



National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum

Feasibility and futures

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Glossary

Bilingualism is a concept referring to an individual's ability to speak two languages fluently.

A **competency model** of language learning is a language learning programme which leads to the language learners reaching a defined level of proficiency/competency in the target language.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) involves the use of the target language while teaching a particular strand/strand unit of another non-language curricular area.

Language Awareness involves engaging the child in reflecting on how language is learnt, on similarities and differences between known and unknown languages (sentence structure, orthography, sounds) and the conventions of language.

Language Sensitisation involves presenting tasters of different languages to foster linguistic and cultural awareness. These tasters include phrases and words in the target language(s). The model aims to pique the learner's interest and curiosity in the language and culture of the target language(s).

Multilingualism is a concept referring to an individual's ability to speak many languages fluently. The Council of Europe use this term to refer to a geographical region where many languages are spoken.

Plurilingualism is a concept developed by the Council of Europe to refer to the totality of an individual's linguistic competences in and across different languages, which develops throughout life (CILT, 2005).

Executive summary

Ireland's changing linguistic landscape and economic shift from European markets to global markets, have moved the focus of this report from one of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, to one of languages in the Primary School Curriculum. The research presented in this report draws on findings relating to English, Irish, modern languages and the Primary School Curriculum as a whole.

Languages and their place in schools have long been a focus of debate **in Ireland**. Those debates about primary education usually include consideration of the lack of policy in the face of general support, the inclusion of two languages in the curriculum, the need for research, and the economic imperative to place an emphasis on modern languages. The advent of a pilot project on modern languages in primary schools in 1998 and its later development as the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) has provided a basis for Irish-based research on modern languages at primary level.

At a **European level**, much support is offered and emphasis placed on modern languages, including a drive for all Europeans to be competent in their native language plus two other languages. In comparison to other European countries, Ireland's provision for and competence in modern languages is lower than that at a European level and more in line with other English speaking and English bilingual countries. The dominant model of language teaching at a European level is one of Communicative Competence, with interest growing in integrating language awareness and intercultural awareness approaches within this model. The Department of Education and Science has worked with the Council of Europe to develop a *Language Education Policy Profile* and is currently working towards developing a *Language Education Policy* for Ireland.

The **Primary School Curriculum** recommends that one-third of teaching time is attributed to teaching language—English and Irish. Language awareness and (inter)cultural awareness feature in both the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge.

Two phases of Primary Curriculum Review have revealed much about the successes and challenges of implementing **English and Irish and the Primary School Curriculum as a whole**. In the case of English, teachers highlighted challenges with the writing strand, and prioritised developing children's writing skills, followed by oral language skills and reading skills. These findings were in line with other research carried out on English and the English Curriculum, where low-levels of literacy were reported, particularly in disadvantaged schools (DES, 2005c; Eivers, Shiels & Shortt, 2005a).

In the case of Irish, Primary Curriculum Review, phase two showed that children are enjoying the use of active learning activities. Side by side with the successes, teachers also identified challenges such as ensuring progression of language competency and in teaching the writing strand. Grammar, reading, spelling and phonics were identified as being particularly challenging. Findings concurred with data from other research examining Irish and Curaclam na Gaeilge where children's writing was reported to be at a low standard and the development of listening skills was poor (DES, 2007).

Assessment, planning, methods of teaching and learning and time/curriculum overload were other challenges reported across the Primary School Curriculum.

With the arrival of newcomer individuals and families, more than 167 languages are now spoken in Ireland. There are approximately 20,000 children at primary level for whom English is an additional language. These children bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural diversity to schools which benefits all children. One of the challenges for teachers is to support these children in accessing the Primary School Curriculum and supporting the development of competence in the language of instruction of the school.

When examining the potential for modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum, this report raises six **key issues**.

- *Children's language learning*: The added advantage that children acquire through early language learning will persist if continuity and progression are planned for.
- *The modern language teacher*: The benefits associated with the modern language teacher being a mainstream classroom teacher far outweigh those associated with him/her being a visiting teacher.

- *Planning and progression:* Further investigation into the extent to which planning and progression can support the child's capacity to use known languages to further enhance his or her language capabilities and to learn how to learn an additional language is required.
- *Languages to be taught:* Ireland's changing demographics means that a diversification of languages is a priority. The strength of language awareness as a model to include and account for linguistic and cultural diversity should be considered.
- *Resourcing:* The challenge of lack of resources for the Primary School Curriculum is well documented through two phases of Primary Curriculum Review.
- *Time for teaching and learning language:* Time has been identified as a challenge through two successive phases of Primary Curriculum Review and for mainstream teachers participating in the MLPSI.

The report presents four mutually complementary **futures** for language in the Primary School Curriculum which aim to increase the focus on language learning within the context of the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge. These futures are

- Language Awareness
- (Inter)cultural Awareness
- Language Sensitisation
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

In considering the changed linguistic landscape, locally, nationally and internationally, this report **recommends** that modern languages do not become part of the Primary School Curriculum at present as an additional and separate subject. Short to medium and medium to long-term goals are outlined. The recommendation in the short to medium-term is to work towards a common and achievable goal for all schools through a unified approach to teaching and learning languages, namely, language awareness. This does not preclude schools from facilitating modern languages where they have capacity to do so. Medium to long-term goals look towards an extended language education for all students which would be reinforced through a Language Education Policy from the Department of Education and Science.

1. Introduction

... this very exciting project which will foster positive attitudes to language learning through the use of active learning approaches including drama, songs and games and by promoting an awareness of being European among the pupils.

(Michael Martin, Minister for Education and Science, May 1998)

In 1997 the Minister for Education and Science announced a pilot project to introduce modern languages to fifth and sixth class children in primary schools. In 1998, the pilot project commenced, introducing a competency model of language learning in French, German, Italian and Spanish to children in 270 primary schools. In 2001 the pilot project was extended and became the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI).

In 2005, the NCCA advised that any decision on the future of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum for all children should be deferred pending the full introduction of the curriculum in schools.

The cap on the number of schools participating in the MLPSI was partially lifted in 2007 to allow schools on the waiting list with capacity within their teaching staff to teach a modern language, to join the MLPSI. At present, 488 schools are supported on the MLPSI out of a total of 3,284 primary schools.

With the completion of the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum this year, the forthcoming publication of the second MLPSI evaluation report (Harris and O Leary, in press) and in light of data gathered through two phases of Primary Curriculum Review, it is timely that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment looks again at the feasibility of including modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum for all children.

However, since the inception of the pilot project and the further development of the initiative, much has changed in Irish primary classrooms. A recent estimate suggests that 167 languages can now be heard in those classrooms (Gallagher 2007) spoken by over 20,000 children from a range of countries, backgrounds and educational experiences. Teachers now work, with the assistance of language support teachers, to enable these children to access the Primary School Curriculum and also face the task of differentiating the curriculum to meet their learning needs – a dual challenge that was never envisaged at the inception of the pilot project in 1998. This changed landscape for languages is well illustrated by the following example from a child's language passport.

Languages around me
Teangacha thart orm

Le lingue attorno a me Sprachen um mich herum
Las lenguas a mi alrededor Les langues autour de moi

Languages	At home	At school	On holidays	With friends	On TV	In shops
Teangacha	Sa bháile	Ar scoil	Ar saoire	Le cairde	Ar an teilifís	I siopaí
Le lingue	A casa	A scuola	In vacanza	Con gli amici	In televisione	Nei negozi
Lenguas	En casa	En la escuela	De vacaciones	Con los amigos	En la tele	En las tiendas
Langues	À la maison	À l'école	En vacances	Avec des amis	À la télé	Dans les magasins
Hindi	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Inglés	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Irlandés	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Ordú	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Polaco	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
gugedda	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Rumano	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Husa	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
georgiano	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Ruso	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Extract from a child's Language Passport in My ELP

The pilot project was and has been *European* in origin and orientation. The choice of languages offered – French, German, Italian and Spanish – reflect Ireland's European

identity, and the importance of Europe and its political, social, cultural and economic institutions for Ireland and its identity and future development. In recent years however, that identity and development has been informed by cultures and economies well beyond the borders of Europe. Recognised as one of the most globalised nations in the world, Ireland has formed important and ongoing connections with Asian and Middle-Eastern countries seen as increasingly significant for economic development. This trend is shared across many European countries, with several now including Chinese in language curricula and seeking to introduce Chinese language and culture to children in primary schools.

Thus, while the Council was asked to consider the feasibility of modern European languages in the curriculum for all children, it would seem important at the outset to note that that the national and international contexts have changed. This is explored further in the report and particular attention is paid to the emerging findings from the second phase of the review of the Primary School Curriculum on Irish, and on the findings from phase 1 on English – evidence of how teachers and children are working with the curriculum in 21st century classrooms with 21st century challenges.

Feasibility issues associated with modern European languages are considered but the report concludes with emerging potential futures for languages in the Primary School Curriculum that arise from new contexts and challenges.

2. Modern language learning: The national context

Introduction

Language learning and language teaching have been the subject of debate, contestation, and controversy since the foundation of the national school system. Consideration of modern languages, and their place in the primary school curriculum has added to that contestation in more recent times. This chapter discusses four recurring themes in that more recent debate - the absence of language policy, the implications of a curriculum that includes Irish and English for all, the need for research, and the economic imperative. These themes set the context for the development of the pilot project on modern languages and the latter Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI).

The chapter moves on to an overview pilot project and the initiative, and consideration of the outcomes of those important developments.

2.1 Recurring themes

2.1.1 The absence of a language policy

In 1987, the report of the Board of Studies for Languages (NCCA, 1987) concluded that a language policy was required to facilitate a *coordinated approach to language education* (NCCA, 1987: 48) so that the teaching of *all* languages could be planned for and progressed. There have been further calls for a co-ordinated language policy for schools (Harris and O Leary, in press; Ó Dochartaigh and Broderick, 2006; Forfás, 2005; NCCA, 2003; NCCA, 2005a; EGFSN, 2007). The Department of Education and Science (DES) have developed a Council of Europe *Language Education Policy Profile: National Report* (DES, 2005a). More recently, a *Language Education Policy Profile* (DES & Council of Europe, 2008) for Ireland has been published in coordination with the DES and the Council of Europe (discussed in Section 6). The DES have

convened a Working Group on Language Education Policy which will consider the priorities made in the Language Education Policy Profile and move towards developing a language education policy for Ireland. While there is an absence of a policy on languages in education in addition to a national language policy, advances made by the DES in convening this Working Group to address the former issue offer light for a language policy.

The absence of policy is even more surprising given the general positive disposition towards modern languages in educational debates in general. For example, some of the positive outcomes cited for inclusion of modern languages at primary level prior to the pilot project on modern languages include Ireland playing an active part in the EU (NCCA, 1993) and children reaching greater levels of proficiency as increased exposure to a language results in better proficiency (INTO, 1991; NCCA, 1993). Another benefit identified was increasing children's learning about and awareness of other cultures (NCCA, 1993; NCCA, 1994).

The National Parents' Council (NPC) have supported the inclusion of a modern language for all children at primary level for 21 years (NPC, 2006: 2). In 1989, the NPC published a discussion paper on Modern European Languages in the Primary School and submitted a report to the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum regretting their decision not to introduce modern languages (INTO, 2004: 78).

Studies by Tynan (2000) and NCCA (2005) with small groups of parents have echoed this positive attitude towards including languages.

2.1.2 A curriculum with two languages

Since 1922, two languages have been a compulsory part of the curriculum at primary level. The current Primary School Curriculum also includes two languages, English and Irish, within its 11 subjects. Religious Education remains the responsibility of the relevant church authority and represents a potential twelfth subject. It is recommended that one third of time in primary schools is allocated to language; 17.7% to children's first language and 15.3% to children's second language. Language in the Primary School Curriculum is explored in Section 4.1.1. The demands of a curriculum which already includes two languages have been documented (NCCA and Department of

Education, 1990; NCCA, 1993). Often these discussions cited Irish as children's experience of second language learning (NCCA, 1993).

In the context of the curriculum, issues identified as requiring consideration included the time available to teachers to teach the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA and Department of Education, 1990; NCCA, 1994). The inclusion of a modern language has been reported to add to timeframe considerations (Harris and Conway, 2002, Harris and O Leary, in press). A further recurring theme related to the existing curriculum overload (NCCA and Department of Education, 1990; NCCA, 1993, Harris and Conway, 2002, Harris and O Leary, in press). This overload is still evident in recent reviews of the Primary School Curriculum (see Section 4.2).

Primary teachers' language competency has been reported as requiring consideration (NCCA, 1994) and challenges relating to continuity of language learning between primary and post-primary levels (NCCA, 1993; Nelligan, 2006) have also been posited.

2.1.3 Need for more research

The Board of Studies for Languages (NCCA, 1987) concluded that they could not make any recommendations regarding the integration of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum due to the dearth of research. With the completion of the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum in June 2007, publication of evaluation reports on the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (Harris and Conway, 2002; Harris and O Leary, in press) and gathering of data from two phases of Primary Curriculum Review, we can now draw on some amount of Irish-based research.

2.1.4 The Economic Imperative

Debates about modern languages have focused on educational, social and cultural aspirations, but they have also, particularly since Ireland joined the EU, focused on economic goals, for individuals and for society.

IBEC have called for an improvement in the language skills of Ireland's workforce (IBEC, 2004) - for a *national co-ordinated system, which makes foreign languages a compulsory subject in primary schools and co-ordinates a seamless transition from*

primary into secondary school, needs to be developed. (IBEC, 2004: 10). The report refers to Ireland's placement in the 2001 OECD indicators; Ireland was placed last in a list of 11 countries in terms of primary children's modern language competency. The OECD 2007 report refers to 2005 figures and indicates that for 9-11 year olds *on average, 7% of the compulsory curriculum is devoted to modern foreign languages* (OECD, 2007: 365 Chart D1.2a). Ireland is reported as one of four OECD countries which does not have a compulsory curriculum for modern languages¹ for 9-11 year olds. Dissatisfaction with the provision for modern languages at primary level is echoed in the ERC report which followed the series of Your Education System (YES) seminars. 57.1% of respondents (n=1,511) indicated that *too little* emphasis is placed on teaching modern languages at primary level (Kellaghan, McGee, Millar & Perkins, 2004).

In 2005, Forfás made further recommendations regarding modern languages at primary level. The document on *Languages and Enterprise* (Forfás, 2005), recommended that modern languages become compulsory in all primary schools and that the importance of foreign language education as a core aspect of learning should be *reflected in the teaching of languages at all levels of the education system* (Forfás, 2005: xiii). The recent report from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN, 2007) reiterated language needs and recommendations made in the Forfás report (2005). The same report also reported the link between *foreign language skills and enterprise development*, and highlighted *the importance of foreign language skills for exporting indigenous firms and foreign-owned firms engaged in international service activities* (EGFSN, 2007: 35). The *White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future* (Government of Ireland, 1995) indicated that modern language learning was to form one component of a European awareness programme for children.

As new economic horizons open up for Ireland beyond Europe and into Asia and the Middle East, so too do linguistic ones. In this context, while debates to date have focused on European languages, the need to give children and young people opportunities to engage with other languages, for example, Chinese, are growing.

¹ Other countries: Mexico, England and Japan. Following the Dearing Review (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) all children at Key Stage 2 in England will study a modern language by 2010.

2.2 Modern language provision prior to MLPSI

Prior to the pilot project on modern languages, the INTO examined the provision for modern languages at primary level (INTO, 1991). In analysing data gathered from 1,834 schools, 24%² of schools were found to already be providing a modern language to their classes. This provision was mostly made after school hours with a minority of schools facilitating a modern language within school hours. French was the most predominantly taught language (75% of respondents). Modern language teaching was more likely to be taught in scoileanna lán Ghaeilge, multi-denominational and larger schools than in other school types. Teachers facilitating modern languages were existing staff members (46%), Irish external teachers (37%) and teachers from other countries (17%).

Modern languages also featured in proposals for alternative **plans for a European dimension** in primary schools. *The European Dimension in the Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA, 1994), represented a proposal for a pilot initiative which recommended a *cross-curricular approach involving different aspects of the curriculum* (NCCA, 1994: 4). A language teaching strand was ruled out in the short term in view of teacher competency in modern languages.

A new avenue was explored in 1998 with the commencement of the pilot project on modern languages in primary schools and its subsequent extension to the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI).

2.3 Pilot project on modern languages in the primary school

2.3.1 The pilot project

The Modern Languages in Primary Schools Pilot Project was announced in 1997 by the Minister for Education and Science. Schools were invited to submit applications to take part in the pilot project and teach a competency model of language learning in one

² All percentages have been rounded to their nearest whole percentage point.

of the four languages, French, German, Italian or Spanish, for fifth and sixth class children. 1,300 schools submitted applications and 270 schools were accepted onto the pilot project. The types of schools accepted represented a range of locations, language teaching medium, designation and religious ethos. Participating schools represented diversity across the modern languages to be taught. In 1998, the pilot project commenced to run over a two year period with funding from the European Social Fund.³ Seven language-specific project leaders were appointed to provide in-service training and resources for teachers and worked from the pilot project's base at the Kildare Education Centre. In 1999, NCCA published the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for teachers and schools involved in the pilot project (NCCA, 1999). These draft curriculum guidelines were designed to complement the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). They comprise the three strands, Communicative Competence, Language Awareness and Cultural Awareness, and the four strand units, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

In June 2001, the pilot project was extended and renamed the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) and a national co-ordinator was appointed. The MLPSI was funded under the National Development Plan (NDP). In 2001, the NCCA published *Teacher Guidelines for Modern Languages in Primary Schools* to accompany the Draft Curriculum Guidelines (NCCA, 1999).

In May 2005, the MLPSI team received accreditation from the Council of Europe for *My European Language Portfolio*, a European Language Portfolio developed specifically for use in schools involved in the MLPSI and based on the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* (NCCA, 1999). The portfolio was published and officially launched in November 2006. Accompanying teacher guidelines are also available. The MLPSI team have developed a dedicated website to support schools participating in the MLPSI. The website can be accessed at <http://www.mlpsi.ie/>.

The MLPSI is currently developed and supported by a national coordinator and seven project leaders from the Kildare Education Centre. The MLPSI is overseen by a Project Management Group (PMG) which report to the Consultative Management Group, a steering committee comprising the partners in education. The MLPSI team have moved

³ Funding from the European Social Fund included a stipulation that lesser taught languages should be included.

from a language-specific model, where project leaders provided school and in-career support in a specific target language to a generic model in 2006/7 school year. Under the generic model, project leaders have responsibility for supporting all languages in schools in a geographical region and providing language-specific in-career training support. Each project leader now supports between 60 and 70 schools. The 2006/7 school year has also seen a focus on promoting a whole school approach to the presence of a modern language in schools and an integrated language policy in schools. A recent partial lift on the cap on numbers from the DES has enabled schools on the MLPSI waiting list with capacity within their staff to teach a modern language, to join the MLPSI. Approximately 95 schools from the waiting list were added to schools being supported in September 2007. The MLPSI team currently support 488 schools. The majority of those schools are teaching French (n=276), followed by Spanish (n=96), German (n=96) and Italian (n=20). German has been experiencing a reduction in the number of schools facilitating the language. It is estimated that approximately 35%⁴ of language teachers teaching modern languages in the MLPSI are staff teachers. The changing numbers of visiting and staff teachers will be examined in more detail in Section 5.2.

The establishment of the MLPSI provided the impetus for Irish research on modern languages in primary schools, a development formerly lacking when policy and thinking were hindered by lack of research. Through two evaluation reports and ancillary research on the MLPSI including unpublished theses (Tynan, 2000; Kiely, 2002; Nelligan, 2006), children's, teachers', principals' and parents' perspectives on the inclusion of a modern language in the Primary School Curriculum have been gathered and reported on.

2.3.2 Evaluation of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann was commissioned to evaluate the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI). Data gathering for the first evaluation report examined information from classroom teachers, visiting teachers and children

⁴ Figures estimated from proportion of schools employing a visiting teacher or school-based teacher indicated in early 2007 and the number of new schools joining the MLPSI after the recent partial lift on the cap on numbers.

participating in the initiative. The second evaluation report was concerned with the views of principals and classroom teachers whose classes are taught a modern language by another teacher. The second evaluation report was conducted by researchers at Trinity College Dublin and the report is currently being finalised. An overview of initial findings is included below.

First Evaluation

The report on the first evaluation of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative was published in 2002 (Harris and Conway, 2002). The evaluation took place over the initial two year period of the pilot project (1998-2000). The first year of research gathered the views of teachers while the second year focused on collecting data from children learning a modern language in schools involved in the pilot project.

Findings from teachers were very positive, with 93% feeling they had benefited professionally from teaching a modern language (Harris and Conway, 2002: 102), an equal 93% feeling their school had similarly benefited and 98% feeling the children being taught a modern language had benefited. Teachers indicated that they had experienced a positive and professional in-service experience provided by the Project Leaders where they had gained valuable insights into language teaching.

Children's attitudes to and competence in listening and speaking the modern language were examined during the second year of the evaluation. 84% of the children who responded to the attitudinal questionnaire were happy that they were learning a modern language in primary school rather than waiting until post-primary school. Results of language tests carried out on a representative sample of 22 classes indicated significant advancement in listening skills and initial competence in spoken language. Children in schools designated as disadvantaged also proved to be making significant progress. These children showed high levels of motivation and obtained levels of communicative competence on par with children in schools which were not designated as disadvantaged.

Areas identified as requiring strengthening within participating schools were the teaching of cultural awareness and fostering links with other schools teaching a modern language or schools in countries where the target language is spoken. Continuity between primary and post-primary levels and sustained contacts between

primary and post-primary modern language teachers were identified as challenges. Use of the target language as the means of instruction was also identified as an area needing to be addressed.

In response to the recommendations of the evaluators, the MLPSI team places greater emphasis on cultural and intercultural awareness and use of the target language in in-career training and across the MLPSI's support materials. Teachers and schools involved in the MLPSI are encouraged to develop links with schools abroad. Existing links include pen-pal exchanges, online exchanges, Comenius projects and links developed through schools hosting a trainee teacher from a country where the target language is spoken. The MLPSI liaise with the *Post-Primary Languages Initiative*, with subject teacher associations, universities and colleges of education.

Second Evaluation

The second evaluation took place during the period 2002-2003. Principals in participating schools were surveyed at the end of the fourth year of the MLPSI (2002), prior to the full introduction of the Primary School Curriculum which was completed in 2007. 93% of schools responded to the principal survey (n=323). Class teachers in participating schools were surveyed at the end of the fifth year of the MLPSI (2003). Only those class teachers who were not involved in teaching a modern language were included in the class teacher survey.

Principals' perspectives

44%⁵ of principals identified timetabling issues, including curriculum overload, as a challenge for the teaching and learning of the modern language. 50% of principals did not indicate any timetabling issues in facilitating the modern language in the timetable. 42% of schools involved in the MLPSI at the end of 2002 had already been teaching a modern language before taking part in the MLPSI. 93% of principals perceived their staff to have had a positive reaction to the MLPSI. Principals reported a general shift to non-staff teachers being employed to teach the modern language; in 1998 63% of language teachers were staff teachers (Harris and Conway, 2002) with the figure falling to 24% in 2002. Class teachers' perspectives below provide an insight into teachers' reasons for not teaching a modern language.

⁵ Percentages have been rounded off to the nearest percentage point.

More challenges were identified where the language teacher was a non-staff teacher; 50% of principals reported challenges where non-staff were employed and 39% where staff were employed. In order of priority, three challenges were identified; overloaded curriculum (52%), extra administration (33%) and recruitment difficulties (27%).

Principals reported low levels of interaction between their schools and feeder post-primary schools regarding involvement in the initiative and the modern language being taught. 52% reported *no interaction at all* while 39% reported *low/very low levels*. Low levels of interaction were also reported for educational matters generally with 61% of principals reporting *low/very low levels*. 83% of principals stated that post-primary schools were aware that the MLPSI was running in the primary school, with the figure reducing to 28% reporting that the post-primary school were aware of the specifics of the programme.

Many benefits of the inclusion of modern languages were identified by principals. Benefits included improved child self-esteem, improved child attitude, enjoyment of the learning process, improved learning, awareness and use of different languages, preparation for post-primary school, increased intercultural awareness, parental approval and enhancement of school image. Those stated, corresponded to those reported from phase one data (Harris and Conway, 2002).

54% of principals would recommend that the MLPSI be expanded to *all schools* while 40% recommended it be expanded to *more schools*. A minority (3%) recommended that it should not be extended or abandoned altogether. 58% of principals stated that they would recommend that the MLPSI be extended to include younger classes. Figures for expansion reflect those reported from the first evaluation report figures (Harris and Conway, 2002).

Class teachers' perspectives

When class teachers were surveyed at the end of 2003, they also reported a similar move from staff teachers to non-staff teachers for teaching the modern language as reported in the first evaluation report (Harris and Conway, 2002). Staff teachers reported a reluctance to teach a modern language due to their perception of overload within the curriculum, a feeling that teaching other classes would have a detrimental

effect on the progression of their own class and a feeling that a specialist teacher would be better placed to teach the modern language. Other reasons provided included the lack of acknowledgement or incentive for staff teachers teaching a modern language during school hours, that the modern language being taught in the school is not one teachers are proficient in and that modern language training courses are not easily accessible to class teachers.

39% of teachers reported that they remained in class while another teacher taught the modern language. 89% of teachers stated that they perceived the modern language as having a *very positive/positive* impact on children. 75% of teachers reported the modern language had a positive impact on other curriculum areas (Geography being the subject cited most often, followed by Music, Irish, Visual Arts and History) while 24% reported the modern language had a negative impact on other curriculum areas (for example, lack of time for other subjects).

50% of teachers stated that they felt children's learning of Irish had benefited modern language learning. 93% of teachers in Irish-medium schools responded positively to this question. Language awareness and skills transfer were identified as the benefits that learning Irish had on modern language learning. 54% of teachers reported a positive change in pupils' attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity, especially among the languages and cultures present in their classes. 88% of class teachers also stated that they felt it was *very important/important* for children to learn a modern language at primary level, with 90% being *very favourable/favourable* to children in their classes learning a modern language. 78% reported *very positive/positive* perceptions of parents to their children learning a modern language at primary level.

93% of classroom teachers reported having learnt a modern language at some stage of their education, with more than 66% of teachers having studied a modern language up to Leaving Certificate standard and 14% in third level education. 85% of teachers have had experience learning French, 26% German, 12% Spanish and 6% Italian. More recently collected data confirms the trend that the majority of teachers have had experience learning French (Nelligan, 2006).

When reporting on their modern language competence, 57% of teachers knew *parts of a conversation* or better, 29% had a *few simple sentences* and 7% *only the odd word*. 37% of teachers had encountered further opportunities to practise or use their modern language since their formal education has ceased, with only 4% currently participating in a modern language course.

When asked whether they would teach a modern language, 62% of teachers expressed an interest in teaching some aspect of a modern language programme. 48% of these teachers identified a need for professional development or already had the competency required and 14% were interested in teaching aspects of a programme requiring minimal knowledge of a modern language. 37% of teachers stated that they would not be interested in teaching a modern language to their classes. Reasons cited for lack of interest included the overloaded nature of the curriculum, lack of confidence and competence and feeling a specialist teacher would be more suited to facilitate a modern language.

39% of teachers recommended that *all schools* should be involved in the MLPSI and 50% recommended that *more schools* should be involved. Reasons cited for extension included equality of access to a modern language for all students and children benefiting from participation. 74% of teachers reported that the children in their classes can continue learning the language they are currently learning in post-primary school.

Areas identified as requiring strengthening were the lack of contact between the primary school and local post-primary schools and the lack of awareness of the specifics of the MLPSI at post-primary level. Extra principal burdens including recruitment and administration were identified. The need to reverse the shift of increasing numbers of non-staff teachers facilitating the modern language back to staff teachers and to address class teachers' concerns about teaching a modern language were also reported.

The second evaluation report concludes with recommendations towards a generalisation (country-wide) phase for modern languages in Ireland.

The second evaluation report has yet to be published. Of note, is the recent partial lift on the cap on numbers of schools participating in the MLPSI which will result in a shift back towards the classroom teacher facilitating the target language. 95 new schools joined the MLPSI in the 2007/8 school year, 73 of which fulfilled the requirement for participation of having the capacity within their staff to teach a modern language.⁶

2.3.3 Evaluation of the Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages in schools

In addition to the data collected in the course of the evaluations, data was also collected from a sample of 103 teachers in respect of their use of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 2001a). This showed that:

- The majority of teachers spent most of the teaching and learning time on activities that developed Communicative Competence, as this was the strand that children most enjoyed. The next most frequently taught strand was Language Awareness, with the activities of worksheets, listening activities and language games being used most frequently in its teaching and learning.
- Teachers tended to spend little time on teaching and learning cultural awareness. This was particularly the case in rural areas where teachers experienced difficulties in accessing appropriate resources.
- 84% of teachers reported spending *most time* developing the strand Communicative Competence, 15% Language Awareness and 1% Cultural Awareness. 6% of teachers reported spending *least time* developing Communicative Competence, 26% Language Awareness and 68% Cultural Awareness.
- The vast majority of teachers were able to integrate aspects of the modern language curriculum into the Primary School Curriculum. However, there were challenges for visiting teachers in achieving this form of integration. It should be noted that in 2001, only two of the eleven subjects in the Primary School Curriculum had been implemented through in-career development (Gaeilge and Science).
- Indicators of teachers' confidence in teaching the language were related to their prior experiences as language teachers. Teacher confidence in language teaching

⁶ The remainder may have been replacing existing schools which were leaving the MLPSI.

was also linked to their capacity to access avenues providing for professional development.

- Irish and English were reported to have *gained, as children started to appreciate the similarities and differences between them and the target language* (NCCA, 2001a: 16).

As referred to in the introduction, in 2005, the NCCA advised deferring the decision on modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum until the completion of the national programme for curriculum in-service in 2007. It suggested that a number of small-scale pilot projects were initiated in the interim to help ascertain potential ways forward. The DES response to the advice requested that three of these pilot projects be explored, namely, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Language Awareness and Networking. For operational reasons, the focus was on CLIL and language awareness, with work on networking deferred pending evaluation of the post-primary networks for junior and senior cycle.

2.3.6 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), language awareness and networking of teachers pilot projects

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) involves the use of the target language while teaching a particular strand/strand unit of another non-language curricular area. **Language awareness** involves engaging the child in reflecting on how languages are learnt, on similarities and differences between known and unknown languages (sentence structure, orthography, sounds) and the conventions of language.

NCCA initiated the pilot projects on CLIL and language awareness during the 2005/6 school year. It was intended that the CLIL and language awareness pilots would provide a basis for exploring the potential of teacher networking. Due to time constraints and staff changes, it was not possible to initiate the networking pilot project. NCCA's Schools' Network project at post-primary level was drawn upon to gain insights into the potential benefits and challenges of networking.

Six schools were involved in the CLIL pilot projects and five in the language awareness pilot projects, two of which were not involved in the MLPSI. The report on the CLIL and language awareness pilot projects was based on data gathered from interviews with

teachers and children, the interviewer's observations, teachers' reflective diaries, and samples of children's work and written reflections of their experience. It is important to highlight the small sample of schools (n=11) on which the report and findings are based. The focus in this instance was on depth of analysis rather than breadth.

The **successes** associated with the **CLIL pilot projects** from the teacher's perspective were increased motivation among children involved, increased use of the target language, potential for making links across the curriculum, opportunities for weaker children and children's enjoyment in learning, and sense of achievement. The **challenges** teachers identified with CLIL were the lack of resources and guidelines for implementing CLIL in the classroom, difficulty in selecting appropriate language, strands and strand units of the curriculum to teach through CLIL, differentiation and lack of time. Teachers also experienced difficulty with assessment; they queried how both the language and content can be assessed accurately.

Children's experiences of CLIL were very positive; they were enthusiastic and felt learning through CLIL was more fun. It had a positive effect on their attitude to the curricular area being taught.

We were learning both things at the same time, so you learn more.

I used to think Geography was boring, but since we did it through French, it is a bit more interesting.

I like doing French through Art because it's easier ...and it's more fun.

The successes teachers identified with **language awareness** were the children's change of attitude towards Irish, an increased awareness among the children of the importance of world languages, a greater sense of inclusion and confidence for all students, especially those for whom English is an additional language, an awareness of previous knowledge of language and an acceptance of other cultures and preparation for modern language learning. The challenges identified were similar to those identified for CLIL – lack of resources, difficulty in planning, time and measuring results. Many of the teachers involved also failed to use English and Irish as a starting point for teaching elements of language awareness.

Children's reactions to language awareness and future language learning were positive, but children failed to make the connection with English and Irish for language awareness. Most of the comments gathered from children referred to a modern language only in the context of language awareness.

...most words of Spanish are like the English words.

If I learn something in a different language and I am afraid [that I'll] forget it, I think of it like I say a different language that sounded like something else in English.

Challenges associated with the CLIL pilot projects included liaison between teachers, planning for progression in content and language, clear guidelines on use of the approach in the classroom, professional development and recognition of the existing use of CLIL for Irish. Challenges identified during the language awareness pilot project included the necessity of a structured programme, support for schools with a clear programme of work and making resources available.

The common challenges identified for both language awareness and CLIL were a need for concrete planning, lack of resources and guidelines, assessment methods and the need for additional time for planning and implementing the approach.

Of interest is that some of the same findings which emerged through the CLIL and language awareness pilot projects also emerged through the teacher-reported data in the two evaluations of the MLPSI – time, planning and resources.

Section summary

- Languages and their place in schools have long been the focus of debate in Ireland
- Those debates about primary education usually include consideration of the lack of policy in the face of general support, the inclusion of two languages in the curriculum, the need for research, and the economic imperative to place a great emphasis on modern languages
- The MLPSI has been successful for schools, teachers and students and much has been learned about how modern languages can be supported in schools through two comprehensive evaluations. Participating schools manage to overcome the challenges of time widely articulated in the Primary Curriculum Review, particularly in the second phase. The two evaluations have also pointed to some challenges in supporting modern languages in schools.
- Two small-scale pilots on CLIL and language awareness showed that challenges are also associated with these approaches.

3. The European Context

This section examines language policy and the place of modern languages in primary school curricula across Europe. This section forms outlines Europe's language skills and includes details of language teaching and learning policy and curriculum and practice for modern languages in Europe.

3.1 Language teaching and learning policy

3.1.1 The work of the European Commission

An important sub-objective of the Lisbon Strategy states that there is a need to improve foreign language teaching at all levels of education throughout Europe. This is seen to be a key means of giving expression to the multilingual nature of the European Union. According to the European Commission report entitled *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* (2001), the improvement of language skills provides for a better capacity for all to participate at different levels of the wider society and enables citizens to access an extended means of communication with fellow Europeans.

In the report, the Commission recognised the significant progress that had been made in primary schools with the introduction of pilot programmes in 17 foreign languages throughout the EU. The Commission called on governments to strengthen the gains that had been made in supporting pilot phases by considering the expansion of foreign language teaching and learning in primary schools (European Commission, 2001: 11).

The Commission urged that national policies for expansion of provision, which build on current strengths, should be mindful of:

- continuity of language learning
- providing children with access to native language teachers
- improving access to in-service education programmes for teachers
- supporting the provision of foreign language teaching and learning by in-service and pre-service teacher education providers.

The Commission acknowledged that there are considerable financial and other resource implications for each of the member states in any generalisation phase of pilot projects and that policy and resource requirements will vary greatly according to the local situations and the linguistic needs unique to different settings.

In looking to the future language needs of the EU, the Commission has concluded that the adoption of one lingua franca for Europe, namely English, is not enough. The Commission has contended that every European citizen should be enabled to communicate competently in at least two other languages of the EU in addition to his or her mother tongue (European Commission, 2003: 4).

Plurilingualism refers to the totality of an individual's linguistic competences in and across different languages. In order to achieve the aim of promoting plurilingualism from an early age, the Commission has called on all of the member states to make specific commitments that will involve additional investments in modern language teaching and learning in primary schools. The Commission prepared an action plan - *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006* (European Commission, 2003) and allocated funding to support each member state in formulating language policies and progressing development in key areas identified.

The Barcelona European Council met in 2002 to discuss the Lisbon strategy and its implementation. The presidency conclusions called for the improvement of *the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age...* (EUROPA, 2002: 19). The same document also called for the promotion of *the European dimension in education and its integration into pupils' basic skills by 2004* (EUROPA, 2002: 19).

In September 2007, the European Commission issued a working report (European Commission, 2007) on the progress member states were making in reaching the objectives outlined in the Action Plan. The report outlines how *the Commission and the Member States have made substantial progress in implementing the actions announced in the Action Plan. As a consequence ..., the promotion of language learning, linguistic diversity and multilingualism as a whole have gained significantly in political importance* (European Commission, 2007: 5). The report acknowledged that

the majority of states reported the lack of teachers with appropriate language proficiency and training as a key barrier to early introduction of modern language learning. No mention of language learning at primary level in Ireland is made in this report even though a country report for Ireland was submitted for the review.

Prior to the progress report in 2007, the European Commission reported on *Europeans and their languages* (2006) in their Eurobarometer. In a survey of 28,694 EU citizens and citizens in potential future states, 56% of respondents reported to know one other language, in addition to their native language, well enough to be able to have a conversation. 28% of respondents reported the same ability in two languages, in addition to their native language (European Commission, 2006). Of the 44% reported not to have this ability, Irish respondents ranked highest with 66% of Irish respondents reporting that they did not know any other language to this level other than their native language.

50% of respondents agree with the importance of being competent in their native language *plus two*, with 44% of respondents disagreeing. 65% of respondents reported that they had learned their additional language(s) at school. The report states that *in every country polled, language lessons at school are most often mentioned as one of the ways that citizens have used to learn foreign languages* (European Commission, 2006: 47). The majority of respondents indicated that they considered the best age to commence teaching a second language was from age 6 onwards. Irish respondents indicated that they thought French, German and Spanish should be the languages taught to children (European Commission, 2006: 34).

3.1.2 The Council of Europe

The Language Policy Division (LPD) of the Council of Europe has created a policy guide for the development of language education policies in member states. As outlined in Section 2.1.1, the DES has already worked with the Council of Europe to formulate a *Language Education Policy Profile* for Ireland (DES & Council of Europe, 2008). The Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland is discussed further in Section 6.1.

As mentioned earlier, the Languages Policy Division of the Council of Europe has provided leadership in assisting member countries to formulate language policies. It has also given practical assistance for language planning and teaching tools at a national and classroom level.

3.1.3 A European initiative to support languages

The Languages Policy Division has developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and the European Languages Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2001) to guide language learners, teachers and policy makers in setting achievable objectives. The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. *It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively* (Council of Europe, 2001: 1).

The European Languages Portfolio (ELP), which enables learners to log and display their language learning experiences, may assist in ensuring greater continuity of language learning between primary schools and post-primary schools. The MLPSI team has produced an ELP accredited by the Council of Europe for the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative and accompanying teacher guidelines.

3.2 Modern languages: curriculum and practice

The nature of modern language curricula used throughout Europe is considered here, along with an examination of some practices in language teaching with specific reference to the UK.

3.2.1 Language curricula

European language curricula generally include communicative competence, language awareness and intercultural awareness, with the emphasis being on communicative competence. Their aims are generally to provide children with the capacity to interact,

to some identifiable level, in a language other than national languages or those that are the child's first language.

There is a predominance of competency-based models for teaching modern languages in Europe, but there is a growing interest in integrating language awareness approaches within competency models of language teaching in Europe (European Commission, 2001b references to *reflecting on language* in Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia).

There are different interpretations of language awareness. Programmes vary from language sensitisation programmes to a more robust embedding of language awareness as a means of adding cohesion to, and making links between, different languages being learned. Methodologies identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) lean towards the latter practice.

Language awareness has been used as a language teaching methodology in participating schools in 190 schools across 10 countries partaking in the Janua Linguarum (Ja-Ling) project (Candelier, 2004: 47). This project refers to an extended definition of language awareness called *Awakening to Languages*. This project was initiated by the European Centre for Modern Languages and was designed to examine how language education, as apart from language learning, could be integrated into different curricula in Europe. Teachers reported positively on the project, with one citing that *this approach helps to trigger pupils' curiosity for and interest in learning languages* (Candelier, 2004: 142). More than half of the parents whose children were involved reported that their children had a greater interest in foreign languages and cultures as a result of their participation, that children were asking more about languages and word origins and 96% of parents felt the project had been beneficial for their children. Language awareness is discussed and defined further in Section 6.

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) suggest how language awareness strategies can be applied to compare and contrast languages known by children, for example, *alphabet, sentence structure, conventions of language, the language appropriate to particular situations and simple rules applicable in the languages* (Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages, NCCA, 1999: 8). The

aim of language awareness approaches is to provide younger learners with concepts about how languages work and how structural representations of various languages are applied in specific conditions of expression (Candelier, 2000).

Language curricula that have a specific intercultural dimension are seen as increasingly important in the European context (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). The focus on intercultural awareness tends to be closely allied to the learning of an additional language. As learners inquire about other ways of living and being, they gain a deeper understanding of what it might mean to be a speaker of the target language. The overall goal is to promote a sense of understanding of how to mediate between different cultural experiences through the use of another language. An intercultural awareness dimension is seen as increasingly important as learners live in societies where there are growing levels of mobility. Children and adults will require skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities to engage with, and within, other cultural milieu.

Different countries have adopted different models of language teaching and learning within their language curricula. The next section outlines how these methods have been implemented and for what languages.

3.2.2 Practices of language teaching

According to the *Key Data on Education in Europe: 2002*⁷ (European Commission, 2002: 157), almost 50% of primary pupils throughout Europe learn a foreign language apart from official or national languages in primary schools. This compares with approximately 3.8%⁸ of Irish children who are currently learning a modern language as part of the MLPSI. The 2005 report updated that core language teaching is now being integrated at an earlier stage and lasts for longer (European Commission, 2005: 27).

The 2002 report noted that European countries generally choose between two modes of foreign language teaching. The first mode uses a block of time – usually about 10% of all teaching time, for teaching and learning modern languages. It is worth noting that the Primary School Curriculum already devotes approximately one third of all teaching

⁷ This is the most recent report providing details of primary modern language learning.

⁸ 488 schools are currently supported by the MLPSI. DES figures available are from the school year 2006/7 and indicate that there were 3,284 primary schools. This means that 15% of Irish primary schools are supported. 5th and 6th class students make up about ¼ of children in schools. An approximation of the number of children supported by the MLPSI is 3.8%.

and learning time to L1 and L2 learning. The second mode of language teaching and learning is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), wherein subject areas are taught through the medium of the L2 or L3.

In regions of Europe characterised by linguistic bilingualism and plurilingualism such as the Basque region of Spain, or countries such as Switzerland and Finland, it has been possible for education policy to reflect language and cultural aspirations at national or regional levels. The states or regions mentioned have been able to maintain and even reinvigorate official and regional languages while also providing children with access to wider linguistic experiences.

Generally, children in these plurilingual contexts are offered initial literacy skills in their first language. Their language learning experiences are then extended to include a dominant national or regional language. Later in primary education, children are offered an additional foreign language. The example of Finland where Finnish and Swedish are two official languages of the country shows Finnish being introduced at the start of primary education and Swedish usually introduced during the third grade when children are about nine years old. Modern languages⁹ are then introduced in sixth or seventh grade when children are about 12 or 13 years old. Three languages are compulsory at this stage of education. However, for children in the Basque region, diversity of language learning starts particularly early. The regional language of Basque is introduced concurrently with the national language of Spanish and in almost all public schools the foreign language of English is offered for children from 4 to 6 years of age (Aliaga, 2003).

The response of school systems to these bilingual and plurilingual contexts is noteworthy, but arguably, driven by the need to improve levels of English in the school-going population and among citizens in general. What has been the response of school systems where the native language (or one of them) is English, and where the same imperative does not exist? This overview summarises how modern languages have been included in primary schools across these countries.

⁹ English is the most commonly learnt language (94%-99% of students), followed by German (11%-49% of students) and French (3%-23% of students) (European Commission, 2001c).

Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to making Wales a bilingual society with recognition for English and Welsh as national languages under the National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales by 2011. English and Welsh are core components of education from key stage 1 to key stage 4 (age 5-16). Modern languages are a core component at key stage 3 (age 11-14) and have been piloting at key stage 2 since September 2003. The former Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) (which merged with the Welsh Assembly Government's new Department for Education Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS) on the 1 April 2006) compiled *Making the link, Language Learning 5-14* in 2003. This document outlined the former ACCAC's commitment to

draw up guidance on language learning from Key Stages 1-3. This guidance will establish principles and recommendations common to English, Welsh and foreign languages. It will help teachers build on earlier learning and help foster greater co-operation between Welsh, English and modern foreign language departments. (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, ACCAC, 2003: 3)

However, by 2008, only one primary school in every 13 was participating in the modern languages pilot initiative. More recently, the ACCAC have announced that languages will not be made compulsory for primary schools.

Scotland

The first initiative on modern language teaching in Scotland was introduced in 1989 and involved post-primary schools and their feeder primary schools. By 1993, 12 post-primary schools and their 76 associated feeder schools were involved in teaching French, German, Italian and Spanish to a variety of class levels. Language tuition was provided by the secondary school language teacher with the classroom teacher assisting with the integration of the modern language into the curriculum.

In 1993 Scotland moved from the pilot phase to a generalisation phase to include all Scottish primary schools. A language competence model was chosen, where French, German, Italian or Spanish would be offered. Modern languages are now a core component of the 5-14 curriculum. *5-14 guidelines for modern languages* were provided to schools and included priorities for language learning, such as child-centred, communicative approach and maximum use of the target language. These priorities were put in place but no curriculum was established. The guidelines were revised in late 2001. The classroom teacher was now charged with providing the modern language. A training programme was rolled out whereby one teacher from each school attended 27 days' training over four terms. The focus of training was on modern language proficiency and teaching methodology. Each teacher was then responsible for language provision in their respective schools. Teachers chose the target language for training, with the proviso that the language chosen was available in the associated post-primary school.

Implementation of modern languages in schools is facilitated by collaboration at local level among clusters of primary schools that act as feeders for post-primary schools. The post-primary schools are also engaged in the clustering arrangements. Approximately 98% of children at P6 and P7 (final two years of primary school) are estimated to be receiving language tuition. However, the level of *language entitlement* received by children varied in each of the local authority areas (HMI, 2005).

The Curriculum for Excellence is currently being developed in Scotland. It is based on four capacities; (1) successful learners, (2) confident individuals, (3) responsible citizens and (4) effective contributors. The Curriculum for Excellence Languages framework accounts for: classical languages, literacy and language, modern languages and Scots Gaelic. Cognisance is taken of the presence of English, Scots Gaelic, new languages like Urdu, Punjabi and Polish and modern languages.

England

In 2007, the Dearing Review (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) recommended that languages be included from the age of seven (key stage two). Following the acceptance of this advice, it is intended that all children at this stage will

study a modern language by 2010.

80% of primary schools currently offer some experience of modern languages. CILT and NACELL support the implementation of modern languages in primary schools. The language offered in schools is determined by the availability of expertise.

Language learning remains a compulsory component of the Key Stage 3 (age 11-14) curriculum but ceased to be a compulsory element at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16).

Northern Ireland

Modern languages are not compulsory at primary level but the revised Primary Curriculum provides flexibility for languages to be introduced and *Schools are also encouraged to teach additional languages* (CCEA, 2007). Many primary schools in Northern Ireland are participating in pilot projects. Languages taught include Irish, French, German, Spanish and Italian. Library Boards develop programmes for schools in their areas and endeavour to provide peripatetic teachers where necessary. The Education minister recently announced the commencement of a review into how languages are taught in Northern Ireland (Department for Education, 2006). This review includes the possibility that all children at primary level may *soon have the opportunity to learn modern languages* (Department for Education, 2006).

Findings from CCEA's evaluation of the first two years of the Primary Languages Pilot are very positive (CCEA, 2007a). The pilot examined 21 schools integrating Spanish and French. The pilot was successful in promoting language learning in a fun and enjoyable way and in developing students' competency in listening and speaking in a modern language. Two models were adopted for the pilots, (1) Teacher-building capacity model and (2) Peripatetic model. Teachers in both models managed to integrate the language into other curricular areas. Parents showed strong support for the pilot with 99.4% of parents stating that they thought modern language learning would benefit their child in future learning and beyond education. Over 30% of parents requested language resources to support their child's learning at home.

Most of the teachers involved reported that they would *like further training* (CCEA, 2007a: 4), especially those who were involved in the second model above. Similar

challenges were identified by teachers as those recorded during the Irish CLIL and language awareness pilot projects – (1) insufficient preparation time, (2) insufficient audio resources for pronunciation and (3) the ability to progress language across year groups.

In general, English speaking countries lag behind the rest of Europe in provision of modern languages in Primary schools. An overview of developments in those countries seems to indicate that Ireland is closest to Wales in its current position. Of note is that both aspire to bilingualism and offer two native languages to all children in primary school.

Section summary

- There is a European push for an improvement in the language skills of Europe's citizens. This push prompts all Europeans to be competent in their native language plus two other languages and move towards a plurilingual education.
- 66% of Irish respondents to the Eurobarometer study reported that they did not have the competence to hold a basic conversation in any language other than their native language. In Ireland, two languages—English and Irish—are taught in the primary education system.
- 50% of European children learn a language other than their native language at school. This compares with an approximated 3.5% of Irish children participating in the MLPSI.
- The Council of Europe have worked with Ireland to develop a *Language Education Policy Profile*. There are many European initiatives to support language learning, for example, the European Language Portfolio.
- Communicative competence is the dominant model of language teaching in Europe. Interest is growing in integrating language awareness and intercultural awareness approaches within this model.
- English speaking and English bilingual countries lag behind the rest of Europe in the provision of modern languages.

4. Modern language learning and the Primary School Curriculum

Introduction

Following on from consideration of policy and practice in Europe and in English speaking countries in particular, this chapter focuses on the Irish primary school curriculum, and the potential it offers for language learning.

4.1 The Primary School Curriculum

The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was developed by the NCCA through widespread engagement with the partners in education. The curriculum is organised into six curriculum areas and eleven subjects. The development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools remains the responsibility of the relevant church authorities. Religious Education as a twelfth subject infers seven curriculum areas. Key aims, principles and features of the curriculum are explained in the Introduction. Curriculum documents and teacher guidelines are provided for each subject. Added to the Introduction, these amount to 23 books. In its totality, the curriculum aims *to enable children to meet, with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future* (Primary School Curriculum, Introduction, 1999: 6). The national programme of in-service for implementation of the Primary School Curriculum by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) was completed in June 2007.

4.1.1 Language and intercultural education in the Primary School Curriculum

Language is one of the six curriculum areas; it includes English and Irish. It is recommended that one third of time in primary schools is allocated to language; 17.7%

to the children's first language and 15.3% to their second language.¹⁰ A key feature of the curriculum is that children have experience of learning two languages – English and Irish. Learning through language is also one of the principles of the curriculum. English and Irish in the Primary School Curriculum are described as conduits of cultural experiences and the child's linguistic competence facilitates learning as it enables the child to learn about his or her world through linguistic interaction with others. The arrival of more languages to schools with children for whom English is an additional language facilitates even greater opportunities for cultural experiences and increased linguistic awareness in all children.

One of the general objectives of the Primary School Curriculum is for children to *develop a competence in a second, and perhaps a third, language at a level appropriate to his or her ability and cultural and linguistic background* (Primary School Curriculum, Introduction, 1999: 36).

Within the English Curriculum and *Curaclam na Gaeilge* there is a focus on both (inter)cultural and language awareness.

(Inter)cultural Awareness

Culture and identity are identified as a key issue in the Primary School Curriculum. Children learn about a culture through its language. An appreciation for languages and for the cultures of others can make a positive contribution to the growing plurilingual and pluricultural nature of Irish society. A capacity to appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity is particularly beneficial if there are children in the class who might speak other languages and come from differing cultural backgrounds. In addition to promoting communicative competence, *Curaclam na Gaeilge* focuses on **language awareness and cultural awareness** as an integral component of the language learning experience.

Cuirfear san áireamh cultúr na tíre nach mbaineann go díreach leis an nGaeilge, cultúr páistí áirithe atá ag freastal ar an mbunscoil in Éirinn faoi láthair, agus cultúr cuid de thíortha na hEorpa chomh maith.

(*Curaclam na Gaeilge*, 1999: 12)

¹⁰ Also see DES circular 0044/2007 http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/cl0044_2007.pdf referring to language and literacy in infant classes in Irish-medium schools.

The Primary School Curriculum specifically mentions the fact that children's linguistic and cultural awareness of other countries, particularly those in the EU, is enhanced by an experience of modern language learning (Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, 1999: 27).

Language awareness

Language teaching in the Primary School Curriculum aims to support transfer of language knowledge across known and new languages. For example by focusing on how languages work, by illustrating how people use languages for different purposes while communicating and by investigating how languages may be related, children will be able to apply knowledge that they have about one language to learning other languages. Language awareness also assists children in refining their language learning skills.

Language awareness is mentioned in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* where teachers are encouraged to explore language awareness issues, such as drawing children's attention to similarities and differences between Irish, English and additional languages (*Curaclam na Gaeilge, Treoirínte do Mhúinteoirí*. 1999: 12). Language awareness is referred to within one of the four strands of the English Curriculum - Receptiveness to Language.

The language awareness component in both *Curaclam na Gaeilge* and the English Curriculum has the potential to promote learning links between modern languages, English, Irish and any other languages present in the classroom. Raising awareness about the links that exist between languages helps to improve overall literacy skills as children extend their knowledge about how languages are related and how they are structured (Boyd & Rozendal, 2003).

4.1.2 Integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum

Providing an integrated approach to learning is a fundamental principle of the Primary School Curriculum. Thus, learning in one curriculum subject/area is deepened and enhanced through the child's experiences of discovery and learning in other curriculum subjects/areas. The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) notes that this approach *creates harmony in the child's learning experiences and serves the complex nature of the*

learning process. (Introduction: 11) and... *gives children's learning a broader and richer perspective*, (Introduction: 16).

Languages then are not just a subject in the curriculum, but are supported through all subjects. Language learning—whether communicative competence, (inter)cultural awareness or language awareness—can happen in all subjects and at all times in the school day, as well as within dedicated language time. As the findings of the Primary Curriculum Review show—mapping this integrated learning, planning for it, and assessing its effectiveness—is challenging for teachers (see discussion in Section 4.2). (Inter)cultural awareness and language awareness offer a mutually reinforcing opportunity for extending children's linguistic and cultural awareness.

4.1.3 The Primary School Curriculum and Modern Languages – making the connection

Links between the Primary School Curriculum and the teaching of modern languages are made explicit in the draft curriculum guidelines.

Strands, strand units and methodologies

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) integrate the teaching and learning of the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, through a thematic approach. A list of topics enables teachers to identify how themes can be developed and how integration of learning can take place with other subjects. *Teacher Guidelines* were produced in 2001. They provided further detail on the three strands, Communicative Competence, Language Awareness and Cultural Awareness. They also covered school planning, classroom planning and a range of approaches and methodologies to support language teaching and learning.

The guidelines recommend that teachers and children should use the target languages in meaningful contexts to support learning. There is also a focus on developing communicative language skills through talking and listening to the teacher and others. Teachers and children work jointly through three different phases of activities, including

- a pre-communicative phase, which entails a motivational exercise that sets the scene for further development

- a communicative phase, which enables children to utilise their newly acquired linguistic representation in concrete interactions
- a post-communicative phase, which allows time for reflection and consolidation of what has been learned.

(Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages, NCCA, 1999: 6, 7)

A similar approach is found in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* which identifies a precommunicative phase, (réamhchumarsáid), a communicative phase (cumarsáid), and a post communicative phase of activities (iarchumarsáid).

A focus on communication

The inclusion of the communicative competence strand in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) is in keeping with the general objectives mentioned in the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999) where one target identified is for the child to *develop a competence in a second, and perhaps a third, language at a level appropriate to his or her ability and cultural and linguistic background* (Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, Government of Ireland, 1999: 36).

The inclusion of the communicative competence strand ensures that children learn at least the basic elements of a modern language through tasks that *challenge the child to the language ... in order to interact effectively with others through role-playing effective communication, social interaction and language games* (Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages, NCCA, 1999: 8).

The communicative strand is motivational for children, as they enjoy interacting through the target language. According to the report commissioned for the NCCA, this is the strand that teachers tend to concentrate most time on as they find *that children respond best to this strand* (NCCA, 2001: 3). Findings from the second phase of Primary Curriculum Review have also revealed the successes that the active learning methodologies associated with a communicative approach can have on children's enjoyment of the language learning process.

Language awareness

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Government of Ireland, 1999: 83) indicates that the language curriculum will be enhanced when teachers highlight and act upon the transferable language learning skills that can occur when children learn different languages.

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages reinforce this point and highlight the relevance of language awareness in the Irish context as, *fifth and sixth classes have already been introduced to two languages* (Draft Curriculum Guidelines for modern languages, NCCA, 1999: 8).

The Language Awareness strand of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) provides opportunities for the teachers to lead the child into rich, rewarding and engaging investigations into how languages are related and structured.

Cultural awareness

The cultural awareness strand in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) is designed to facilitate learning about other countries and cultures. The strand supports integration with other subjects.

It can also be linked to other areas of the language curriculum. In *Curaclam na Gaeilge* for example, it states that that children should explore aspects of Irish culture while increasing their knowledge of European cultures ... *Cuirfear san áireamh cultúr na tíre nach mbaineann go díreach leis an nGaeilge, cultúr páistí áirithe atá ag freastal ar an mbunscoil in Éirinn faoi láthair, agus cultúr cuid de thíortha na hEorpa chomh maith* (*Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge*, 1999: 12).

The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* were based on the layout of the Primary School Curriculum. In examining the Primary School Curriculum, though should also be given to the process of its rolling review and other research which provides evidence of the successes and challenges of its implementation.

4.2 Primary School Curriculum: research findings

Much can be learned about the successes and challenges teachers are experiencing in implementing the Primary School Curriculum and the impact of the revised curriculum on children's learning through findings from two phases of Primary Curriculum Review, studies conducted by the DES and other research such as the National Assessment of English Reading (NAER) (2004) and Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools (DES, 2005c). Of particular relevance to any consideration of the future of languages in the curriculum are findings relating to the curriculum for English and Irish and the overall response of teachers to working with the curriculum.

The discussion begins with findings for English and Irish, followed by general findings which impact all subjects in the Primary School Curriculum.

4.2.1 Focus on language – English and Irish

4.2.1.1 English

The first phase of Primary Curriculum Review (PCR) examined English, Mathematics and Visual Arts (NCCA, 2005b). One of the most significant findings of this phase was that teachers reported difficulty in using the organisational framework in strands of the English Curriculum to plan and used the strand units instead (NCCA, 2005b; DES, 2005). NCCA produced additional support materials in 2005 which flipped the strands and strand units to help address this issue.

Teachers reported difficulty with the writing strand. A majority of teachers identified developing children's 'writing skills' as their greatest priority, followed by oral language skills, followed by reading skills. Teachers noted a lack of information and advice on teaching functional language skills including grammar, spelling and phonics and identified them as areas requiring further attention and support (NCCA, 2005b).

Language awareness is embedded in the Strand *Receptiveness to Language* within the English Curriculum. Teachers reported this Strand as the second most useful

strand in the English Curriculum after the Strand Competence and Confidence in Using Language (NCCA, 2005b: 34).

During the same period as PCR data gathering was taking place, the DES was carrying out an Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools. The subjects being evaluated were the same as for PCR, phase 1, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts. The evaluation found that the reading strand was being successfully implemented by the majority of teachers (DES, 2005) and the *Oral Language* strand unit. Gaps identified in teachers' implementation of the English Curriculum were a lack of emphasis on higher-order thinking skills and insufficient attention to the *emotional and imaginative development through language* strand. The teaching of writing was weak in more than 50% of the 59 classrooms where English was evaluated. It was recommended that greater range of reading materials be made available in more than 40% of classrooms. Only 25% of classes were noted for fair practice in implementing the strands *receptiveness to language, competence and confidence in using language and developing cognitive abilities through language* (DES, 2005: 50). It was recommended that clear guidelines should be provided for teachers on lesson structures for English reading, oral language development and writing at each class level (DES, 2005: 52).

The 2004 National Assessment of English Reading (NAER) was conducted by the Educational Research Centre (Eivers, Shiel, Perkins & Cosgrove, 2005) on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. The report outlined how levels of reading achievement had not changed since 1998. Only high-achieving students showed a slight improvement (better comprehension of documents) on the recorded 1998 data. The report does note that the fifth class children surveyed would not have had experience of the revised Primary School English Curriculum (1999) since infant class. Reference is made to the high attainment of 15-year olds in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Eivers et al, 2005). While inferences cannot be made about primary reading in English from PISA 2003, Eivers et al (2005) refer to a parallel study where countries ranking similarly to Ireland in PISA 2003, were among the highest performing countries at primary level (PIRLS; Mullins, Martin, Gonzalez & Kennedy, 2003). Ireland ranked equally well in PISA 2006.

Data gathered for NAER included questionnaires from 51 inspectors on their views of the teaching of English. Most of the inspector respondents were satisfied with the level of resources available in schools but *fewer were satisfied* with how the resources were used (ERC, 2005). Nearly 75% of the inspector respondents felt that teachers required some in-career development, with 30% reporting that the teaching of oral language required attention. Less than 50% of these respondents felt that teachers had a comprehensive knowledge of the methods for teaching English. More than a third of respondents *believed that teachers had a somewhat, or very limited, understanding of the English Curriculum* (ERC, 2005: 22).

There was evidence that classroom practice had not fully evolved from the practices espoused in the predecessor to the Primary School Curriculum, such as *insufficient differentiation in some classrooms* and suggestions that teachers

need to place greater emphasis on planning oral language, reading, and writing activities designed to enhance pupils' comprehension of texts...additional support in teaching reading comprehension skills as they relate to different text genres, and in developing pupils' ability to respond to reading through oral language and writing (ERC, 2005: 28).

In taking a closer look at literacy (and numeracy) in disadvantaged schools, low achievement has been reported (DES, 2005c), with nearly half of the children in schools evaluated in the DES study on *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners* obtaining very low scores in reading. 43.3% of children scored at or below the 20th percentile (i.e. the lowest 20% of test scores), with fifth and sixth class children's performance being weaker than the overall performance of all children. Recommendations to address these low levels of achievement included planning, professional development for teachers, parental involvement and assessment. These recommendations are referred to in Section 4.2.2 below.

Further research conducted in parallel to the DES study revealed similar findings. 94 designated disadvantaged schools were randomly chosen to participate in this study conducted by the Educational Research Centre (Eivers, Shiel & Shortt, 2005a).

Children from designated disadvantaged schools were shown to have *poorer reading achievement scores than those in non-disadvantaged schools* (Eivers et al, 2005a: 5). Approximately 30% of children in first, third and sixth classes were shown to have *serious reading difficulties*, scoring in the lowest 10% of test scores. Approximately one hour a day was reported to be used teaching English per day. This is reported to be *far less than research suggests is necessary for very disadvantaged pupils* (Eivers et al, 2005a: 20). According to the authors of the report, research suggests that 90 minutes to two hours a day should be given to English/reading in this environment. This time contrasts the 4 hour allocation suggested for children's first language in the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, Introduction: 70). One of the recommendations of the researchers is that the suggested time for English (the children's first language in the instance of the ERC report) in the curriculum is increased to at least 90 minutes per day (7.5 hours per week) in schools designated as disadvantaged. Further recommendations are integrated into Section 4.2.2 below.

English as an Additional Language

When the revised *Primary School Curriculum* was published in 1999, the make-up of Irish classrooms was very different from how it is today. It has been found that over 167 languages are now spoken in Ireland (Gallagher, 2007) with the arrival of newcomer individuals and families. The arrival of 20,000¹¹ children to primary schools who have varying levels of competency in English, different cultural backgrounds and experience of different education systems (or none yet at all) have uncovered a new set of benefits and challenges for the primary school system. The presence of newcomer children brings diversity to the cultural and linguistic environment of the school which benefits all children. One of the challenges relating to children for whom English is an additional language is to facilitate them in accessing the Primary School Curriculum through the language of instruction of the school. A dual challenge exists here of teaching or improving children's English language competency so that they can communicate in school and everyday life and enabling the children to reach a competency which is high enough to allow them to access the teaching and learning of the Primary School Curriculum in their school.

¹¹ The DES estimates that there are approximately 28,000 children in Ireland whose native language is neither English nor Irish, 20,000 at primary level and 8,000 at post-primary level.

The mainstream teacher is now required to differentiate for varying levels of language competency as well as for the needs of all children in his/her classroom. He/she also requires additional time to liaise with the language support teacher of the child for whom English is an additional language. While there are certain areas and towns where these challenges are greater due to greater numbers of newcomers settling (for example, the Dublin 15 area or Gort, Co. Galway), the challenge has reached nearly every school in Ireland.

In order to recognise and address the language needs of parents of children for whom English is an additional language, more publications are being made available in the most common of the new languages. For example, the NCCA's parents' DVD, *The What, Why and How of Children's Learning in Primary School*, can be watched in five languages – English, Irish, French, Lithuanian and Polish and the INTO has produced information for parents, *Your Child in the Primary School: Tips for Parents*, in English, Irish, French, Polish and Spanish.

4.2.1.2 Irish

The second phase of Primary Curriculum Review was initiated during the 2006/7 school year. It examined the experiences of teachers, principals, parents and children with *Curaclam na Gaeilge* and Science and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum. Findings for Irish were based on teachers' experiences since the full implementation of *Curaclam na Gaeilge* during the 2002/2003 school year.

Findings for Irish indicated that children enjoyed the communicative approach to language learning and the increased use of active learning activities including drama and word games outlined in *Curaclam na Gaeilge*. Analysis indicates that there may be a need for an examination of the phonics and grammar components of the Curriculum, as identified for English (NCCA, 2005b), to ensure there is progression in children's language learning. Teachers have indicated one of their greatest challenges was in teaching the writing strand. Grammar, reading, spelling and phonics were identified as being particularly challenging. Reference was made to teachers' challenge, especially by those in English-medium schools, to teach two separate phonic codes (one in English and one in Irish).

Across the three subjects reviewed in PCR2, assessment was reported as being used least in Irish to provide feedback to children. Teachers reported making little use of oral or literacy-based activities to develop children's cultural awareness. Instead, they relied on songs and classroom games. Negative attitudes to Irish from parents and children, time, class size, curriculum overload and lack of resources were also cited as challenges.

In developing children's language awareness in real contexts, respondents (74%) most frequently marked drawing children's attention to various patterns within the language of Gaeilge such as grammar, spelling and punctuation marks. Highlighting similarities and differences between Gaeilge and English (e.g. word order in sentences) was also frequently cited (72%). This was followed by 65% of teachers who said that they drew children's attention to similarities and differences between letter sounds in English and in Gaeilge, and in other languages.

In developing children's language awareness the smallest percentage of respondents, 32%, reported drawing children's attention to similarities between Gaeilge and other languages, if appropriate.

The Inspectorate of the DES also reported children's positive attitudes to learning Irish at primary level (DES, 2007) but noted teachers' concerns for the standard being achieved across the four skills. 52% of classes observed were reported to have weak or poor development of listening skills. Children's oral language skills were reported to be satisfactory in 56% of classes observed, where children could express themselves about the subject matter of the lesson. The converse, 44% of classes, were reported to have *failed to attain an appropriate standard of spoken Irish* (DES, 2007: 52).

75% of children were reported to have an acceptable level of understanding of the reading materials presented by the teacher. However, the level of materials presented to children was reported to be at a lower level than was suitable for the class being observed. 38% of children were reported to show a significant lack of interest in and understanding of their reading materials and often displayed poor word recognition skills. The teaching of reading was reported as good in approximately half of the classes, although the formal teaching of reading skills was not evident in approximately

50% of classes (DES, 2007). Children were reported to rely on their English reading skills in Irish. Only lower-order writing skills were developed in Irish. There was no evidence of the teaching of phonology of Irish in classes.

Children's personal and creative writing was reported to be at a low standard, with children showing difficulties in writing simple stories. The difficulty was attributed to children's lack of appropriate language to express their views.

Only half of classes inspected showed Irish being taught to a *good* or *very good* standard. Nearly half of teachers were reported to have had difficulties in structuring their lessons and in implementing the principles of the curriculum. As within the Primary Curriculum Review for Irish (NCCA, in press), there was little evidence of assessment being used in a structured way for Irish (DES, 2007).

In 2006, Harris reported on data gathered in 2002 on Irish levels of attainment in *ordinary schools* (English-medium), *all-Irish* (Gaelscoileanna) and *Gaeltacht schools*. The data showed that children's proficiency in Listening, Speaking and Reading in all-Irish schools was similar to levels recorded in 1985 (Harris and Murtagh, 1988). Teachers' perception of children's ability did not change in the 15 year period. A decrease was noted in the number of children obtaining mastery in the verb-related objectives in Irish listening and understanding the make up of verbs.

A greater decline in student proficiency was recorded in Gaeltacht schools, where rates of attainment in seven Irish learning objectives were lower than in all-Irish schools outside the Gaeltacht and a decline noted between the 1985 and 2002 proficiencies.¹² Two of the seven listening objectives and four of the eight speaking objectives analysed showed statistically significant declines in competency between 1985 and 2002.

The report noted that children in ordinary schools (English-medium schools) showed the most significant declines in ability between the two data gathering periods 1985 and 2002. Fewer children in 2002 were obtaining high levels of performance or mastery and nearly all aspects of ability in speaking and listening had fallen since 1985 (Harris,

¹² This could be attributed to changing demographics in Gaeltacht areas.

2006). The percentage of children failing in 2002 was significantly higher in Speaking, Listening and Writing than in 1985. In 2002, children were shown to obtain competence in key objectives or make at least minimal progress.

While advances have been made in English and Irish teaching and levels of children's competency, it is evident from a range of sources that considerable challenges remain. There are other pressure points relevant to the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum which incorporates language and other subjects.

4.2.2 General findings

General findings have emerged from research examining teachers' successes and challenges in implementing the Primary School Curriculum and the impact that the Primary School Curriculum has had on children's learning and achievement. The challenges and impact identified are summarised in the tables below.

Table 4.1. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: Planning

Key findings	Reports
<p>Planning</p> <p>Schools need further support in planning for language in the <i>Primary School Curriculum</i> (1999), including the development of a whole school plan which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identifies teaching and learning priorities for the school ▪ informs teachers' classroom planning (including assessment) ▪ ensures progression of skills and curriculum linkage and integration ▪ is effective for languages ▪ includes aspects of differentiation which address the needs of all pupils ▪ includes measures to support children identified as being at risk of encountering reading difficulties, including children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Traveller children ▪ includes whole school plans to address literacy challenges, particularly in disadvantaged settings. <p>Schools need dedicated time for collaborative planning. Class and resource teachers should collaborate in the planning and implementation of IEPs for children who receive resource time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. An evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science</i> (DES, 2005c) ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools</i> (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005) ▪ <i>An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts</i> (DES, 2005) ▪ <i>Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and Solutions</i> (Eivers et al, 2005a)

Table 4.2. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: Assessment

Key findings	Reports
<p>Assessment</p> <p>Teachers need greater support on assessment in the curriculum including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ broadening the range of assessment methods used ▪ using information gathered from assessment to plan for progression of learning and differentiation ▪ developing a written school policy on assessment ▪ assessment policy and planning for assessment ▪ diagnostic or descriptive information on standardised tests so that they are not seen as out of date by the start of the new academic year ▪ reporting to parents of children for whom English is an additional language. <p>Teachers need in-career <i>development to enable them to use a variety of assessment techniques</i> (ERC, 2005). They reported challenges associated with assessment including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ time to assess the children ▪ appropriateness of the assessment tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. An evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science</i> (DES, 2005c) ▪ <i>An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts</i> (DES, 2005) ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1</i>, (NCCA, 2005) ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005)</i> ▪ <i>Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and Solutions</i> (Eivers et al, 2005a) ▪ <i>Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15</i> (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007)

Table 4.3. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: School leadership and management

Key findings	Reports
<p>School leadership and management</p> <p>Principals, post holders and school management need further support in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensuring children's language and literacy skills are developed throughout all levels of the school, particularly¹³ in designated disadvantaged schools ▪ catering to the needs of children and families for whom English is an additional language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. An evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science</i> (DES, 2005c) ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005)</i> ▪ <i>Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15</i> (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007)

¹³ It is notable that findings from the ESRI longitudinal study that the experiences of children in junior cycle (ESRI, 2007) indicate that reading abilities at the beginning of first year have a very strong link with student performance levels in the Junior Certificate exam.

Table 4.4. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: Parental/home involvement

Key findings	Reports
<p>Parental/home involvement</p> <p>Parents require further support in helping children develop language and literacy skills in the home from the pre-school years to the senior classes. Findings point to a link between pre-school reading in the home and literacy achievement.</p> <p>Findings point to the link between the availability of educational resources in the home and outcomes in reading tests.</p> <p>Parental attitude towards languages (Irish in particular) has an impact on children’s own perception of and achievement in languages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Irish in Primary Schools: Long Term Trends in Achievement</i> (Harris, 2006) ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1</i>, (NCCA, 2005) ▪ <i>Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. An evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science</i> (DES, 2005c) ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools</i> (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005) ▪ <i>Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and Solutions</i> (Eivers et al, 2005a)

Table 4.5. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: Curriculum Implementation

Key findings	Reports
<p>Curriculum Implementation</p> <p>Teachers require support in providing opportunities for children to develop their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ process writing and writing skills in a variety of genres ▪ reading comprehension skills and higher order thinking skills ▪ oral skills and respond to reading through oral language and writing ▪ emotional and expressive skills ▪ use of ICT as a learning resource for language and literacy. <p>Teachers report pressure points in implementing the curriculum,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time/curriculum overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2</i>, (NCCA, in press) ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1</i>, (NCCA, 2005) ▪ <i>An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts</i> (DES, 2005) ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools</i> (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005) ▪ <i>Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and Solutions</i> (Eivers et al, 2005a)

Table 4.6. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: CPD

Key findings	Reports
<p>Continuous Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how to use information gathered through assessment effectively ▪ how to lead curriculum development and change within the context of the school ▪ effective use of ICT ▪ teaching in a disadvantaged setting ▪ should be ongoing, school based and aimed specifically at each particular schools needs ▪ pre-service training on teaching reading is not meeting teachers' or children's needs ▪ the emphasis on oral language in the curriculum is not sufficiently supported by training ▪ to meet the needs of children for whom English is an additional language. <p>Teachers are often unaware of the CPD opportunities available to them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools</i> (prepared for the DES by the Educational Research Centre, 2005) ▪ <i>Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. An evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science</i> (DES, 2005c) ▪ <i>Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and Solutions</i> (Eivers et al, 2005a) ▪ <i>Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15</i> (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007)

Table 4.7. Synthesis of key findings from selected reports: Methods of teaching & learning

Key findings	Reports
<p>Methods of Teaching and Learning</p> <p>Teachers need support for implementing a range of teaching and learning methodologies, for example, through exemplification and support materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1</i>, (NCCA, 2005) ▪ <i>An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts</i> (DES, 2005) ▪ <i>Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2</i>, (NCCA, in press)

Evidence suggests that across the Primary School Curriculum and especially in the language area, teachers and schools are still struggling to come to terms with the breadth and scale of the Primary School Curriculum. Despite the progress that has been made in implementing the revised curriculum in English and Irish, more work is required to consolidate what has been achieved.

Section summary

- The Primary School Curriculum promotes an integrated approach to teaching and learning.
- Culture and identity are key issues in the Primary School Curriculum. Cultural awareness and language awareness are promoted in Curaclam na Gaeilge and the English Curriculum.

- The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) and *Teacher Guidelines* (NCCA, 2001) complement the structure and layout of the Primary School Curriculum. The three strands of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* are (1) Communicative competence, (2) Language Awareness and (3) Cultural Awareness.

- English
 - *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1*: teachers' greatest priorities were developing children's writing skills, followed by oral language skills and reading skills. A lack of information and advice on teaching functional language skills (grammar, spelling and phonics) were reported.
 - *Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation*: findings indicated that the teaching of writing was weak and there was a lack of emphasis on higher-order thinking skills. Guidelines were reported to be required for English reading oral language development and writing.
 - *National Assessment of English Reading*: findings indicated that the teaching of oral language requires attention, that teachers did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the methods for teaching English and that many teachers had a limited understanding of the English Curriculum. Reading comprehension and responding to reading were further areas identified as requiring attention.
 - *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools*: nearly half of children in disadvantaged schools obtained very low scores in reading, with 30% having serious reading difficulties.
 - *English as an additional language*: further challenges are presented by children for whom English is an additional language. English language competency, accessing the Primary School Curriculum and further differentiation were identified as challenges.

- Irish
 - *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2*: Children are enjoying the active learning activities prevalent in the communicative approach. The writing strand, phonics, grammar, reading and spelling were areas identified as requiring attention.

- *Inspectorate Evaluation Study*: Only 56%% of children were reported to be making good progress in oral language development. The teaching of listening skills and reading skills require attention. Children's writing skills were reported to be at a low standard.
 - *Irish Levels of Attainment*: Children's levels of competency in Irish are decreasing, especially in English-medium schools. Speaking, listening and writing were significantly lower than in previous assessments.
- General findings
 - Planning, assessment, school leadership and management, parent/home involvement, curriculum implementation, continuous professional development and methods of teaching and learning were identified as areas requiring attention.

5. Modern languages in the Curriculum: Issues

This section outlines issues concerning the feasibility of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. Six issues are discussed as follows:

- Children's language learning
- The modern language teacher
- Planning and progression
- Languages to be taught
- Resourcing
- Time for teaching and learning language

For each issue, the discussion focuses on key points which are of particular importance in determining the way forward. The first issue focuses on children and their language learning.

5.1 Children's language learning

It is now generally agreed that even though younger learners (up to the stage of puberty) may make some initial advances above those who learn a language later, *learners exposed to a second language at primary and who then at secondary level are mixed in with later beginners do not maintain an advantage for more than a modest period* (Singleton, 1989: 22).¹⁴ Furthermore, it appears that younger children do not learn a language faster or better than older children. What, then, are the benefits of learning an additional language for children in primary schools?

Johnstone (2002) has argued that learning additional languages in primary schools is a justifiable exercise leading to more fluent pronunciation, more confidence in experimenting with the target language, increased language awareness, improved language learning skills and increased diversity in the curriculum being studied.

¹⁴ While reference is made to second language acquisition, the study of second language acquisition also refers to third and subsequent language acquisition.

Interestingly, recent studies (Hoffman, 2001; Cenoz, Hufeizen & Jessner, 2001) have considered the question of L3 learning in the context of L1 and L2 learning. Thus, children who learn a third language (L3) in primary schools are able to draw significantly on their first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition skills to progress their L3. The evidence suggests that children may also acquire L2 and L3 more thoroughly if learning takes place in naturalistic settings where children are immersed in the language and have very few opportunities to use their L1. In a classroom setting total immersion and CLIL programmes do approximate some naturalistic conditions, when used over time (Cummins, 1991).

Of note here, is the extent to which rationales for L3 learning among young children, relate to the development of children’s language learning skills in L1 and L2. The evidence suggests that questions concerning the feasibility of modern languages in the *Primary School Curriculum* can only truly be discussed in the broader context of children’s language learning in the *Primary School Curriculum*, specifically in English and in Gaelge.

5.2 The modern language teacher

Currently, two types of teacher facilitate modern languages in primary schools. These are described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 School-based teachers and visiting teachers

School-based teachers	Visiting teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mainstream class teacher responsible for teaching a modern language to 5th/6th. ▪ Mainstream class teachers teaching their own class. ▪ Language teaching assistants or pre-service teachers on placements from European colleges of education or on Comenius placements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-primary language teachers ▪ Native teachers with European or other qualifications ▪ Non-native teachers with ESL or other language teaching qualifications ▪ Native and non-native teachers with no teaching qualifications

In recent years, there has been a shift from the school-based teacher facilitating the modern language to the use of visiting teachers - from 75% of class teachers at the commencement of the pilot project to 24% in recent years (Harris & O Leary, in press: 21). This data was gathered during 2002-2003. It is of note that this reduction in mainstream teachers facilitating the modern language coincided with the introduction of

the Primary School Curriculum, suggesting perhaps, that while teachers saw value in children learning a modern language, it was not feasible for in-school staff to facilitate, given the competing demands of teaching 11 curriculum subjects. Not surprisingly, following the recent partial lift on the cap for schools participating in the MLPSI, newly participating schools from the waiting list are required to have expertise within their own staff to facilitate the modern language.

The benefits and challenges of facilitating a modern language are outlined for each type of teacher (school-based and visiting) in Tables 5.2 and 5.3.

Table 5.2. Types of modern language teacher: Benefits

Staff teacher can	Visiting teacher can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure continuity in teaching style ▪ facilitate integration and linkage across the Primary School Curriculum ▪ facilitate language awareness across the Primary School Curriculum ▪ respond to individual children's learning needs and styles ▪ implement the school disciplinary code and policies ▪ teach literacy in all subjects of the Primary School Curriculum ▪ adopt a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach using Irish and/or a modern language where proficiency is sufficient ▪ manage teaching and learning resources for sustained usage ▪ incorporate knowledge and skills that have come about as a result of on-going policy changes within the educational sector. ▪ reduce principal load experienced in planning for, extra administration and recruitment of visiting teachers (Harris and O Leary, in press). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure continuity between primary and post-primary schools in cases where they are also post-primary language teachers ▪ use the target language as the medium of teaching as they have excellent to fluent proficiency ▪ provide a personal insight into the culture of the target language country ▪ encourage children to communicate in the target language by providing a real impetus for children to use the language.

Table 5.3. Types of modern language teacher: Challenges

Staff teacher can	Visiting teacher can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lack the necessary proficiency to teach a modern language¹⁵ and could experience difficulty teaching through the target language ▪ lack knowledge about language teaching methodologies including language awareness and CLIL¹⁶ ▪ be reluctant to teach a modern language (Harris and O Leary, in press) due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the overloaded nature of the curriculum (time, content) ○ the lack of acknowledgement for extra responsibility ○ the difficulty of accessing modern language training courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ be unfamiliar with the contents of the Primary School Curriculum and can experience difficulties in implementing a CLIL approach, integration across the curriculum and language awareness. ▪ consume a large proportion of the DES budget assigned to primary modern language learning¹⁷ ▪ be difficult to recruit for particular languages ▪ add extra administration, recruitment and planning to principals' load (Harris and O Leary, in press) ▪ consume more teacher time when liaising with the class teacher ▪ lack training in language teaching methodology/didactics ▪ limit the accumulation and sustainability of staff-capacity for a modern language within a school.

The tables above suggest that the benefits associated with the modern language teacher being a mainstream class teacher far outweigh those associated with his/her being a visiting or peripatetic teacher. In this context, the *Primary School Curriculum* emphasises the integrated nature of learning:

The strands [within each curriculum subject] are not discrete areas of learning, as they overlap and interact to form a holistic learning experience for the child. They will also assist teachers in identifying possibilities for integrated learning within subjects and curriculum areas, and throughout the curriculum as a whole.
(Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, 1999: 42)

¹⁵ Harris and Conway (2002: 44) reported that 20% of the staff modern language teachers surveyed indicated that they did not have sufficient language competency to teach a modern language.

¹⁶ Teachers do have experience of teaching Irish and English as first and second languages. However, findings from the report on the Language Awareness and CLIL pilot projects indicate that teachers are not using Irish or English as starting points for teaching Language Awareness.

¹⁷ This amount will decrease as new schools participating in the MLPSI must have capacity within their own staff to teach a modern language.

It is clear that the key challenges for visiting teachers facilitating a modern language concern the extent to which they can reasonably be expected to create links between the L3 and the child's experiences across the 11 other curriculum subjects.

5.2.1 Professional development opportunities for modern language teachers

Pre-service provision for modern language or L3 learning is on a limited scale. A number of colleges offer students the choice of subject specialism as part of the B.Ed. degree. However, pre-service courses in teaching a modern language or L3 are optional in some pre-service teacher education programmes, and mandatory in none. In 2008, five of the six pre-service colleges of education will provide students with access to optional language programmes.

The report prepared for the DES on the future national teaching requirements in primary schools, *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century*, suggested that *an elective module on language teaching (relevant to all four languages) be provided in the colleges* (DES, 2002: 118). This recommendation was premised on a four-year B.Ed. programme or a two-year post graduate programme. Of note, is the conclusion, within the report, that a module for language competence was not feasible due to the increased demands it would place on students' time and college resources.

The work of project leaders in the MLPSI is recognised in the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) as being one of the most positive factors in ensuring success of the MLPSI. The project leaders facilitate two language-specific in-career professional development days each year for all teachers participating in the MLPSI. Visiting language teachers attend these in-career days at their own cost. Generally, the focus of in-service provision has been the honing of teacher strategies for improving target language pedagogy. More recent provision has been assisted by the PCSP in providing days tailored to visiting teachers with an overview of the Primary School Curriculum. Project leaders also visit schools to assist in provision and planning of modern languages. Each project leader supports between 60 and 70 schools.

In 2001, two-year diploma courses for French and German and one-year certificate courses for Spanish and Italian were established in a number of Institutes of Technology (Harris and Conway, 2002). Accreditation was provided by HETAC and

funding from the DES. The courses aimed to provide teachers with the proficiency to teach a modern language to the children in their class(es). After a number of years, funding from the DES was reduced and then stopped and most classes were discontinued from this point.

Drawing parallels from the language competency education programme in Scotland (Johnstone, Cavani, Low & McPake, 2000), the first evaluation report (Harris and Conway, 2002) indicated that a once-off, intensive teacher education programme for all 5th and 6th class teachers to improve their modern language competency levels, would cost in the region of €29 million in total. However, the relevance of this figure is somewhat questionable, given that more recent approaches to in-service support have begun to focus to a lesser extent on external delivery of pre-formed courses to all teachers, and to a greater extent, on the use of alternative approaches to meeting the needs of individual teachers, in the context of their 'whole' teaching experience. For example, ICT offers significant potential to link clusters of schools with similar school profiles/demographics, where teachers may share common challenges and priorities for their future teaching. By situating the issue of modern language or L3 learning in the context of the challenges of learning existing languages and also the challenges of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, there may be some scope for re-visiting more cost-effective ways of providing in-service language support for teachers.

While detailed information on the review findings is provided in the previous section, of significance here is that teachers identified a number of key priorities for the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge, during the reviews of these subjects. For example, in the recent review of Curaclam na Gaeilge, teachers' priorities focused on providing a greater range of language experiences for children, balancing the focus on *meaning* with a focus on *form*, and effectively managing the use of two phonetic codes when teaching and learning reading and writing. Similarly, challenges with oral language, reading and writing, as well as grammar, spelling and phonics were identified by teachers in the review of the English Curriculum (NCCA, 2005). Given the challenges associated with teaching English and Gaeilge in primary schools, it is clear that the issue concerning pre-service and in-service provision for modern language

learning or L3 learning, can only be addressed in the broader context of children's language learning in primary schools, beginning with L1 and L2 in the first instance.

5.3 Planning and progression

Planning for teaching and learning languages involves key persons inside and outside the school. The document *School Planning: Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools* (DES, 1999) has identified some of the key considerations in effective school planning, including the *collaborative effort and collaboration that takes place between the principal, the teachers, the board of management and the parents of the pupils attending the school* (DES, 1999: 9). The inclusion of parents and the local community in planning become particularly relevant where there are children for whom English is an additional language. Many information documents for parents developed by the education system are now being made available in the new languages represented in Ireland. Section 4.2.1.1 examined examples of these publications in more detail.

However, it is worth noting that planning pressures already exist within the context of the 11 subjects of the Primary School Curriculum and in meeting the individual learning needs of every child (see Section 4.2.2 for further information). Schools have reported the need for support in developing whole school plans which identify teaching and learning priorities for the school, inform teachers' classroom planning, ensure progression of learning and skills, include differentiation details to address the needs of all children and measures to support those at risk of encountering reading difficulties and literacy problems (DES, 2005c; ERC, 2005; DES, 2005; Eivers et al, 2005a).

Not surprisingly, research conducted by the ESRI for the NCCA (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004) showed a lack of continuity and progression between the primary and post-primary sectors. The research pointed to poor transfer of information in general.

Similarly, research initiated as part of the first evaluation report (Harris and Conway, 2002) indicated that only 18% of primary school teachers in the MLPSI (i.e., 18% of 14% of all primary schools) have had some contact with language teachers in post-

primary schools. Findings from the second evaluation report revealed that 52% of principals in schools participating in the MLPSI reported *no interaction at all* with feeder post-primary schools and 39% reporting *low/very low levels* (Harris and O Leary, in press). 83% of principals reported that the post-primary schools were *aware* that the MLPSI was running in the primary school with only 28% being aware of the specifics of the MLPSI. The evidence suggests that for modern languages, little continuity is accounted for when moving into post-primary school.

To facilitate continuity between primary and post-primary modern language learning, Harris and Conway (2002: 227) suggested that the potential of the Scottish model of school clustering might assist in promoting continuity of learning in modern languages between primary schools and post-primary schools. However, the evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002) highlights the difficulties of achieving a successful programme in Ireland where localised support mechanisms have not traditionally been a feature of curriculum implementation. By shifting the focus from a competency model approach to modern language or L3 learning towards an approach which complements and builds on children's learning in L1 and L2, progressing to a language education, we can open up the scope for thinking about new ways to promote planning and progression in children's language learning within and from primary to post-primary school.

For example, following from the curriculum review findings, it is reasonable to propose that schools can benefit from a focus on maintaining and extending the higher-order thinking skills from primary to post-primary school. Findings from the review of *Curaclam na Gaeilge* showed that teachers reported that the use of higher-order language functions was the least helpful of a range of strategies for planning for the progression of children's learning.

Of interest here is the extent to which planning and progression can support the child's capacity to use known languages (L1, L2) to further enhance his/her language learning capabilities and to learn how to learn an additional language (from his/her experience of L3 in primary school). These are the skills that (s)he can build upon.

5.4 Languages to be taught

Section 4.2.1.1 outlined the changing demographics of classrooms in Ireland and the current presence of about 167 languages. The presence of Middle-Eastern, Eastern European, African and South American languages show the variety of linguistic competency in classrooms all over Ireland. The 2007 census showed that 10% of our population were born outside of Ireland.

By limiting this question of feasibility to a focus on just one modern language experience for children in primary schools, we risk limiting our understanding and support for the development of linguistic diversity in Ireland. Within the increasing diversity of over 167 languages being spoken in Ireland and among 20,000 primary school children, further consideration is required of the diversification of languages.

Gogolin (2002) comments, as follows, on the development of the majority language and minority language in newcomers:

...the observation of linguistic development in immigrant communities shows that the language of the majority does gain in importance for them and is frequently used, but at the same time and without contradiction the inherited language does not at all lose its relevance for them (Gogolin, 2002: 12).

Gogolin identifies the *task of mastering a linguistically complex situation*, such as the multiple languages present in our classrooms and communities, as being dependent on *language awareness and metalinguistic competence* (2002: 19). She notes that these skills are not automatically learnt when learning a modern language, rather that they represent a new area to be explored, *education which explicitly deals with linguistic and cultural complexity...no matter which language is spoken* (Gogolin, 2002: 19).

While language awareness is already a component of the *English Curriculum* and *Curaclam na Gaeilge*, its focus in classrooms should also take account of the languages of children for whom English is an additional language. Reference has already been made to language awareness and definitions of language awareness. Section 6.2 will provide a more comprehensive discussion of language awareness.

5.5 Resourcing

Findings from two phases of Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA, 2005; NCCA, in press) reported a reliance on the use of textbooks for teaching and learning, which teachers explained as one means of compensating for limited subject-knowledge (e.g. in Science). Teachers also reported a lack of suitable and age-appropriate resources, especially in the case of Irish. ICT was cited as being used to a limited degree for teaching and learning (NCCA, 2005; NCCA, in press) due to the need for investment in schools' ICT infrastructure including funds for ICT planning, maintenance and improvement. These findings were also reflected in the *ICT Framework: Final report on the school-based developmental initiative* (NCCA, 2007). Teachers and principals identified a need for funding to acquire resources (NCCA, in press).

In the current Initiative, schools receive a discrete resource grant during the first two years of involvement in modern language teaching. This is used to identify and purchase materials for modern language teaching and learning. The grant is dependent on the number of children that are learning the modern language. Project Leaders often assist schools in the task of identifying appropriate resources. However, it is worth noting that the grant is awarded to participating schools only, and for the purposes of teaching the modern language only.

In addition, Project Leaders generate language-specific resources for use during in-career training days. These in-career materials provide the most practical link between the objectives identified in the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) and the activities and strategies that teachers use in classroom interactions with children. All MLPSI resources are available on the MLPSI website. *MyELP*, the European Language Portfolio developed by the MLPSI and accredited by the Council of Europe, is a further resource available for languages.

It is worth noting that significant scope exists for both the resource grant and the language-specific resources to support the development of children's language learning in English and Irish in the Primary School Curriculum and for all schools to have access to, and to benefit from these resources.

5.6 Time for teaching and learning language

There are 11 subjects in the Primary School Curriculum. Use of the phrase *the seven curricular areas* hides to some extent the reality that there are now more subject areas than ever before in the curriculum (Sugrue, 2004: 197).

The issue of *lack of time* has been identified as one of the greatest impediments to curriculum implementation by teachers in two phases of Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA, 2005b, in press). Teachers identified two key dimensions of the time issue. One focused on perceived curriculum overload (i.e. insufficient time to fully implement all curriculum subjects or to cover all the objectives within each subject) while another focused on class size/children's needs (i.e. insufficient time to meet the needs of all learners). Similarly, lack of time, related to curriculum overload and class size, was identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation in English, Mathematics and Visual arts in the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005b).

While curriculum integration offers some potential to address this time/overload challenge, teachers' identification of *curriculum overload* as a key challenge to implementation in two successive phases of review suggests that more significant work may be required to redress the mismatch between the size and scope of the Primary School Curriculum and the time provided for teaching and learning in primary schools. In this context, the feasibility of modern languages as an extra curriculum component, with additional requirements and competencies, becomes untenable.

5.6.1 Time for learning the target language in the MLPSI

The time allocated for teaching and learning modern languages in the Initiative is 90 minutes per week.

The report commissioned by the NCCA (2001) into the use of the *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages indicated that just over half of the 103 teachers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the 90-minute time frame allocated to modern language teaching was appropriate. However, respondents raised a number of issues concerning timetabling constraints and the *overcrowded nature of the curriculum* (NCCA, 2001: 16). Pressures on timetabling, which would persist and become more

apparent if the number of visiting teachers continued to increase, were also included in the first evaluation report (Harris & Conway, 2002: 206) in the context of issues to be addressed for expansion of the MLPSI.

Harris and Conway found that while the majority of MLPSI teachers were content with the time allocated to modern languages (2002), classroom teachers reported far more difficulties finding time to integrate the modern language than non-staff teachers. Not surprisingly, Harris and Conway have suggested that teachers are *constrained by curriculum overload and (for exchange teachers) concerns about being absent from their own classes for too long* (Harris & Conway, 2002: 63).

The majority of principals in schools participating in the MLPSI (87%) reported that *excessive time is devoted to the modern language* (Harris and O Leary, in press: 15). Principals referred to the particular time constraints present for 6th class teachers and children. Class teachers who don't facilitate a modern language for their own classes also reported that it is more difficult for teachers in their schools to find time to integrate a modern language (Harris and O Leary, in press). This shows the continuing trend for staff-based teachers spending less time than visiting teachers teaching the modern language each week. The same reason was supplied in this context – overloaded curriculum. 31% of staff teachers and 57% of visiting teachers were reported to teach the required 90 minutes per week (Harris and O Leary, in press: 65). The report refers to the relaxing of guidelines on time per week to between 60 and 90 minutes per week from the Project Management Group. These guidelines were evident in a *DES information document on the operation of the Project in the 2005/6 school year* (Harris and O Leary, in press: 66).

Of note here is the statistic that a total of 44 schools (ca. 10% of participating schools) left the MLPSI between 2003 and 2008. Of the 44, 36% gave time pressure as the reason for leaving, 20% staffing issues and 10% local issues. The remaining 34% failed to supply a reason. Recognition should be given to the existing 488 schools on the MLPSI which make time for teaching a competency-based model of language teaching within the Primary School Curriculum.

The *Primary School Curriculum* allows schools to use discretionary time (1999: 64) to incorporate teaching and learning modern languages. Two hours per week of discretionary time are outlined for senior classes. However, given the pressing demands of the existing time allocated to 11 subjects (NCCA, 2005; NCCA, in press) and the predictable and often unpredictable and time-consuming realities of primary teaching (preparing for religious sacraments, hosting school visitors, taking field trips, attending to an upset child, seizing a *teachable moment*, etc.) in reality discretionary time is very limited if not unavailable.

Data from both the evaluation of the MLPSI and successive reviews of the curriculum in schools provide evidence concerning the lack of time currently available for teaching modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum. Recognition should be given to the 488 schools in which teachers and principals make time to teach a competency model of modern language learning to fifth and sixth class children. However, in the context of the lack of time evidenced, the question becomes one of how to support schools in developing a coherent and coordinated approach to language learning within the Primary School Curriculum while also responding to the diversity of languages represented by children in primary school classrooms in Ireland today. The next section further considers this question of feasibility, in the context of the six issues outlined in this section.

Section summary

This section has outlined six issues concerning the feasibility of modern languages in the *Primary School Curriculum*, as follows:

- *Children's language learning*: The added advantage that children acquire through early language learning will persist if continuity and progression are planned for.
- *The modern language teacher*: The benefits associated with the modern language teacher being a mainstream class teacher far outweigh those associated with him/her being a visiting or peripatetic teacher.
- *Planning and progression*: To what extent can planning and progression support the child's capacity to use known languages (L1, L2) to further enhance his/her language learning capabilities and to learn how to learn an additional language (from his/her experience of L3 in primary school)?
- *The language(s) to be taught*: Ireland's changing demographics (167 languages

being spoken country-wide) means that the diversification of languages is a priority. The strength of language awareness as a model to include and account for linguistic and cultural diversity is discussed.

- *Resourcing*: The challenge of lack of resources for the *Primary School Curriculum* is well documented in the recent review of the curriculum in schools. Significant scope exists for both the resource grant and the language-specific resources for schools in the MLPSI, to support the development of children's language learning in English and Gaeilge in the *Primary School Curriculum* and for all schools to have access to, and to benefit from these resources.
- *Time*: In two successive phases of curriculum review, teachers have reported lack of time as a key impediment to curriculum implementation. Furthermore, successive evaluations of the MLPSI have identified lack of time to integrate the modern language, as a key issue for mainstream teachers.

6. Emerging futures

6.1 From feasibility to futures

This report has presented evidence that the language learning experiences of children where modern languages have been included in the Primary School Curriculum has been positive. There is a strong commitment at European level for all Europeans to be competent in their native language plus two other languages. Ireland appears to lag behind in this regard, with most children not encountering a third language until they enter post-primary school.

However, the question of whether modern languages could be included in the Primary School Curriculum has been replaced by broader questions of how languages generally should be supported in the Primary School Curriculum. These questions emerge from a set of new challenges ranging from the challenge of supporting children of a wide range of abilities in becoming competent and confident in their mother tongue whether English or Irish, to supporting children for whom English is an additional language in acquiring the skills needed to access the curriculum, to ensuring that children are at home in a country of many languages. Equally, the question of what languages to include also emerges and remains unresolved in the absence of a national policy on languages in education.

Following the publication of a *Language Education Policy Profile* (DES & Council of Europe, 2008) for Ireland, the DES has convened a Working Group on Language Education Policy which will consider the priorities made in the Language Education Policy Profile and move towards developing a language education policy for Ireland.

The policy profile contains a section outlining guiding principles and action priorities for consideration by the DES in the development of an overarching language policy for Ireland. This document draws together research and publications from Ireland which make reference to language and language learning. The concluding section of the report provides guideline principles and action priorities for the DES. Reference is

made to the National Development Plan 2007-2013, where the importance of developing language skills to make Ireland a *truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and through lifelong education* is highlighted. The five action priorities outlined include a need (1) to define a clear policy position on language in Irish society and the education system, (2) for professional development of language teachers, (3) to draw up an action plan for language learning at primary level, *which should be the keystone of language learning in the education system* (DES & Council of Europe, 2008: 53), (4) for assessment and certification in language learning and (5) to develop an *English is not enough* conviction in Irish society. The *Language Education Policy Profile* will provide the basis for developing a language education policy for Ireland. Work on its development has begun and in time it will provide a reference for all curriculum development in languages.

In the meantime, findings from two phases of Primary Curriculum Review and other research based on the impact of the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum (Section 4) question the feasibility of an additional and separate subject at this time.

Findings, as outlined in Section 4, relating to the Primary School Curriculum point to existing needs in implementing the English Curriculum and *Curaclam na Gaeilge*, such as planning for progression, developing children's writing, and the development of grammar and phonics (NCCA, 2005; NCCA, in press). Further pressures identified across subjects in the Primary School Curriculum include the limited time to teach an overloaded curriculum to a class of children with varying needs and the requirement for support in using a variety of approaches and methodologies. Literacy and numeracy require further focus and attention. General findings point to pressures on planning, school leadership and management, parental/home involvement and continuing professional development requirements for teachers.

In this context, responses to the broader language questions noted here might focus on moves towards more integrated approaches. These approaches would involve paying attention to commonalities and making links across a range of language learning, to enrich children's language environment and experiences:

- pedagogical approaches: CLIL

- paying motivated attention to the links between languages: Language Awareness
- heightening children's awareness of the language 'world' all around them: (Inter)Cultural Awareness
- anticipating plurilingual approaches: Language Sensitisation

6.2 Mapping possible futures for languages in the Primary School Curriculum

The futures proposed here do not preclude schools continuing with a competency model of language teaching and learning where they have the capacity to facilitate such a model. Rather, those futures proposed aim to provide for all schools in language learning and teaching and gradually shift towards a greater emphasis, awareness of and focus on language teaching and learning across the curriculum. Such a shift in emphasis would serve to strengthen the implementation of language across the curriculum (a need identified by NCCA through two phases of Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA, 2005, NCCA, in press)).

CLIL approaches

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an approach which involves the use of a language being learned in the classroom (for example, Irish in English-medium schools) as the language of instruction for certain subjects. An example would be teaching Physical Education through Irish. The CLIL approach has considerable potential for integration of language development into a range of areas of the curriculum.

Sustained exposure to a target language has been shown to be more beneficial than blocks of teaching time (Curtain, 2000; European Commission, 2003). A CLIL approach to teaching modern languages would reinforce the integrated nature of the Primary School Curriculum and might help to alleviate some of the challenges faced by teachers in locating the time to teach languages. Results from the small scale CLIL and language awareness pilot projects indicated that time remained an issue for planning for and implementing a CLIL approach in the classroom. If extra resources and

guidelines were provided, the time required to plan for and teach using a CLIL approach could potentially be reduced. However, using the CLIL approach places pressures on the language competency of the teacher as subject-areas are taught through the medium of the target language and implies a requirement for professional development.

CLIL is already used in some schools in Ireland. The European Commission: Eurydice (2006b) prepared a report on CLIL provision in Europe. Table 2.1 represents the figures which were prepared by the DES (2005b) as part of their submission to Eurydice for inclusion in the 2006 report. The figures indicated are those compiled from teachers *reporting on their use* of CLIL.

Table 2.1. Teacher-reported data on CLIL usage from school year 2003/4

	Schools	% of all schools	Children	% of all children
Irish-medium schools	229	7.3	29,794	6.9
English-medium schools with Irish stream/class	5	0.2	146	0.03
English-medium schools in which one or more subjects are taught through Irish	862	27.4	112,755	26.2

(DES, 2005b: 2)

What is required to integrate a CLIL approach?

- A definition of what CLIL is and how it can best be used as an approach in the classroom
- Professional development for teachers in the CLIL method
- Teacher competency in the target language or professional development in the target language
- Resources to support teachers in implementing a CLIL approach, for example guidelines and sample activities.

A further pilot project, larger in scale to the previous pilot, could be conducted in schools to examine the feasibility of CLIL methods.

Language awareness approaches – towards a language education

Language awareness, or knowledge about language, *is a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to language in use, and which enables language learners to gradually gain insights into how languages work. It is also a pedagogic approach that aims to help learners to gain such insights* (Bolitho, Carter, Hughes, Ivanic, Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2003).

Candelier offers a further definition of language awareness; *The awakening to languages, then, takes us away from the area of teaching/learning a particular language (only so we can return better equipped) and leads us firmly into the area of general language education* (Candelier, 2004: 19).

Eric Hawkins has been cited as the ‘father’ of language awareness approaches. In the 1960s he endorsed the idea that reflection on language should form part of language curricula (James, 2005). Hawkins has outlined a language pentagon which makes reference to five overlapping features of a new approach to a school language apprenticeship (Hawkins, 1999). The five features are:

1. Mastering the mother tongue *through a coherent language policy across the curriculum* (Hawkins, 1999: 138)
2. Language awareness in the curriculum including all language teachers learning to cooperate with one another, a requirement also cited by Little (NCCA, 2003).
3. Education of the ear – children should be taught to learn how to listen and what to listen for, as with the prior example of what to expect in written texts
4. Awakening to languages so that children *see language difference as interesting and not threatening* (Hawkins, 1999: 140)
5. Learning how to learn a foreign language which should include children’s growing awareness of how the foreign language compares with their mother tongue and how foreign languages are learned.

In examining Hawkins’ pentagon, we can adapt the fifth point to the Irish scenario to refer to English and Irish in primary schools as well as other languages present in the classroom. Where a teacher has the competency to include a modern language, this too should be included.

Language awareness is already a feature of the strand *Receptiveness to Language* in the English Curriculum. It is also a feature of the *Curaclam na Gaeilge* where *Feasacht Teanga* incorporates the concept of language awareness. The *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* for modern languages (NCCA, 1999) encourages teachers to make links between the languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Greater emphasis could be placed on the teaching of language awareness as part of a competency model of language learning, in this instance, the competency models within the English Curriculum and *Curaclam na Gaeilge*. In building on and extending this focus on language awareness in both of these curricula, a more integrated approach to teaching languages could be realised. This integrated approach, or **language education**, could examine the similarities and differences between known languages and languages being learnt in order to maximise future language learning potential.

Children's attention should be drawn to the **sounds, orthography and syntax** of languages, as well as to the **meaning of words and how words are constructed**. Children should be encouraged to become *get beneath the surface of language* (Bolitho et al, 2003) and become young linguists who have a **greater awareness of language, how it works and how it is put together**.

In reflecting the importance placed on maintaining the community language(s) of children for whom English is an additional language and making reference to the other languages present in the classroom through the course of English and Irish language teaching (NCCA, 2006), it is important that the teacher allows time for all children to reflect on and to *notice* the similarities and differences between *all* languages present in the classroom. If the teacher has competence in a modern language, reference should also be made to that language.

The benefits of a focus on language awareness are enhanced opportunities for children to reflect on their native language, for example, the structure of written and oral language, which can result in improved levels of literacy. One such example refers to the requirement to predict what is coming in a reading text so that nothing will be missed and comprehension achieved. Children who *come to a reading task and are*

uncertain about the syntax of the language will fail to anticipate the kind of word to expect as they follow a text (Hawkins, 1999 referring the work of Oller, 1979 on Cloze tests). Findings from the small scale language awareness pilot project (see Section 2.3.6) showed that children had a changed attitude towards Irish, an increased awareness for world languages, a greater sense of inclusion and confidence, an awareness of previous knowledge of language and an acceptance of other cultures.

In an Irish context such an approach could work to develop more positive attitudes to language learning generally. Of note is that in the research conducted by the ESRI for the NCCA on student attitudes to different curriculum areas, languages were the most disliked of all subjects (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004).

What is required to promote a greater emphasis on language awareness in schools and to extend the former definitions provided in the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge?

- A revised definition of language awareness geared towards teachers based on the details provided above
- A language awareness framework to offer a supporting structure for work in this area and within which student progress could be supported
- Professional development to include language awareness approaches
- Resources to support teachers in implementing a language awareness approach.

NCCA are currently finalising areas of work in response to the PCR findings for all subjects reviewed. Identified areas of work, such as assessment and integration, will be explored through a primary network of schools. Within the context of the findings for English and Irish, an increased focus on language awareness as described above could be explored through the network. The focus of working with teachers through the network would be to support teachers in generating support materials and approaches for language awareness. In this way, the use of language awareness would be formalised and practical examples of the approach being used gathered.

(Inter)Cultural Awareness approaches

Intercultural awareness already features in the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge. Culture and Identity are identified as a key issue in the curriculum, (see Section 4.1.1). In this instance, capacity for teaching (inter)cultural awareness already

exists with a language awareness-based model. In 2005, NCCA published *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Teachers* to help support schools and teachers in planning for intercultural education.

Language awareness approaches and intercultural awareness approaches offer a symbiotic relationship. In increasing the focus on one approach, the other approach mutually benefits. For instance, in focusing on language in the classroom, emphasis can also be placed on where these languages are spoken and how they differ from the language of instruction in the classroom. The *English as an Additional Language, Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2006) document promotes a joint focus on the languages of the classroom and countries where those languages are spoken. The guidelines reflect the intercultural awareness embedded in the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge to further encourage the integration of learning about other cultures, customs and festivities from the home countries of the children in the classroom.

Intercultural resources can be built up on a school basis, where individual teachers research and source resources for teaching about the cultures, customs and festivities of the home countries of the children in his/her class. These can be added to a whole-school resource over time, from which other teachers can draw when the same home countries or cultures are relevant to their class and also add to as new home countries and cultures appear in their class. Such resources might include details of the language(s) and script used in the countries, the predominant religions in the countries and marked festivities in the countries.

What is required to promote a greater emphasis on intercultural awareness approaches in schools?

- Promoting the intercultural awareness components of the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge, promoting the *English as an Additional Language: Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2006) document and promoting the *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2005).
- Professional development for teachers in working with children for whom English is an additional language.

Language Sensitisation approaches

Language sensitisation has been described as an *encounter programme ... the aim is to raise the awareness of the existence of other languages through a taster experience of one foreign language or by offering an encounter with several foreign languages* (Harris and Conway, 2002: 224). This method is effective in helping children develop *metalinguistic and intercultural awareness* (Harris and Conway, 2002: 224).

Language Sensitisation programmes are described by one commentator as developing *children's understanding about language learning by means of an encounter with one foreign language and, occasionally, several, with an emphasis on the primary child's present interests and cognitive development* (Martin, 2000: 18). They aim to develop in learners an appreciation for the cultural and linguistic diversity that may be exhibited in classrooms. Therefore, they may not be particularly concerned with the promotion of one target language or the development of competency in one target language, rather the development of phrases in a number of target languages and language learning skills. Where the aims may be to enhance the underlying metalinguistic and intercultural awareness skills of the learners, this approach does not represent a competency model.

This approach could be integrated at the fifth and sixth class level where children could be facilitated in gaining basic competence in formulaic phrases in a range of target languages. Within a broader context of language education, having an increased exposure to more languages and their countries of origin would also facilitate an increased focus on language awareness and intercultural awareness.

This approach alleviates the pressures on teacher competency in a target language (although some professional development would be required to facilitate teachers in learning a *modest standalone language element* (Martin, 2000: 18) in one or more target languages) and on teaching time but does require consideration for planning and resources. It also facilitates some of the languages of the classroom in which there are children for whom English is an additional language to be integrated. Parents of these children might be asked to contribute their language expertise and cultural awareness of their home country to allow languages which are not known by the teacher to be included.

What is required to include a Language Sensitisation approach in schools?

- Professional development for teachers providing them with a basic set of fixed phrases in a range of languages. This would be facilitated through suitable audio and/or ICT resources.
- Resources for teachers
- Planning at the school level to ensure basic teacher competency (fixed phrases) in the chosen languages or parental participation and successful integration of the languages in the classroom.

6.3 Shaping the future for languages

In focusing on language, and the future development of language in the Primary School Curriculum, a unified approach to the teaching and learning of languages is required. This approach could take account of the commonalities and differences of teaching and learning in the English Curriculum, Curaclam na Gaeilge and in differentiating for children for whom English is an additional language. This approach could also take account of the many languages and cultures present in our classrooms and communities. As highlighted in Section 6.2, a focus on language awareness offers opportunities to bring a considerable measure of integration to language teaching and learning across the curriculum, its target being *the awakening to languages*.

Candelier (2004) provides an insight into the benefits a language awareness or *awakening to languages* approach can have on many of the areas identified as requiring attention,

Besides aptitudes for listening to, analysing and learning languages, the awakening to languages also aims to promote the development of favourable perceptions of and attitudes towards not just the languages and their diversity but also those who speak the languages and their cultures. Naturally this applies all the more to the languages and cultures of ... immigrant or native pupils, who are thus recognised by the school. Beyond its contribution to language learning, the awakening to languages represents a facet of the

intercultural approach, of which it is an integral part along with its specificities.
(Candelier, 2004: 20)

Short to medium-term goals for language education – building on existing practice

In formalising a common and *achievable* language education goal for all schools, the promotion of language awareness already sits within the language area of the Primary School Curriculum. It promotes intercultural learning, diversity of languages and higher-order thinking skills – namely metalinguistic skills within the competency model of the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge. Rather than discrete time being apportioned to the teaching of language awareness, language awareness for all languages should be integrated into existing language time as is currently outlined in the English Curriculum and Curaclam na Gaeilge.

In seeking to build upon existing practice, a renewed focus on language awareness **does not preclude** a competency model or CLIL approach where this is feasible for schools given staff expertise, and the general availability of support and resources. But what it does offer is the potential for **all children** to build upon their growing awareness of the nature and structure of language, to consolidate the languages they use, and to be motivated towards learning and engagement with other languages. Through this approach, children will have the opportunity to become young linguists with a greater awareness of how languages work. With the aid of resources and support materials for teachers and schools those other languages can include the mother-tongues of learners for whom English is an additional language, as well as familiar European languages, and the increasingly significant languages of Asia. With professional development opportunities for all primary school teachers in language awareness approaches, the resources and support materials can translate into high quality learning experiences for Ireland's multi-lingual 21st century children.

Plans for a language strand within the Primary Network are already being formulated. The language strand will begin to address the areas of language work identified as needing support through Primary Curriculum Review phase one and two in the short term—methodologies and assessment. This work will extend over time to realise the medium-term goals outlined. Over the coming years, as the NCCA continues its work

with teachers on languages across the curriculum, it will be important that opportunities are provided for teachers—including those teaching modern languages—to further develop as language teachers.

Medium to long-term goals for language education

Having focused on language awareness in the short to medium-term (item 2 listed below), some of the areas identified within Hawkins' language pentagon (Hawkins, 1999) which have not already been addressed could start to form the framework for an extended language education for all children. The process of the development of these elements is not necessarily linear.

1. Mastering the mother tongue
2. Language awareness in the curriculum
3. Education of the ear
4. Awakenings to languages
5. Learning **how to learn** a foreign language.

This extension to the short to medium-term language education would go hand in hand with a Language Education Policy for Ireland. Once finalised, this policy should provide guidelines on languages in the education system and ensuring continuity of provision across levels. A fresh view will be cast on language education and any system pressures in order to examine the boundaries and potential of this extended language education.

At the same time, children for whom English was an additional language will have progressed through the education system and may provide additional linguistic wealth among newly qualified teachers. Through the short-term goals for language education and the presence of more languages in our classrooms and community, children's interest in increasing their competency in other languages may also have increased and potentially be available among newly qualified teachers. Evidence of this increase in interest attributed to new children and languages in classrooms and the community can already be seen through children learning phrases in other languages with their friends' or neighbours' assistance.

Existing teachers who have an interest in language learning or existing knowledge of another language should be facilitated in accessing competency-appropriate professional development in their chosen language. These teachers could provide a language specialist within their schools.

The medium to long-term goals will extend current language provision and the short to medium-term goals of language awareness to a more holistic approach to teaching language which includes a pre-service focus on linguistics and language learning skills and methodologies. In the longer term and within the context of a Language Education Policy, the goals for language education could be re-examined in order to ascertain whether it would be feasible to extend competency models in primary education. While the setting of goals is important in mapping next steps, the idea of futures for language may also be useful. Futures overlap and can be worked on as opportunities arise. As opposed to the linearity of goals, futures emerge from a range of sources at different times. In a futures context, what may be labelled 'long term', can, as opportunities arise, and priorities change, become the focus for more immediate action.

6.4 Conclusion

While a language education for all could form a common strand for all schools, competency models could also be facilitated in schools where suitable provisions are in place. The NCCA will continue to work on plans for the language strand of the Primary Network and present them to Council. The work within the language strand will start to make headway towards exploring some of the short to medium-term goals outlined above.

Section summary

This section presented four mutually complementary futures for language. These futures were

- Language Awareness
- (Inter)cultural Awareness
- Language Sensitisation
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The recommendations outlined in this section were:

Short to medium-term

- Modern languages should not be part of the Primary School Curriculum as an additional and separate subject at present.
- Children should be supported as language learners *across* the curriculum, and helped to build on this at post-primary level.
- There should be a strengthened focus on language awareness in the Curriculum, which should be integrated into current language time.
- Teachers should be supported in their methodology and assessment in English and Irish.

Medium to long-term

- The language education developed in the short to medium-term should be extended and further developed in the medium to long-term.

An extended language education for all children would go hand in hand with a Language Education Policy, which will define a clear and overall policy position on languages in the Irish education system.

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