

SCoTENS

LANGUAGE EDUCATORS' CONFERENCE

13-14 November 2009 Queen's University Belfast

Report by Dr Eugene McKendry (QUB)

The Background

Modern Languages (ML) education (including Irish) constantly swings between states of concern and optimism. The take-up of languages in our schools has fluctuated, but the trend on the whole is downwards. The introduction of the Revised Curriculum in Northern Ireland in September 2007 makes ML optional at Key Stage 4, which will severely affect numbers as has been the case in Britain where ML numbers have fallen off alarmingly since KS4 languages became optional in 2002.

<http://www.cilt.org.uk/research/language Trends/index.htm>

In Britain, languages in the Primary School have been promoted in recent years in order to offset this trend and motivate pupils by an early start in languages, but this may be placing too great a burden of expectancy on the primary sector. Nevertheless, the growing support for primary languages, north and south, is important and will develop. The primary and post-primary ML projects in the Republic have done much to increase diversification of provision (<http://www.ncca.ie/index.asp?locID=347&docID=-1>) but also raises the question of the relationship between English, Irish and Foreign Languages in provision. Diversification has also been an area of particular focus in Northern Ireland (Neil & McKendry: "Diversification and other aspects of Language provision in the Lower Secondary School in Northern Ireland". In *Language Education in Ireland: current practice and future trends*, eds Gallagher & Ó Laoire, Irish Association for Applied Linguistics-IRAAL, 2006).

The traditional view of diversification, focusing on Irish and the main European and world languages, must, however, be reconsidered in light of the new demography and linguistic landscape of Ireland with the recent influx of large numbers of immigrants and workers speaking languages not traditionally offered in our schools. This new linguistic diversity is an enriching challenge that must be taken aboard in ML provision and

training. Greater awareness among ML providers of, and collaboration with, English Language and English as an Additional Language (EAL) are also required.

The increasing linguistic awareness among the population, North and South, is welcome. Allied to this is the recognition of Irish as a working language in the EU and the Languages Act in the Republic, both of which are essential moves to normalising the situation of the language. A comparative overview of national language policies internationally would be welcome and informative. Recent years have seen the emergence of Language Strategies in these islands. Language strategies have been produced for England, Wales and Scotland. A Northern Ireland Languages Strategy is in preparation, as is a University Languages Strategy in QUB, providing a possible replicable model for other institutions. The Council of Europe Report on languages in the Republic and papers such as Prof. Little's report on languages in the post-primary curriculum point towards similar strategic developments in the Republic.

<http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/LanguagesPaper.pdf>

Allied to these developments are the Revised Curriculum in Northern Ireland and the NCCA's Primary, Junior and senior Cycle reviews in the Republic, with their respective demands on teachers and teacher educators.

These issues should all be considered in the broad context of recent developments at national and European level in the area of language policy, provision and support. The European Union considers modern languages among the basic skills or key competencies required by all its citizens and is concerned to promote excellence in the teaching and learning of languages as well as greater diversity in the range of languages available to learners in the Member States, as witnessed by the recent European Commission Action Plan, *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*.

[http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:EN:PD](http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:EN:PDF)

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The Project

Section II of the Commission's Action Plan report discusses *Better Language Teaching* and devotes its Section 3 to Language Teacher Training, where it notes:

Language teachers may often feel isolated, unaware of developments elsewhere with the potential to improve their work; they may not have access to adequate professional support networks; it is therefore important to facilitate contacts and effective networks between them at a regional, national and European level.

With this in mind, Drs McKendry (QUB) and Farren (NUIG) applied for and received funding from SCoTENS to organise in Queen's University Belfast a conference of language teacher educators, primary and post-primary, north and south, in collaboration with NICILT, the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, housed in the School of Education QUB. <http://www.qub.ac.uk/edu/nicilt/>

The organisers drew upon the expertise of NICILT's sister organisations in CILT UK, in particular that of *CILT, the National Centre for Languages* in London, the UK government's recognised centre of expertise on languages, which includes teacher education at all levels <http://www.cilt.org.uk/>. . NICILT was a particularly suitable venue as, being housed in the School of Education QUB, it also serves as a resources and support centre for students on the Modern Languages PGCE in QUB, the only post-primary PGCE for MLs in Northern Ireland.

A particular aim of the conference was to network and encourage collaboration among the varied sectors represented, North/South, Primary/Post-Primary, Irish/Foreign Languages, English/ Modern Languages/ English as an Additional language . 'Modern Languages' in Northern Ireland includes Irish, while the distinction is made in the Republic between Irish and Modern Languages. A combining of resources and objectives across all languages, including English (Literacy) and English as an Additional Language was an aim of the conference.

Delegates

The partners drew up a list of the institutions in their respective jurisdictions which provided languages teacher education. While only QUB and its Constituent colleges, Stranmillis and St. Mary's, and the Open University deal directly with languages teacher education in the north, there are many institutions in the south which provide languages teacher education.

Modern Languages ITE Courses identified in the Republic of Ireland

Primary

Trinity College, Dublin. BEd Primary

“The degree of Bachelor In Education (B.Ed) is a professional degree, which is intended to provide for the academic and professional requirements of primary school teachers. It is taught jointly by the School of Education and three associated Colleges of Education – the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, the Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill, Blackrock, and Colaiste Mhuire, Marino. Students register both with a College of Education and attend further courses, in common with students from the other Colleges of Education, within the School of Education”

<http://www.tcd.ie/Education/courses/bed.php>

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino BEd Primary

The Froebel College of Education BEd Primary

The Church of Ireland College of Education BEd Primary

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick BEd Primary

St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra BEd Primary

University College Cork: PGDE Post-Primary

University College Dublin: PGDE Post-Primary

NUI Galway PGDE; DIO Post-Primary

NUI Maynooth PGDE Post-Primary

Trinity College Dublin: PGDip Post-Primary

Dublin City University: GDEd Post-Primary

University of Limerick BSc ; BA Post-Primary

St. Angela’s College, Sligo BEd Post-Primary

Modern Languages ITE Courses identified in Northern Ireland:

St. Mary’s University College: BEd Primary

St. Mary’s University College: PGCE Primary (Irish-Medium)

Stranmillis University College BEd Primary

Queen University Belfast:
Open University

PGCE Post-Primary
PGCE Post-Primary

An Integrated Overview

The primary aim of the conference was to bring together Initial Teacher Educators, north and south, from the various sectors: primary, secondary, foreign languages, Irish. The growing awareness of multiple literacies to include English mother tongue and English as an additional language is also recognised and a future meeting could expand more fully into these areas.

'Integrated Overviews' of languages education in the two jurisdictions were given in the first session of the conference.

Language Education in Northern Ireland

Eugene McKendry of Queen's University Belfast gave an overview of languages in Northern Ireland. The retention of the Grammar/Secondary divide meant that traditionally languages were seen as a grammar school subject although Irish was commonly taught in Maintained Secondary schools. Languages became compulsory for all pupils from 1992 under the Northern Ireland Curriculum but under curriculum review, became optional at Key Stage 4 from 2007. Not surprisingly, the numbers taking languages have fallen. There was an initial rise towards the end of the 1990s with the introduction of compulsory languages post-primary, but that number is dropping steadily with languages now optional at KS4. French is still the most widely learnt language although a policy of diversification from the 1980s has reduced its percentage. Irish is holding its position despite being in a disadvantaged, indeed discriminated position as schools must provide another language before offering Irish. This has meant that many Maintained Catholic secondary schools have had to drop Irish. Spanish has markedly increased its numbers due to strong marketing and a positive popular perception. German is losing its popularity and the recent closure of the German department in QUB will reinforce this.

There is a current strategy to promote primary languages in the United Kingdom. All primary pupils in England will study a foreign language. In Northern Ireland local promotion of primary languages has been delegated to the Education and Library

Boards. The main focus is on a peripatetic project for Spanish. The project now includes Irish and, in the goal of inclusivity, Polish for local children.

The idea of an integrated view of languages provision would cover lifelong language learning, from the cradle to the grave, as promoted in the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme, but beyond the scope of this conference.

An integrated view would also suggest a strategy. A Languages Strategy for England was introduced in 2002 and Scotland and Wales have also developed a strategic approach. We are still waiting for the publication of the Languages Strategy for Northern Ireland which has been in preparation since 2006.

This document when it eventually appears will be the focus of our attention in the future.

The full paper is included as an appendix

Language Education in the Republic of Ireland

Jacinta McKeon of University College Cork focused on language education at post-primary where Modern Languages and Irish are seen as two distinct curricular areas. She presented the current situation in modern languages and Irish, discussing policy, uptake, syllabus and assessment. The current situation of modern languages and Irish at primary level was also discussed. The final section of the paper summarised current issues and challenges.

In post-primary, a modern (foreign) language (MFL) is not a requirement although Irish is compulsory up to Leaving Certificate. The National University of Ireland's modern (foreign) language requirement for matriculation is seen as vital to maintaining the numbers studying a MFL to Leaving Certificate level. French is by far the most commonly learnt language. The Leaving Certificate statistics for 2009 show that 78% of student studied a MFL, 56% opting for French, 15% for German, 6% for Spanish, 1.5% for Italian and other languages. Recent trends have shown only slight fluctuation in the languages chosen.

The Post-Primary Languages Project encourages greater diversification with Russian, Japanese and Arabic now offered. The Modern Languages in the Primary School initiative introduced MFLs into the primary school alongside Irish.

The changing characteristics of learners in a more multicultural environment has brought greater attention to the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Many pupils are also recognised as having special needs.

The level of proficiency attained in general is a matter of concern, particularly with Irish. The lack of an integrated languages policy and the absence of a nationally coordinated teacher education programme make the opportunities provided by this SCoTENS conference particularly timely.

Delegate Input

All institutions except the Open University were requested to fill in a questionnaire (Appendix 1) prior to attending in order to supply basic data and allow information to be gathered from institutions unable to attend. Contact has been made with the Open University Modern Languages coordinator based in England since the conference and future collaboration has been assured.

Questionnaire returns were received from all institutions except the Church of Ireland College of Education. All other institutions were able to attend and present their ML courses, except DCU and Sty Angela's College, Sligo, both of whose questionnaire returns provide valuable information. The information contained in the questionnaires and powerpoints is very rich, covering linguistic and pedagogic aims, course structures and provision, and research. The questionnaires and powerpoint presentations have all been loaded on to the conference VLE.

All delegates agreed that there is the basis in the conference inputs from ITE institutions for a valuable ongoing research project into the current state of Modern Language teacher education in Ireland, North and South.

Guest Inputs

EPOSTL

Dr Barry Jones Homerton College Cambridge, spoke on the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL), a document for students undergoing Initial Teacher Education. EPOSTL encourages students to reflect on their didactic knowledge and the skills necessary to teach languages. They are helped to assess their own didactic competences and enabled to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education.

Main aims of the EPOSTL

1. to encourage student teachers to reflect on the competences a teacher strives to attain and on the underlying knowledge which feeds these competences;
2. to help prepare them for their future profession in a variety of teaching contexts;
3. to promote discussion between student teachers and their peers and with their teacher educators and mentors;
4. to facilitate self-assessment of their developing competence;
5. to provide an instrument which helps chart progress.

http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/FTE/html/FTE_E_news.htm

ICT and the new teacher

Edmund Ellison, a recent graduate of the QUB Modern Languages PGCE and currently following a Masters degree course on Educational Multimedia in QUB, gave a presentation on “ICT and the Beginning Teacher”, presenting current approaches to integrating ICT with ML teaching with illustrations from his website supporting Irish teachers and students using multimedia resources

www.gaelnet.info

Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research

Participants visited the premises of NICILT where Wendy Phipps, NICILT executive officer, gave an overview of NICILT’s role and the NICILT resource centre which

contains a wide range of language teaching materials which are available for group or individual study and consultation in the Centre.

NICILT is a partnership between CILT the National Centre for Languages (London), and Queen's University Belfast with funding from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DE). It is part of a UK-wide network of institutions all offering a range of services to teachers and learners of modern languages. NICILT aims to serve all sectors and stages of education in Northern Ireland and support the implementation of national objectives in language learning and teaching. This includes, where appropriate, support for early language learning, for the post-16 sector and for adult education.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/NICILT>

Appendix 1

SCoTENS Language Educators Symposium QUB 13-14 November 2009

FRIDAY 13 November

- 01.00 Buffet Lunch
- 01.45 Welcome
- 02.00 Language Education in Northern Ireland. An Integrated View. (EMcK)
- 02.45 Language Education in the Republic of Ireland. An Integrated View
(JMCK)
- 03.30 Tea
- 03.50 Presentation of NICILT (Wendy Phipps)
- 04.15 Institution Presentations Northern Ireland
Institution Presentations Republic of Ireland (1)
- 05.30 ICT and the new teacher (Edmund Ellison)
- 06.00 End Day 1
- 07.30 Dinner (Deane's at Queens)

SATURDAY 14 November

- 09.00 Institution Presentations Republic of Ireland (2)
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.00 Portfolio RoI (Patrick Farren)
- 11.45 EPoSTL (Barry Jones)
- 12.30 Discussion
- 01.00 Clabhsúr
- 01.00 (Lunch)

Appendix 2

**SCoTENS LANGUAGE EDUCATORS CONFERENCE
QUB 13-14 November 2009**

Please complete the table below with reference to your own institution
Please provide a **SEPARATE RESPONSE** for each course offered (eg PGCE;
BEd; Irish; Modern Languages)

1) Name of your institution:
2) Initial Teacher Education qualification offered (tick all offered): PGCE <input type="checkbox"/> PGDE <input type="checkbox"/> HDipEd <input type="checkbox"/> BEd <input type="checkbox"/> BA <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>
Comments
3) Phase: Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Post-Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/>
Comments
4) Structure of Languages Initial Teacher Education programme: (eg 2 weeks Primary Placement; 6 weeks in-house; 12 weeks placement; 4 weeks in-house; 12 weeks placement; 1 week inhouse) OR One day per week in placement school, etc.
5) Number of hours per week in language teaching methods:
6) Brief outline of goals and anticipated outcomes of language methods course:

7) Number of hours, if any, dedicated to development of students' target language proficiency on course/programme, or any support provided:	
8) Number of visits by Supervisor(s) of teaching practice to each student teacher during School Experience attachments:	
9) Number of students on ITE Languages Course (per language if possible):	
10) Overall number of students on ITE course:	
11) Staffing Provision	
Teaching Staff Full Time ____ Part Time ____ Guest Lecturers ____ Comments:	School Placement Supervisors University Staff ____ Part Time Staff ____
12) Other relevant information:	
13) Name and Position of Respondent:	

Appendix 3

VLE Documents

Documents from the conference can be accessed at:

<http://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B3QYq8r0CZe6ZDAzMjgyZGIYjE3OC00NjRhLTgyYjgtMTRkM2RjYjI2MWIx&hl=en>

Access has been granted to SCoTENS administration.

Appendix 4

Languages in Northern Ireland – an Integrated View

Background

Although its education system has a number of features that distinguish it from Great Britain, Northern Ireland developed a 'step by step' policy with respect to educational changes introduced by central government for England and Wales. Scotland long had its own education system.

So the *Education Reform Act* of 1988 in England was followed by the *Education Reform Order* Northern Ireland in 1989

Nevertheless, the NI education system has a number of features that distinguish it from Great Britain. In particular, selection at age 11, introduced through the Education Acts of the 1940s and mostly abandoned in favour of a comprehensive system in Britain in the 1960s, has been retained in Northern Ireland. The Transfer Test, popularly called the 11+ examination, divides pupils between the roughly 30-35% who are accepted into Grammar schools, and the rest who attend Secondary, formerly called 'Intermediate', schools, with a few Comprehensive schools.

While the secondary schools are mixed ability and many achieve very good GCSE results and some offer A-levels, they cater in general for the less-academically inclined pupils, and also for a lower income population. This is clearly seen in the Free School Meals statistics. As well as pupil capabilities, parental aspiration, large-scale coaching, and Bernstein's educability all play a role in success in the selection examinations.

The transfer arrangements are currently under review.

The other distinguishing feature is the religious divide in education. State or controlled primary, Grammar and Secondary schools cater predominately for the

Protestant community, while the Maintained sector makes similar provision for the Catholic community. There is also the Integrated sector, which was set up in the 1970s to promote more harmonious relations between the Protestant and Catholic communities through educating children together. The post-primary Integrated sector is non-selective, and attracts pupils who fail to get a Grammar school place. The number of pupils attending Integrated schools circa 6% Finally, Irish-medium schools have emerged in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years, with over 4000 pupils attending Irish-medium nursery, primary and post-primary schools.

Another distinguishing feature is the position of the Irish language, which as an indigenous minority language has no equivalent in England, although it can be compared to some extent with the so-called community languages in Britain, Urdu, Chinese, etc, a population which has recently become a factor here in Northern Ireland as well, and of course with Welsh and Gaidhlig in Wales and Scotland.

A problem for Irish is that while in the Catholic community there exists a widespread belief in the validity and importance of Irish, in contrast, there is an enduring suspicion and antipathy surrounding the language among the wider Unionist, Protestant community, to the extent that the language was dubbed the 'green litmus test' of community relations (Cultural Traditions Group, 1994: 6). Unfortunately, other than some Integrated schools, not a single non-Catholic school offers Irish.

Northern Ireland Curriculum

It is somewhat surprising to realise that before the introduction of the National Curriculum, the only compulsory subject in schools was religious Education, although society's expectations and exam specifications produced the curriculum

we were familiar with –all schools also offered English, Maths, and a range of other subjects. But until the 1960s in the UK,

‘the learning of languages had been the preserve of the Grammar schools’. The change to comprehensive schools in Britain in the 1960s led to the emergence of a ‘Languages for All’ policy with languages made available across the ability range in post-primary schools.

In Northern Ireland, the retention of the Grammar/Secondary divide meant that traditionally only the Grammar school minority of pupils studied a second language, mostly French, although Irish was commonly taught in Maintained Secondary schools, as well as in all Catholic Grammar schools. The ‘Languages for All’ philosophy was adopted in Northern Ireland’s post-primary schools as well, with mixed results.

In Britain, ‘for many pupils the experience of language learning did not incline them to continue once the subject became optional, and around 70% of all pupils abandoned the learning of a foreign language by the age of fourteen.

In Northern Ireland, the drop-off was notable in the non-Grammar schools. The Northern Ireland Inspectorate reported in 1990 that while a majority of pupils embarked upon language studies in Year 1 post-primary, by Year 3 only one-quarter of these schools provided modern languages for all pupils (DENI, 1990: §4.45).

But the Education Reform Order of 1989 laid the ground for the gradual introduction of a common Northern Ireland Curriculum. From **1992** Languages became mandatory for all pupils at Key stages 3 and 4, that is up to GCSE at 16. The original intention was that a foreign language, chosen from French, German or Spanish, must be studied, after which Irish could be offered. This would have led to the marginalization and eventual disappearance of Irish from the school

system, particularly in the Secondary schools. The rationale was utilitarian, intending to ensure [quote]

“that Northern Ireland pupils, no less than their peers in the rest of the United Kingdom, should be able to compete as equals with their European counterparts in an increasingly international job market”

It is important to recall today that languages were introduced for the sake of the economy, not for cultural or personal interest reasons. This calls into question the wisdom of current patterns where German is disappearing from our schools.

The government was eventually persuaded to move, grudgingly, on the position of Irish and the then Minister of Education, Dr Mawhinney, announced that the legislation would [quote]

“require all secondary schools to provide one or more of French, German, Spanish or Italian, so that all pupils will have the option available to them in their own school to acquire competence in one of these major European Community working languages. A school may, if it wishes, offer Irish in addition to these”

While this improved upon the original proposals, it meant nevertheless that many secondary schools had to stop offering Irish as they could not maintain two languages.

But from **1995** every post-primary pupil studied a language from 11 to 16, up to GCSE.

The National and Northern Irish Curricula were strictly prescribed. Programmes of study were devised for each subject. The modern languages specifications followed a common Functional Notional syllabus for all the languages, regardless of linguistic particularities, and was based upon a version of Communicative Language Teaching which paid little attention to linguistic form.

The Curriculum Council for Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) undertook a programme of monitoring and research. A major research project was carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research between 1996 and 2000. It

was designed to discover the views of Key Stage 3 pupils (age 11-14) and their teachers on the curriculum.

In summary, these studies suggested that pupils considered that the curriculum

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

The studies suggested that teachers felt that there was:

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

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

Modern Languages and the creative arts were consistently seen as the subjects least useful for the future. They were also perceived as the least important for pupils' current needs

The follow-up report on the Key stage 4 cohort reported pupils' views that "Languages were thought to be not useful", while on continuity and progression "Irish doesn't, but the rest follow-on"

In addition to the NFER studies, other emerging influences included studies on thinking skills and neuroscience, ICT initiatives, European trends and advice from the business and employment sector. Taking these concerns into consideration, CCEA set about designing the revised NI Curriculum.

After a contested consultation, proposals for review of curriculum and assessment at Key Stage 3 were published in 2003 as Pathways. These were extremely radical and it was not until 2006 that the Revised NI Curriculum was published. In the meantime there had also been a process of curriculum review in

Britain which took aboard many of the innovative proposals of Pathways, but progressed more coherently from the National Curriculum.

Phased implementation of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum started in September 2007.

Hand out Big Picture

Traditional Subjects are now arranged into Areas of Learning, one of which is modern Languages

(ML MFL n/s)

The arts covers Art and design, Drama, and Music,

Environment and Society covers History and Geography

Mathematics and Numeracy is now Mathematics with Financial capability.

POINTING TO BIG PICTURE

LINE1 The revised curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives

LINE 2 as an individual, a contributor to the economy and the environment.

LINE 3 This is to be achieved by introducing Learning for Life and Work at the top level, comprising Personal Development, Home Economics, Local and Global Citizenship and Employability.

All other learning areas contribute to Learning for Life and Work through the emphasis on Connected Learning and Cross-Curricular Skills.

In contrast to the close specification of the previous curriculum, the revised curriculum is much more open to individual interpretation and is summarised on one page.

Each subject strand in the Revised curriculum is set out on terms of how it contributes to the objectives in the Revised curriculum. The statutory curriculum for each subject strand is set out as 'Statements of Minimum Requirement' and makes reference to 'Key Elements' of the curriculum such as Mutual Understanding, Ethical Awareness and Education for Sustainable Development.

The statements of minimum requirement are the compulsory elements of the curriculum in terms of knowledge and understanding, curriculum objectives, key elements and learning outcomes which must be taught.

Aside from these statements, teachers can choose the content they feel best suits their teaching context.

This individual focus and flexibility immediately raises questions about assessment. GCSEs are still to be sat at the end of KS4 and teachers, pupils, parents want to know what is needed for the examination.

There has been much activity around this as you can imagine and new specifications for GCSE were published by CCEA earlier this year. There is now an element of controlled assessment, marked by the teacher, reflecting the individuality and flexibility, and moderated by CCEA.

I have put this on to the Google VLE I'll be discussing later.

- **Unit 1- Speaking (30%)**

Candidates complete 2 controlled assessment tasks

Each worth 30 marks

Teachers mark tasks

CCEA moderates marking

Available every summer from 2010

The GCSE examination is a summative assessment., an Assessment **of** Learning. (AfL) The revised curriculum places great store however on Assessment **for** Learning (AfL).

AfL is encouraged by the Revised Curriculum and includes building a more open relationship between learner and teacher, clear learning intentions shared with pupils, peer and self assessment, peer and self evaluation of learning and individual target setting.

It is not, however, statutory:

While the Revised Curriculum does not require you to integrate AfL practices into your classrooms, we strongly recommend the use of AfL as best practice.. The introduction and regular use of AfL in the classroom can help you to fulfil other statutory components of the Revised Curriculum (like Thinking Skills and Personal CapabilitiesIn addition, AfL offers significant advantages for pupils

(CCEA The Revised Curriculum
2007)

The GCSE and post-16 examinations are recognised as barometers of assessing achievement, but they are also useful indicators of language health and outcomes in our schools.

But such outcomes should be seen in a wider perspective.

The 2000 Nuffield Languages Inquiry reports that, in terms of linguistic competence, the UK is 'doing badly'. As each language valiantly fights its own corner, we are losing the greater battle: 'We talk about communication but don't always communicate. There is enthusiasm for languages but it is patchy. Educational provision is fragmented, achievement poorly measured, continuity

not very evident. In the language of our time, there is a lack of joined-up thinking' (Nuffield 2000:5).

This holds true for Northern Ireland as well.

However, the most significant development in the last decade has been that languages are no longer compulsory at Key stage 4, 14 years to 16. This has been the case in England since 2002, and in Northern Ireland since 2007. In other words, pupils are now only required to do 3 years of modern language study in post-primary education – the lowest compulsory language education in Europe.

There is still an area within the curriculum called MFL in England, “Modern Languages” in Northern Ireland to allow for Irish, but within this area, there are the competing language subjects of French, German, Spanish, Irish, where the various languages are joined in an internecine competition for a shrinking slice of a crowded timetable. It reminds me of ‘Cogadh na gCarad, the War of Friends, Civil War..

If Nuffield identified a lack of ‘joined-up thinking’ in 2000, the Curriculum Review process since that date displays policy contradiction. The 1980s and 1990s promoted ‘Languages for All’ and ‘Diversification’, but Curriculum Review portends a U-turn. Languages are no longer compulsory at Key stage 4. The internet in particular and globalisation in general has led more people to believe that ‘English is enough’ and languages have lost out in the timetable.

It would also be naïve to believe that the whole staffroom shares the linguists concerns about the pressure on languages. Northern Ireland has retained selection at age 11, and so we have a Grammar/Secondary school divide. In most secondary school staffrooms you will find teachers who welcome languages becoming optional, since many pupils find languages difficult and results are relatively poor – and this includes many language teachers who find teaching to lesser able, demotivated pupils stressful and a strain. I feel this is partly due to

the way in which the so-called Communicative approach to language teaching, as it was enshrined in our programmes of study, has become boring and burdensome for pupils across the ability range. As we have seen languages came out badly in the NFER and CCEA longitudinal research, based mostly on pupils' views.

The numbers taking languages has fallen

Number of GCSE entries by language (percentage change over period in brackets)

	French	Irish	Spanish	German	Italian
1996	13838	2021	1561	1496	156
1997	13275	2171	1737	1371	128
1998	13213	2180	1801	1380	93
1999	13195	2350	2105	1390	109
2000	13318	2484	1987	1489	199
2001	13394	2452	2444	1412	207
2002	13099	2638	2639	1390	164
2003	12478 (-9%)	2641 (+30%)	3013 (+94%)	1244 (-16%)	163 (+5%)
2004	12436	2530	2945	1266	151
2005	11239	2248	3132	1315	137
2006	10658	2258	2848	1264	114
2007	10415	2446	3046	1203	79
2008	9008 (-35%)	2147 (+6%)	3232 (+107%)	1204 (-20%)	38 (-76%)

We can see similar patterns in the UK as a whole.

	French	Spanish	German
2000	341004	49973	133659
2001	347007	54326	135113
2002	338468	57983	126216
2003	331089	61323	125663
2004	318095	64078	122023
2005	272140	62456	105288
2006	236189	62143	90311
2007	216718	63978	81061
2008	201940	67092	76695
2009	188688 (-55%)	67070 (+35%)	73469 (-45%)

http://www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/gcses/

GCSE National Statistics (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

We have seen the overall drop in languages Nationally in the UK, and locally in Northern Ireland, but while the general trends are similar there are some important local differences which make the Northern Ireland experience significant.

First of all, we still have the 11+, with selection at Age 11. The successful pupils go to grammar schools, which have always had a strong reputation for supporting languages. Other pupils go to secondary schools where the language tradition has not been so strong. Since languages became optional in Northern Ireland in 2007, there has been an almost calamitous withdrawal from languages in secondary schools at age 14. Most alarmingly, grammar schools are now withdrawing from compulsory languages in Key Stage 4, age 14-16.

In the summer of 2007, in anticipation of languages becoming optional at KS4 and the introduction of the Revised Curriculum at KS3, NICILT carried out an audit of post-primary ML provision, where a clear distinction could be drawn between language provision in secondary and grammar schools.

I received this letter from a Grammar school headmaster in June.

Hello Eugene,

As a committed European and a committed linguist I am increasingly concerned at the rapid drop in interest in the “traditional” modern languages and I know this concern is shared by other grammar school principals. We are beginning to wonder if, for example, French still deserves to hold a slot in the regular timetable, or should it be offered as an extra-curricular activity.

I hear students question why we are not offering Polish and they argue that it would be more useful to them than French.

As schools move on to provide the 24 subjects at GCSE and 27 at A level (which will be required by law from 2013) perhaps modern languages will struggle to attract the interest of pupils who have other options available to them.

Maybe its time to inject a fresh approach, to give pupils “tasters” of other European and world languages, to help them appreciate the relevance and value of certain languages – rather than force-feeding French and producing the resistance so evident in so many schools these days.

We have seen the 107% increase in Spanish GCSE in Northern Ireland over the last 12 years and the 35% increase nationally. The reasons are many: the weather and holiday homes with cheap flights; the Beckham factor when David Beckham moved to Real Madrid. There is also the Spanish government policy of promoting Spanish globally; there is also the belief that Spanish is easier than other languages “El espanol es facil” is the motto, with the subtext that other languages are more difficult.

The role of government policy and cultural institute support is vital. French cultural institutions have been quietly working as before, the Goethe Institut moved much of its activities to eastern Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the language has suffered in our schools as a result. Irish has been hidebound by the political appointees approach to Foras na Gaeilge, and Spanish support for their language is remarkable. The policy is strong and the money and resources are available.

However, foreign cultural institute and agency support depends upon local support as well.

There is a current movement to promote primary languages in the United Kingdom. In England, all KS2 pupils will be entitled to study a foreign language by 2010. In Northern Ireland, local implementation and support has been delegated to the Education and Library Boards.

CCEA website Primary

The main focus currently is on a peripatetic project for Spanish. When I asked one of the board officials concerned why French was being ignored in the project, I was told

“French has had its chance. It’s time to do something else”

The project now includes Irish, and in the goal of inclusivity, Polish for local children. The difficulty about this is that since this policy was introduced last year, many of the Polish children have now gone back to Poland,

Moving from primary to Higher Education, I can only mention that this university is in the process of closing down its German department. I wrote a letter of concern to the vice-chancellor in my NICILT capacity, and was reassured that German is available in the Languages Centre and that students are encouraged to follow a course there or access its self-tutoring resources.

The idea of an integrated view of languages provision would cover lifelong language learning, from the cradle to the grave, as promoted in the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme, but beyond our scope today.

An integrated view would also suggest a strategy. A Languages Strategy for England was introduced in 2002, and strategies have also been produced for Scotland and Wales. We are waiting [o, why are we waiting] for the publication of the Languages Strategy for Northern Ireland which has been brewing since 2006.

This document when it eventually appears will be the focus of our attention in the future.