

The National Languages Strategy provides an overview of the position of languages in education in Ireland today, outlines the challenges facing Ireland in its development as a multilingual society and makes recommendations, in relation to language education and more broadly, which seek to meet these challenges and enhance Ireland's position within an increasingly multilingual global economy.

The National Languages Strategy is aimed primarily at policy decision-makers at national, local and institutional levels across Ireland. It seeks to encourage these key stakeholders to collaborate in the development of a coherent and integrated national policy for languages in education. This policy would ideally put in place a clear and consistent framework for the provision of language education at each level within the education system (primary, post-primary and third levels). ►

# NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## KEY ISSUES

- ▶ **IRELAND** is the only country in Europe, other than Scotland, where a foreign language is not compulsory at any stage of the mainstream educational curriculum.
- ▶ **THE** widespread but erroneous perception that 'English is enough' militates against the kind of plurilingual ambitions and achievements common in non-anglophone EU member states. '[T]he main challenge for Ireland...is to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two or more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and through lifelong education' (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation 2010).
- ▶ **THE** Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation strategy and action plan (2010) emphasises Ireland's need to create the best possible international trade and investment environment for business and to improve long-term competitiveness by driving innovation and productivity. Developing language capacity within our society must be a key factor in this plan. In an increasingly competitive global employment market, candidates' job prospects are significantly enhanced by proficiency in one or more foreign languages.
- ▶ **ONE** of the biggest threats facing language education in Ireland is the gradual erosion of the NUI third-language matriculation requirement. The removal of the third-language requirement would have serious consequences for the sustainability of languages at all levels, a situation which would ultimately undermine Ireland's status and competitiveness in global terms.
- ▶ **THAT** vertical and horizontal coherence be enhanced in language learning at all stages of the curriculum by adopting the Common European Framework of Reference and the European Language Portfolio, as recommended by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2005) and various other stakeholders.
- ▶ **THAT** the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative be integrated into the mainstream curriculum, as strongly recommended by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2005) and the Council of Europe Policy Profile (2008) document, rather than being limited to extra-curricular time and to a portion of schools.
- ▶ **THAT** advanced proficiency in a third language be made a universal requirement in order to integrate plurilingualism into the curriculum.
- ▶ **THAT** modern languages be treated as a priority subject at third level, in the context of the development of a global society. (A similar action was recommended in the UK by the Browne Review and the British Academy). This is an urgent issue if the erosion of language capacity in Ireland is to be prevented.
- ▶ **THAT** a Language Advisory Board be established, whose role would be to advise on policy initiatives and development. Board membership should include not only language specialists at all levels of the Irish educational system, but also representatives from organisations such as Enterprise Ireland, NCCA, and government departments. Representation from the Immigrant Council of Ireland and other established immigrant organisations would facilitate an inclusive approach to the shaping of language policy in Ireland. The Board should also engage with language strategy developments in Northern Ireland.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **THAT** the Department of Education and Skills, in consultation with language-teaching experts at all stages of the educational system, and on the basis of the many expert reviews produced in recent years, formulate a coherent languages-in-education policy and that adequate resources be allocated, as a matter of urgency, to implement it.

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