



ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF LEGISLATING FOR INCREASED IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION PROVISION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Article 8 of Bunreacht na hÉireann states that ‘The Irish language as the national language is the first official language’. Irish is also an official language of the EU.

Since the foundation of the state, the Irish government has consistently invested funds and resources in supporting the Irish language. However, the state has never formally requested the Department of Education to statutorily provide Irish-medium immersion education. In 2023, less than 3.8 per cent of post-primary school children were able to access Irish-medium education, despite over 8 per cent attending Irish-medium primary schools. The reported demand from annual surveys indicates a potential demand of 20 per cent plus.

UNESCO data has led to Irish being categorised as ‘Definitely Endangered’ and is at significant risk of become extinct within the next 100 years. Academic research indicates that the current poor intergenerational transmission of Irish is a primary contributor to its ‘Definitely Endangered’ categorization, with the lack of Irish-medium immersion education a significant factor.

The passing of primary legislation to statutorily provide for a steadily increasing level of Irish-medium immersion education would have a positive economic impact.

1. There would be a small potential cost related to the possible provision of new school building infrastructure, which over a 20-year period is estimated to range between zero and €10 billion. This should be put in the context of a current 5-year capital expenditure Department of Education budget of €6 billion and an annual budget (2023) of €9.6 billion. School building infrastructure has a life cycle of 50-60 years minimum, so the maximum amortised cost over the coming 20-year period is c. €2 billion.
2. There would be no additional cost associated with the provision of Irish-medium immersion education as the same number of teachers would be required. The cost of training new teachers proficient in Irish in grow capacity, would over a 20-year period have no additional economic cost.
3. The cost of training public servants to meet the statutory requirement that 20 per cent were proficient in Irish would be reduced to zero over a 20-year period as the increasing numbers of bilingual pupils coming through an Irish immersion education system would create the necessary pool of recruits.

4. The investment made by the state in Irish-medium primary school pupils, which is currently largely dissipated due to the low numbers being able to continue in post-primary immersion education, would be enhanced and reinforced and not wasted.
5. No research has been conducted in Ireland assessing the impact of bi-lingual skills on earnings potential. Academic research in Canada indicates that bilingual people have a minimum increased average earnings expectancy of around 5 per cent over their mono-lingual peers, which has the beneficial side-effect of increasing economic activity and associated tax base. An additional 5 per cent earnings capacity combined with steadily increasing bilingual numbers over 20 years to 20 per cent would mean that the capital investment would more than pay for itself within its lifetime.
6. International research has established that being bilingual has increased advantages, including lifetime cognitive benefits and delayed onset of ageing related conditions. These advantages have an economic benefit, currently unquantified.

The state has ambitious policy targets for the language. The economic analysis conducted indicates that these could be met on a cost neutral basis (worst case), or potentially with an economic gain, from the increased earnings expectancy, over the long term.

INTRODUCTION

The starting point for any discussion of the Irish language is Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland, which states that ‘The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.’ Irish is an official EU language unique to Ireland and is of crucial importance to the identity of Irish culture. This is now recognised at both domestic and EU levels.

The Irish language has been an EU Treaty language since 1973, when Ireland joined the European Union. This meant that only the EU treaties were translated into the language. In 2007, at Ireland’s request, Irish became an official and working language in the EU, but under a derogation granted by the European Council, not all documents were translated into the Irish language at that point. In 2015, Ireland asked the Council to gradually phase out the derogation by 1st January 2022. On 1st January 2022, the language gained full status as an official language of the European Union. This gave it equal status with the other 23 official languages of the EU.

Since the foundation of the state, the Irish government has invested consistently in supporting the Irish language. However, the state has never formally asked the Department of Education, through the passing of legislation, to make a statutory provision for Irish-medium education. This is contributing to the poor intergenerational transmission of the language, which combined with the steady decline in the total number of people speaking Irish regularly has resulted in Irish being categorised as ‘definitely endangered’.

Irish is one of the 12 most at-risk languages in Europe and is in danger of vanishing over the next 100 years, according to a 2021 study. Language learning platform Busuu ranked the **Irish language** as ‘definitely endangered’ after collating data from **UNESCO’s** Atlas of World Languages in Danger.ⁱ

This analysis looks at a single issue within the toolkit for promoting and improving the amount of Irish spoken on a daily basis; **Irish immersion education**.

SECTION 1: OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARDS THE IRISH LANGUAGE

20-YEAR STRATEGY FOR THE IRISH LANGUAGE 2010-2030

The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 was published on 21st December 2010. The strategy promised to promote a holistic, integrated approach to the language in a fashion that is consistent with best international practice.

The aim of Government policy towards the language was set out in the Strategy:

- Increase the number of families throughout the country who use Irish as the daily language of communication.
- Provide linguistic support for the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking community and to recognise the issues which arise in areas where Irish is the household and community language.
- Ensure that in public discourse and in public services the use of Irish or English will be, as far as practical, a choice for the citizen to make and that over time more and more people throughout the State will choose to do their business in Irish.
- Ensure that Irish becomes more visible in our society, both as a spoken language by Irish citizens and also in areas such as signage and literature.

The Strategy laid out 13 objectives:

- **Objective 1:** The special status given to the Irish language in the Constitution and in legislation such as the Official Languages Act 2003, the Education Act 1998, the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Broadcasting Act 20012, will be upheld.
- **Objective 2:** The Official Languages Act will be fully implemented. The right of the public to use Irish in dealings with the State and with other bodies will be developed and the appropriate arrangements to deliver this will be put in place.
- **Objective 3:** The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.
- **Objective 4:** The Gaeltacht will be given special support as an Irish-speaking area.
- **Objective 5:** Irish will be taught as an obligatory subject from primary to Leaving Certificate level. The curriculum will foster oral and written competence in Irish among students and an understanding of its value to us as a people. This will be supported by enhanced investment in professional development and ongoing support for teachers, as well as in provision of textbooks and resources, and support for innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
- **Objective 6:** A high standard of all-Irish education will be provided to school students whose parents/guardians so wish. Gaelscoileanna will continue to be

supported at primary level and all-Irish provision at post-primary level will be developed to meet follow-on demand.

- **Objective 7:** Irish language pre-school education will continue to be supported and third-level education through Irish will be further developed.
- **Objective 8:** The State will continue to support Foras na Gaeilge in the context of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999.
- **Objective 9:** High quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish will be ensured, especially through the continuous development of RTÉ, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4.
- **Objective 10:** Every assistance and support will be given to the European Union in implementing the decision to make Irish a working and official language in the EU from 1 January 2007.
- **Objective 11:** In order to promote Irish nationally and to preserve and strengthen it in the Gaeltacht, the work being done by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and by agencies and bodies which come under its aegis will continue to be reinforced.
- **Objective 12:** The use of the Irish language by An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces will be continued and developed.
- **Objective 13:** The Government recognises the vital role of the Irish language voluntary sector and will continue to support it.ⁱⁱ

The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 aims to continue to support Gaelscoileanna and develop an all-Irish provision at post-primary level to meet follow-on demand.

IRISH LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES

The Irish Government stated in 2021 that ‘the use of the Irish language at official level is an integral part of the ongoing efforts to ensure that the language is used among future generations.’ⁱⁱⁱ It emphasised that it had put in place Irish language support schemes to provide funding for a wide range of Irish language initiatives outside Gaeltacht areas and abroad.

Under these grant schemes, community-based committees and organisations, that operate through Irish outside the Gaeltacht, may make an application under the department’s Irish Language Assistance Schemes. Funding can be provided to assist with the costs associated with building or repairing Irish language centres and the purchase of buildings for use as Irish language centres and/or the purchase of equipment for such centres. The purpose of the capital assistance that is provided under this fund is the strengthening of Irish as a community and family language in accordance with the objectives of the Gaeltacht Act 2012 and the 20-Year Strategy for Irish 2010-2030.

The Irish Language Support Schemes are part-financed with receipts from the National Lottery. The objective of this programme of funding is to provide financial assistance to a range of organisations and activities that support the promotion of the Irish language

outside the Gaeltacht. Organisations that receive annual funding include Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, Gaillimh le Gaeilge, Gnó Mhaigh Eo and Gael Taca, Cork.

The Schemes also fund initiatives that assist public bodies in implementing the Official Languages Act and that support the status of Irish as an official and working language of the European Union. These initiatives include, for example, the development by Fiontar, Dublin City University, of a database of EU terminology in the Irish language.

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT 2020

The Programme for Government (2020) acknowledged the importance of the Irish language as the first language of the State, as a living language, and as vital component of the heritage of the island. It expressed a determination to increase the visibility of Irish and its daily use in the community. It expressed a desire to have first-language Irish speakers feel empowered as active citizens and for those without fluency to feel confident enough to use Irish on a regular basis in everyday life, in the workplace, and in the community.

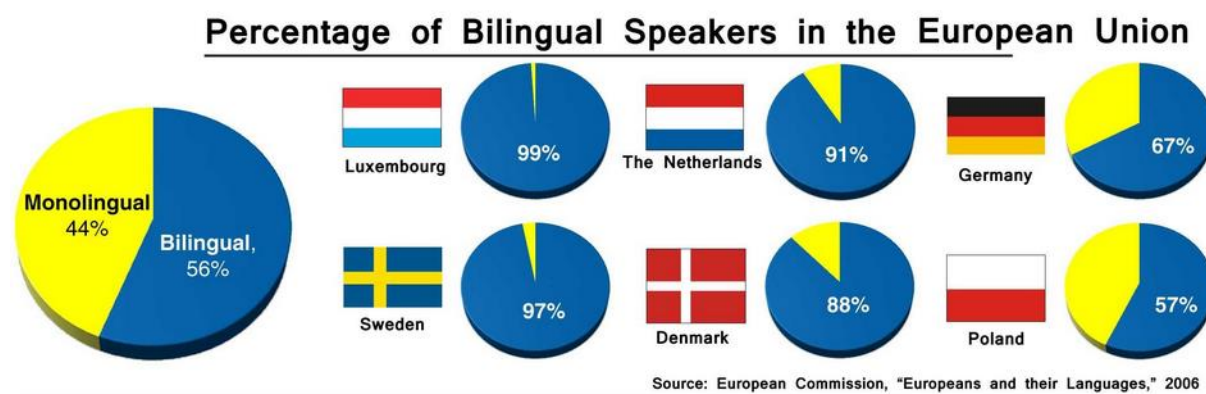
The Programme made a commitment to:

- Adopt a whole-of-government approach to the protection and promotion of the Irish language, in implementing the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and Action Plan.
- Strengthen and enact the Official Languages Bill by the end of 2020 and include periodic reviews to monitor the overall objective of ensuring that 20 per cent of new recruits to the public service are Irish speakers.
- Promote the development of Irish Language Centres in Dublin and across the country, for a community-based approach to Irish-language promotion.
- Encourage and support Irish speaking communities outside the Gaeltacht and develop platforms to increase young people's engagement with the Irish language (e.g. TG4, Raidió na Gaeltachta, RTÉ, Raidió Rí-Rá).
- Promote the Irish language in workplaces and social settings, through Conradh na Gaeilge and other organisations. Develop a national media campaign in support of this work.
- Expand the 'Teanga Tí' / Family Language Scheme and explore the introduction of similar schemes across the country.
- Commit to the protection and preservation of Gaeltacht areas, to ensure that they remain at the heart of a living language.
- The Programme contained a commitment to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational primary schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

The overall expenditure of the State on Irish language and Gaeltacht schemes administered by the Department of the Gaeltacht (and including the funding of TG4) is equivalent to just 0.17 per cent of State expenditure.

SECTION 2: EU POLICY TOWARDS MULTI-LINGUALISM

Ireland lags behind other EU countries in terms of bi and multi-lingualism.



Multilingualism and language proficiency are regarded very highly at an EU level and feature strongly in policy. The EU believes that national languages are a fundamental feature of a country's cultural identity and an important element of its sovereignty. In the EU, multilingualism is described as 'the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives'. The EU's multilingualism policy has three goals:

- To encourage language learning and promote linguistic diversity. It aims to prevent discrimination between citizens whose languages are spoken by many people and others using less widely spoken ones.
- To give citizens access to EU legislation, procedures and information in their own languages. Multilingualism makes it possible for Europeans to participate in public debates and consultations.
- To promote a multilingual economy as the efficiency of the single market is based, among other things, on a multilingual mobile workforce.

EU countries are also committed to the preservation of regional or minority languages.

The EU promotes language learning but recognises that it has limited influence over educational and language policies, as these are the responsibility of the individual EU countries. In practice, this means that the EU cannot go beyond recommendations.

In 2002, the EU leaders set the objective of ensuring that Europeans could communicate in two languages in addition to their native language. Education ministers renewed this commitment in May 2019, by adopting one of the components of a new package of legislation, namely a text recommending the acquisition of a first foreign language for social or professional purposes and, if possible, a second foreign language to enable interaction with a certain degree of fluency.

Research shows that there is clear evidence that foreign language skills are a career driver – if they form part of a broader package of relevant (specific) skills. In combination with the right educational background and relevant work experience, foreign language

skills provide access to jobs in international trade and services for which they are a prerequisite. There is also evidence that foreign language proficiency facilitates career progression.^{iv}

SECTION 3: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

At an international level there is a strong recognition of the value of linguistic diversity. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a UNESCO treaty adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 17th October 2003.^v This Convention is a recognition of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development.

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as *‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.’*

The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ is manifested in oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; the performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship.

Languages are primary vehicles for cultural expression and the transmission of cultural heritage.

International experience indicates that

1. Immersion education and adult education have potential in securing intergenerational language transmission, but they have to be implemented on a large enough scale in order to be fully effective.
2. Primary legislation to provide a legal framework to guarantee the provision of immersion education is a key indicator of language vitality (European Parliament 2017). Ireland is one of a small handful of European countries that has not made such provision.

WALES AND BASQUE COUNTRY – CURRENT TARGETS

In Wales, there a target to get one million people speaking Welsh by 2050, which would represent a doubling of the number of Welsh speakers by 2050. To hit this target, there is a plan to increase Welsh medium education by a third over the next 14 years. Currently 22 per cent of seven-year-olds are being taught in Welsh-medium schools but Welsh Government policy is to increase the numbers attending Welsh medium education to 30 per cent by 2030 and 40 per cent by 2050.

Proposals for a new Welsh Medium Education Bill have been published by Labour ministers and Plaid Cymru. Plaid Cymru said it set the foundation for every pupil to have Welsh-medium education.

Proposals include reflecting the target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 in law as well as giving legal status to the language categories for schools. The aim is to increase Welsh language provision within English-medium schools and also to increase the number of schools in the Welsh-medium category.

In the Basque Country, improving education in Basque has been and is the main reform of the Basque education system in recent decades. The policy is working as evidenced by the fact that the number of students enrolled in infant and primary Basque-medium education increased from 17 per cent in 1983 to 78 per cent by 2019.^{vi}

SECTION 4: RATIONALE FOR LEGISLATING FOR PROVISION OF IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION

FUNDING OF IRISH LANGUAGE

Proposals in the Irish Language & Gaeltacht Growth Plan set a target of 0.4 per cent for the overall percentage of Government expenditure on Irish and the Gaeltacht by 2029. In Budget 2025, €106.9 million was allocated, which is equivalent to 0.16 per cent of overall expenditure. Table 2 shows the trend in funding of the Irish language since 2014. In Budget 2025, €166.9 million is being allocated to promoting the language. In the overall context of the public finances this is a relatively small amount of money.

Table 2: Government Funding of Irish Language

(€000)	DEPT. OF GAELTACHT	TG4	TOTAL
2014	41,409	32,750	74,159
2015	43,063	32,240	75,303
2016	51,206	32,540	83,746
2017	46,613	32,790	79,403
2018	48,567	33,790	82,357
2019	55,522	34,233	89,755
2020	71,909	37,233	109,142
2021	78,601	40,733	119,334
2022	85,651	44,933	130,584
2023	94,199	52,233	146,432
2024	100,600	57,033	157,633
2025	106,900	60,000	166,900

Source: Conradh na Gaeilge & Dept. of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media.

IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

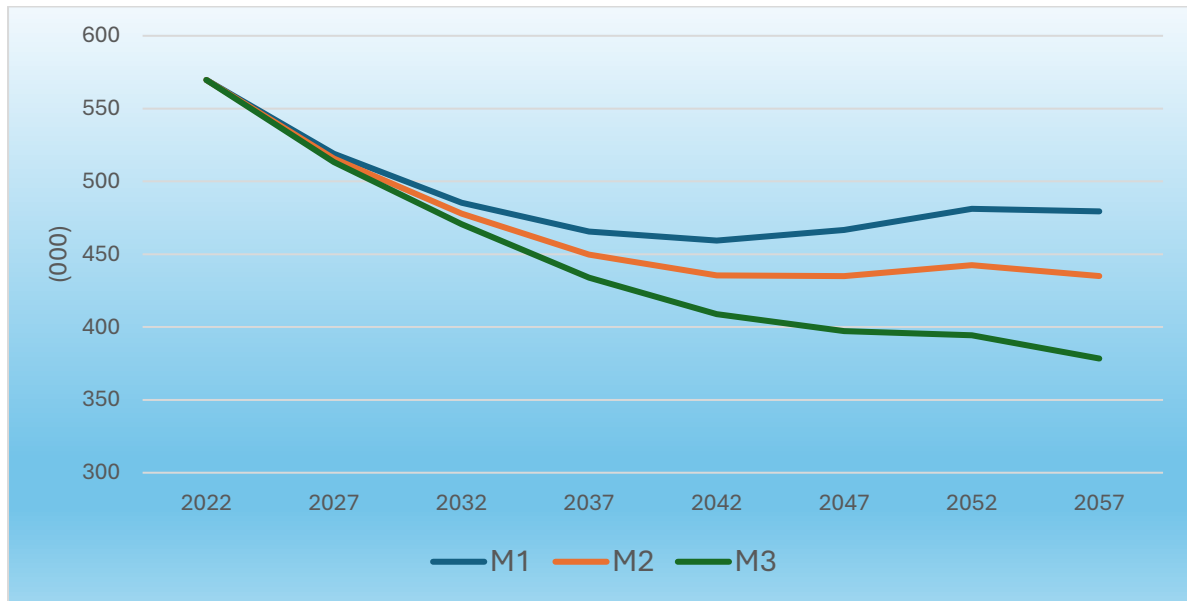
The number of Irish Medium Primary schools increased by just 2 between 2018 and 2022 and the number of students declined by 1,339 (2.9 per cent), compared to an overall decline in pupil numbers of 9,629 (1.7 per cent). The number of students in Irish Medium Primary schools accounted for 8 per cent of total students in 2022.

The number of Irish Medium Post-Primary schools increased by just 1 between 2018 and 2022 and the number of students increased by 1,160 (8.9 per cent), compared to an overall increase in pupil numbers of 43,493 (12 per cent). The number of students in Irish Medium Primary schools accounted for 3.5 per cent of total students in 2022. (Appendix 3).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

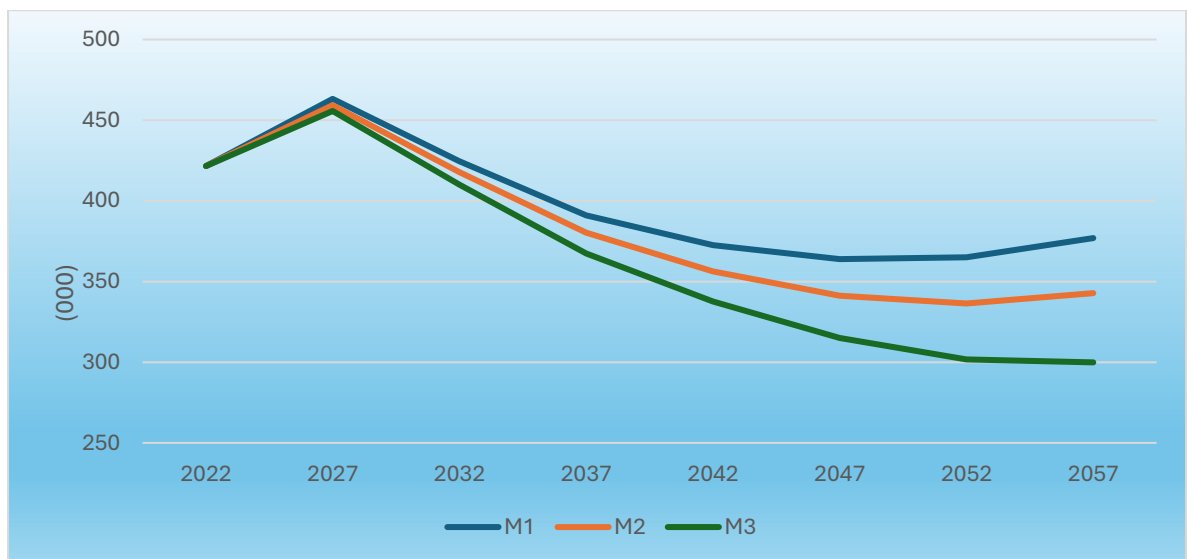
CSO projections assume that the primary school population is broadly represented by those aged 5-12 years of age. In 2022 there were 569,700 children in this age group. This number is projected to decrease significantly, by between 84,300 and 99,000 to 2032, depending on the scenario chosen. The fall in births since 2010 is expected to impact negatively on the number of primary school children under all combinations of assumptions. However, the rate of decline is dependent on the assumption chosen.

Figure 1: Primary School Student Projections



Source: CSO Population Projections 2024

Figure 2: Post-Primary Student Number Projections



Source: CSO Population Projections 2024

The number of children of secondary school age (i.e. persons aged 13-18 years) in 2022 was 421,500. This number is projected to increase over the time period to 2032 and decrease thereafter in all scenarios. The rate of decline is dependent on the assumption chosen. By 2057 there will be an estimate of between 44,000 and 121,600 less secondary school students than in 2022.

IMPACT ON BILINGUAL NUMBERS

On current numbers it can be forecast that in the next 20 years around 47,000 pupils will be leaving Irish medium post-primary education as a cohort that can be considered bi-lingual, (around 2,300 per annum).

By creating sufficient capacity over the coming 20 years to ensure that 20 per cent of pupils are able to attend Irish medium education, then the number of pupils leaving school with bi-lingual skills will increase to over 160,000, (around 8,000 per annum), with at least 20 per cent of all pupils finishing thereafter bilingual, (around 12,000 out of 60,000). This translates into an average annual increase of pupils finishing IME education of around 450 pupils year on year.

The Irish State has explicit targets to promote and grow the Irish language. This is laid out clearly in the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. There would appear to have been little follow through in terms of clearly identifying the Irish language expertise and skills required to achieve the ambitious targets. The education system is naturally viewed as one of the critical engines generating the linguistic ability on which the strategy is based.

POLICY RATIONALE

The policy rationale for legislating for the provision of Irish Medium Education are strong.

- Meeting the targets of Irish government policies relating to the Irish language by ensuring increases in inter-generational transmission.
- Meeting of EU multi-lingual objectives.
- The adoption of a formal framework to guide the Department of Education to develop and implement policy towards the Irish language.
- Begin the process of moving the UN categorisation of the Irish language from 'definitely endangered' to 'vulnerable', and ultimately to 'safe'.
- Meeting the Government policy target of two hundred and fifty thousand Irish speakers by 2030. There is a direct link between the areas with the highest number of Irish speakers in the census and the areas in which there are gaelcholáistí, which suggests that gaelcholáistí foster adult Irish speakers.

The bottom line is that the Irish government has committed to a strategy to promote the Irish language.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RATIONALE

Impact on Earnings

The economic benefits of bi-lingualism have been documented internationally. Appendix 1 summarises research from a University of Guelph study authored by Louis Christofides and Robert Swidinsky. The main conclusions are that bilingual employees earn more than their unilingual counterparts, even if they are not using their language skills on the job; bilingual men earn 3.6 per cent and bilingual women earn 6.6 per cent more than those who speak only English; and in English Canada, the economic benefits of having French as a second language are associated with language knowledge rather than language use in job-related activities.

There is no research available in Ireland analysing the impact of a second language on earnings. However, if the Canadian research results are applied to Ireland, average earnings would increase by €2,129 or 4.9 per cent. Increased earnings would benefit recipients but would also boost economic activity and tax revenues.

Table 1: Impact of Bilingualism on Earnings

	% WORKFORCE	MEDIAN EARNINGS	% INCREASE	€ INCREASE	WEIGHTED INCREASE PER PERSON (€)
Male	50.90%	47,187	3.60%	1,698	864
Female	49.10%	39,039	6.60%	2,576	1,265
Weighted Average		43,186	4.90%		2,129

Source: CSO, Distribution of Earnings by Gender and County 2023 & Jim Power Economics

Enhancing Investment Returns on Irish Language

The Department of Education's figures show that only around 30 per cent of students in gael scoileanna continue to Irish-medium education at second level. The state has invested to a certain extent at primary level and has spent additional money through enhanced grants to ensure students leave 6th class proficient in Irish.

The investment at second level is considerably less and the investment is essentially lost amongst 70 per cent of those students as they lose their proficiency in Irish in an English-medium secondary school.

It is likely that the main reason for the low transfer rate is the lack of an Irish-medium option. Twelve counties have no gaelcholáiste and some of the existing gaelcholáistí are oversubscribed and so cannot cater for students who wish to attend them.

Considerable investment is undertaken at primary level through the gael scoileanna. If this is not backed up by strong immersion availability at secondary level, much of the

Irish language fluency could be lost. In other words, if there is significant investment in primary level Irish language teaching, it would make complete sense to ensure that the fluency can be carried through to secondary level.

Public Service Employees

The Language Scheme 2023-2026 was prepared by the Department of Social Protection as required under the Official Languages Act 2003. The Department is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Official Languages Act and the Department's policy is to ensure that:

- All letters and emails received in Irish are replied to in Irish.
- Headings of stationery, including for example, notepaper, compliment slips, file covers, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually.
- All recorded oral announcements on phonelines are bilingual.
- Documents setting out public policy proposals, financial statements, annual reports and strategy statements are published bilingually on the Department's website.
- Signage in Departmental offices is compliant with the Acts.
- Circulars/mailshots are in both Irish and English.
- Application forms are in both Irish and English.
- The official place names of Gaeltacht areas are used by the Department.

The National Plan for Irish Language Public Services 2024-2030 is a strategic 6-year plan. It is the first ever Plan of its kind in the history of the State and a central element in the move towards a fully bilingual public service under the [Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021](#) .

This National Plan, which is based on five specific strategic themes, is intended to act as a roadmap for public bodies in terms of systematically increasing and improving the number and quality of Irish language public services that they provide. It will also provide a pathway to increasing the number of staff competent in Irish to facilitate the provision of these services. The Irish state has legislated that at least 20 per cent of the staff recruited to public bodies will be competent in the Irish language by 2030. Around 60,000 state employees will need to be proficient in Irish by 2030.

Immersive bilingual education will be essential to achieving these objectives and will deliver significant savings on current costly long-term public/civil service employee education programs.

Cognitive Ability & STEM Education

Research results have long shown that there are cognitive, linguistic, academic and social advantages to being bilingual. Complex problem solving and cognitive ability has the potential to enhance both the uptake and outcome of future STEM education. Learning another language has very positive benefits for cognitive development. (See Appendix 2).

Research shows that students in gaelscoileanna achieve higher educational outcomes - e.g. higher results in English, in Maths and Irish, better communication skills, better cognitive ability etc.

There is also a direct link between the areas with the highest number of Irish speakers in the census and the areas in which there are gaelcholáistí - proof that gaelcholáistí create adult Irish speakers. Bilingual children become multi-lingual a lot quicker and easier than monolingual children - if we need our children to become multi-lingual, getting them speaking their own language will facilitate the learning of the 3rd language.

Societal Demand

The 2013 Irish Language Survey asked respondents to state how important they felt it was that their children grew up with the Irish language and what they considered will happen to the Irish language in future. In the Republic of Ireland over three-in-four parents indicated that they feel it is important their child grows up with the Irish language (78 per cent).^{vii}

In the Exit Poll conducted for General Election 2024, 50 per cent of respondents said that not enough is being done to support the Irish language. The findings for young people are particularly compelling. 66 per cent of 18–24-year-olds responded that not enough is being done, and 65 per cent of 25-34 year olds.

Social Cohesion

Immersion programs can foster greater cultural understanding and community engagement and cohesion, leading to more collaborative local economies and better social capital. In addition, non-Irish origin communities will have enhanced integration prospects through bilingualism.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The capital cost of delivering 350 Irish medium schools over 20 years would not be significant. With school numbers projected to decline, existing English medium schools could be converted into Irish medium, schools at no extra cost.

If we assume that 350 new schools would have to be provided the capital costs over 20 years would be estimated at around €7 billion in today's price terms based on a 600-pupil school. Depending on timing of delivery of the schools and likely construction inflation the total cost could be around €10 billion. However, this would be the upper limit, and the likely capital expenditure required would be significantly lower assuming existing schools could be used.

It would of course be necessary to ensure that there are sufficient Irish language teachers to deliver Irish medium education. However, there would be no extra cost involved in providing the necessary teachers as no extra teachers would be required outside of the current projected demand for teachers.

The passing of primary legislation to statutorily provide for a steadily increasing level of Irish-medium immersion education would have a positive economic impact.

There would be a small potential cost related to the possible provision of new school building infrastructure, which over a 20-year period is estimated to range between zero and €10 billion. This should be put in the context of a current 5-year capital expenditure Department of Education budget of €6 billion and an annual budget (2023) of €9.6 billion. School building infrastructure has a life cycle of 50-60 years minimum, so the maximum amortised cost over the coming 20-year period is c. €2 billion.

The cost of training public servants to meet the statutory requirement that 20 per cent were proficient in Irish would be reduced to zero over a 20-year period as the increasing numbers of bilingual pupils coming through an Irish immersion education system would create the necessary pool of recruits.

The investment made by the state in Irish-medium primary school pupils, which is currently largely dissipated due to the low numbers being able to continue in post-primary immersion education, would be enhanced and reinforced and not wasted.

No research has been conducted in Ireland assessing the impact of bi-lingual skills on earnings potential. Academic research in Canada indicates that bilingual people have a minimum increased average earnings expectancy of around 5 per cent over their mono-lingual peers, which has the beneficial side-effect of increasing economic activity and associated tax base. An additional 5 per cent earnings capacity combined with steadily increasing bilingual numbers over 20 years to 20 per cent would mean that the capital investment would more than pay for itself within its lifetime.

International research has established that being bilingual has increased advantages, including lifetime cognitive benefits and delayed onset of ageing related conditions. These advantages have an economic benefit, currently unquantified.

APPENDIX 1

https://www.uoguelph.ca/news/2010/08/bilingualism_pa_1.html

Bilingualism Translates Into Higher Earnings, Study Finds

August 31, 2010 - News Release

Bilingual employees earn more than their unilingual counterparts even if they aren't using their language skills on the job, according to a new University of Guelph study. Economics professors Louis Christofides and Robert Swidinsky examined the earnings of Canadians and compared the difference in wages between bilingual and unilingual employees as well as bilingual employees who are required to speak a second language on the job.

They found that bilingual men earn 3.6 per cent and bilingual women earn 6.6 per cent more than those who speak only English, but there was no additional financial reward for bilingual employees who actually speak French in the workplace.

“In English Canada, the economic benefits of having French as a second language are associated with language knowledge rather than language use in job-related activities,” said Christofides. “It seems you don’t have to actually speak a second language on the job to reap the financial rewards of being bilingual.”

These research findings are featured in today's *Globe and Mail*.

The study, which was recently published in *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*, is the first to explore the distinction between language knowledge and language use.

To obtain their findings, the two researchers examined data from Statistics Canada's 2001 census, which for the first time asked respondents not only about their knowledge of the official languages but also about the languages used at work. This allowed Christofides and Swidinsky to compare people's use of bilingual skills with their income.

The reason bilingual employees are often paid more even though they may not actually be using their language skills could be that these skills indicate other marketable qualities, said Christofides.

“In light of the limited demand for French in the marketplace in English Canada, a possible interpretation for why bilingual employees tend to earn more money than unilingual employees is that second-language skills may indicate those individuals are stronger in unmeasured labour market characteristics such as ability, cognition, perseverance and quality education. These unmeasured characteristics can potentially have a bearing on labour productivity and increase the wages of bilingual individuals.” The two economists did find, however, that speaking a second language on the job does pay off for employees working in Quebec, where the demand for English is higher than the demand for French in the rest of Canada.

Study results show that bilingual francophone men in Quebec earn up to seven per cent more than those who speak only French, and that number increases to almost 21 per cent for those who actually speak English on the job. Results were similar but slightly lower for women.

This means that for every \$1,000 a unilingual francophone man earns in Quebec, one who knows but doesn't use English at work makes an additional \$70, and one who

knows and also uses English earns a further \$139 – a total of \$209 more than a unilingual francophone.

“In Quebec, too, a significant component of total rewards for English second-language skills is derived from language knowledge,” said Swidinsky. “However, because of the substantial demand for English in Quebec and international workplaces, an important further component of the overall return, especially for francophone men, is associated with the actual use of language in the workplace.”

The study also found that Quebec bilinguals who use both languages at work have similar earnings regardless of whether their mother tongue is French or English, he said. “In general, the study concludes that the gains from language reflect the needs of the marketplace.”

APPENDIX 2

NEUROLOGICAL BENEFITS OF LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Research results have long shown that there are cognitive, linguistic, academic and social advantages to being bilingual. Learning a language is not only a useful way of communicating with other people, but it can also have a very positive impact on the long-term health of the brain. There is considerable scientific and neurological evidence that it improves cognition, slows down ageing of the brain, increases the ability to multitask, improves decision making and increases creativity.^{viii}

The neuroscience benefits of bilingualism seem very compelling. Research was conducted on bilingual people who have two languages side by side from early childhood have been studied for decades. MRI technology allows scientists on a visual level to study the differences between monolingual and bilingual brains.^{ix}

Bilingual people have more neurons and dendrites, which is a short-branched extension of a nerve cell along which impulses received from other cells are transmitted to the cell body. This is known as ‘grey matter’, and this is more dense in bilingual subjects compared to monolingual subjects.

‘White matter’ is the system of nerve fibres which connect all four lobes of the brain and helps the brain to learn and function. Bilingual adults have increased white matter integrity compared to adults with one language.

Bilingualism is shown to result in better academic performance, improved concentration, a more powerful memory, stronger communication skills, and more creativity.

- Research in recent years has shown that the cognitive advantages last for the person’s life and can delay the onset of dementia (Bak, 2014; Bialystok, 2009; Lauchlan, Parisi, & Fadda, 2013).
- Another advantage to being bilingual is that a bilingual is familiar with two separate cultures and the different values associated with each.
- Researchers such as Cenoz & Genesee (1998) showed that bilinguals have better divergent thinking in comparison to monolinguals.
- Bilinguals are also better at problem-solving (Bialystok, 2009).
- Children who are completely bilingual are more aware of the needs of the listener compared to monolingual children (Lazaruk, 2007).
- Cenoz (2003) showed that it was easier for bilinguals to learn an additional language.
- Thomas & Collier (2001) found that the achievement of pupils in bilingual programmes was better than their monolingual peers in each subject area following 4-7 years attending a bilingual programme or an immersion education programme.

- Baker (Comhdháil Gaelscoileanna, 2008) claimed that there are disadvantages for any learner not in a bilingual system.
- Cummins (1976) proposed the threshold hypothesis when discussing the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. According to the threshold hypothesis a reasonable level of competence must be achieved in the two languages in order to benefit from the advantages.

These are just some of the advantages accruing to bilinguals evidenced in the research. The most important point concerning all-Irish schools in Ireland is that bilingualism suggests advantages rather than the opposite. The case can be made to education authorities that Irish should have a central role in a bilingual education system and that learners would benefit from it.

It is important to remember that Irish-immersion education does not come at a cost of English language development. Studies have shown that immersion students score well on both first language and second-language tasks, and neither come at a 'cost' of each other (Parsons & Lyddy, 2016).

APPENDIX 3

IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOL STATISTICS

TOTAL PUPIL NUMBERS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Primary Schools	3,240	3,240	3,241	3,240	3,231
Number of Primary Students	567,772	567,716	561,411	554,788	558,143
Number of Post-Primary Schools	722	723	730	728	727
Number of Post-Primary Students	362,899	371,450	379,184	391,698	406,392
IRISH MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOLS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Irish Medium Primary Schools	247	250	249	252	249
% of Primary Students in Irish Medium Schools	8.10%	8.10%	8.10%	8.10%	8.00%
Irish Students in Irish Medium Primary Schools	45,990	45,985	45,474	44,938	44,651
IRISH MEDIUM POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Irish Medium Post-Primary Schools	49	49	50	50	50
% of Post-Primary Students in Irish Medium Schools	3.60%	3.60%	3.70%	3.60%	3.50%
Irish Students in Irish Medium Post-Primary Schools	13,064	13,372	14,030	14,101	14,224

Source: Department of Education

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