



Irish

The Irish language in education in the Republic of Ireland

| Regional dossiers series |



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Contents

Register	2
Foreword	3
1 Introduction.....	5
2 Pre-school education.....	15
3 Primary education	18
4 Post-primary education	22
5 Vocational education	27
6 Higher education	28
7 Adult education.....	37
8 Educational research.....	39
9 Prospects.....	41
10 Summary statistics	45
Education system in Ireland	47
References and further reading.....	49
Addresses	51
Other websites on minority languages	53
What can the Mercator Research Centre offer you?.....	55

Register

DES:	Department of Education and Science
DIT:	Dublin Institute of Technology
ITÉ:	Linguistics Institute of Ireland
HEA:	Higher Education Authority
NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCVA:	National Council for Vocational Awards
NUI:	National University of Ireland
PLC:	Post-Leaving Certificate Courses
RTC:	Regional Technical Colleges
TRBDI:	Tipperary Rural Business Development Institute
UL:	University Limerick
VEC:	Vocational Education Act



Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

contents

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



1 Introduction

language

Irish, or *Gaeilge*, is an autochthonous language spoken in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (which is part of the United Kingdom with a devolved assembly). It is a Celtic language closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx and more distantly related to Welsh, Breton and Cornish. According to the 1996 Census 1.43 million persons (1,430,205) aged 3 and over, returned themselves, or were returned, as Irish speakers in the Republic. This constitutes 43.5% of the total population. There are no figures from this census for ability to read and write since the question was changed for the first time to reflect ability and frequency in speaking the language. Previous censuses, up to 1991, did not record ability in writing, but did record ability to read but not to speak Irish. In 1991, 371,768 persons were in this category, an increase on previous figures. Certain levels of reading and writing ability can be assumed in the 1.43 million speakers recorded in 1996.

legislative status

A cultural revolution at the end of the nineteenth century preceded the political revolution of the twentieth. The restoration and development of the Irish language was then a significant issue for the native government from its inception. Article 4 of the 1922 Constitution designated Irish as the national language of the Free State. Since English was jointly recognised as an official language official status for Irish is understood. Article 8 of the present (1937) Constitution designates Irish as the first official language by virtue of its being the national language. Article 25 states that the text in the national language shall prevail, in case of conflict between the texts of a law enrolled in both the official languages, or the texts of any copy of this Constitution. The interpretation of these articles has been left to the courts. After some years of initial work, on July 19th 2000, the Cabinet gave approval to the preparation of a general scheme on the proposed Official Languages Equality Bill, which it is hoped to publish by the end of 2000. Under the Bill, the language rights of the citizen will be established in accordance with the constitutional status of both the official languages. A legal obligation

will be placed on State departments and public services to provide services to the public through Irish at an agreed level. The Minister of State responsible has stated publicly that the Ombudsman will still deal with complaints as happens now, but that a Commissioner for Languages may also be appointed.

Irish speaking

The majority of primary Irish speakers using the language on a daily basis are located in the regions known as *Gaeltacht* areas (to which the language receded during the language shift that occurred) and in networks or individual cases outside those regions by those who have made Irish their language of choice. The latter may be from the *Gaeltacht*, or have learned the language in school to native speaker proficiency. A significant proportion of these are to be found in the catchment areas of parent initiated Irish medium playgroups and schools. Many bring up their children with Irish as the first language. While the majority of children in Irish medium schools are from English speaking homes, they may be considered part of the language community now. The table shows the breakdown of the 1996 census in greater detail.



CENSUS 1996				
	Speaking competence	% of designated population	daily/regular use	% of population with competence
State total	1430205	435	353663	25% circa
Gaeltacht	61035	763	35275	58%
Non-Gaeltacht	1369170	427	318388	23,25%

With regard to self-reported ability in Irish throughout the State, the following points are of note.

- In the crucial pre-school cohort (3-4 years), Irish speakers were 10% of the total (including 50.9% in the *Gaeltacht*).

- The highest percentages are recorded for the three age cohorts between age 5 and 24, those currently in or having recently left the education system (in the *Gaeltacht* also).
- The large majority of this census figure represents second language speakers generated by the school (across all age cohorts).

Throughout the State, 1.43 million people report themselves as having competence in Irish. Of these, only 25% regularly use that competence: the majority (up to 80%) being currently in the education system. Of the 25% of regular users of Irish, among those with competence in the State, up to 80% are also currently in the education system or have recently left it, in the age cohorts 5-24. If these are removed, the real figure for regular users throughout the State is 71,000, or 3% of the population. However, since a proportion of the school population attend Irish medium schools and a further proportion of these are also home bilinguals, the real figure is closer to 100,000, or about 5%.

Taking census figures and other surveys together, the evidence is that approximately 5% of the population (across all age groups) has high active competence; 10-12% has good competence and occasional regular use; 25-30% are on a declining scale towards low passive competence. The success of State education policy has been a significant factor in generating these levels of competence, as is the development of the parent led Irish medium sector of education. Both contribute to the high societal recognition of Irish as an ethnic marker and to support for policies for the language, especially for effective teaching, as attested in social surveys.

**education
system**

Schooling is compulsory from age 6 to 15. (The Education Welfare Bill currently under Parliamentary debate proposes to raise the upper limit to 16). However, over 50% of four-year-olds and almost all five-year-olds are enrolled in junior and senior Infant classes in primary schools. Formal pre-school education for the under-fours, funded by the Department of Science and Education is limited, concentrating on specific forms of

disadvantage and on children with special educational needs. Primary schooling usually lasts from age four (junior infants) to age twelve (sixth class). Pupils recognised for purposes of capitation grants are required to be not less than twelve years of age on the 1st January of the school year in which they enter post-primary education, where they follow the Junior Cycle for three years (leading to a public examination: the Junior Certificate) and Senior Cycle for two or three years leading to the final public examination, Leaving Certificate. The three-year Senior Cycle (taken in the large majority of schools) must include a Transition Year Programme after Junior Cycle. The Leaving Certificate is available in several forms to make provision for different levels of ability and interest. Senior Cycle completion rate falls from 91.6% at age 16 to 63.2% at age 18.

The statistics below serve for the school year 1998/1999, the latest available, provided by the Department of Education and Science, although not yet published. The Primary (first level) sector serves 452,533 pupils, including special schools and pupils with special needs, in some 3,200 schools with 21,500 teachers. The private non-State aided sector has 5,312 pupils and 37 schools in addition. While the pupil teacher ratio is 21 the average class size is 25 to 26. Over half of primary schools are small (4 teachers only). Primary education has been organised on a denominational basis since 1831, the schools being part of a specific church's parish in the majority of cases. However, the current and capital costs of primary schools, including the full cost of the teachers' salaries are predominantly funded by the State and supplemented by local contributions. Special additional funding is available for schools in disadvantaged areas.

Post primary second level education serves some 362,000 pupils in approximately 760 schools (the numbers vary due to local amalgamations/rationalisation in some instances and the provision of new institutions in others), with 23,435 full time or equivalent teachers. The majority of schools at second level are private secondary schools, 432 with approximately 60% of total intake, mostly owned and managed by religious orders; some

by individuals or Boards of Governors. However, the State pays over 95% of teachers' salaries, as well as allowance and capita-tion grants to the 95% of secondary schools which have opted to join the free education scheme begun in the 1960s. There are 245 vocational schools, with some 26% of second level students, established under the Act of 1930 and administered by over thirty local vocational education committees (VEC). The State pays 93% of the total cost of their provision. The chief Executive Officers of these VECs have an important role in the schools under their jurisdiction. 82 Community and Com-prehensive schools, established by the State from the 1960s, educate approximately 14% of students at this level. These are allocated individual budgets by the State. Apart from a small number of private schools, education is free.

It has been said that Irish education has a unique pattern of ownership and management, an apparently contradictory situa-tion of private ownership and control combined with substantial public finding, largely for historical reasons. The dominant pat-tern is one of church ownership and management but with the state responsible for the bulk of capital and current costs and retaining control of curriculum and assessment.

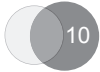


administration

Overall responsibility for most aspects of State funded edu-cation at first and second level lies with the Department of Education and Science (DES), as well as for some aspects of post compulsory education and training. Third level institu-tions are autonomous and self-governing. Since, however, the majority are substantially funded by the State, they come under the Higher Education Authority (HEA). This is a statutory body under the aegis of the Minister which is responsible for furthering the development of higher education and the alloca-tion of funding to designated institutions. For institutions in the non-university sector of higher and further education, the Quali-fications (Education and Training) Act 1999 was passed in July 1999 to establish an integrated new administrative structure for the development, recognition and award of qualifications. It pro-vides for an overall National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

with two subsidiary Councils, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council for the Institutes of Technology and the Further Education and Training Awards Council for other bodies.

The Education Act 1998 (which amended some sections of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) 1978 and of the Vocational Education Act 1930) is the first legislation of general application on the organisation of education in the state, placing the education system at first and second level on a statutory footing. Part IV of the Act deals with the establishment of representative Boards of Management in schools not maintained by VECS, as one of the duties of the patron of a school. The VEC itself is deemed patron for the purposes of the Act. In other instances, recognised patron means the Church representative for the majority of primary schools or owner/ trustees/ board of governors of post-primary schools. Some Irish medium schools have made their own arrangements for the position of patron, particularly at primary level, through an over-arching body, *An Foras Patrúnachta*. At second level they follow the prevailing pattern. The functions of Boards of Management include the school plan, a factor which could have significance for language policy in the school.



support structure

The functions of the Inspectorate as detailed in the Education Act 1998 include to support and advise schools; to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of educational provision; to conduct research for policy purposes; to advise the Minister: to be involved in the preparation and marking of public examinations. In relation to Irish, their function is to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching, development, promotion and use of Irish in schools and centres for education and to report to the Minister on these matters.

A network of Education Support Centres throughout the country, begun in 1972 and funded by the DES, are involved in ongoing in-service and provision of materials. Irish benefits from this service in general. In particular the first designated Education Centre for services on behalf of Irish as subject and

as medium has just got underway in the Cork *Gaeltacht* and will be operational by school year 2001. When the current building programme is complete, there will be 21 full-time centres, 8 part time and 1 Irish medium centre.

Section 31 of the Education Act (1998) provides for a body of persons with the dual function of providing support services for education through the medium of Irish, including *Gaeltacht* schools and for the teaching and learning of Irish as a subject. This body may also advise the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). It has not yet been established. Support services means a large range of services, including speech therapy and psychological services.

Other provisions of the Act that may be seen as a form of official support for Irish are mentioned in the objects of the Act for those involved in implementation (extension of bilingualism; greater use of Irish in school and in the community; maintenance of community language in *Gaeltacht*) and in the functions of the Minister (to provide support services through Irish to recognised schools teaching through Irish and to any other recognised school requesting such provision).

Irish benefits from three voluntary organisations that are grant aided by *Foras na Gaeilge*, the new all-Ireland statutory agency that has replaced the language board: *Gaelscoileanna* for Irish medium education: *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* (joint committee on pre- schooling which includes the voluntary body *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha*) and *Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge*, the organisation for teachers of Irish.

**curriculum and
assessment**

Part VII of the Education Act (1998) places the existing National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on a statutory basis to be implemented by December 2000. Once established, the composition of the Council is to include persons who are representative of Irish language organisations. The general functions implicit in the title include advising the Minister on strategies which have as their objective the enhancement of

the effectiveness in the teaching and use of the Irish language in schools. The Council also shall have regard to advice on aspects of the language at school that may come from the body of persons to be set up under Section 31.

The Council has, in fact, since its inception overseen enormous changes across all curricular areas for both primary and post primary sectors, including the communicative approach for languages of the Council of Europe. Assessment modes have also changed but not to the extent of variety and flexibility that the Council would wish. In Irish, for example, aural tests were introduced for both public examinations. The Council, however, while providing the actual syllabi and counsel on assessment modes and marking, is an advisory body to the Minister. It is the Minister and the DES who are responsible for implementation.

Included in the functions of recognised schools, the Act stipulates promotion of the development of the Irish language and traditions, Irish literature, the arts and other cultural matters as well as contributing to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in the case of schools located in a *Gaeltacht* area.



Irish medium education

There are two distinct types of Irish medium education.

- (1) In *Gaeltacht* areas (except in a single instance of a primary *gaelscoil*) the education system at first and second level is and has always been a part of the mainstream State system, the only difference being that the medium of instruction is Irish, whereas in most of the State system the medium is now English. Maintaining Irish as medium is, however, hindered by many factors outside the control of the school. The reality that many *Gaeltacht* schools are de facto becoming more bilingual, with Irish gradually losing ground as the dominant language is due to a series of ongoing societal changes, not all of which are purely linguistic. The linguistic background of pupils is now very varied, particularly with incomers who may be children of returned *Gaeltacht* emigrants brought up abroad. The recently

established (2000) Commission on the *Gaeltacht* will be including these factors in their deliberations. The most recent statistics available are given in the table.

Irish Medium Education- <i>Gaeltacht</i>		
1999 - 2000		
	Schools	Pupils
Primary	110	8,035
Post-primary	20	3,443
Total	130	11,483

Post-primary *Gaeltacht* schools may be private secondary schools, vocational schools/colleges, community or comprehensive schools. There are two second-level schools that are not recognised by the DES as fulfilling the linguistic criteria for *Gaeltacht* schools, that is, satisfactory provision for giving education through Irish to the pupils.

- (2) After the public questioning of the 1960s with regard to the perceived lack of success of State language policy since 1922, changes were made in official policy. In education, this provoked a largely parent initiated voluntary movement through two organisations, one for preschoolers: Na Naíonraí Gaelacha later co-partners with An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta; the other for primary and post primary education, Gaelscoileanna. Groups founded by the preschool movement are found all over the country, including the *Gaeltacht*, but they remain outside the formal system of education. However, the growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education, as well as the need for childcare, has meant a more public admission of their contribution, particularly through the National Children's Strategy of the Department of Health and Children and the National Forum on Early Childhood Education.

These playgroups (*Naíonraí*) are also instrumental in ensuring linguistic continuity to primary school. The Irish medium educa-

tion movement is constantly developing and the organisation *Gaelscoileanna* is now recognised by the DES as one of the partners in education. Many primary *gaelscoileanna* begin with a small group of children, largely English speakers from English speaking families, in temporary premises, with a qualified teacher paid for by the parents and with no official recognition. Once the criteria for recognition has been met, the *gaelscoil* becomes part of mainstream education. Conditions for *gaelscoileanna* are slightly more favourable, but under constant review towards convergence with the system in general. At second level, *gaelscoileanna* are usually founded as part of the existing system, although only as a result of State concession to demand.

Some Irish medium streams exist in English medium institutions. These are not considered a solution by the organisation *Gaelscoileanna*, which has also reacted negatively to the DES idea of a campus solution where several schools of differing linguistic philosophy may share the same central facilities.

- (3) In addition to these two main categories, two other types of Irish medium education also exist. At primary level, there are several Irish medium model schools (*modhscoil*) directly under Departmental aegis. At primary and post-primary level (outside *Gaeltacht* regions) there exist a variety of patterns, e.g. primary level: a curricular area or a class group within a school may be taught entirely through Irish (almost 31% of the primary sector reported such an approach); second level: some subjects may be taught through Irish.

More specific information on Irish as a curricular subject area and as medium of instruction is given in the sections below.

2 Pre-school education

group and provision

More than half of four-year-olds and the majority of five-year-olds are in the Junior and Senior Infant classes of Primary schools. These correspond to Pre-Primary level in the International Standard Classification of Education. Depending on the location and type of school they attend, these children will either receive instruction in Irish as a subject or else be taught through Irish as medium. The DES also runs some specific educational programmes for 3-4 year olds with specific disadvantages.

The DES has put in place a limited number of compensatory programmes for three year olds with specific socio-economic disadvantage, or with special educational needs. The Early Start Preschool programme, attached to specific primary schools, set up in 1994, forms part of the DES Programme to break the cycle of disadvantage. The figures for 1998-99 are given below. The Health Authorities also give grants to voluntary bodies working in similar fields. These types of pre-primary provision are mainly in community run nurseries and playgroups. It is difficult to quantify in these areas, as needs and available funds are liable to change.

DES Early Start Programme (3-4 year olds) 1998-99	
schools	40
pupils	1,535
teachers	55
childcare assistants	55

Irish medium

Outside the official system, a variety of establishments, some funded by the Health Boards, cater for under fours, especially for the age range 3-4. Among these, some playgroups and some St. Nicholas Montessori schools consider their approach bilingual, as they offer songs, stories, rhymes in Irish. The Child Care Act 1991 provides the regulatory system through the Department of Education and Children. *Naionraí*, Irish medium playgroups under the aegis of the voluntary organisation *An*

Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta are directed mainly at 3-4 year olds. Their intake is almost predominantly from English speaking families where parents have made a specific language choice in favour of Irish, except in *Gaeltacht* areas where the linguistic background will be more varied. The aim of the *Naíonra* is the total development of the preschooler through an Irish language immersion programme structured around the child's communicative needs.

staff training

Two aspects are vital to training: language competence and methodological skills in the presentation in an immersion setting of linguistic material relevant to the all round developmental needs of young children, the majority – but not all – of whom will be English speakers. While a minority of the *Naíonra* staff may be former Primary teachers, their pedagogic training need not necessarily be suitable, often the opposite. Most staff will have had no formal training. Since 1978, *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* (joint committee for preschooling) has provided intensive week long and weekend courses for staff training, some now with financial input from regional funds. These courses are not formally recognised. Recently (1999-2000), with the involvement of *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, the *Gaeltacht* authority, a specific Irish medium validated course has been introduced by *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta*, leading to the qualification Level 2 (Childcare) from the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA). All such training is Irish medium.

Since the *Naíonraí* function in a voluntary climate, staff training requirements, while considered essential, are the responsibility of organisations. They are a requirement of the organisation, but not officially compulsory, although the Child Care Act 1991 expects staff in regulated institutions to have some related background, not necessarily statutorily validated.

statistics

The first groups were established in cities in the late sixties and early seventies, based largely on the Welsh experience. The voluntary organisation *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha* was founded to coordinate the field, under the aegis of the Gaelic League

(founded 1893). In 1978 this organisation became a partner in the joint committee with the then new language board *Bord Na Gaeilge*, which provided annual funding. The joint committee is now set for further structural change with the introduction of *Údarás na Gaeltachta* on its board. Figures for year 1999 - 2000 are given in the table.

Naíonraí 1999-2000					
Gaeltacht	98	boys	50,4%	families	
rest of Republic	180	girls	49,6%		
total	278	total	3,257	total	3,078

Linguistic background (available for 3,809 of total): Irish					
	nativelike	good	some	understand	little or none
mothers	8%	12%	39%	21%	19%
fathers	9%	11%	34%	23%	24%
children	4%	1%	12%	18%	65%

Source (both tables): Organisation An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta.

language use Since the *Naíonra* programme is immersion, it is intended that only Irish be used during sessions.

instructional material Some, but not yet sufficient, appropriate materials have been produced by *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* and some others by *An Gúm*, the Irish language publications branch of the DES, which has now become part of *Foras na Gaeilge*, the new all-Ireland language body. Other commercial products have been adapted.

3 Primary education

Irish as curricular subject area

target group Irish is offered as a subject area to all pupils in recognised schools from age four in Junior Infants to age 17/18 in the final year of second level education. It is part of the core curriculum during the years of compulsory schooling 6-15. Primary education caters for children from 4 to 12. Two infant classes are normally an integral part of the primary school.

legislation Article 42 of the Constitution acknowledges the family as primary and natural educator and their freedom to provide this education at home, in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State. Although the State shall not oblige parents to avail of such State schools, it requires that children receive a certain minimum education. The State shall provide for free primary education and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative.

In a judgement delivered in the High Court on 16th April 1999, Ms Justice Laffoy interpreted this article to mean that ‘an obligation to provide for the education of the children of the State at their first stage of formal teaching and instruction must involve an obligation to provide for education in the constitutionally recognised first official language of the State. It follows that the requirement of the rules that teachers teaching in recognised primary schools should have proficiency in Irish is a valid provision under the constitution... also a valid requirement under European Community law...it is neither disproportionate nor discriminatory’.

rule 31 Rules and regulations set out the conditions for recognition of primary schools by the DES. They are designated as national schools since 1831. As such, they are under local management and are staffed by teachers qualified under the Rules. Rule 31 states that the inscription *Scoil Náisiúnta* must be displayed with the name of the school, or bilingually, if the manager specially desires. The 1998 Education Act now regulates the system for recognised schools.

curriculum

At national level, the curriculum is formulated by the Minister for Education and Science, on the advice of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The DES, through the inspectorate, then oversees its implementation. This national curriculum may be adapted to suit the individual school through the school plan. In practical terms, the NCCA, through representative committees and education officers, prepares the curriculum: the syllabus and guidelines for teachers. A new primary school curriculum across all subject areas is currently (2000) being introduced on a phased basis. The basic principles of the approach since 1971 (when the last changes were introduced) have been child-centredness, with the emphasis on activity and guided-discovery learning through an integrated curriculum, since primary teachers are class teachers. These principles however, while implemented in every other area since 1971, have only now been introduced into the curriculum for Irish. From 1971, the method for Irish has been basically aural-oral, or audio-visual. The communicative approach is now on the way in, to provide continuity with post-primary. For the first time also, this new curriculum for Irish offers possibilities for differentiation to Irish medium schools whether *Gaeltacht* or *gaelscoil* and guidance for English medium schools on integration of Irish with other subjects. There is now no public examination at the end of primary schooling. Records are kept by teachers and tests, standardised on the English-medium sector, are used in schools. *Gaeltacht* teachers are now protesting that no suitable tests standardised on *Gaeltacht* pupils are available for this new curriculum.

exemptions

All recognised primary school pupils will then have exposure to Irish teaching throughout their schooling and – in schools other than Irish medium – at least hopefully some form of integration between Irish and other areas of the curriculum, as reported by up to 31% of primary schools in the latest available statistics (1998/1999). The Revised Curriculum now being implemented advises at least 4 hours of teaching per week for the first language and 3.5 hours for the second, with 3 hours and 2.5

respectively for Infant classes which have a shorter schoolday. However, it is a general view that both the quantity and quality of Irish teaching in primary schools varies greatly. Pupils in certain categories may be allowed exemption from Irish classes, e.g. years spent abroad, foreign children, attested learning difficulties. The number of such exemptions stands at 1,234 for the year 1999-2000.

Irish medium education

The first Irish medium schools were begun at the start of this century, *Scoil Éanna* for boys by Patrick Pearse in 1908 and *Scoil Bhríde* for girls, by a group in 1917, both in Dublin. *Scoil Bhríde* is still functioning as a recognised primary school, the first *gaelscoil*.

Existing model schools came under the aegis of the native government after independence. There are now several, with the Minister as patron, functioning through Irish in the cities.

In April 1922, the (then) Provisional Government decreed that Irish be the medium of instruction for Infant classes. This was gradually extended and reached its apex in the 1940s. Reaction from teachers and segments of the public, together with a negative piece of research in 1967, led eventually to Irish being reduced to subject matter only in the majority of schools. Parallel with, and following on this policy change, parents began a movement for Irish medium education for their children. The first such school began in Dublin in 1952, the second in 1967 and the development has not since halted. One such school has been established in the *Gaeltacht* near Galway city. Figures at September 1999 are as follows, supplied by the organisation *Gaelscoileanna*.

statistics

Irish medium primary education-outside <i>Gaeltacht</i>	
schools	114
pupils	19,554



There are now only two counties which do not have such provision. Until the advent of this type of democracy in education, there existed only the denominational schools or private schools. The regulations, however, did not preclude interdenominational school or lay management. The Irish-medium schools then broke the mould and provided a democratic management model which is now the norm.

funding

The criteria for recognition, and therefore funding, for Irish-medium schools are largely the same as for any other application for a State-aided school, although the upper level of the required criteria may be lowered slightly.

special and remedial education

There is no specific provision for Irish medium special education except in some local instances in *Gaeltacht* areas. The remedial education option in pre-service teacher training, as well as the in-service course offered, may include a module on Irish as curricular area. The provision is totally inadequate. Literacy problems have been recognised in primary education and the number of remedial teachers increased to 1,400. Guidelines have been issued officially on learning support. However, Irish language problems have been ignored.

teaching materials

For Irish as school subject, the commercial publishers supply reading schemes and some other materials. *An Gúm*, the publications branch of the DES, which has now been incorporated into the new all-Ireland language body, supplies books for subject matter being taught through Irish. Some other ventures, both private and State funded also exist. But overall, the provision is limited, patchy and largely unexciting. The Linguistics Institute of Ireland (ITÉ) has recently provided materials for teaching Art and Science through Irish in certain classes in non-medium schools.

4 Post-primary education

- target group** The several sectors of post-primary education cater for students from age 12 (in January of first year) to age 15, the limit of compulsory schooling, at Junior Cycle and for ages 15 to 17/18 at Senior Cycle. Depending on category, schools may be single sex as are the vast majority of private secondary schools, or co-educational as are the rest of schools.
- legislation** The Intermediate Education Act (Ireland) of 1878 and the work of the Commissioners (largely on secondary schools) came under the control of the native government in 1922. The Vocational Education Act 1930 created 38 VECs to oversee a new type of technical education, funded centrally and by local authorities. This Act was amended in 1970 to allow for co-operation between the secondary and vocational sectors under a system of shared control. A small number of comprehensive and community schools (the first founded in 1963) come largely under the DES. Their designation shows the underlying philosophy. Until the Educational Act 1998, it was largely the regulatory power of the Minister that governed the whole sector.
- Irish as curricular subject area** Irish is offered as part of the core curriculum at both Junior and Senior Cycle. Almost 80.5% of 17 year-olds and 63.2% of 18 year-olds are retained in Senior Cycle. The official target is for at least 70% at Leaving Certificate level. The Rules state that (a) the curriculum must include certain subject areas, one of which is Irish; (b) the Leaving Certificate course for recognised pupils must include not less than five of the 24 specified subjects, of which one shall be Irish. While the majority follow the established Leaving Certificate course, two other alternatives may be taken if approved by the Minister: the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. Both must include courses in Irish. It is, however, no longer mandatory to pass the examination in Irish in order to receive a pass and receive a Certificate in the entire Leaving Certificate examination. All recognised second level students, then, will have exposure to the teaching of Irish, more in some

schools than in others. There is no distinction made in the prescribed courses for Junior and Senior Cycle between Irish as first and second language, although regional differences are acknowledged. The same course is followed in all schools. Since 1989, the curriculum for Irish syllabus and examinations, at Junior and Senior Cycle, has been changing to the communicative approach advocated by the Council of Europe. To accommodate increasing diversity of learners, the examination at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate is offered at three levels: Foundation, Ordinary, Higher. Literature is not part of the Foundation courses. The Leaving Certificate Applied has a specific course and examination in Irish, in the *Gaeltacht* and in the rest of the country. The rules state that the children of foreigners who are diplomatic or consular representatives in Ireland may substitute for Irish any other subject from the list of approved subjects. Other exemptions are also allowed. The most recent figures for all students in second level currently having an exemption are 7,812 (1999-2000).

Irish medium

Second level Irish medium education includes *Gaeltacht* schools (given above), some schools which have traditionally taught all subjects through Irish and, increasingly, second level schools established to cater for the output of parent led primary immersion education. Both the latter now come under the *gaelscoileanna* category. There are also a small number of schools which have over the years reduced their coverage of subjects taught through Irish.

Irish medium second level education - outside <i>Gaeltacht</i>		
	Gaelscoileanna (1999-2000)	some subjects through Irish
schools	30	7
pupils	4998	363

Source: Organisation *Gaelscoileanna* (column 1) and official statistics (2)

- funding** All medium schools are part of mainstream education. The funding and management will depend on the category of this sector which they represent. Teachers who teach subjects other than Irish through the medium of Irish or who teach in *Gaeltacht* schools, or in island schools, receive an additional allowance. In 1998-99, there were 233 teachers in receipt of these grants.
- special and remedial education** There is no special provision in special education for Irish speakers. Remedial work is largely the responsibility of a teacher who may have received no more than an occasional lecture on remedial work in Irish as a subject or a medium.
- teaching materials** *An Gúm*, as with the primary sector, is the provider for subjects taught through Irish. There are many gaps. Much of what is available is unsuitable. Irish as subject area fares much better with the commercial publishers as the market is much greater. Much is expected from the new legislation, Article 31 of the Education Act 1998 as well as specific mention of an Education Unit in the legislation setting up *Foras na Gaeilge*.
- examinations** There are two public State examinations: Junior Certificate taken at the end of compulsory education at age 15 and Leaving Certificate at age 17/18. Leaving Certificate has three parallel programmes: Leaving Certificate; Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, begun in 1989 which, in addition to elements of the normal programme, emphasises entrepreneurial and vocational modules; a self-contained Leaving Certificate Applied with a cross-curricular rather than subject base and vocational preparation which may lead to post Leaving certificate courses but not to direct entry into third level.

statistics 2000 While schools may offer an approved programme in Irish, not every student will undergo the examination. There are usually lesser numbers presenting for Irish than for English. In the current year (2000), 62,235 candidates presented for Leaving Certificate, including 3,899 repeat candidates (who may do one or two subjects only). Of this total, 87.6% sat Irish and 92.9% sat English. If repeat students are removed, the figures are 93.5% sat Irish and 99% English. Approximately 94% of the numbers sitting English take Irish, not necessarily the same students.

For Junior Certificate, the total figures sitting the examination stood at 61,470. Of these, 92.8% sat Irish and 98.3% sat English (at some level). Again, approximately 94% of the number sitting English take Irish. (It is of note that 672 students sat the first Leaving Certificate examination in 1926).

Pupils sitting public examinations in Irish 2000		
Level/Exam.	Leaving Certificate	Junior Certificate
Higher	16,955	22,794
Ordinary	31,850	29,020
Foundation	5,726	5,243
Total	60,736	57,057

2000 % Pupils receiving honours grades (A - C: 59-100%)		
Level/Exam.	Leaving Certificate (A1 - C3)	Junior Certificate (A - C)
Higher	80.1	76.4
Ordinary	73.9	57.4
Foundation	80.5	73.6

Despite these results and a communicative oriented methodology, there is still disquiet with the outcomes being attained. In 1999 the Minister requested a survey to provide him with information on Irish at second level. The NCCA also published commentaries on examination results.

**additional
instruction**

Many second level students attend three-week courses at Summer Colleges in the *Gaeltacht* during school vacation. Costs are kept down through State subventions for both instruction and student accommodation in local houses. In recent years, up to 60 colleges catered for 23,000 students, aged 12-18.

5 Vocational education

target group and structure	<p>In addition to the vocational element of the two alternative Leaving Certificate programmes, the programme <i>Youthreach</i> provides two years of education, training and work experience for over 7,250 young people between 15 and 18 who leave school without any formal educational qualifications. <i>Youthreach</i> is operated by VECs and FÁS, (<i>Foras Áiseanna Saothair</i>), the training and employment authority (established 1988) and participants receive a training allowance. <i>Youthreach</i> is funded by the European Social Fund.</p>
language use	<p>In <i>Gaeltacht</i> areas, there have been problems with regard to <i>Youthreach</i> provision through Irish. In general with regard to vocational education provision, Irish is not a component factor of the various initiatives, unless the programme is being offered in a <i>Gaeltacht</i> area. Projects run by <i>Muintearas</i>, a <i>Gaeltacht</i> based educational venture and the <i>Gaeltacht</i> Authority will be through Irish. Overall, Irish has very little visibility in vocational education, except minimally in Community training workshops which are run through VECs jointly with FÁS, the Training Authority, for 16-25 year olds considered at risk. Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC) are delivered by some 220 schools and colleges, largely in the vocational school sector. They are usually of one or two years' duration, free, and offer work experience and maintenance grants (to eligible students). Currently, there are just under 25,000 places on offer for more than 1,000 courses, leading to qualifications which may be recognised for continuation to diploma courses and degree courses in Institutes of Technology. Some colleges offering PLC courses have links with British colleges for continuation. Unless offered in a <i>Gaeltacht</i> area, Irish will not form part of these PLC courses.</p>

6 Higher education

structure

There are four separate sectors in higher education: universities, institutes of technology, colleges of teacher education and private institutions.

There are seven universities, some of which have designated institutions attached, as the table shows. All the universities now come under the latest Universities Act of 1997, which has amended or repealed sections of earlier Acts. That legislation gave separate autonomous university status to the existing colleges of the National University of Ireland (NUI).

Higher education

University	Constituent Institutions	Original date of Establishment	Legislation Now	Attached Institutions and date of attachment
University of Dublin	(1) Trinity College	1591	(Charter of Elizabeth 1 of England) Act 1997	Confers qualifications for certain courses in Dublin Institute of Technology. Confers qualifications for 3 small colleges of Education and St. Catherine's College of Home Economics
National University of Ireland (NUI)	(4) NUI Dublin NUI Cork NUI Galway NUI Maynooth	1908 (Formerly Queen's Colleges as still now in Belfast)	Act 1997	National College of Art and Design Royal College of Surgeons Royal Irish Academy
University of Limerick (UL)	(1) UL	1989 (former National Institute for Higher Education 1980 Act)	Act 1997	Thomond College of Physical Education, incorporated into UL 1991 Mary Immaculate College of Education attached 1991
Dublin City University (DCU)	(1) DCU	1989 (former National Institute of Higher Education 1980 Act)	Act 1997	St. Patrick's College of Education attached 1993

The two 1989 Universities were the first established since political independence. The 1997 Act established the three constituent colleges of the National University as constituent universities as well as Maynooth (founded in 1785 for theological preparation of R.C. priests, but which now has a secular university also).

Two 1992 Acts gave statutory autonomous status and new designation to the existing Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and existing Regional Technical Colleges (RTC) which had come under local VECs. Including DIT which incorporates six colleges, there are now 13 Institutes of Technology (RTCs re-named) catering for just under half of all third level enrolment.

Universities and Institutes of Technology have statutory governing bodies and are State funded.

Rationalisation has resulted in two large colleges of teacher education: St. Patrick's in Dublin and Mary Immaculate in Limerick (both Catholic), as well as three smaller colleges: Froebel and St. Mary's, (both Catholic) and the Church of Ireland College of Education, all three in Dublin. These five colleges are all under private denominational management, but largely supported by the State.

The Tipperary Rural Business Development Institute (TRBDI) is a new venture: an electronic campus with two centres, strong local and international links and an outreach service IT based. Irish language and culture are offered in some of the diploma courses.

**language use
and support**

Irish is offered as an academic discipline in its own right and as also part of teaching methodology on the higher diploma in education course at all four NUI universities. In UL, Irish is offered in the school of Languages and in the training of teachers. These courses will be through the medium of Irish. Modules in other courses may also be offered through Irish occasionally in some universities. At DCU in the School of Business Stud-



ies courses in Finance, Computers, and Enterprise are offered through Irish.

The National University of Ireland at Galway was funded by Act in 1929 to offer courses through Irish, which it has done since, adding courses in media and a diploma in education in recent years. The take up is not high, however, despite State scholarships, and there are difficulties in finding suitable staff. Nevertheless, the university has maintained its regulations on staff competence despite moves from within its own governing body, although exceptions have to be made when necessary, as in the recent case of an appointment in medicine. Currently, courses or modules are offered through Irish, mainly in the arts.

A recent survey by *Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge* found some 38 courses, at under-graduate and post-graduate level, leading to degrees or diplomas, whether relating to Irish language and culture, or to a body of knowledge taught through Irish, across the higher education level sector, colleges of education excluded.

Almost all universities have support systems in Irish for staff and students, (including residential accommodation), Galway and Cork in particular. Cork and Galway have highly successful Centres for Spoken Language that offer a range of courses to students; in adult education; to foreigners. Limerick is now establishing a similar Centre for Irish. Galway also has off-campus sites that perform the same function.

**Irish and
matriculation
requirement**

The constituent universities of the NUI have a general matriculation requirement for entry that includes a basic competence in Irish. Entry to third level institutions is competitive, based on a points system according to grades received in Leaving Certificate subjects. Extra points (on a sliding scale) are awarded to students answering examination papers through the medium of Irish. A recent Commission on the points system sought to end this practice as being discriminatory. Their proposal was not accepted by the minister.

Institutes of Technology do not have a general Irish requirement for entry. However, some courses in some institutes require competence in Irish, while some courses or modules are conducted totally through Irish, e.g. Tralee (performing arts), Galway/Mayo (business application). DIT has a course through Irish in journalism.

Neither Trinity College nor the two universities at Limerick and Dublin established since independence had a matriculation requirement for Irish. However, the incorporation of Thomond College of Education into the University of Limerick in 1991 strengthened the position of the language in the legislation for UL. The NUI requirement in relation to competence in Irish for matriculation purposes, is under constant threat, both from within these Universities and among some of those seeking entry, largely due to the competition for university places, which is, however, now decreasing, as young people are beginning to opt for highly paid work in a booming economy rather than further qualifications. This trend may not, of course continue.



teacher training qualifications

Provision for Irish in the Colleges of Education for primary teachers is regulated by the DES with regard to initial entry to college and later entry to the profession. Course content is decided by the colleges and the universities which validate them, leading to the Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) degree after 3 years.

As well as a certain level of points, one of the criteria for entry to *primary* school teacher training is a good proficiency in the Irish language, set at a minimum of grade C3, or 55-59%, in the Leaving Certificate examination, including the oral exam. A quota of up to 10% of places is retained for *Gaeltacht* entrants whose points level may be lower than the normal requirement. During training, all five Colleges of Education offer Irish as an academic or as a professional subject and as a component of teaching methodology. These courses are conducted through Irish, as well as some electives.

The general pattern of instruction in Irish by hours per week is given in the table below.

Instruction in Irish: hours per week

Irish	St. Patrick's, Dublin			Mary Immaculate, Limerick		
	*Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Academic or	4	5	5	4 (obligatory for all)	4-5	4-5
Professional	1	1	1		1	1

* In fact, almost 75% of first year students at St. Patrick's College opt for Academic Irish in first year.

Three smaller colleges	
Literature/ School oriented material	2
Language	1

The three small colleges also offer a course on language issues, including bilingualism, through English. Irish then may be considered an essential element of primary teacher training. It is also obligatory to pass in the Irish course offered by any particular College for the award of the B.Ed. degree and DES recognition as a primary teacher. However, Irish competence among B.Ed. graduates varies greatly. Failures in Irish are more frequent than in other subject areas. A compensation mechanism may allow a teacher to graduate without having actually passed the examination in Irish methodology. The proportion of Irish-medium instruction overall may vary considerably across colleges. One of the smaller colleges, *Coláiste Mhuire, Marino* (St. Mary's) conducts all the college based instruction (approximately 18 hours per week) through the medium of Irish except Religion. Part of the smaller colleges' courses are given in the university.

Trainee teachers spend one three-week session in the *Gaeltacht*, which is funded by the DES. Student teachers at the Church of Ireland College of Education have two such *Gaeltacht* sessions.

**in-service
training**

In-service courses in which Irish and associated subject matter through Irish may be included are conducted regularly by the DES, the union, (INTO), the colleges of Education, Education Centres and subject associations. Due to a shortage of teachers arising out of rationalisation as well as a desire to create a level of harmonisation in education with Northern Ireland, new regulations are now in place for incoming primary teachers from outside the State. These are given provisional recognition and allowed to teach without knowledge of Irish for five years, during which they are placed on the appropriate point of the salary scale and receive qualification allowances, without increments. During this period they prepare for the SCG exam, *scrúdú cáilíochta Gaeilge*, or qualifying examination in Irish. Restricted recognition may be given to other trained incoming teachers to function in certain special schools and classes where Irish is not a curricular requirement. The union (INTO), which is all-Ireland, has suggested that while all pupils have the right to be taught Irish, it need not necessarily be by the class teacher. Those in pedagogic support of the integrated curriculum do not agree. The present shortage of primary teachers has led to a situation where there are currently 1,200 unqualified persons teaching in primary schools. A recent DES circular (24/00) on the employment in primary schools of qualified second level teachers, whether in a temporary or substitute capacity, acknowledges that while it is recommended that such persons should possess Irish to grade C at higher level Leaving Certificate standard or its equivalent, it may not always be possible to recruit such teachers. It is the responsibility of the school in such cases to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the teaching of Irish. Under no circumstances, states the DES circular, should such a class be deprived of competent Irish language tuition. Such schools will be required to show what arrangements are in place to the Department's Inspectors when they visit the schools.

Colleges of primary education are also now running courses for graduates to prepare them for primary teaching.

While the primary teachers' degree is a concurrent B.Ed., subject teachers at second level consecutively acquire a degree first in their basic subjects and then a higher diploma in education, during which the methodology module will be directed towards chosen subjects. For those choosing Irish, this module will be through Irish, while the rest of the course is English medium. There is no specific course directed at the practicalities of immersion or bilingual classroom for whatever subject. The National University at Galway has recently begun a higher diploma in education course entirely through Irish. Until this year (2000), all second level teachers were required to have a basic competence in Irish for registration and recognition by the DES. This has now been changed to and is required only for teachers teaching in Irish-medium schools in the *Gaeltacht* or in a *gaelscoil*, or teaching a subject through Irish in any school. The requirement had previously been vigorously defended by the DES in the European Court of Justice in the Groener case, which was won by the State.

Private third level institutions will have specific areas of instruction and Irish is not normally part of that, except very peripherally in isolated instances where modules in culture or anthropology form part of the courses.

**specific
provision for
Irish medium
teachers**

There is no specific pre-service course available for primary teachers who will teach in the developing immersion system or in the *Gaeltacht*, apart from the instruction through Irish at St. Mary's and a diploma course in aspects of management for Irish-medium schools recently begun through TCD and a network of Education Centres. There are currently 2,590 students in the five colleges, including post-graduates in a 4th year. The new NUI Galway higher diploma through Irish is available for second level teachers. However, cognisance must be taken of the fact that the specific teaching skills needed for immersion classrooms is not necessarily the same as providing a course in education through the medium of Irish.

Irish medium university No official decision, or even acceptance of this idea, has greeted the lobby that considers this development essential to the life of the *Gaeltacht* and to the natural needs of immersion education. A series of particular centres of excellence in specific areas, e.g. community development, media, rather than bricks and mortar, appears to be taking hold as a possible nucleus for such a development.

legislation The Universities Act (1997) contains several supportive references to Irish language and culture, e.g. the objects of a university include (Part III, Chapter I, 12 (e)) 'to promote the official languages of the State, with special regard to Irish' and in so doing may collaborate with Irish language interests (13 (d)). The Higher Education Authority Act (1971) places a general duty on the Authority with regard to national aims, whereby it shall bear constantly in mind the restoration of the Irish language and national culture and shall endeavour to promote these national aims. In 1999 the HEA allocated £500,000 on targeted initiatives for Irish across the sector under its remit on foot of proposals submitted in three areas: teaching subject matter other than Irish through the medium of Irish; development of the language throughout the institution; publication of Irish textbooks out of print.

7 Adult education

structure and provision

Apart from the further education courses for post Leaving Certificate students already detailed, adult education within the statutory sector is conducted through VEC provision, as well as extra-mural or night classes run by third level institutions. VECs have statutory responsibility for the provision of continuation education. Courses in Irish language at differing levels are very common as part of this, with fees at low levels. Some courses are run during the day.

Courses in Irish language skills are run by several voluntary organisations, particularly *Conradh na Gaeilge*, *Gael-Linn* and by Irish medium educational institutions for parents in the catchment area. Courses for adults are also available in *Gaeltacht* centres. *Aontas*, the adult education NGO, has issued a report in the past on continuation education through Irish for the *Gaeltacht*. *The Gaeltacht Authority*, Galway University, and the organisations *Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne*, and *Muintearas* run courses through Irish in *Gaeltacht* areas, some leading to diploma qualifications. The Dublin Institute of Technology has also run extern courses in the Kerry *Gaeltacht* to prepare classroom aides for *Gaeltacht* schools.

legislation

The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) contains a section regarding Irish language and culture, where the DES commits itself to the appointment of a designated officer to the proposed National Adult Learning Council as well as the establishment of a specific subcommittee to progress initiatives. The DES will also fund a 3-year initiative in *Gaeltacht* areas.

statistics

The adult education sector is very fluid. It is impossible to quantify and no statistics are available. The majority of courses in Irish language skills do not lead to qualifications.

training

There is no training course available with a qualification in teaching Irish to adults. Voluntary organisations have begun to run weekend courses for intending or practising teachers, with

methodological content largely devoted to the communicative approach. These courses are conducted through the medium of Irish.

self-instruction There are several multi-media courses available, including the use of video, audio and computer. The take up is not known.

8 Educational research

There are many unpublished post-graduate dissertations on aspects of Irish and Irish in the education system. They can be extrapolated from registers of theses in Irish Universities compiled by the Educational Studies Association of Ireland. Some appear in the education journal of the DES, *Oideas*, and others in the Irish Journal of Education, from the Research Centre in Drumcondra, Dublin.

The Research Centre and the Linguistics Institute of Ireland (ITÉ) are the two main official sources for educational and linguistic research. The staff of the latter have published in the sociolinguistics of the language, in psycholinguistics and in areas of applied linguistics, see references. Some examples are given below.

Irish medium playgroups

The Hickey study from ITÉ (1999) on early immersion shows that children make significant advances in Irish during their period in the *Naíonra*, which leads to greater use of Irish in their homes as well.

Irish medium schools

Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (ITÉ) (1994) found that the Irish medium schools in the Dublin area were more popular at primary than at second level, largely because of problems of access. They also found that, if available, a significant number of parents would opt for Irish medium education. It was largely the father rather than the mother who chose the type of schooling for the family. Some studies (Greaney and Ó Ciaráin) found achievement in Irish, English and Mathematics in Irish medium schools to be as good as or better than in English medium schools. The Harris and Murtagh study (1999) found that a more communicative approach and accompanying materials, as opposed to the audio-visual or oral-aural methods solely, had more effective results on primary pupils' attitude and competence, particularly with lower levels of ability. Materials were developed to present other areas of the curriculum (Art, Science) through Irish. The report also showed pupils to be reasonably well disposed to the

language and to integration with Irish speakers. Less positive attitudes emerged in relation to commitment to actually learning the language. Ó Fathaigh studied second level students' attitudes. Ó Riagáin has also produced studies on examination results. The NCCA also are now producing studies on aspects of education from the material at their disposal.



9 Prospects

general

The current trend towards continued retrenchment of the language in the heartland with parallel development in networks of second language speakers will continue. Proposed legislation will hardly reverse the situation in the *Gaeltacht*.

The present less active, even neutral, approach to language policy at State level will continue into the future. Responsibility for language promotion – without an overall, or even underlying, policy framework – will be left to the semi-state bodies and the voluntary sector. The latter two, if capable of working in partnership, might possibly create the climate for real community mobilisation of a kind that would once more invigorate the State approach. The new political situation of greater co-operation North and South in Ireland will have one of two possible effects. The desire to placate Unionism will continue to cause dismantling of current supportive policies, particularly in education, or alternatively, each jurisdiction will almost vie with the other to ensure that harmonisation of structures and approach keep pace. The fact that the Secretary of State for Education at Westminster declared Irish as an approved language on the curriculum in 1998 is a positive factor. Wealth, an unemployment rate of 4.4%, Commissions on Human Rights, and changing societal attitudes, are creating the conditions for liberal treatment of what is perceived to be a linguistic minority, rather than a national collaborative venture.

legislation

If all the articles of the Education Act 1998 were firmly implemented, the support structure would be greatly strengthened. The proposed Official Languages Equality Bill, if enacted, could have a psychological effect that would strengthen the efforts of those who make Irish their chosen language but, perhaps, weaken the general good will towards Irish through alienation. Ireland has always been an anomaly in the context of lesser-used languages, since official policy was not only territorially based with regard to the *Gaeltacht* regions, but also extended to the entire State and nation. That might well weaken in the

future, narrowing to official services being available largely for those who seek them within a laissez-faire approach.

**Irish as a
curricular
subject area**

In this type of situation, Irish as subject will continue to be offered for the years of compulsory schooling, but the range of pupils excepted from taking it may widen. Since the Junior Certificate examination is now an enormous undertaking, with little or no school based assessment to lighten the load, the subjects publicly examined may be reduced to a small core of languages and mathematics. Irish will probably remain at this level. However, it may well become an elective at Senior Cycle level. This may be hastened by the very real possibility of the NUI Universities no longer requiring competence in Irish as a matriculation entry requirement. It would appear that the several aims of acquiring competence in Irish now current may need to be more clearly disentangled. The State aim of some minimal competence in the indigenous language for all could be met either through the Junior Certificate core curriculum and public examination or, in addition, a public examination in Irish that could be taken separate from the Leaving Certificate and at any point during the Senior Cycle. Such an examination might well have stand alone components, rather than different levels. In this way, the linguistic skills – aural comprehension, reading comprehension, oral skills, writing skills (both the latter differentiated by type) – could be examined and certificated separately. In addition, literature could form a separate module, not necessarily obligatory. Such an approach does not, of course in any way preclude the continuation of the existing Leaving Certificate examination at Ordinary and Higher Levels, particularly as preparation for specific careers: teaching, journalism, interpretation, civil service etc.

The present communicative syllabi will be extensively reviewed to ensure (a) continuity and not repetition from primary school to second level; (b) to allow for a more understanding approach to the sociocultural differences between majority languages (as central to the initial Council of Europe work) and lesser used languages.

**Irish medium
primary**

While the immersion sector will continue to develop, particularly in areas where no *gaelscoil* currently exists, it is beginning to reach saturation point in its current form. The DES desire for streams in English-medium schools and campuses shared between different types of school may have two effects. On the one hand, it undoubtedly weakens the immersion atmosphere conducive to language acquisition. On the other hand, it creates less of a dichotic situation and could have the beneficial result of raising the standard of Irish in non-immersion schools. Two totally parallel systems are not altogether desirable. It will be necessary to attempt also to build up bilingual schools where some at least of the curriculum will be taught through Irish. Quality may need to replace quantity in the immersion sector for two reasons. The variety known as *Gaeilge líofa lofa* (awful fluent Irish = fluent but with mistakes) urgently needs attention. Without an appropriate system of training for immersion, most teachers – who tend to come straight in from colleges of education – do not have the support system they need.

Without support, the *Gaeltacht* schools will rapidly deteriorate to schools where the dwindling number of first language speakers can no longer receive the language development needed in Irish, with subsequent deleterious consequences.

**Irish medium
post-primary**

This sector will not grow to the same extent as primary. New schools are more likely where there is some concentration of primary schools. It is unlikely that the new schools will be private secondary schools but rather will continue to be community colleges or units or streams within the sector. A new training course will gradually be devised to cater for needs.

**Irish medium
university**

With the gradual development of particular courses in existing institutions, there is a possibility that the co-ordinating body for third level, the HEA, may eventually structure arrangements to provide the nucleus at least of a virtual university. Some institutions may then use their existing out-reach facilities to deliver courses, including aspects of teacher training. Whether this might eventually lead to a new devolved college is still a

moot point. The demographics of a falling number of entrants to second and, as a consequence, third level will undoubtedly influence the position of Irish in the higher education sector. Competition may reduce its status.

vocational training

There is a need for surveys to examine the vocational possibilities that exist, or could be created, and then for a promotional campaign to highlight them, before this sector will develop, even in the *Gaeltacht*.

emigration

Particularly since the famine years of the 1840s, Ireland has had a continuing emigration problem. The position has been reversed in recent years, with better job opportunities at home. The net results of these movements are as follows. Many Irish speakers have emigrated, reducing the size of the language community. Returned emigrants have introduced non-Irish speaking wives and children into the community, with resulting problems, particularly in education. On the other hand, the diaspora also contains many Irish speakers or people wishing to re-possess the language of their forebears. Irish Studies are consequently a part of many universities abroad.



teacher training

The needs of Irish as subject and medium will undoubtedly be met through new courses. If not, the standards of Irish, if not education through Irish, can only deteriorate.

10 Summary statistics

1998-1999 DES Department of Education and Science and
1999-2000 *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Gaelscoileanna*

summary statistics

Type of Education	Number of Institutions		Enrolment (Number of Students)	
	Irish medium (including <i>Gaeltacht</i>)	English (DES)	Irish medium (voluntary)	English
Preschool	278	40	3,257	1,535 (DES)
Primary	224	2,976	27,589	409,146
Post-Primary	50	710	8,441	353,554
Further Education	18 DES aided 50-60 aided by other Departments or non-State aided.		370,638 (full time up to age 24)	
Universities	7			
Teacher Training	(primary) 5+2 (Home Economics)		2,590	

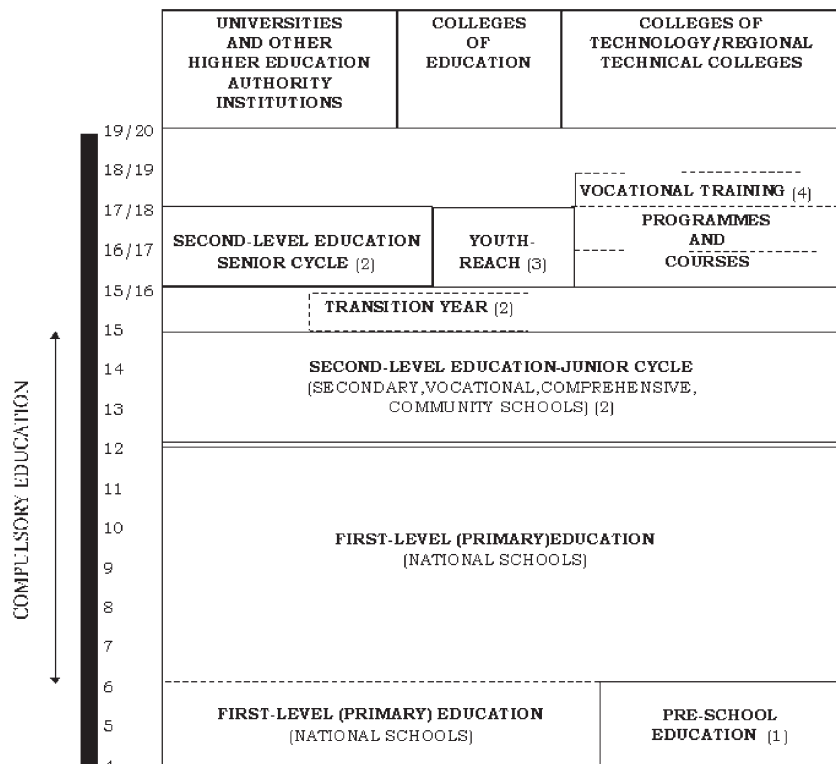
- Notes**
- (a) Irish medium enrolment above does not take into account certain groups or subjects taught through Irish in otherwise English medium schools, given separately below. Figures in table above supplied by the organisation *Gaelscoileanna*.
 - (b) English preschool gives only specific DES institutions for 3 - 4 year olds, not the large voluntary playgroup sector.
 - (c) Special schools are not included in DES figures
 - (d) Enrolment figures for Universities and Further Education have been extrapolated from DES and Census data.

Some subjects/class groups taught through Irish (1998-1999)			
Primary		Post-primary	
Schools	Students	Schools	Students
975	132,879	7	363

Education system in Ireland

Eurydice

IRELAND



1. There is no national system of pre-school education in Ireland. However, primary (*National*) schools may accept pupils on or after their 4th birthday. Existing pre-school services are mainly private and not part of the formal education system. The average age for starting school is five years.
2. Second-level schools cover lower and upper secondary education - Junior and Senior Cycles. The four main types - Secondary, Vocational, Comprehensive and Community - all now offer a comprehensive curriculum combining academic and vocational subjects. The Transition Year is a one-year interdisciplinary programme, either at the end of full-time schooling or

in preparation for the Senior Cycle. The Junior Cycle leads to the new Junior Certificate providing access to the Senior Cycle. At Senior Cycle, the main courses are the 2-year Leaving Certificate leading to higher education or employment, and the Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes which prepare for working life.

3. Youthreach is an education and training programme available to young people who have left school with no formal qualification. It lasts 2 years [a Foundation year and a Progression year]. It is run jointly by the education authorities [Vocational Education Committees - VEC] and the Vocational Training and Employment Authority (*FAS*).
4. Training courses of various lengths are provided by *FAS* for unemployed young people: Community Training Workshops, Travellers Training Workshops.

= alternative beginning or end of level/type of education

References and further reading

- main official texts regulating teaching of Irish**
- 1929 Funding Act for University of Galway Act (specifically for courses through Irish)
 - 1937 Constitution (since action for Irish in education would stem from this primarily)
 - 1971 Higher Education Authority Act
 - 1998 Education Act (year of introduction rather than passage usually given)
 - 1991 Act of incorporation of Thomond College into University of Limerick
 - 1997 Universities Act
- publications**
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Ó Tuathaigh, M.A.G. (1990) *The development of the Gaeltacht as a bilingual entity*. Páipéar ócáide 8 (Occasional paper 8). Dublin, ITÉ

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www.ir/gov.ie/educ/

Irish medium education

All at the same address as Foras na Gaeilge

preschool

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

primary and second level

Gaelscoileanna

teachers of Irish

Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge

Irish organisations

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Other websites on minority languages

- Mercator** **www.mercator-central.org**
General site of the Mercator-project. It will lead you to the three specialised centres:
- Mercator Research Centre** **www.mercator-research.eu**
Homepage of the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. The website contains the series of Regional dossiers, a database with organisations, a bibliography, information on current activities, and many links to relevant websites.
- Mercator-Media** **www.aber.ac.uk/~merwww/**
Homepage of Mercator-Media. It provides information on media and minority languages in the EU.
- Mercator-Legislation** **www.ciemen.org/mercator**
Homepage of Mercator-Legislation. It provides information on minority languages and legislation in the EU.
- European Commission** **http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/langmin_en.html**
On the website of the European Commission information is given on the EU's support for regional or minority languages.
- Council of Europe** **<http://conventions.coe.int>**
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995). European Treaty Series 148 and 157, Strasbourg.
- Eurydice** **www.eurydice.org**
Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The sites provides information on all European education systems and education policies.

EBLUL

www.eblul.org

Homepage of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. This site provides general information on lesser used languages as well as on projects, publications, and events.

EuroLang

www.eurolang.net

EuroLang provides coverage of the concerns felt in the minority language regions in the European Union. EuroLang is EBLUL's news service.

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