathematics and science subjects has remained consistent as DENI has protected these subjects through ring-fencing their allocation. English has seen a drop from an intake high of 42 in 1993/94 to an intake of 21 in 2017/2018. The greatest drop, however, has been in the area of modern languages, which has fallen from a high of 52 in 1993/94 following the introduction of a compulsory modern language in 1992 under the NIC to an allocated intake of 17 for the last number of years. The decrease in quota for modern languages is a consequence of the ending of the compulsory language requirement at Key Stage 4 in 2006, leading to a drop in PGCE recruitment in the area from 2006/2007 onward. This modern languages figure has, however, regularly been increased as the sciences, physics in particular, failed to reach their quota. The final modern languages cohort for some years now finishes around 20 which usually also includes some of the Irish students also choosing the IME option which has difficulty in attracting students from other curricular areas. The number of students choosing the Irish option on the PGCE is usually about 5-7. The noticeable change in recent years has been the increase in the number of students offering Spanish, with combined French/Spanish being the most popular option.

Language teacher supply in Great Britain is highly reliant on European nationals (Worth, 2020, p. 5) and the university Departments of Education there need to try to attract native speakers of curricular languages from continental Europe to their PGCE courses due to the lack of local modern language applicants. This is not the case in Northern Ireland which year on year produces a sufficient number of suitable graduate applicants to the Modern Languages PGCE in QUB. Native

speaker applicants to QUB, including Irish, need to offer a satisfactory competence in a second curricular language.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Newly qualified teachers go through the GTCNI Induction and Early Professional Development Programme mentioned above which normally lasts 3 years. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to support language teaching is now limited and the Department of Education has no support role. The in-service support that used to be provided by the now disbanded Education and Library Boards has been withdrawn across all subject areas.

Due to the difficulty mentioned above in attracting students on to ITE language courses in Britain, fully funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses are available there to refresh a student teacher's main teaching language and to study another language. These SKE courses can be completed before, or alongside teacher training and are available to study full-time or part-time, classroom-based or on-line. A similar refresher course would be a great boon for Irish teachers, particularly to encourage primary teachers to teach the language. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that such funding specifically for primary Irish would be forthcoming from DENI. Cross-border, perhaps even European, schemes would be welcomed.

Newcomer Communities and Pupils

Emigration rather than immigration has been the historic pattern for the island of Ireland and so the country remained largely unaffected by the large-scale post-World War II immigration into Great Britain. In addition, since the late 1960s the 'Troubles' made Northern Ireland less attractive to prospective newcomers. Prior to the UK and Ireland joining the EU at the same time in 1973, the only ethnic communities of any size in the region were from India, mostly professional and business people, who settled in the 1920s and 1930s, and Chinese people arriving in the 1960s, mostly in the restaurant business (McKendry, 2002). Each community brought its own culture, but the local population showed little interest in their languages, nor did these immigrant communities see the need to share them with locals. The 1986 accession

of Spain and Portugal to the EU led to a sizeable number of Portuguese immigrants to the mid-Ulster region, working mostly in the agricultural and food processing industries. While economic downturns have meant that a number of these have since left the area, many Portuguese families have settled in Northern Ireland. The 2004 expansion of the EU with the accession of eight Eastern European countries plus Cyprus and Malta led however to significant changes in immigration patterns. Membership of the European Union grants EU nationals the right to move freely from one member-state to another to work or to live and post-2004 significant numbers of immigrants arrived into Northern Ireland from countries such as Poland and Lithuania. There are also a growing number of migrants from outside the EU, from the Philippines, Ukraine, Russia for example, living and working under different kinds of temporary work visas (Bell, Jarman, & Lefebvre, 2004).

The total Northern Ireland population in the 2011 Census was 1.8 million. 4.5% of the resident population (81,314) were born outside of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, an increase of 199% since the 2001 census. The most common country of birth of non-UK/Ireland residents in Northern Ireland was Poland (19,658 residents), followed by Lithuania and India. Polish is also the most common language spoken other than English or Irish, followed by Lithuanian, Portuguese, Slovak, and Chinese (CSO/NISRA, 2014, pp. 38–39). In 2018, 10.65% of births in Northern Ireland were to mothers born outside the UK and Ireland, suggesting that many newcomers are settling in the region (NISRA, 2018, Table 3.15). One can compare the 1996 figures when, out of a total of 24,087 births in Northern Ireland, two were from the eight Accession countries of 2004 and 542 from all other countries other than the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

The suddenness and rapidity of this growth in immigration have led to challenges. In 2005, the Northern Ireland government's Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) presented an 'equality agenda' in its policy document *A Shared Future*. This set out the government's vision for the future of Northern Ireland, aspiring to establish over time *'a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance'* (OFMDFM, 2005a, p. 3). This was soon followed by the *Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland* which welcomes the *'skills, new ideas, and fresh perspectives'* these new participants in society bring with them (OFMDFM, 2005b, p. 4), but nevertheless acknowledges that:

> The speed and extent of the increase in numbers of migrant workers in Northern Ireland – and the sheer diversity of the people involved – pose complex challenges for Government and society alike.
>
> (OFMDFM, 2005b, p. 31)

When the GFA was signed in 1998, there was little awareness of multilingualism in Northern Ireland, other than a wariness of Irish among the general Unionist population and the emergence of a flourishing immersion Irish-Medium Education sector (McKendry & McKendry, 2019). A 1999 survey by Gallagher and Leitch (2000) indicated that Northern Ireland teachers generally had a low level of awareness of ethnic communities and their cultures. Until recently, the educational focus on community relations in Northern Ireland was on the long-standing religious (Catholic/Protestant) and identity (Irish/British) differences in the region and ethnic minority communities attracted little attention in education or society, in strong contrast to the neighbouring island of Great Britain which had a long history of immigration, mostly from former British Empire countries. However, as Northern Ireland becomes an increasingly multicultural society, particularly after the EU expansion in 2004, OFMDFM expresses the hope that newcomers might play an important role beyond the workplace in a post-conflict society (OFMDFM, 2005a, p. 29). Government acknowledges the reality that Northern Ireland is becoming a society where, as well as making an economic contribution, the incoming workers and immigrants could make an important social contribution. As the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister says:

> But minority ethnic people are welcome here not just for the economic contribution that they can make. They make an important contribution to the social, public, and cultural life of Northern Ireland. They also have a genuinely leavening effect on a society that has long been frozen in its “two traditions” divide.
>
> (OFMDFM, 2005a, p. 29)

Under Annex E, *Rights, Language and Identity*, of the 2020 *New Decade, New Approach* document, the proposed Office of Identity and Cultural Expression will “celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland’s rich cultural and linguistic

heritage, recognising the equal validity and importance of all identities and traditions" (§5.3.4).

Tonkin describes a global tendency towards *'individual bilingualism and multilingualism, the creation of a language ecology that allows an individual to move in and out of overlapping linguistic codes with relative freedom'* (Tonkin 2003, 326). The linguistic and cultural landscape in Northern Ireland has changed radically with the arrival of so many newcomers introducing their languages and cultures, a new *'linguistic dispensation'* (Aronin & Singleton) which may have a positive and enriching effect upon a divided society and upon its attitudes towards its indigenous languages and culture.

McKendry (2016) discusses Irish and Polish in a *'new context of diversity'* in Northern Ireland's schools. Attention is drawn to the positive potential of a project of particular note that was developed by Gael Linn in 2007. Entitled *Szacunek–Meas* ('Respect'), it aimed to promote a greater understanding of Polish language and culture amongst the local community in the districts of Armagh and Newry. The project won a Council of Europe European Award for Languages and a special award for the promotion of languages in the community. The judges commented:

> The success of the project and the pride of the participants in their achievements were evident during the visit. The project provides an intellectual and cultural stimulus for them and fosters mutual respect for the cultures and communities.
>
> (CILT 2008)

Ethnic/Community Languages in Northern Ireland's Schools

Prior to the 2004 expansion, Mann-Kler (1997) reported the lack of mother tongue teaching in schools in Northern Ireland and also how poor English-language skills were a major contributory factor to low academic achievement in the Chinese community (citing McKnight, 1997). The report recorded that many women experienced language and communication barriers, relying on family, friends, and

children to interpret for them. Ethnic communities often created informal support structures where there was no statutory provision. Most community language support and teaching took place in complementary schools or classes after school or at weekends, run largely on a voluntary basis by the language communities concerned, with some individual entries for formal examinations. Mann-Kler documented provision of Cantonese, Urdu, and Punjabi classes as central objectives for the Chinese Welfare Association, the Indian Community Centre, and the Craigavon Asian Women and Children's Centre, respectively. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce Northern Ireland set up a Chinese Language School in Belfast in 1983 with the main objective of maintaining the Chinese language and culture among the younger generation of Chinese. The school now offers classes in Cantonese and Mandarin for school pupils and adults and prepares students for state examinations. Among the more recent post-2004 EU arrivals, the Polish Educational and Cultural Association Northern Ireland (PECA) was formed in May 2012 and is connected to the Polish Saturday School in Belfast which began in 2007, and to other Polish language schools operating in Northern Ireland.

Children who enrol in a school without enough English to participate fully in the curriculum are registered as English as an Additional Language (EAL) or Newcomer pupils. Table 19 lists figures supplied by DENI for the top ten home languages of Newcomer/EAL children in primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland in the school year 2017/18. In total, 89 first languages were recorded.

Table 19 The top ten languages spoken by Newcomer/EAL pupils in Northern Ireland (2017/18)

1	Polish	6,671	***6***	Arabic	723
2	Lithuanian	2,797	***7***	Tagalog/Filipino	668
3	Portuguese	1,279	***8***	Slovak	580
4	Romanian	1,005	***9***	Latvian	567

5	Malayalam	814	***10***	Chinese (Mandarin/ Putonghua)	545

The 2019/20 Schools Census total of 17,391 newcomer pupils (5% of total enrolment) has increased from 1,366 (0.4% of total enrolment) in 2001/02. While most immigrant families have moved to Northern Ireland for work, some pupils are children of mixed nationality parentage with one parent being of local origin. A few pupils are children whose parents are in management positions in local and international firms.

Turning again to examination entries, Tables 20 and 21 give the number of GCSE and A-Level entries, respectively, for languages other than the main curricular languages (French, German, Irish, and Spanish). The great majority of pupils taking these examinations are from home or newcomer language backgrounds as the languages do not form part of mainstream school languages' provision.

These examination entries evidence the earlier presence of a Chinese community, then Portuguese, followed by Polish with the 2004 expansion of the EU. One can note that substantial newcomer languages such as Lithuanian are not represented in Tables 20 and 21 as they are not offered as GCSE subjects. The entries for Russian suggest both a residual option for local students in a few schools (Queen's University Belfast closed its Slavonic Studies department some years ago) and some newcomer candidates with a background in the former Soviet bloc countries now in the EU. These languages are catered for by British-based boards rather than by CCEA.

While there is an increase in Chinese A-level entries between 2005 and 2014, there has been a marked decrease in the Chinese entries at the GCSE level. This has been attributed to a change in GCSE regulations and protocols (Ward, 2011, p. 24). Many pupils switched to the Chinese course offered by the International GCSE (iGCSE) which is an international alternative to GCSE designed originally for students abroad but now becoming more common in Great Britain, especially in independent, fee-paying schools. Independent schools do not feature much in Northern Ireland and pupils from Northern Ireland were entered by their schools as

external candidates for the Chinese iGCSE. There is no International GCE or A-Level and so students who chose the Chinese iGCSE revert to the standard A-Level.

Table 20 Home languages GCSE entries

Subject	**2014**	**2005**	**Subject**	**2014**	**2005**
Polish	67	0	**Japanese**	2	0
Russian	20	7	**Turkish**	1	0
Portuguese	12	1	**Bengali**	1	0
Arabic	4	1	**Persian**	1	0
Chinese	3	19	**Urdu**	0	1
Dutch	2	0			

Table 21 *Home languages A-Level entries*

Subject	**2014**	**2005**	**Subject**	**2014**	**2005**
Chinese	35	21	**Persian**	2	0
Polish	34	0	**Bengali**	1	0
Russian	7	6	**Modern Greek**	0	2
Portuguese	7	0	**Dutch**	0	1
Arabic	5	0	**Turkish**	0	1
Japanese	3	0			

EU policy documents emphasise how important it is for immigrant pupils to learn the host country language(s) (European Commission, 2008), but it is also recognised how valuable it is to foster the heritage languages, particularly with regard to human capital (Niessen & Huddleston, 2009). The European Union also maintains

(European Commission, 2009) that language diversity should be recognised as an asset to society. In this vein, DENI funded the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) from 2007 onwards to give advice and support to schools catering for newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland. The main aim of the authorities is to facilitate full participation in society for immigrants through the acquisition of English, but DENI and IDS recognise the importance and value of the mother tongue and the culture it carries. When education services were reorganised in April 2015, a new Education Authority (EA) was set up and the Intercultural Education Service (IES) replaced the IDS. If cultural and diversity awareness of these various languages is encouraged and developed among local pupils, there is an argument that their respect and understanding of the advantages and identity of Irish (and Ulster-Scots as a local dialect) could and should also be developed. When Irish is linked to this understanding in the context of Citizenship and the skill-based curriculum, there is a hope that the controlled sector could welcome this broader, intercultural approach, as had already happened in many schools with Cultural Heritage when the Northern Ireland Curriculum was first introduced in 1989. This integrated approach is at the core of the Revised Northern Ireland curriculum, at both primary and post-primary levels. One cannot, however, ignore the reality that there is a risk that *'recognising the equal validity and importance of all identities and traditions'* could be used to diminish the status of Irish and have as a result, as the French saying goes, *'to drown the fish in water'* (*'noyer le poisson dans l'eau'*).

Teachers' Views: A SWOT Analysis

The Northern Ireland (St. Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 imposed a duty on the Northern Ireland Assembly to *'adopt a strategy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language'*. In this context, and in response to the recommendations in 2007 of the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe for the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, POBAL, the umbrella advocacy organisation for the Irish language community in Northern Ireland, proposed at a conference in 2008 the preparation of an Irish language strategy for Northern Ireland. In order to inform the education element of this *Creat Straitéiseach don Ghaeilge ó Thuaidh/ Strategic Framework for the Irish language*, the author carried out a survey among language stakeholders. A SWOT (Strengths,

Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, sometimes SCOC (C=Challenges), was adapted to an Irish language context. This gave rise to an LLDD questionnaire (Láidreachtaí; Laigí; Deiseanna; Dúshláin). The questionnaire was provided on-line, through e-mail, and in hard copy form, in Irish and in English. The results were presented at the 2013 Educational studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) annual conference held in Limerick. The survey was recirculated in 2014 and analysed by this author and Seán Ó Treasaigh of the Celtic and Irish Studies department of Queen's University Belfast. While respondents found much to be positive about, there were also significant concerns around current practice and future developments. Responses included:

Strengths

- The value of Irish for pupils' cultural enrichment and heritage; the reinforcement of pupils' identity.
- The employment opportunities in the developing Irish language community and education sectors.
- The commitment of teachers, community workers, etc. to Irish.
- The importance of the Gaeltacht and summer/Easter courses; opportunities for trips and special events. An Fáinne.
- The value of Irish in schools for maintaining a positive view of Irish in community.

Weaknesses

- Concern about resources/materials for Irish teachers at all levels.
- People's ignorance/misunderstandings about Irish.
- Lack of support from various agencies.
- Concern about the standard of Irish among teachers and student teachers.

Opportunities

- The opportunity to develop Irish in primary schools.
- The opportunities offered by modern technologies in teaching Irish.
- The opportunities for employment using Irish.

- Support from language assistants and Irish in the community.

Challenges

- The need to focus on English-medium schools as well as Irish-medium Education.
- The need to project a positive image for Irish in Northern Ireland.
- The need to keep the teaching of Irish up-to-date, abreast with new technologies.
- The need to provide textbooks and resources.
- The challenge of encouraging pupils to continue with Irish to GCSE and beyond.
- The need in Northern Ireland to provide awareness and provision of Irish in controlled and integrated schools.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has discussed Irish in education in Northern Ireland within the policy and practice of curricular modern languages in general and the emerging context of newcomer languages in education and the community.

As also in Great Britain, Modern Languages have declined overall in recent years in Northern Ireland's education system, but Irish faces particular challenges. Gael Linn (2018) reports teachers' concerns that the language could be at death's door in the English-medium sector. A significant number of GCSE and A-level entries for Irish come from the Irish-medium sector and could disguise the fall-off for Irish in the English-medium sector. While it might appear from many of the figures presented in this paper that the language is holding its own when compared with French and German but like them being eclipsed by Spanish, it must be realised and argued that, unlike those languages whose future and language communities are assured in their vernacular countries, assuring the health of Irish in our schools is an existential issue and the role of new speakers (Walsh et al.) is essential to the future of the language.

In contrast to the other curricular languages, we have seen a 69% increase in Spanish GCSE in Northern Ireland since 2000 (115% since 1996) and a 105% increase 2000-19 across Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This marked difference between Spanish and other languages merits some comment. The reasons are many: the focus upon primary Spanish in the PMLP; the weather and holidays in Spain, with holiday homes and cheap flights; the Beckham factor when David Beckham moved to Real Madrid in 2003 soon after the introduction of compulsory languages post-primary, which had a positive influence among boys who have traditionally been less enthusiastic language learners.

The cultural institutions are central to the promotion of their respective languages. The Alliance Française is well-established and maintains its activities to support the learning of French. The Goethe Institut, on the other hand, transferred much of its focus to Eastern Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, just when languages became compulsory. German has suffered in our schools since then partly as a consequence of this decision, but also due to its reputation for being more difficult and *'a grammar school subject'*. The Spanish government's support for promoting their language abroad is extremely robust. Having joined the European Union in 1986, it has been able to benefit from the outset from the opportunities offered by the EU to promote their language in education abroad. This is in contrast to the Irish government which choose not to have Irish as a working language when it joined the European Economic Community in 1973, leading the former Swedish ambassador to the European Union to comment before Sweden joined the European Union in 1995:

> **…**vi inte kan tänkas följa det irländska exemplet och avstå från att svenska blir ett officielt EU-språk.
>
> …we cannot contemplate following the Irish example and neglect to have Swedish become an official EU language.
>
> (Ingmar Karlsson, *Svenska Dagbladet,* 29/8/1994)

Unfortunately, the lack of status in Europe has hampered the language in Northern Ireland and has been used to limit its promotion in the education system. The official Spanish policy, on the other hand, is strong, the marketing effective, and the education resources and opportunities provided through the Consejería de

Educación and the Instituto Cervantes which was set up in 1991 a few years after Spanish entry to the EU are impressive. The then King Juan Carlos as the official patron of the Cervantes Institute expressed the wish that learning Spanish would continue to be a global preferred option, an *'opción preferente'* (La Vanguardia, 11/10/2011). The perception that Spanish is easier than other languages is promoted. *'El Español es fácil'* is an Instituto Cervantes motto, with the subtext that other languages are more difficult, a perception borne out by the strength of Spanish in non-selective schools.

Unfortunately, Irish has no comparable support structure in Northern Ireland. While Irish-medium education has its statutory position plus organisations like Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, COGG, St. Mary's University College and the Áisaonad to provide what support they can (and they do often struggle), Irish teachers in English-medium schools often feel as if they have been abandoned. Gael Linn continues to support the promotion of the Irish language in schools with a variety of schemes such as Gaeltacht Courses, Irish language quizzes, public speaking competitions, learning and teaching materials etc. Many Irish language teachers mention Gael Linn as being one of their best resources in the promotion of Irish beyond the classroom (Gael Linn 2018). Gael Linn was appointed by the North/South Language Body Foras na Gaeilge as a Ceanneagraíocht (Lead Organisation) in 2014 with responsibility for the promotion of Irish in the English-medium sector in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland but its funding and staffing are limited. Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge played an important role from 1964 until it lost its funding in 2015. The recently established An Gréasán hopes to provide some succour. CCEA has provided textbook support for English-medium schools, as did NICILT through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and use of the former director's personal research funds which are no longer available. BBC Gaeilge is well received. Many individual teachers and cluster groups provide their own materials and adapt computer resources (Quizlet, Duolingo, Kahoot, Google Classroom, Twinkl, etc.) which have the advantage of being focused on the requirements of their own specific class groups, but place a heavy burden on the teachers. Some materials can also be adapted from the Republic of Ireland's Irish language education resources. On the whole, however, Irish teachers in English-medium schools have little support. The need to pay due attention to the

English-medium sector as well as Irish-medium Education was raised in the responses to the SWOT analysis above.

Much of the policy discourse and academic comment in the anglophone United Kingdom and Ireland focus on their bad standing in language surveys and statistics reports such as Eurobarometer and Eurostat. These sources suggest that Irish (and UK) citizens *'lag behind most of their fellow European citizens in language competence'* (DES, 2017). This is somewhat misleading because when English is taken out of the equation, the percentage of students in full time education learning French, German and Spanish compares favourably with the rest of Europe (Eurostat). In addition, all pupils in the Republic, other than those with exemptions, learn Irish. There are undoubtedly many countries in Europe where a significant percentage of their school population have access to and develop competence in a second and sometimes more languages. But on the whole English predominates:

> At EU level, almost all students (97.3 %) learnt English during lower secondary education in 2014. In addition, the proportion of students learning English at primary level has increased at EU level by 18.7 percentage points since 2005, reaching a total of 79.4 %.
>
> (Eurydice Highlights – 2017 Edition)

What is presented in Europe and worldwide as multilingualism increasingly fails to extend beyond a global English. Internationally, most pupils learn English as a second language and the figures will increase as the current young generation grows up. What has emerged in all sectors of education is not multilingualism, but anglophonization which *'like globalization, often works against the intercultural, polyphonic outcomes desired by international educators'* (De Wit et al.). In most of Europe, multilingualism or the third language are of little importance, as long as one has a competence in English. In Sweden, for example, a country which like the rest of Scandinavia is often held up as a model to aspire to, the mother tongue plus two ideal has had limited success:

> However, in the educational arena, the situation of second foreign language teaching [in Sweden] is often described as "catastrophic". (Cabau-Lampa)

With Eurostat as source, Devlin and Pew Research (2020) record 18% of school students in Sweden learning Spanish, 8% learning German and 6% learning French. These figures for languages other than English in Europe, and globally, suggest that any comparison of language competences should be treated with caution. In an anglophone society like Northern Ireland, there is a need to be more flexible in language choice. It is important to recall today that a compulsory language was introduced for the sake of the economy (Mawhinney 1989), not for cultural or personal interest reasons. This calls into question the current pattern where German, the language of the strongest economy in Europe, is in danger of disappearing from our schools. The Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP) allowed Spanish to gain a foothold in Northern Ireland's primary schools which pupils then carried on through into post-primary as their preferred language. When the author asked the civil servant in charge of the project why Spanish was offered rather than French or German, languages with a stronger economic profile, the answer was that Spanish is a *'Lifestyle'* language, a view reflected in the Scandinavian and other choices.

The commercial argument for learning languages has to contend with the view that *'English is Enough'*, a mindset that leads school pupils and people in general to believe that learning foreign languages isn't worth the bother and which contributed to the decision to end compulsory language learning at Key Stage 4. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in its Education and Skills Survey (2012) reported that nearly three quarters (72%) of businesses said they value foreign language skills among their employees, particularly in helping build relations with clients, customers and suppliers (39%), but only 2% preferred Modern Languages as a degree subject (CBI 2012, p. 47). Businesses prefer to employ foreign Native Speakers as they can more efficiently deal with non-English speaking clients and there is no shortage of speakers of other languages with good English language competences and, importantly, other marketable skills, knowledge and experience. Similar views are expressed in, for example, the British Academy's *Lost for Words* (2013).

The importance of a language apprenticeship (HMSO, 1987, §10) and developing language awareness and transferable language skills in school to promote openness and flexibility in language learning throughout life underline how attitude is as important as academic aptitude in acquiring language competence and

confidence. Language learning in our schools has suffered from internecine rivalry and vicarious standard-bearing among language interests which can negatively influence and affect pupils. Irish has suffered more than other languages from such negativity, from government policy such as the discriminatory marginalising of Irish in the 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order to teachers and parents asking, *"What use is Irish?"* The Irish lobby (if there is one!) must broadcast the message that, in real terms, utilitarian arguments that are at least as equally valid can be made for Irish as for foreign languages, considering the economic opportunities within the island of Ireland as well as professional opportunities abroad (academic, translation, etc.). The broad societal and commercial opportunities aside, the humanist arguments of identity, cultural self-worth and validation for the language have not lost any of their relevance and importance and constitute a real advantage for the language in education and society. Williams (2000) looks at some of the arguments surrounding reasons to teach Modern Languages and claims there are serious defects in the argument on grounds of vocational usefulness. He claims that such an argument is invalid in the workplace unless someone is very competent. Will a school leaver with GCSE French, German or Spanish really be able to cope competently? (Williams, 2000, p. 17). He continues that *'on the grounds of utility alone, it is wasteful to subject all young people to the study of a language which they will never need to use'* (Williams, 2000, p. 17). Lawes joins the debate, commenting that the vocationalism surrounding language learning and education *per se* diminishes its status (Lawes, 2000, p. 41). As well as making the case for attainable employment opportunities in Irish through projects such as *Do Ghairm le Gaeilge* (Foras na Gaeilge and GradIreland), language apprenticeship and the cultural and environmental factors referred to above in the 1974 Primary Education Teachers' Guide are *'of considerable help in the teaching of Irish and confer certain advantages which no other second language can claim to the same extent in Ireland'* (DENI, 1974, p. 106).

We have seen how the alarming decrease in Irish in the English-medium post-primary sector is happening alongside the growth in Irish-medium education. However, the transfer rate from IME primary schools to English-medium post primary is high, with about a quarter or fewer IME primary pupils transferring to Irish-medium post primary education. Anecdotal evidence suggests that appropriate language

provision for pupils transferring to English-medium post-primary schools is not always guaranteed and they may find themselves in an *ab initio* classroom, which is of little benefit to themselves and discourages the beginners. On the other hand, these pupils as more capable peers can provide a valuable boost to the beginning pupils in the Vygotskian social-constructivist perspective which underpins the Northern Ireland Curriculum, whereby they can take the role of '*knowledgeable other'* to support and motivate their classroom comrades in the linguistic zone of proximal development (ZPD) (1978, p. 86). St. Mary's University College is funded to provide initial teacher education and continuing professional support for Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland. The Áisaonad in the college plays a vital role in developing resources for the sector. As the largest centre for supporting Irish language education in Northern Ireland, the college's resources, staff and material, could also develop strategies to benefit the English-medium sector.

There have been many different methods and approaches to second language teaching and learning (McKendry, 2009). Debate and developments around the methods of language teaching and learning have been ongoing since the time of Comenius in the 17th century, if not before. The complexity of contexts and the greater appreciation of the issues lead us to the conclusion that the panacea of a single, universal, optimum method for teaching and learning modern languages does not exist. The debate in language education, including immersion, has centred around the balance between language teaching which focuses on grammatical form and a communicative approach. Teachers now acknowledge the need to adopt an informed, eclectic approach, incorporating elements from the range of methods available. Most language teaching today aims to achieve oral communication, and the GCSE Irish and Gaeilge specifications also aim to achieve competence in all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (CCEA, 2020).

As we have seen, the Modern Languages Programmes of Study specifications devised for the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NICC, 1991; 1992), prescribed a common Functional Notional syllabus for all the languages. This Programme of Study was based upon a topic-focused version of Communicative Language Teaching which paid little attention to linguistic form or regard for linguistic particularities. Influenced by Krashen, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as the norm in second language and immersion teaching approaches

during the 1980s and 1990s. Classroom tasks were designed with the aim of providing students with the skills necessary to communicate naturally. The focus on fluency often took priority over accuracy in order to encourage language use. However, this emphasis on communicative production was accused of often leading to a neglect of linguistic structures and with limited transactional outcomes. A more balanced approach is now advised for practice in all 4 skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing and due recognition of the language system (grammar, vocabulary and phonology). More recent literature and research recognise the importance of input (Krashen, 1985, p. vii), but recommend approaches such as those that are task-oriented, content-oriented, cognitive, process-oriented and encourage learner autonomy. The overall approach of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum is away from practice which could be characterised as instructivist and teacher-directed to an approach which is more constructivist and pupil-directed.

Rather than a peripatetic, external approach to language learning at primary school, such as under the PMLP, an in-house language awareness approach building on diversity and the Cultural Heritage approach of 'Local, to National, to International', and embracing the various strands of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, may bear more fruit. Likewise, when moving to post-primary, we must realise and accept that for many, perhaps a majority, of our pupils, school-based language learning may not go beyond the compulsory Key Stage 3, age 14. CCEA does provide an OLA (On-Line Assessment) qualification for Key Stage 3 and there is also the opportunity to get the Fáinne. For CCEA, the benefits of OLA include 'flexible, functional language content and grammatical structures' and alignment to the Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2020). The revised NIC, which focuses on cross-curricularity, has the potential to foster a more integrated cross-curricular approach around linguistic awareness as a foundation for the study of a particular language as we can't foresee which language(s) will be required/encountered in later or adult life.

An awkward reality in the discourse around Irish is that while goals such as diversity and multilingualism are claimed, much of the policy and motivation is unsympathetic to the Irish language. The language still struggles under the legal disadvantage imposed by the Education Reform (NI) Order whereby post-primary schools are required to provide one of French, German, Spanish or Italian before

they can offer Irish. It would be naïve to ignore the animosity towards Irish that exists in much of Northern Ireland society. State or controlled schools ignore Irish and the integrated sector has a poor record in offering the language. The focus on promotion and support for the language in the classroom, in policy and pedagogy, should be on the maintained and integrated sectors while the controlled sector should be encouraged to provide a wider curricular context for the language and culture under Citizenship.

Comenius, the 17th century Czech philosopher who advocated textbooks written in native languages rather than Latin and gave his name to the European Union educational project which aims *'to help young people and educational staff better understand the range of European cultures, languages and values'* (European Commission, n.d.), encouraged students to learn their neighbours' languages. In a globalised world, the borders have become blurred. Travel, media and technology bring languages from across the world into the classroom. But for school students in Northern Ireland, Irish is the most obvious *'neighbour'* language. We have discussed the value of language apprenticeship and the flexibility it can foster when learners are faced with whichever languages the adult world offers. We finish with this little 9th century Irish poem, given the title 'The Vanity of Pilgrimage' and inscribed in the margin of a copy of the letters of Saint Paul now found in Dresden in Germany. It embodies the complexity of what is commonly called nowadays 'The European or the Global Dimension'. It also grounds our linguistic landscape and the importance of one's own culture and identity:

Techt do Róim

Mór saido, becc torbai!

In ri chon·daigi hi foss

Mani·m-bera latt, ni·fogbai

(Thurneysen, p. 41)

With a little licence, it translates as:

Travelling to Rome,

Great effort, little benefit,

And the goal *(lit. 'the king')* you seek there,

If you do not bring it with you, you will not find.

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Examination Entries for 2020

The examination process for 2019-20 was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The tables below record the entries, but not the results which were based on estimations.

Provisional GCSE Results 2020 (Northern Ireland). 2019 figures in brackets.

	FRENCH	GERMAN	IRISH	GAEILGE	SPANISH
Grammar					
Males	1100	398	367	28	1169
Female	1605	319	528	45	1586
Total	2705	717	895	73	2755
Non-Grammar					
Males	268	12	154	13	231
Female	584	23	362	24	433
Total	852	35	516	37	664
F.E.					
Males	7	6	0	0	10
Female	3	6	0	0	11
Total	10	12	0	0	21
Other					
Males	0	6	79	53	21
Female	3	3	65	46	21
Total	3	9	144	99	42
Overall					
Males	1375	422	600	94	1431
Female	2195	351	955	115	2051
Total	3570	773	1555	209	3482
(2019)	(3924)	(677)	(1644)	(204)	(3254)
Overall change since 2019	-9%	+14%	-5.5%	+2%	+7%

(Source: CCEA Website)

Provisional GCE AS-Level Results 2020 (Northern Ireland). 2019 figures in brackets.

	FRENCH	GERMAN	IRISH	SPANISH
Overall				
Males	139	60	110	222
Female	382	89	251	473
Total	521	149	361	695
(2019)	(616)	(146)	(397)	(786)
Overall change since 2019	-15.5%	+2%	-9%	-11.5%

(Source: CCEA Website)

Provisional GCE A-Level Results 2020 (Northern Ireland). 2019 figures in brackets.

	FRENCH	GERMAN	IRISH	SPANISH
Overall				
Males	91	37	92	154
Female	242	53	223	319
Total	333	90	315	473
(2019)	(358)	(69)	(291)	(458)
Overall change since 2019	-7.5%	+29%	+7.5%	+3%

(Source: CCEA Website)

Appendix 2

Extracts from the Good Friday Agreement

Economic, Social and Cultural Issues

3. All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

4. In the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it:

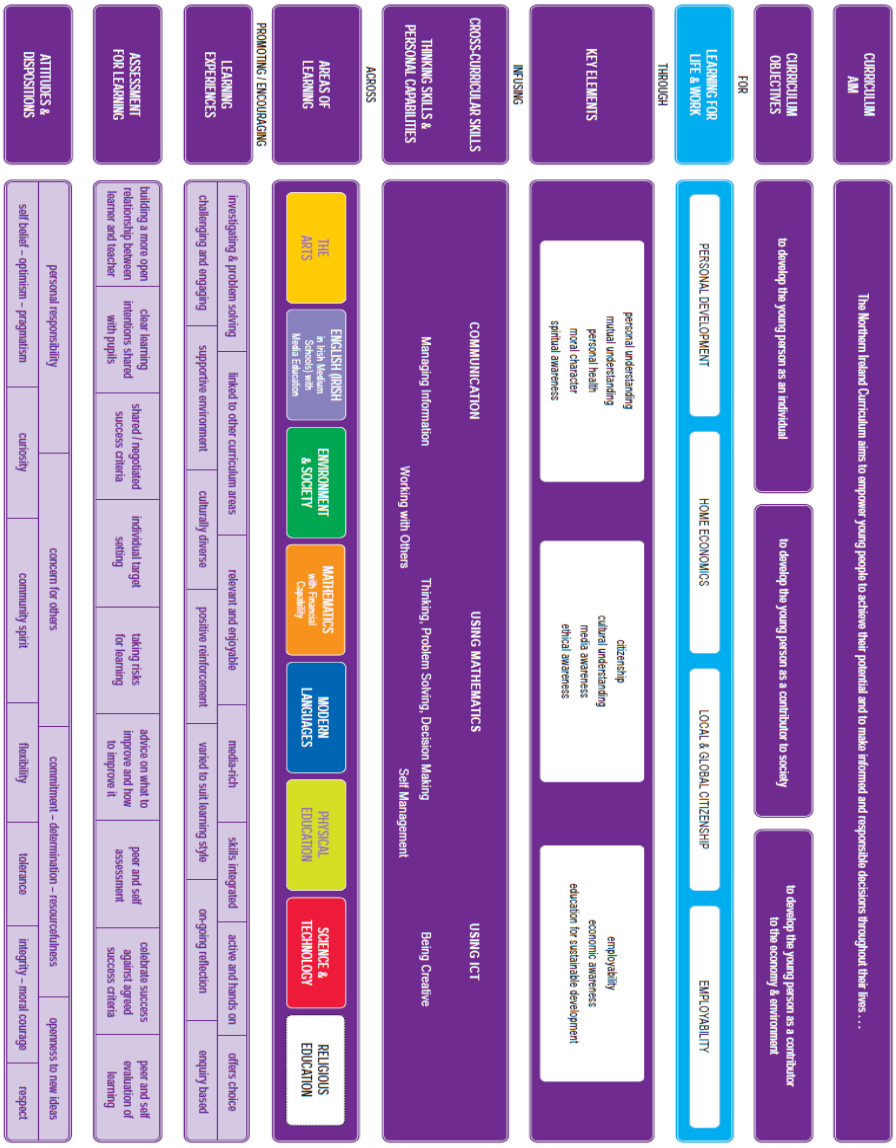
- take resolute action to promote the language;
- facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;
- seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;
- make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;
- place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with current provision for integrated education;
- explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifís na Gaeilge in Northern Ireland;

• seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland; and

• encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.

Appendix 3

The Big Picture at Key Stage 3 (CCEA 2007a)



A Big Picture of the Secondary Curriculum in England (QCDA)

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