



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022

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Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017 – 2022

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Foreword by the Minister

I am delighted to publish this *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*, which I know is keenly anticipated in Gaeltacht communities. The Government is strongly committed to strengthening Irish as a living language in the Gaeltacht. We recognise the economic, linguistic, educational and cultural importance of the Gaeltacht to the Irish people, and so strengthening the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities is a core aim of the Government's *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*. The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* sets out how the education system will support that objective.

My Department's *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* has, among its overarching goals, to improve the learning experience and success of students in languages, to support transitions, and to build stronger bridges between education and the wider community. Action 33 of this Action Plan aims to strengthen Irish-language learning in the Gaeltacht through the publication of this Policy and its implementation on a phased basis, as resources permit. In doing this work, my Department will work closely with the Department of An Taoiseach, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

If we are to secure the future of Irish as a spoken language in the Gaeltacht, we have to realise the enormous challenges faced by the language, and be realistic and ambitious in how we tackle those challenges. The decline in the use of Irish as a community language is well documented; so, too, are the challenges faced by Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings as they seek to serve children from a variety of homes, ranging from those where Irish is the family language to those where the home language may be English or another language.

My Department and I believe that the revival and maintenance of Irish is best achieved through inter-departmental, targeted supports, and collaborative networks with other Departments and agencies for the benefit of Irish-language speakers in Gaeltacht communities.

We know that schools and the education system alone cannot secure the future of the Irish language. Only speakers and communities in the Gaeltacht supported by language-planning processes can do so. We also realise that schools and educational settings have an important role to play in passing on the language to future generations, by supporting the community to use the language and appreciate the richness of their heritage, and by cultivating an awareness of the learning advantages that bilingual and multi-lingual learners possess.

This Policy challenges schools and early-years' settings in the Gaeltacht to provide high quality Irish-medium education to their learners and it commits the Government to supporting schools that accept this challenge with an appropriate range of dedicated additional resources. The Policy also recognises the need to promote innovation and recognise excellence, high achievement, and successful approaches and initiatives in schools for the benefit of students, in the context of available resources.

The research that was conducted by the Department's Inspectorate and also by academic experts to underpin this Policy has demonstrated that many Gaeltacht schools are already providing high quality Irish-medium education, but in other schools located in the Gaeltacht, Irish-medium education is either not available or only partially available. This Policy seeks to encourage as many schools as possible to provide high-quality education fully through Irish, so that Irish-medium schooling will be the preferred option for parents in the Gaeltacht.

I want to thank the many individuals and groups from Gaeltacht communities who participated in the extensive national consultation process that has informed this Policy. Many of you came to public meetings held in the Gaeltacht, you participated in several meetings with my Department officials, you made over 550 written and on-line submissions, and all of you shared with us your experience and concerns regarding educational provision in the Gaeltacht. Your involvement has been invaluable and demonstrates the enormous importance that Gaeltacht communities attach to the language and to high-quality educational provision.

My Department and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you as we work together to realise the ambitious vision and goal that we have set ourselves to secure and improve education in the Gaeltacht in the years ahead.

Richard Bruton TD

Minister for Education and Skills

October 2016

Executive Summary

Why is a Policy on Gaeltacht Education needed?

Maintaining and securing the vitality of Gaeltacht areas as the home of Irish-speaking communities is of enormous social, linguistic, educational, cultural and economic importance. This *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* sets out how the education system will contribute to supporting and promoting the future use of Irish as a living indigenous language in the Gaeltacht.

It is clear that schools in Gaeltacht areas face considerable challenges. Work on this Policy began with reviews of national and international research, and a number of case studies on Gaeltacht schools undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. This work reveals the stark challenges faced by primary and post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. Students come from homes with very varied levels of Irish-language skill. There is an increasing use of English in Gaeltacht communities and children raised through Irish are in the minority in Gaeltacht schools.

The research also showed that the socio-linguistic context of Gaeltacht schools is complex and differs widely depending on the status of the language within the local community, social and demographic factors and the proportion of people who speak Irish on a daily basis. While the majority of schools in the Gaeltacht provide Irish-medium education, a considerable number do not provide education wholly through the medium of Irish. Yet, the Education Act, 1998, highlights the responsibilities of schools in Gaeltacht areas to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language.

The need for a strategic response and sustained action to address the linguistic challenges facing the Gaeltacht is clear. For these reasons, the Government determined that a specific *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*, containing targeted measures to improve Irish-medium educational provision, was required. This Policy has been developed by the Department of Education and Skills following an extensive public consultation process, involving not only Gaeltacht communities, but also many organisations that work in the Gaeltacht.

The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* and the measures it contains will help to fulfil the ambition in the Government's *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* to maintain and extend the use of Irish as a spoken language. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and this *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* have been developed in collaboration with the Interdepartmental Group led by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and under the guidance of the Cabinet Committee on Arts, Irish and the Gaeltacht chaired by An Taoiseach. There was further collaboration through a High Level Group comprising officials of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Action 33 of the Department's *Action Plan for Education 2016 -2019* aims to strengthen Irish-language learning in the Gaeltacht through the publication of this *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* and its implementation on a phased basis, as resources permit. The Department will work closely with the Department of An Taoiseach, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to implement the actions in this Policy.

A vision for Gaeltacht education

The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* recognises the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht as an area of significant linguistic, cultural and economic importance. It is an irreplaceable resource for speakers and learners of Irish. The Department's Policy reaffirms the Government's commitment to the regeneration and survival of the Gaeltacht as a viable Irish-speaking entity.

The Policy recognises the role that schools and early-years' settings play in providing high quality Irish-medium education and in fostering Irish-language proficiency and usage in the wider Gaeltacht community. The confidence and support of parents and the local community for the work of schools and early-years' settings in Gaeltacht areas are critical.

The Policy is designed to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for young people in the Gaeltacht. The Policy values and promotes quality in the education system in the Gaeltacht and its actions are grounded on the principles of effective self-evaluation, improvement, collaboration and partnership.

The Policy aims to build on the advantages and linguistic strengths which exist in the Gaeltacht in conjunction with local language-planning processes. It seeks to strengthen Irish-medium educational provision through a range of actions and targeted supports in the Gaeltacht.

The overarching goal of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

The overarching goal of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for all young people living in Gaeltacht areas and in this way to support the use of Irish as the main language of families and of Gaeltacht communities. Specifically, the Policy aims to ensure that a sufficient number of schools and early-years' settings use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all areas of learning (apart from English and other languages), in each of the Language-Planning Areas within the Gaeltacht (as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012). This will involve:

- Supporting and improving the quality of Irish-medium instruction in Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings, so as to ensure that Irish-medium instruction is the first choice of parents in each of the Gaeltacht areas
- Supporting appropriate Irish-medium educational provision for children and young people who are being raised through Irish
- Increasing the proportion of schools and early-years' settings that operate solely through the medium of Irish so that all students have access to Irish-medium instruction¹
- Fostering innovation and excellence in the delivery of Irish-medium education and in schools' linkages with Gaeltacht communities through the recognition of Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*) that may share their practices with other schools and become involved in leading communities of practice.

The Policy will be successful if it ensures that all children in the Gaeltacht have ready access to schools and early-years' settings that use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all subjects, and that support the use of Irish in their communities.

¹ Currently, 76% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas self-report that they operate solely through the medium of Irish. It is also known that 46% of publicly funded early-years settings in the Gaeltacht operate through the medium of Irish.

Gaeltacht School Recognition Process

Under the Policy, schools will be invited to seek recognition as a Gaeltacht school. To achieve Gaeltacht school recognition, schools will be required to operate entirely through the medium of Irish, (apart from the English and other language curricula), in accordance with language-based criteria set out in Table 1 of this Policy. For example, these Gaeltacht schools will:

- Implement a two-year total-immersion programme in the infant cycle in all Gaeltacht primary schools, during which no English will be taught
- Extend the availability of a full curriculum through Irish for students in post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht by moving towards a total-immersion approach where all subjects, apart from the English and other language curricula, will be taught through Irish
- Focus particular attention on the differentiated language needs of native Irish speakers as well as learners of Irish
- Provide equal opportunities for those in remote Gaeltacht schools through online and blended-learning programmes
- Support their school communities in the language-planning process by contributing to the use and maintenance of Irish in the school and local Gaeltacht community.
- Participate in the language-planning process, as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Further details of criteria for recognition as Gaeltacht Schools are outlined in Table 1 in Section 1 of the Policy. Schools will be able to achieve this recognition through a staged, incremental process over a period of five years.

Schools that commit to becoming Gaeltacht Schools will, through their self-evaluation processes, develop an Action Plan that will demonstrate clearly how the school will fulfil the requirements of the recognition process in a staged way and how it will build linkages with its local community to foster the use of the Irish language.

Schools, whose application to participate in the Gaeltacht Schools recognition process is approved, will be granted additional teaching and/or other resources, including dedicated continuing professional development (CPD), on a staged basis, as the recognition process commences and as each stage of it is successfully achieved.

In addition, recognised Gaeltacht schools will also have an opportunity to work towards becoming Irish-medium Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence / *Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais* in conjunction with current and new award programmes.

The Policy notes the importance of early-childhood provision and envisages that supports will be provided by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Udarás na Gaeltachta to improve urgently the availability of high quality early-years' education through Irish in the Gaeltacht.

Actions to support the implementation of the Policy

The Policy recognises that a specialised and specific range of supports is required to develop the capacity of Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings to ensure that the overall vision of providing high quality Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht is reached.

These supports are set out under the seven pillars of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*, and the details are outlined in Section 5 of this document.

The seven pillars of dedicated support in the Policy are:

1. Strengthening the structure of educational provision
2. Improving the quality of teaching through Irish
3. Building the capacity of school leaders and school management
4. Improving the curriculum for Irish
5. Improving language resources and supports
6. Strengthening early-years' educational provision
7. Building awareness, communicating with and supporting parents.

Dedicated structures

A new dedicated Gaeltacht Unit will be established in the Department to oversee and support the implementation of the Policy to ensure a quality Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht for young people. The Gaeltacht Unit will be assisted by the Department's Inspectorate who will support schools, monitor and report on the impact of the Policy. In their support work with schools, the Inspectorate will work closely with COGG and with the school and leadership support services that will cooperate with COGG.

The Department will also allocate additional resources to COGG to develop quality learning resources and oversee specific actions within the Policy that will assist in further developing high quality Irish-medium education and Irish-language teaching, thereby ensuring that schools are well equipped to meet the needs of both their teachers and students.

The Inspectorate and the Educational Research Centre (ERC) will collaborate on the overall evaluation of the impact of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*.

1. Introduction

Successive Governments have recognised the linguistic, economic and cultural importance of the Gaeltacht. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* reaffirms the Government's commitment to the regeneration and survival of the Gaeltacht as a viable Irish-speaking entity. The Department of Education and Skills (the Department) collaborates with other Departments and agencies in delivering on this commitment. The *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* has prioritised the publication of this *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*.

Vision for Gaeltacht education

The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* recognises the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht as an area of significant linguistic, cultural and economic importance. It is an irreplaceable resource for speakers and learners of Irish. The Department's Policy reaffirms the Government's commitment to the regeneration and survival of the Gaeltacht as a viable Irish-speaking entity.

The Policy recognises the role that schools and early-years' settings play in providing high quality Irish-medium education for young people and in fostering Irish-language proficiency and usage in the wider Gaeltacht community. The confidence and support of parents and the local community for the work of schools and early-years' settings in Gaeltacht areas are critical.

The Policy is designed to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for young people in the Gaeltacht. The Policy values and promotes quality in the education system in the Gaeltacht and its actions are grounded on the principles of effective self-evaluation, improvement, collaboration and partnership.

The Policy aims to build on the advantages and linguistic strengths which exist in the Gaeltacht in conjunction with local language-planning processes. It seeks to strengthen Irish-medium educational provision through a range of actions and targeted supports in the Gaeltacht.

The overarching goal of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

The overarching goal of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for all young people living in Gaeltacht areas and in this way to support the use of Irish as the main language of families and of Gaeltacht communities. Specifically, the Policy aims to ensure that a sufficient number of schools and early-years settings use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all areas of learning (apart from the English and other language curricula), in each of the Language-Planning Areas within the Gaeltacht (as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012). This will involve:

- Supporting and improving the quality of Irish-medium instruction in Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings, so as to ensure that Irish-medium instruction is the first choice of parents in each of the Gaeltacht areas
- Supporting appropriate Irish-medium educational provision for children and young people who are being raised through Irish
- Increasing the proportion of schools and early-years' settings that operate solely through the medium of Irish so that all students in the Gaeltacht have access to Irish-medium instruction²

² Currently, 76% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas self-report that they operate solely through the medium of Irish. It is also known that 46% of publicly funded early-years' settings in the Gaeltacht operate through the medium of Irish.

- Fostering innovation and excellence in the delivery of Irish-medium education and in schools' linkages with Gaeltacht communities through the recognition of Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*) that may share their practices with other schools and become involved in leading communities of practice.

The Policy will be successful if it ensures that all children in the Gaeltacht have ready access to schools and early-years' settings that use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all subjects, and that support the use of Irish in their communities.

Gaeltacht School Recognition Process

Under the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*, schools located in the Gaeltacht will be invited to apply for recognition as Gaeltacht schools. To achieve Gaeltacht school recognition, schools will be required to operate entirely through the medium of Irish, apart from the English and other language curricula, in accordance with language-based criteria, as set out in Table 1. Schools will be enabled to achieve this recognition through a staged, incremental process over a period of five years.

Schools that commit to becoming Gaeltacht Schools will, through their self-evaluation processes, develop an Action Plan that will demonstrate clearly how the school will fulfil the requirements of the recognition process in a staged way and how it will build linkages with its local community to foster the use of the Irish language.

Schools, whose application to participate in the Gaeltacht Schools recognition process is approved, will be granted additional teaching and/or other resources, including dedicated CPD, on a staged basis, as the recognition process commences and as each stage of it is successfully achieved.

In addition, recognised Gaeltacht schools will also have an opportunity to work towards becoming Irish-medium Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*) in conjunction with current and new award programmes.

Table 1: Criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht School

<p>A recognised Gaeltacht School will be expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At primary level, implement a two-year full-immersion programme through Irish in the infant cycle, during which no English will be taught • At primary level, implement a total-immersion approach, where all areas of learning, apart from English, will be taught through Irish • At post-primary level, extend the availability of a full curriculum through Irish, apart from the English and other language curricula, as the Gaeltacht school moves towards a total-immersion approach • Deliver high quality educational experiences through Irish to all students focusing particular attention on the differentiated language needs of native Irish speakers³ as well as learners of Irish • Develop an Action Plan that will articulate how the school will ensure the use of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation within the school and will communicate and promote the benefits of learning Irish and learning through Irish to students, parents and the school community
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³ A native speaker of Irish is defined as a child who is raised through Irish in an Irish-language community and whose parents speak Irish as the main language of communication in the home, such being declared at the point of enrolment for school.

- Review the quality of Irish-medium educational provision to ensure continuous improvement using the school self-evaluation (SSE) process
- At primary level, provide Irish-language learning experiences in accordance with the L1 learning outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools
- At post-primary level, implement L1 specifications for Irish at junior cycle and senior cycle, when such are available⁴, and encourage their uptake by students, particularly native speakers of Irish
- Use Irish-language materials to support the teaching of all curricular areas through Irish, apart from English and foreign languages
- Deliver curricular, co-curricular activities, and where relevant, extra-curricular activities through Irish
- Support their school community in the language-planning process by contributing to the use and maintenance of Irish in the school and local Gaeltacht community
- Prioritise the use of Irish in communicating with parents, the local community and other parties
- At primary level, establish useful and mutually beneficial language and cultural links with the local *naíonraí*
- At post-primary level, establish useful and mutually beneficial language and educational links with local Irish-medium primary and/or post-primary schools by utilising online and blended-learning opportunities
- Make every effort to recruit teaching and ancillary staff that are proficient in Irish, and have a knowledge and understanding of pedagogical practice relevant to teaching through Irish as well as an understanding of the language and cultural dynamics of the Gaeltacht.

The Policy recognises that a specialised and specific range of supports is required to develop the capacity of Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings to ensure that the overall vision of providing high quality Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht is reached.

The Policy vision, pillar actions and supports will be achieved by a process of recognising a Gaeltacht school into the future on the basis of each school agreeing to adopt a set of criteria on the basis of language, as outlined in Table 1 of the Policy, that includes their community participating in the language-planning process, as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

These dedicated supports are set out under the seven pillars of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* as listed in Table 2. The additional actions to complement each of the seven pillars of support are outlined in Section 5 of the Policy.

⁴ The Minister for Education and Skills has requested the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to develop separate L1 and L2 specifications for Irish at junior cycle. It is expected that these specifications will be implemented from September 2017. Work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools.

Table 2: Support Pillars of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

Support Pillar 1	Strengthening the structure of educational provision
Support Pillar 2	Improving the quality of teaching through Irish
Support Pillar 3	Building the capacity of school leaders and school management
Support Pillar 4	Improving the curriculum for Irish
Support Pillar 5	Improving language resources and supports
Support Pillar 6	Strengthening early-years' educational provision
Support Pillar 7	Building awareness, communicating with, and supporting parents

Will there be additional resources available to schools? _____

- Schools seeking to achieve Gaeltacht recognition status will be granted an initial tranche of additional resources for a period of three years.
- During that period, they will engage in school self-evaluation processes to develop and begin the implementation of a school-improvement plan to support the provision of quality Irish-medium education
- Schools that can demonstrate sufficient progress by the end of a three-year period will retain their additional resources and will be granted a new tranche of resources for a further two-year period.
- Schools that fulfil the criteria listed in Table 1 will be recognised as Gaeltacht schools. They will retain this recognition while they continue to fulfil the criteria.
- Schools will also have an opportunity to work towards becoming Irish-medium Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*) in conjunction with current and new award programmes.

How will this new Gaeltacht School recognition scheme be administered and overseen? _____

- A new dedicated Gaeltacht Unit will be established in the Department to oversee and support the implementation of the Policy.
- A dedicated team of inspectors will be assigned to support the implementation of the Policy in Gaeltacht schools. They will engage with Gaeltacht schools regarding the targets and actions schools have included in their language improvement plans, they will advise the leadership and teachers in the schools, and they will confirm the school's achievement of the criteria for Gaeltacht School status. The inspectors will work closely with staff from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and the various school support services, that will work with COGG, (including the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the Inclusion Support Service, the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and the Centre for School Leadership) to ensure an integrated approach to supporting improvement in the schools.
- COGG will be given additional resources to assist in supporting and resourcing schools to successfully implement the Policy.
- The Inspectorate and the Educational Research Centre (ERC) will undertake overall evaluation of the impact of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*.

2. Background – Why is Change Needed?

We must maintain and revitalise the Irish language

The continued existence of areas where Irish prevails as the language of the family and the community is an important cornerstone for the maintenance and revitalisation of the Irish language. As an Irish-speaking entity and as the heartland of native speakers of Irish, the Gaeltacht provides an environment where the language can evolve naturally in a modern context. The Gaeltacht is also a unique and irreplaceable resource for speakers and learners of Irish from outside the Gaeltacht. The linguistic and cultural landscape in Ireland would be greatly impoverished by the absence of vibrant Irish-speaking communities in Gaeltacht areas.

Irish as a family and community language in Gaeltacht areas is very fragile

The stark reality is that the status of Irish as a family and community language in Gaeltacht areas is very fragile. In some areas, Irish is no longer the language of the family and the community. Unless immediate action is taken, it is likely that this will increasingly be the case across all Gaeltacht areas. A report published by Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2015 on the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, *Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: 2006-2011* [Comprehensive Linguistic Study on the Usage of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006-2011], concluded that as things stood, Irish would not survive as the language of the community in any Gaeltacht area beyond the next ten years.

Education can play a role

There is widespread recognition that the educational system can play a key role, albeit together with other domains, in supporting the use of Irish as the language of the family and the community in Gaeltacht areas. The Education Act, 1998, highlights the responsibilities of schools in Gaeltacht areas to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and the language-planning processes taking place under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 also highlight the role of Gaeltacht schools in fostering Irish-language competence and usage in support of the language in the wider Gaeltacht community. The provision of Irish-medium education that is of a high quality and relevant to the needs of students is critical in this regard.

Early-years' education through Irish has an important contribution to make

There is also widespread recognition of the important contribution that early-years' education through Irish can make to the revitalisation of the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas, particularly with regard to supporting families who are raising their children through Irish. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* gives a commitment to the provision of Irish-medium early-years' educational settings (*naíonraí*) in every area where there is an Irish-medium primary school, and in other areas where there is a demand for such.

Status of Irish in schools located in the Gaeltacht currently is under threat

Mirroring the situation in the wider Gaeltacht community, the status of Irish is also under threat in schools located in Gaeltacht areas. While it is acknowledged that Irish-language usage and competence among young people would be considerably diminished in the absence of the contribution of schools, Gaeltacht schools are challenged in their capacity to maintain the use of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and

socialisation in the school context. 102 of the 134 primary mainstream schools (76%)⁵ and 19 out of the 28 post-primary schools (68%)⁶ located in Gaeltacht areas report that they teach the curriculum fully through Irish. In the early-years' sector, 59 of the 127 settings in the Gaeltacht are Irish-medium and supported by Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta⁷.

Challenges for Gaeltacht schools

The challenges facing Gaeltacht schools include linguistic diversity among students, a decline in the numbers of native speakers, a decline in the use of and proficiency in Irish among learners, the small size of schools, the lack of availability of teachers with proficiency in Irish to deliver the curriculum through Irish, and conflicting demands from parents. There can be a tension for schools in reconciling their responsibilities to meet the educational and language needs of students and supporting the use of the language in the community. It is evident that schools require clear and coherent direction as well as comprehensive support if they are to support Irish-language usage in their local Gaeltacht communities, meet the educational and linguistic needs of their students, and overcome the many challenges that constrain their capacity to do so.

Vibrant Irish-speaking communities contribute to the economy of the Gaeltacht

The maintenance of Gaeltacht areas as vibrant Irish-speaking communities and the attraction that this has for Irish-language speakers and learners makes a significant contribution to the economy of Gaeltacht communities. However, Gaeltacht areas also have many economic challenges as evidenced in high levels of emigration and lack of employment opportunities. These challenges have impacted on the reproduction and sustainability of Irish-speaking social and cultural networks within Gaeltacht areas. It is important in this context that Gaeltacht schools meet the needs of the learners, not just in their Gaeltacht communities, but also in the wider national context. The provision of a broad and balanced education through Irish that is forward-looking and progressive will be critical in this regard.

Extensive research and consultation underpin this Policy

This *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* sets out the vision of the Department for the provision of a quality education through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and the commitments of the Department for the realisation of that vision for the period 2017-2022. The Policy is informed by extensive research and consultation with a range of educational and Irish-language stakeholders, both at national level and in Gaeltacht communities⁸. In recognition of the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht as a linguistic and cultural entity, the increasingly fragile status of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and schools, and the experiences of other countries and regions associated with lesser-used languages, the Policy contains a range of positive interventions and supports that are specific to the needs of Gaeltacht schools and communities. These measures will necessitate the provision of additional resources that will be ring-fenced for schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools. The five-year time-frame for the implementation of the Policy takes account of the need for immediate action if the Gaeltacht, as an Irish speaking entity, is to survive.

⁵ Statistics are based on an analysis of 2015/2016 Gaeltacht primary school returns. The special education school located in the Gaeltacht is not included in this statistic.

⁶ This statistic is based on an analysis of 2015/2016 post-primary school returns.

⁷ Based on *Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta* statistics (2015).

⁸ The research and consultation documentation that informed the development of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education can be accessed on the website of the Department of Education and Skills at www.education.gov.ie

3. Vision for Gaeltacht Education

Quality Irish-medium education – Commitment of the Department of Education and Skills

The Department is committed to the provision of a quality Irish-medium education in areas that are recognised as Gaeltacht areas in accordance with the planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. The Department recognises the respective roles of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) and Údarás na Gaeltachta in overseeing and supporting the implementation of the language-planning processes by communities in individual Gaeltacht Language-Planning Areas and in supporting early-years' educational provision through Irish in such Gaeltacht areas.

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 – Commitment of Government to the Gaeltacht

The Department is committed to the implementation of the educational measures in the Government's *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* that support the promotion of Irish as a living language in Gaeltacht areas. These educational measures are incorporated into this Policy. The Department acknowledges that the status of the Irish language in school provision is core to the support of Irish-language usage in Gaeltacht communities and the language-planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Needs of both native speakers and learners of Irish must be addressed

The Department believes that quality language learning and Irish-medium educational provision in Gaeltacht schools are essential to support the effective acquisition of Irish amongst all students, both native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish, to support Irish-language use among students within the school and the community context, and to enable all students to reach their full potential educationally. The quality of the Irish-medium education provided is also critical to winning the confidence and support of all parents, both Irish-speaking and English-speaking, for progressing the work of the school through Irish, and for supporting Gaeltacht parents who choose to raise and educate their children through Irish.

The Department is committed to ensuring that differentiated support is provided for the Irish-language development and socialisation of native speakers within the schooling system in Gaeltacht areas. Such support will include ensuring that the curriculum for Irish meets the needs of native Irish-language speakers and that discrete language-enrichment supports are provided for them, as well as for learners of Irish.

The Department acknowledges that the contribution of the formal education system in itself is not sufficient to ensure Irish-language usage in Gaeltacht communities and that action is also required in other domains, and particularly at community level, to reinforce the work of schools and early-years' settings, in supporting the use of Irish. The importance of engagement with family, community, education, social, business and public affair domains in strengthening language usage is given recognition in the language-planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Policy on Gaeltacht Education complements the Language-Planning Process

The Department's *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* will complement language measures in Gaeltacht communities, support collaboration between Gaeltacht schools and their local communities, and stimulate action and participation at local level. In particular, it will complement the language-planning processes that are being implemented by Gaeltacht communities.

4. Defining the Gaeltacht School Recognition Process

Current situation

A Gaeltacht school is currently defined on the basis of geographical location in a recognised Gaeltacht area in accordance with the Gaeltacht boundaries, first defined under the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 1956 and last amended in 1982. Practice with regard to the use of Irish as the language of communication and instruction varies considerably among schools located in Gaeltacht areas as currently defined, particularly in light of the significant variance in patterns of Irish-language use in communities across such areas.

Gaeltacht School recognition criteria - New definition and model

The Gaeltacht Act, 2012, which provides for a redefinition of Gaeltacht areas based on language criteria instead of geography, creates an environment that is conducive to the development of a more meaningful definition of what constitutes a Gaeltacht school and the introduction of a dynamic process for the recognition of such schools.

In future, a school located in the Gaeltacht will be eligible to seek recognition as a Gaeltacht School on the basis of implementing specific language criteria, set out in Table 1 in Section 1 of this Policy, and on condition that it is participating in the language-planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

The total-immersion educational model through Irish to be delivered in recognised primary and post-primary Gaeltacht schools will clarify expectations in relation to language and educational practice across such schools. The model provides for both native speakers and learners of Irish and has the advantage of allowing all children in a local community to access education in their local Irish-medium school while attending to the specific needs of young native-speakers of Irish. It also reflects the findings of research as well as best practice in Gaeltacht schools. The total-immersion educational model through Irish was also overwhelmingly endorsed during the consultation with stakeholders on Gaeltacht education.

Gaeltacht School Recognition Process

The process of recognising Gaeltacht schools will complement the implementation of the language-planning processes in local communities that are taking place under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. Such language-planning processes will have commenced in all 26 Language-Planning Areas by the end of 2016⁹.

A Circular will issue to individual schools, in the first half of 2017, inviting them to apply to the Department for recognition as a Gaeltacht School in accordance with the language criteria set out by the Department in Table 1.

Following a period of consultation with their respective local communities, and in association with the language-planning process in Gaeltacht areas led by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA), all schools located in the Gaeltacht will respond to the invitation.

⁹ A list of the 26 Language-Planning Areas in the Gaeltacht is available on the website of Údarás na Gaeltachta at <http://www.udaras.ie/en/limisteir-pleanala-teanga-ghaeltachta>

Based on a staged-progression model, schools located in the Gaeltacht will be given a five-year period from September 2017, by which to gain full recognition as Irish-medium Gaeltacht Schools. This staged approach will contribute to and operate alongside the language-planning process in Gaeltacht areas led by the DAHRRGA.

On a staged incremental basis, additional resources and supports will be made available to primary and post-primary schools opting for recognition as Gaeltacht Schools, in line with the criteria set out in Table 1, and subject to an assessment of each Gaeltacht school's action plan and a review of how effectively resources are used by schools to improve Irish-medium education.

Schools seeking to achieve Gaeltacht school status will be granted an initial tranche of additional resources for a period of three years. During that period, they will engage in school self-evaluation processes to develop and begin the implementation of a school-improvement plan to support the provision of quality Irish-medium education.

Schools that can demonstrate sufficient progress by the end of a three-year period will retain their additional resources and will be granted a new tranche of resources for a further two-year period. Schools that fulfil all of the criteria will be granted Gaeltacht School status at the end of the five-year period.

The new recognition process for Gaeltacht Schools is a dynamic process that will support active involvement by members of school communities in collaboration with their local community in reflecting on, making decisions about and improving the status of Irish in the work of the school and in the quality of the educational provision through Irish provided by the school.

Schools in transition

English-medium schools or schools that practise partial-immersion or a bilingual approach, that are situated in language-planning areas, will be facilitated to move, on a phased basis, to a total-immersion approach through Irish in order to gain recognition as a Gaeltacht school. This transition will be within a timeframe to be agreed with the Department in accordance with guidelines from the Department and the availability of resources. Such a transition, once commenced, will normally take four to five years in the case of primary schools. In the case of post-primary schools, the phasing-in period will include options such as the establishment of an Irish-medium unit as an interim measure to provide Irish-medium education on the understanding that it has the potential for establishment as a stand-alone school in the medium to long-term. Schools in the Gaeltacht that are in transition will become eligible for additional funds and access to dedicated supports for Irish-medium education on the basis of preparation and implementation by the school of an action plan that outlines the measures that it is taking to strengthen Irish-medium education and to facilitate transition to a total-immersion approach within the timeframe agreed with the Department.

Non-participation in the recognition process

As the school recognition process is dynamic, and action by schools to apply for recognition as Gaeltacht Schools is based on decisions at local level, the situation may arise that an individual school, following consultation with its community, may opt not to participate in the process for recognition as Gaeltacht Schools. This may occur in instances where Irish is no longer the main medium of instruction in the school and English is predominantly the language of the community, and those from the community who wish to avail of Irish-medium education have alternative access within the language-planning area. Such a decision must be relayed to the Department of Education and Skills by the board of management.

Where a school's board of management, following consultation with their school community (parents, teachers, patron) and local language-planning committee, decides that they do not wish to commit to recognition as a

Gaeltacht school, these schools, although physically situated in the Gaeltacht, will be recognised as English-medium schools.

Focus of the Department's Policy

Parallel provision of Irish-medium and English-medium educational provision is already available in some Gaeltacht areas, particularly those that are immediately adjacent to areas not designated as within the boundaries of the Gaeltacht. It is not intended during the lifetime of this Policy to extend parallel provision to Gaeltacht areas where such is not currently available. The focus of the Department's Policy will be on strengthening Irish-medium education in existing schools in a manner that will provide for the differing and distinctive needs of both native speakers and learners of Irish. The option of parallel provision will be reviewed upon implementation of the Policy.

Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*)

Recognised Gaeltacht schools will also have an opportunity to work towards becoming Irish-medium Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (*Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais*) in conjunction with current and new award programmes. These schools will be particularly innovative in the ways in which they provide high-quality Irish-medium education and in the ways in which they will link with their local communities. A key objective in identifying such schools will be to acknowledge innovative practices and to seek to disseminate them to other schools. These Gaeltacht schools will have opportunities to share their practices with other schools and they may become involved in leading communities of practice.

5. Model of Support

Gaeltacht Schools will require significant support if they are to address the many challenges that they face and if they are to provide an Irish-medium education of the highest quality to their students in accordance with the criteria set out in Table 1.

Integrated model of support for recognised Gaeltacht schools

An integrated model of support which includes positive interventions and supports at school, community and system level will be available to schools that are recognised as Gaeltacht Schools. Such dedicated supports will require considerable investment and will be ring-fenced for delivery in the Gaeltacht education context in light of the unique linguistic and cultural importance associated with Gaeltacht areas as Irish speaking communities and the unprecedented challenges facing the status of Irish as the language of the community in Gaeltacht areas. Only schools, that are recognised as Gaeltacht schools or schools located in Gaeltacht-planning areas that have clearly committed to transition to recognition as a Gaeltacht school implementing a total-immersion educational approach through Irish, will have access to the supports available in the integrated model of support.

Supports available to individual schools that are recognised as Gaeltacht schools, or participating in the Gaeltacht school recognition process, will include:

- Access to additional teaching staff for the purposes of language support, including differentiated support to assist with the language enrichment of native speakers

- The opportunity to avail of additional teaching resources through the placement, on an ex-quota basis, of newly-qualified graduates, for one year, from Irish-medium initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Gaeltacht primary and post-primary schools
- Additional funding for schools to support the roll out and implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* and the Gaeltacht school recognition process at school level in accordance with specific criteria as set out in Table 1. This will take account of the size of the school, current staff allocation, the school's language profile and needs, socio-economic context, proportion of staff that have attained qualifications that are related to Irish-medium education, and levels of progress and commitment to the Irish language
- Access to dedicated professional development opportunities, overseen by COGG, for teachers and principals to build capacity and support the implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*.

An independent appeals process will be put into place whereby schools can appeal how additional resources are allocated and deployed.

The Seven Support Pillars

The seven pillars of the integrated model of support outlined in Table 2 reflect the key drivers identified during the Department's review of Gaeltacht education and in the consultation with stakeholders who are critical to the delivery of a quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools. Each of the pillars complement, work in tandem and concurrently with each other.

5.1. SUPPORT PILLAR 1: Strengthening the structure of educational provision

Current educational context in the Gaeltacht

All educational provision at primary level and most provision at post-primary level in Gaeltacht areas is currently accommodated in stand-alone schools. In a few instances, provision for Irish-medium education at post-primary level is accommodated in Irish-medium units, either directly attached to an English-medium parent school or remotely attached to an Irish-medium parent school.

Strengthening educational provision in Gaeltacht primary schools

The current configuration of educational provision in the Gaeltacht presents particular challenges at both levels. The large proportion of small Gaeltacht schools, particularly at primary level, presents management and administrative difficulties at school level that include the formation of boards of management with the appropriate range of skills.

There is a need to explore the potential for reconfiguring the many small primary schools in the Gaeltacht in the interest of leveraging the resources that are available and strengthening their capacity to deliver Irish-medium education and support Irish-language usage. One option will be consideration of how the shared governance concept¹⁰ that was established on a pilot basis and set out in the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019* (DES, 2015) can be developed to include discrete administrative, management and planning structures that are specific to the needs of schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools. Such consideration will involve consultation with relevant stakeholders including school patrons and, where practicable, the extension of the pilot.

¹⁰ The shared governance concept that has been piloted involved the same set of board members populating the boards of management of two schools under the same patronage.

Strengthening provision in Gaeltacht post-primary schools

At post-primary level, students who attend small Gaeltacht schools have access to a limited range of subject options, particularly for the Leaving Certificate. Irish-medium units have a number of limitations, especially if directly attached to an English-medium parent school. These limitations include challenges in achieving a clear language identity, constraints on extending students' use of Irish, reduced choice of subjects, lack of access to subjects through Irish, and challenges in sustaining enrolment.

The potential for enhancing access to broader Irish-medium curricular provision at post-primary level lies in the information and communications technology (ICT) domain. The establishment of hub or e-schools with virtual classrooms in existing schools connected to a number of small Irish-medium schools or Irish-medium units in Gaeltacht areas would help to extend the range of curricular choices available to students, particularly at senior cycle, in these schools.

Other options for strengthening the capacity of Irish-medium units include, where feasible, the accommodation of the unit in a separate building to the parent school, linking the unit to an Irish-medium parent school, making Irish available through the full post-primary cycle, and linking the unit to a hub school for extension of subject provision at senior cycle. The implementation of such options will be contingent on the sociolinguistic context of the unit, whether it is directly attached to an English-medium parent school or remotely attached to an Irish-medium parent school or whether stand-alone Irish-medium provision is already available in the area. The feasibility of such options will be assessed by the Department in each of the three existing Irish-medium units that are currently operating in Gaeltacht areas.

The provision of Irish-medium units, in addition to those already available in Gaeltacht areas, will only be considered where there is clear evidence in terms of projected enrolment and their potential for development as stand-alone Irish-medium schools. Such new units will therefore be established on a transitional basis only.

The Policy will deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 1 to strengthen the structure of educational provision.

Table 3: Support Pillar 1: Goal to strengthen the structure of educational provision

SUPPORT PILLAR 1: Strengthening the structure of educational provision			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Strengthening the structure of educational provision	Ensuring the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium education at early-years, primary and post-primary levels in each of the Gaeltacht language-planning areas and in this way to support the use of Irish as the main language of families and of Gaeltacht communities	Ensuring that high-quality and relevant Irish-medium education is available to students in each of the Gaeltacht planning areas through recognised Gaeltacht primary schools and through recognised Gaeltacht post-primary schools (or through an e-school model) by 2022. This will involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting and improving the quality of Irish-medium instruction in Gaeltacht schools and early-years' settings, so as to ensure that Irish-medium instruction is the first choice of parents in each of the Gaeltacht areas 	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit) DCYA DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta

Strengthening the structure of educational provision		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting appropriate Irish-medium educational provision for children and young people who are being raised through Irish • Increasing the proportion of schools and early-years' settings that operate solely through the medium of Irish so that all students in the Gaeltacht have access to Irish-medium instruction¹¹ • Fostering innovation and excellence in the delivery of Irish-medium education and in schools' linkages with Gaeltacht communities through the recognition of Gaeltacht Schools of Excellence (<i>Scoileanna Gaeltachta Barr Feabhais</i>) that may share their practices with other schools and become involved in leading communities of practice. 	
	Providing additional funding to Gaeltacht schools to support the roll out and implementation of the <i>Policy on Gaeltacht Education</i> through the Gaeltacht School recognition process at school level in accordance with specific criteria (e.g. language of instruction, school size, proportion of staff that has attained ITE or post-graduate qualifications in Irish-medium education)	Supporting the Gaeltacht school recognition process and phased allocation of dedicated funding to roll out and implement the <i>Policy on Gaeltacht Education</i> through the Gaeltacht School recognition process at school level in accordance the specific criteria	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit)
	Exploring the potential for reconfiguring the many small schools in the Gaeltacht	Considering the potential for development of the shared governance concept that was established on a pilot basis and set out in the <i>Governance Manual for Primary Schools</i> (DES 2015).	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit; Schools Capital Appraisal Unit; Forward Planning Section; Teacher Allocation and School Governance Section) School patrons

¹¹ Currently, 76% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas self-report that they operate solely through the medium of Irish. It is also known that 46% of publicly funded early-years' settings operate through the medium of Irish.

Strengthening the structure of educational provision	Exploring the potential for the establishment of a hub school or e-school with virtual classrooms as an option for extending the range of curricular choices available to students in small post-primary schools	Establishing a pilot hub post-primary school in a large Gaeltacht school that is connected to a number of smaller post-primary schools and to include one Irish-medium unit at least	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit; Schools Capital Appraisal & Forward Planning Sections; TES) PDST Technology in Education
	Strengthening Irish-medium educational provision in the 3 Irish-language Units (<i>Aonaid</i>) attached to post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht, where feasible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodating the Irish-medium unit in a separate building to the parent school • linking the unit to an Irish-medium parent school • exploring the potential of the virtual classroom to extend subject provision at senior cycle • making Irish-medium provision available through the full post-primary cycle in the Irish-medium unit 	Carrying out a review of the potential for implementation of these measures in each of the Irish-medium units (3 in total) currently available at post-primary level and implement as appropriate	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit; Schools' Capital Appraisal Section and Forward Planning Section, TES) PDST Technology in Education

5.2. SUPPORT PILLAR 2: Improving the quality of teaching through Irish

Irish-language proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and language-immersion skills

Teaching quality is critical to the provision of high quality learning experiences through Irish for students in Gaeltacht areas in two respects. Firstly, it is essential that teachers in Gaeltacht schools have high levels of competence in the Irish language, particularly for the purpose of providing enriched language input for all pupils, including native speakers of Irish, and delivering the curriculum effectively through Irish. Secondly, it is important that teachers have the necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills to deliver the curriculum through Irish in the Gaeltacht educational context. Such pedagogical knowledge includes an understanding of language dynamics in Gaeltacht areas, of immersion education and of differentiated teaching and learning approaches in order to provide for the needs of students across the full range of learning and language abilities in multi-grade, multi-class and multi-lingual settings, including the specific needs of native speakers of Irish.

Recruitment challenges

Gaeltacht schools face a number of challenges to assuring teaching quality. Schools report considerable difficulty in recruiting teachers with sufficient competence in Irish to teach through the language. This difficulty is magnified at post-primary level due to the small pool of teachers available to teach different subject areas through Irish. Evidence from the review of Gaeltacht education provision conducted by the Department's Inspectorate in some Gaeltacht schools indicates effective delivery of the curriculum through Irish in Gaeltacht school classrooms but that such practice is not widespread, particularly at post-primary level. Evidence of practice in Gaeltacht schools also indicates that teacher competence in the Irish language does not of itself lead to effective teaching and learning and that pedagogical competence to mediate the curriculum through Irish is also an essential requirement.

Primary Gaeltacht schools report difficulties in recruiting teachers with sufficient proficiency in the language from the teacher redeployment panels. Since 2013, the Department has made improvements to the operation of the redeployment process with a view to addressing such difficulties. Teachers on redeployment panels are now required to indicate whether they are interested in being redeployed to teach in an Irish-medium school. This assists the operation of the redeployment process of Irish-medium schools. While this approach has been positively received by the relevant education partners, Gaeltacht education stakeholders have called for the establishment of a separate redeployment panel for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools with a view to ensuring that teachers who are both willing and competent to teach through Irish are employed in Gaeltacht schools.

However, it would not be feasible to implement such a dedicated redeployment panel given the small numbers of Gaeltacht schools and the geographical spread in their location. Nonetheless, there is need to monitor on an ongoing basis the effectiveness of the redeployment arrangements, particularly their impact on Gaeltacht schools.

Another way of ensuring a supply of teachers for Gaeltacht schools is to provide graduates of Irish-medium initial teacher education (ITE) courses at primary and post-primary levels with a guaranteed Gaeltacht school placement of one-year duration upon graduation. Further details of this are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Teacher education opportunities

To enhance the supply of teachers available to teach through Irish and the quality of such teaching, provision for Irish-medium education will be strengthened during all phases of the teacher education continuum - initial teacher education (ITE), induction and continuing professional development (CPD) - with due regard to structural and policy developments in this area including *Droichead*,¹² *Cosán*¹³ and the outcomes of the Teaching Council's review of supply and demand for teachers.

Nonetheless, there is a need for dedicated ITE and CPD provision for prospective and practising teachers in Gaeltacht schools, both in the mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) context that will support them to facilitate students' learning through Irish in the complex context that characterises educational provision in Gaeltacht schools. In particular, there is a need to support prospective and practising teachers in providing for learners from diverse language backgrounds, in differentiating provision for native speakers, in providing for children with SEN and in managing multi-grade, multi-class and multi-lingual settings. Appropriate and high quality professional learning opportunities should be in place for teachers at all stages on the continuum of teacher education who wish to enhance their competence to teach through the medium of Irish. These opportunities should be supported by the appropriate structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level.

¹² *Droichead* (2015) is the enhanced model of induction for newly-qualified teachers developed by the Teaching Council.

¹³ *Cosán* (2015) is a draft framework for teachers' learning developed by the Teaching Council.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to support pedagogical competence at primary level

At primary level, ITE providers currently make provision for Irish-medium education on an optional basis for their students. While practice varies across providers in terms of the opportunities provided, the options available to student teachers in relation to inputs on Irish-medium education include:

- Modules that allow students to study the pedagogy of some curricular areas through Irish
- Modules on Irish-medium education and pedagogy and
- Placement in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.

These efforts have supported the Irish-medium sector to some extent but it is evident that they are not sufficient to ensure that there is a supply of teachers with the necessary Irish language and pedagogical competences available for recruitment in Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools in general at primary level. It is necessary to establish a concurrent four-year Bachelor of Education ITE course through Irish leading to a qualification as a primary teacher that will be incorporated into the development of a teacher supply model for the educational system generally and the recently reconceptualised programmes for ITE. Such a course will be made available in addition to existing ITE provision and will be established by one of the existing ITE providers subject to a competitive process. A number of providers have expressed interest in establishing such an ITE course.

The potential for provision of Irish-medium programmes in other ITE providers at primary level will be considered in light of the experience of the initial Irish-medium programme and its impact on meeting the teacher supply needs of the Gaeltacht primary schools and the Irish-medium sector.

School placements in Irish-medium contexts

In light of the difficulties that Gaeltacht schools have in recruiting teachers, consideration has been given to how graduates of the new Irish-medium ITE programme will have the opportunity upon graduation to avail of a guaranteed placement of one-year duration in a Gaeltacht school on an ex-quota basis. Such a placement would facilitate the completion of the newly qualified teacher's induction in a Gaeltacht school setting which would in turn contribute to the development of the newly qualified teacher's pedagogical knowledge and understanding of Irish-medium educational processes as well as help to enrich the teacher's own Irish-language competence. It would also provide the placement school with a valuable additional language and teaching resource that should enhance the quality of Irish-medium educational provision in the school.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to support pedagogical competence at post-primary level

At post-primary level, one ITE provider currently makes provision for the preparation of teachers to teach in Irish-medium schools and generally attracts students across a particular geographical spread. Given the difficulties facing Irish-medium and Gaeltacht post-primary schools in recruiting teachers, further consideration will be required in order to identify the appropriate way to meet the requirements of such schools, including the strengthening of existing provision. Opportunity will also be taken to explore, in the context of a teacher supply model, how access to ITE through Irish at post-primary level can be extended on a wider geographical basis via additional provision, such as a blended-learning programme, potentially delivered through a collaboration between providers. As is the case at primary level, graduates of these programmes will have the opportunity upon graduation for placement of one-year duration in Gaeltacht post-primary schools on an ex-quota basis.

Assessing Irish-language competency in initial teacher education

Linking the assessment of student teachers' Irish-language competency in Irish to the *Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge (TEG)*¹⁴, has the potential to improve the achievement of students across initial teacher education programmes at individual and system levels. Consideration should be given as to whether a more challenging threshold of competency is required for those intending to teach in the Irish-medium sector, both within and outside the Gaeltacht.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

Teachers in Gaeltacht schools need ongoing support in ensuring that they have the confidence and competence to plan for and facilitate the provision of high quality teaching and learning experiences for students through Irish, and the provision of differentiated language-learning experiences, as appropriate, to linguistically diverse groups of learners. In particular, they will need support on how to differentiate language and educational provision for native speakers of Irish relative to that provided for learners of Irish.

Dedicated continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities should be made available that will enable teachers in Gaeltacht schools to reflect on, share and develop their classroom practice in ways that will improve educational and language outcomes for learners. It is desirable that such dedicated CPD opportunities for teachers in Gaeltacht schools incorporate a variety of learning experiences to include those that are formal and informal, personal and professional, collaborative and individual, school-based and external to the school or workplace. Dedicated CPD opportunities for teachers in Gaeltacht schools should be aligned to the professional development framework for teachers in the general school population.

Such learning experiences would arise from dedicated CPD opportunities by the support services, teacher and school networking opportunities, engagement in post-graduate studies, and research and engagement in immersion language-learning experiences in a Gaeltacht region. It is also desirable that such professional development opportunities are contextualised in educational and pedagogical research generally and leverage the existing structures and resources that are available in support of teacher professional development. Opportunities for sharing of practice between teachers in Gaeltacht schools and across the Irish-medium sector generally should also be strengthened through networking and the establishment of professional communities of practice.

Teachers in Gaeltacht schools, similar to teachers in other schools, also have a responsibility to access the professional development opportunities for the Irish-medium context that are available in terms of keeping their subject and pedagogical knowledge current and demonstrating their commitment to their learning and professional growth as teachers in the Irish-medium or Gaeltacht context.

Co-ordinating the delivery of dedicated CPD supports for Gaeltacht schools

Given that Gaeltacht schools and indeed Irish-medium schools constitute a small proportion of schools nationally, there is need for a single agency to co-ordinate the delivery of the necessary dedicated CPD supports for principals and teachers in Gaeltacht schools to assist them in participating in the language-planning processes in Gaeltacht areas and delivering Irish-medium education of the highest quality. The nomination of a single agency will help to ensure that discrete CPD provision for Gaeltacht schools and teachers does not become diluted in general teacher-education provision and that in a context of limited resources, there is not unnecessary duplication in such provision. Gaeltacht schools and teachers will also continue to access the programmes rolled out by the national support services.

¹⁴ Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) may be accessed at: www.teg.ie

In its advisory role regarding the provision and promotion of education through the medium of Irish in schools that are located in Gaeltacht areas and the provision of support services to those schools through the medium of Irish, COGG is well positioned to assume a co-ordination role in the delivery of dedicated CPD support for teachers in Gaeltacht schools, but it will require additional capacity.

Planning for the delivery of dedicated CPD for Gaeltacht schools

In planning for the delivery of dedicated CPD opportunities for teachers in Gaeltacht schools, COGG will liaise with the Gaeltacht Education Policy Unit in the Department and with support services, including the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the Junior Cycle Team (JCT), the Inclusion Support Service (to which the Special Education Support Service is transitioning) and the Centre for School Leadership as well as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Education Centre Network and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). COGG will also liaise with schools and teachers in Gaeltacht areas with a view to identifying the needs of schools, principals and teachers. Arising from the consultation process with agencies and schools, an annual plan for the delivery of such dedicated CPD opportunities, in addition to the national CPD programmes, will be agreed with the Department on an annual basis, and ring-fenced funding will be provided to COGG to support its implementation. The plan will outline the CPD strands to be delivered and the specific roles and responsibilities of COGG, support services, education support centres and other relevant parties with regard to its implementation.

The three existing part-time education centres located in Gaeltacht areas will play an important role in supporting the provision of CPD opportunities for teachers in Gaeltacht schools, not just those that are centrally planned but also those that respond to identified needs at local level. The education centres in particular will support teachers in forming professional-learning networks.

It is acknowledged that the pool of teachers and other educational professionals available and willing to plan for and deliver dedicated CPD opportunities through Irish to the Irish-medium sector is small and that support services can experience challenges in recruiting such personnel. Recruitment policies in the support services will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis with a view to determining how best to attract and retain such personnel.

The Policy will deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 2 to improve the quality of teaching through Irish.

Table 4: Support Pillar 2: Goal to improve the quality of teaching through Irish

SUPPORT PILLAR 2: Improving the quality of teaching through Irish			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Improving the quality of teaching through Irish	Reviewing the effectiveness of teacher redeployment arrangements in order to support the delivery of Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht	Reviewing on an ongoing basis the effectiveness of the arrangements for the redeployment of teachers at primary level to support the delivery of Irish-medium education, particularly for Gaeltacht schools	DES (Teacher Allocation and School Governance Sections)

Improving the quality of teaching through Irish	Increasing opportunities for preparation of student teachers to deliver the curriculum through Irish	<p>Providing a new Irish-medium Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme for primary teachers that addresses the needs of teachers in the Irish-medium sector, providing places for 30 teachers per year from 2018/19</p> <p>Reviewing the potential for provision of such a course in other ITE providers in light of the experience of this ITE programme</p>	DES (TES) ITE provider chosen by competitive tendering process HEA
		Giving 30 primary and 30 post-primary graduates of Irish-medium ITE programmes opportunity upon graduation to avail of a guaranteed placement of one-year duration in a Gaeltacht school on an ex-quota basis subject to predetermined criteria	DES (Payroll Section; Teacher Allocation Section)
	Extending the supply of newly-qualified teachers for Irish-medium education at post-primary level	Strengthening the supply of teachers from the existing ITE provider by providing places for an additional 30 post-primary teachers per year from 2018/19	DES (TES) HEA Teaching Council
		Exploring options for extending an opportunity to potential students in a wider geographical spread to access ITE programmes through Irish and to include provision of a blended-learning programme through collaboration between providers	DES (TES); Higher Education Authority (HEA); Teaching Council
	Exploring potential for linking assessment of student teachers' competence in Irish to the TEG	Reviewing arrangements for assessment of student teachers' competence in Irish and provide advice on linkage of such assessments to the <i>Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge (TEG)</i>	DES (TES) Teaching Council

Improving the quality of teaching through Irish	Providing dedicated CPD opportunities for principals and teachers in Gaeltacht schools	Providing annual dedicated specialised CPD for principals and teachers in Gaeltacht primary and post-primary schools, led by COGG in collaboration with national support services, to support the first and second-language teaching of Irish	Gaeltacht Education Unit COGG in collaboration with national support services, Education Centre Network & NEPS
	Expanding opportunities for teachers to engage in post-graduate study and research on Irish-medium and immersion education and language pedagogy for first and second-language learners of Irish	Developing a one-year post-graduate programme on Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education (to include an optional management module) for an annual cohort of 30 serving primary and post-primary teachers, including principals in Gaeltacht schools	DES (TES) HEA Post-graduate provider chosen by competitive tendering
		Providing third-level research bursaries annually for five primary teachers and five post-primary teachers to engage in research on Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education	COGG
	Expanding opportunities for networking and sharing of practice	Establishing networks of teachers in Gaeltacht schools to include links with teachers in the Irish-medium sector more generally	COGG & PDST Education Centre Network
		Establishing a dedicated support and resource portal for Gaeltacht schools and the Irish-medium education sector with links to Scoilnet and relevant sites	DES (ICT Policy Unit; Gaeltacht Education Unit) COGG PDST Technology in Education

5.3 SUPPORT PILLAR 3: Building the capacity of school leaders and school management

Effective school leadership is essential for the successful delivery of Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools, particularly in light of the particular challenges facing the schools. Principals of Gaeltacht schools, together with the members of their school senior management team, can play a key role in creating a positive vision regarding the place of Irish in the work of the school and in engendering commitment from teachers, parents and other members of their school community to the realisation of that vision. Principals of Gaeltacht schools also play a key role in leading whole-school planning and school self-evaluation processes that support the delivery of Irish-medium instruction in Gaeltacht schools in terms of clarifying expectations, ensuring consistency of implementation and promoting improvement in students' learning.

School principals and senior management teams

There is a need to ensure that principals and other senior members of the school team are enabled to fully realise their leadership and management roles in the Gaeltacht school context. In particular, it is important that principals in Gaeltacht schools have the necessary knowledge and skills including an understanding of immersion education and an ability to engage in whole-school language planning, to meet the particular demands of leading and managing in a Gaeltacht school, and to support the Irish language as the language of the family and the community.

Continuing professional development and networks to support school leaders

It is desirable that professional development opportunities for principals are contextualised in educational research and educational management research generally, and leverage the existing structures and resources that are available to support the professional development of principals. Support for principals will include provision of dedicated induction and CPD opportunities that are aligned to the continuing professional development framework for principals in the general school population. Support for principals will also include the establishment of networks among principals of Gaeltacht schools to facilitate the sharing of best practice. It will also involve the provision of opportunities for the sharing of learning and practice about leadership and management between Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools in general.

As is the case for teachers, COGG will co-ordinate the delivery of dedicated supports for principals to ensure that ongoing support is provided in accordance with identified needs and that there is effective use of resources and support structures available. In planning for the delivery of professional learning opportunities for principals in Gaeltacht schools, COGG will liaise as necessary with the National Centre for School Leadership (CSL), the PDST, JCT, primary and post-primary management bodies and with Gaeloideachas, the umbrella group for Irish-medium education. Principals of Gaeltacht schools will also continue to access the mainstream programmes rolled out by the national continuing professional development support services.

Supporting boards of management of Gaeltacht schools

Boards of management of Gaeltacht schools also have a very important role to play in supporting and planning for the delivery of Irish-medium education and in supporting the use of Irish as the language of their community. It is important that boards of management of Gaeltacht schools receive discrete support in the realisation of their leadership role in the Gaeltacht school context.

In addition to DES-funded general governance training provided by management and patron bodies for boards of management, COGG will co-ordinate the provision of dedicated training for boards in relation to language planning, upholding the language ethos of the school, the role of boards of management in the Gaeltacht school recognition process and their contribution to the maintenance of Irish as the language of the community.

Role of patrons of Gaeltacht schools

Patrons have an overarching supervisory role with regard to preserving the 'characteristic spirit' or ethos of the school¹⁵. The enactment of this role takes effect in particular during the approval of the appointment of teaching staff and the appointment of boards of management. In Gaeltacht schools, the school ethos, as determined by the cultural and linguistic values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, is of particular importance. In light of this and the number of patrons across Gaeltacht schools, there is a need to clarify the role of patrons of Gaeltacht schools with regard to the implementation of the linguistic ethos and language policies of the schools under their aegis.

The Policy will deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 3 to build the capacity of school leaders and school management.

Table 5: Support Pillar 3: Goal to build the capacity of school leaders and school management

SUPPORT PILLAR 3: Building the capacity of school leaders and school management			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Building the capacity of school leaders and school management	Providing dedicated induction and high quality professional development opportunities for principals in Gaeltacht schools	Developing and implementing a high quality annual specialised professional development programme on leadership for principals in Gaeltacht schools	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit) COGG in consultation with the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), national support services (PDST, SESS/ISS, JCT), Education Centre Network and NEPS
	Expanding opportunities for principals to engage in post-graduate research on leadership and management, particularly in relation to Irish-medium and immersion education in the Gaeltacht school context.	See post-graduate programme on Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education above in 5.2	DES (TES) HEA Post-graduate provider chosen by competitive tendering
		Providing bursaries to principals to engage in research in relation to Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education from Q3 2018	COGG

¹⁵ Section 15(2)(b) Education Act, 1998 states that a board of management of a school shall 'uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school.'

Building the capacity of school leaders and school management	Expanding opportunities for networking and sharing of practice	Establishing professional networks of principals in Gaeltacht schools to include links with principals in the Irish-medium sector more generally	COGG in consultation with PDST, CSL & Education Centre Network IPPN NAPD
		Establishing a resource portal for Gaeltacht schools and the Irish-medium educational sector with links to Scoilnet and relevant sites	DES (ICT Policy Unit; Gaeltacht Education Unit) COGG PDST Technology in Education
	Supporting boards of management in their management and governance role, particularly with regard to language ethos and language planning	Developing guidelines for boards of management of Gaeltacht schools from Q4 2017	COGG in consultation with the CSL and management bodies
		Providing all boards of management of Gaeltacht schools with access to specialised training at least once every two years from 2018	COGG in consultation with the CSL and support services
	Clarifying the role of school patrons with regard to upholding the language ethos in Gaeltacht schools under their aegis	Engaging with school patrons to clarify their role with regard to the language ethos and language policies in schools under their aegis and disseminating such clarifications to boards of management of Gaeltacht schools	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit; School Governance Section)

5.4 SUPPORT PILLAR 4: Improving the curriculum for Irish

The curriculum for Irish has a central role to play in supporting the development of Irish-language competence among both learners and native speakers in Gaeltacht schools and among students in the Irish-medium sector more generally.

Differentiated learning outcomes for students in Irish-medium schools

Irish-language curricula that include separate learning outcomes for students in Irish-medium schools to those in English-medium schools have the potential to raise expectations for the learning of Irish and to support the delivery of enriched language-learning experiences for all students in Gaeltacht schools, particularly those who are native speakers of Irish. Such Irish-language curricula will also help to enhance the ability of students in Gaeltacht schools to learn through Irish.

Primary Language Curriculum (*Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*)

The Department and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) are committed to the development and implementation of differentiated Irish-language curricula at primary level. A new *Primary Language Curriculum* for infants to 2nd classes, with separate learning outcomes for Irish in Irish-medium schools to those in English-medium schools, has been developed and implementation commenced from September 2016. A continuing professional development programme for teachers is supporting its phased implementation. The NCCA is developing similar differentiated language-learning outcomes for Irish for third to sixth classes.

Junior Cycle L1 and L2 Curriculum Specifications for Irish (*Sonraíocht Ghaeilge na Sraithe Sóisearaí T1 agus T2*)

Following intensive consultation, differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle are being developed. The L1 curriculum specification for Irish will meet, in particular, the Irish-language learning needs of students who are native speakers of Irish and who are being educated through Irish. The L2 curriculum specification developed for Irish will meet, in particular, the Irish-language learning needs of students who are being educated through the medium of English. Both junior cycle curriculum specifications will be assessed at two levels, higher and ordinary levels.

All post-primary schools that are recognised as Gaeltacht schools will be required to make the L1 curriculum specification available to their students at junior cycle and to actively promote student uptake of this option, particularly in light of the fact that the language learning for the student engaging with this specification will enable the student to reach his/her potential as an Irish-language learner and support his/her ability to learn through Irish. Post-primary schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools may also make the L2 curriculum specification available for students where it is evident that the L2 specification will meet more effectively such students' Irish-language learning needs. The cohort of students accessing the L2 curriculum specification is expected to constitute a small minority of students in Gaeltacht schools.

In addition, short courses also have the potential at junior cycle and in Transition Year to enhance the understanding and appreciation of students in Gaeltacht schools for the language context, culture and history of the Gaeltacht.

Curriculum specifications for senior cycle

At senior cycle, work on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 curriculum specifications for Irish will commence when the differentiated curriculum specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools. As at junior cycle, schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools will be required to make the L1 curriculum specification available to their students and to encourage greater student uptake of the L1 specification option.

Supporting students in Gaeltacht schools

A range of measures will be considered with a view to incentivising students in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools to engage with the L1 curriculum specification for Irish at senior cycle. A school's capacity to deliver L1 curriculum specification for Irish at senior cycle will be greatly enhanced by strong uptake of the L1 curriculum specification at junior cycle. Measures to incentivise students may include awarding of third-level bursaries to students who perform at or exceed a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination. In addition, for those students who achieve a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in Leaving Certificate, 10% of places in all ITE programmes will be reserved provided the applicants also comply with the other entry requirements for these programmes. Recognition of performance in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination, may also be considered as a requirement for entry to third-level courses which require a higher competence in Irish including courses that include Irish as a language option (e.g. law and Irish), and third-level courses that are delivered through Irish.

There will be an ongoing review of the development, implementation and the content of differentiated L1 and L2 Irish curricula to ensure that they meet the needs of all students, particularly native speakers of Irish.

The Policy will deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 4 to improve the curriculum for Irish.

Table 6: Support Pillar 4: Goal to improve the curriculum for Irish

SUPPORT PILLAR 4: Improving the curriculum for Irish			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Improving the curriculum for Irish	Ensuring that the content of Irish-language curricula meets the needs of pupils/students in Gaeltacht schools, particularly native speakers of Irish	Completing the development of the Primary Language Curriculum for all classes in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools and supporting its implementation to ensure that the learning outcomes meet the needs of pupils in Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools, including native speakers of Irish	DES NCCA COGG PDST
		Completing the development and introduction of separate L1 and L2 specifications for Irish at junior cycle and ensuring that the learning outcomes of the L1 curriculum specification meet the needs of students in Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools, including native speakers of Irish	DES NCCA COGG PDST JCT
		Developing differentiated L1 & L2 curriculum specifications for Irish at senior cycle and ensuring that the learning outcomes of the L1 curriculum specification meet the needs of students in Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools, including native speakers of Irish	DES NCCA COGG PDST

Improving the curriculum for Irish	Introducing measures that will incentivise students in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools to engage with the L1 curriculum specification for Irish at junior cycle and senior cycle	<p>Requiring all recognised Gaeltacht schools to make L1 Irish-language curriculum specification available for students and to actively promote student uptake of this option</p> <p>Introducing a third-level bursary scheme for students who perform at or exceed a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination</p> <p>Reserving 10% of places in all ITE programmes for students who perform at or exceed a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination if the applicants also comply with the other criteria for entry to the programmes</p> <p>Exploring the potential for recognition of performance in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate as a requirement for entry to third-level courses which require a higher competence in Irish</p>	DES (Gaeltacht Policy Unit; TES and Higher Education Section) HEA; Teaching Council
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5.5 SUPPORT PILLAR 5: Improving language resources and supports

Irish-language resources and materials

The availability of quality Irish-language resources and materials for the mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) context can greatly support the delivery of Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools. Since the establishment of COGG, there have been significant improvements in the range of Irish-language and educational resources, including textbooks that are available to support teaching through Irish. Other bodies such as An Gúm, the Council for Curriculum, Evaluation and Assessment (CCEA) and the Áisaonad¹⁶ in Northern Ireland, have also made a significant contribution to the availability of Irish-language teaching resources and reading material for young people.

Irish-language curriculum and assessment materials

There has also been a significant enhancement of the range of Irish-language curriculum and assessment materials available for use in the special educational needs context in Irish-medium settings. Significant progress has also been made in relation to the provision of assessment materials relevant to the Irish-language needs of learners in Gaeltacht schools. For example, standardised tests that are normed for the population of Irish-medium primary schools, including Gaeltacht schools, are now available. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of tests that are appropriate to testing the competences of native speakers of Irish. The development of such tests is constrained by the difficulties associated with norming for a native-speaker population of Irish of the scale found in Ireland.

¹⁶ An tÁisaonad, Coláiste Ollscoile Naomh Muire, Belfast

Extending the range and quality of resources

Despite the progress made, there is need for ongoing development and updating of resources that are available to the Irish-medium education sector, including Gaeltacht schools, to support the full range of educational activity in both mainstream and SEN settings. In particular, there is need to ensure that the Irish-language educational materials available are accessible in terms of language content to learners and that the quality of the materials available are comparable to the quality of the materials available in English. There is also a need to ensure that the Irish-language materials are available for the full range of subjects, particularly at post-primary, and that language materials are updated in a timely manner as new curricula come on stream.

Access to a dedicated portal for Gaeltacht schools and the Irish-medium sector

Ongoing development and updating of the resources for Gaeltacht schools and the Irish-medium sector in general will require sustained investment. As a starting point, however, existing expertise and resources in relation to Irish-medium education should be leveraged as much as possible. Principals and teachers in all Gaeltacht schools should be made aware of the range of Irish-language teaching and learning resources that are already available and should be supported on how to access and to use the resources. Such an approach will be assisted by the establishment of a dedicated support portal for Gaeltacht education and Irish-medium provision more generally that is linked to Scoilnet and other relevant websites.

A dedicated portal for Irish-medium education will also host guidelines on planning, management, pedagogical and assessment practice in Gaeltacht schools that build on the materials produced to date and incorporate the understandings and best practice described in national and international research and observed in Irish-medium classrooms including such classrooms in Gaeltacht schools. The portal will also host guidance on matters specific to SEN provision in the Irish-medium context, including the prioritisation of Irish-language literacy skills and Irish as the language of instruction. The potential to accommodate the sharing of teaching and learning resources through the portal to further enhance the professional expertise of teachers in Gaeltacht schools will also be explored.

Enhancing Irish-medium education through North/South collaboration

The sharing of resources on an all-Ireland basis also provides a valuable opportunity to leverage the Irish-medium resources available. North/South collaboration has the potential to facilitate the sharing of research resources and the expertise of agencies in areas of provision where shortcomings in the range of resources are evident. Such collaboration will be especially important in the provision of resources relating to special educational needs and assessment. For example, NEPS Internal Management Group (IMG) has already established links with Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) in Northern Ireland, and is therefore well-placed to liaise with COGG and PEPs with a view to exploring ways of addressing gaps in school-based assessment tools and those reserved for psychologists for use in the Irish-medium sector. There is an opportunity to further advance collaborative endeavours of this nature under the umbrella of North/South co-operation mechanisms.

The linguistic diversity of Gaeltacht schools

Gaeltacht schools provide for students from diverse language backgrounds including those whose main language at home is English, those who come from bilingual homes, those whose main language at home is Irish, and those whose home language is neither Irish nor English. This linguistic diversity presents a challenge for schools and teachers in meeting the educational and language needs of the students and in delivering the curriculum through Irish.

Supporting the native Irish-language speaker

The focus of language provision in Gaeltacht schools is often on learners of Irish with a view to ensuring that they have the capacity to learn through Irish. This may be at the expense of the language proficiency of native speakers who require differentiated provision to enrich their Irish language development and promote their socialisation in the Irish language. The evidence is that young native speakers of Irish in the Gaeltacht are not achieving native-speaker norms or full acquisition and enrichment in the language. Differentiated provision for native speakers of Irish is also necessary to support and endorse the endeavours of parents who are raising their children through Irish.

Schools and teachers will require support to deliver differentiated language provision, particularly to native speakers of Irish but also to learners of Irish in the multi-class/multi-grade and multi-lingual contexts. As a starting point, such differentiated provision should be incorporated into normal classroom practice and supported by dedicated professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals in Gaeltacht schools. Differentiated language provision should also be promoted by the dissemination of management practices, and also teaching and learning practices, as informed by effective practice in Gaeltacht schools and in research, that support the language development of native speakers of Irish.

Nonetheless, discrete supports are required to enable Gaeltacht schools and teachers to meet the Irish-language needs of their students, particularly native speakers of Irish. The provision of such discrete supports will build on existing support structures. While schools will be required to prioritise the language needs of native speakers, schools will have flexibility on the use of the additional supports in accordance with the language profile of the school and the relative proportion of native speakers and learners of Irish in the school. Schools will require guidance on how to use the additional supports to optimum effect.

Developing and optimising the role of the language assistant

Discrete supports will include strengthening the language assistants' scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*) that is currently being implemented in Gaeltacht schools. The language assistants' scheme, which has been in operation since 1999 under the aegis of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA), involves the employment of local native Irish-language speakers for part of the school year.

The purpose of the scheme is to strengthen the use of Irish as a spoken language among Gaeltacht pupils and students in primary and post-primary schools, and to further its usage on a daily basis. The scheme was originally targeted at students with little or no Irish to enable them to access the curriculum through Irish in Gaeltacht schools. More recently, it has been deployed to support the language needs of native speakers of Irish.

While researchers and relevant stakeholders are positive about the scheme, it is timely to review the impact of the scheme on students' language learning and engagement and explore how the scheme can be strengthened to support native speakers of Irish as well as learners of Irish in Gaeltacht areas. Such a review, to be carried out under the aegis of the DAHRRGA with support from the Department of Education and Skills, would include consideration of how the knowledge and skills of language assistants and their language-learning input can be enhanced to support the language development of students.

Dedicated language support for pupils

Schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools will also have access to additional language-support teachers who will assist with the development of language plans in the school and the delivery of dedicated support to pupils with specific Irish-language learning needs, including native speakers of Irish in accordance with priorities identified

by the school. The provision of access to such support teachers in Gaeltacht schools will be determined on the basis of overall school enrolment and the language profile of the school. It will be operated along the lines of the new model for allocating additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs in schools (National Council for Special Education, 2014).

Supporting students with low proficiency in Irish

Another potential language and learning support for Gaeltacht post-primary schools involves the provision of a 'Bridging Support' bilingual programme (*Droichead*) at junior cycle that is parallel to the Irish-medium instruction provided in the main part of the school. The *Droichead* programme allows students with low proficiency in Irish to have a bilingual education on a transitional basis, while receiving supplementary supports to improve their Irish and facilitate their transfer to Irish-medium provision. The programme includes the delivery of a comprehensive range of language, pedagogical and assessment interventions to the target students that is supported by extensive resource provision such as additional language and teaching supports.

The success of the *Droichead* programme in one school merits consideration for its potential extension to other post-primary Gaeltacht schools but with due regard for the level of resourcing available and the need for strong leadership, comprehensive planning, effective communication and teacher commitment to support its implementation. The potential for extension of the *Droichead* programme in a modified form will be piloted in a number of post-primary schools on the basis of expressions of interest and need.

Educational services through Irish

Progress has been made with regard to the provision of educational services through Irish to Gaeltacht schools. For example, the Department's Inspectorate and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continue to build their capacity to deliver their respective services through Irish to Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools. The Inspectorate is also committed to the delivery of its education-focussed inspections through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium early-years' settings. The various school support services (including the Professional Development Service for Teachers, the Junior Cycle for Teachers, and the Inclusion Support Service) have sought to deliver services through the medium of Irish to schools in Gaeltacht areas. Nonetheless, the delivery of services in Irish in the SEN context and access to specialists with capacity in Irish remain a challenge, namely because of the low numbers of SEN students combined with their dispersal across the wide Gaeltacht geographical entity.

Raising awareness of the benefits of bilingualism

There is an opportunity to increase the awareness among professional and para-professional staff of the literature and other evidence supporting the intellectual, speech and career benefits of bilingualism and the specific bilingual needs of pupils with special educational needs in Gaeltacht contexts. COGG, in collaboration with NEPS and the Inclusion Support Service (ISS), to which the Special Education Support Service (SESS) is transitioning, could play a role in providing guidance on support for the bilingual needs of children with SEN in Gaeltacht areas and in the development of guidelines to support professional and para-professional staff on the benefits of bilingualism. The potential to increase the capacity of other professionals to deliver services through Irish in support of the educational needs of students in Gaeltacht areas will be a matter for relevant bodies.

The Policy will deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 5 to improve language resources and supports.

Table 7: Support Pillar 5: Goal to improve language resources and supports

SUPPORT PILLAR 5: Improving language resources and supports			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Improving language resources and supports	Enhancing the provision of language resources and supports to assist with whole-school planning, teaching, learning and assessment in both mainstream and SEN contexts	Establishing a dedicated online portal for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium provision more generally in mainstream and SEN contexts with links to Scoilnet from Q1, 2018	DES (ICT Policy Unit; Gaeltacht Education Unit) COGG PDST Technology in Education
		Developing and disseminating good-practice guidelines for Gaeltacht schools to inform and support the provision of a high quality Irish-medium education from 2018 (in relation to language planning, leadership and management, use of resources, provision for the language needs of native speakers of Irish, Irish-medium pedagogical practice, use of information and communications technology (ICT), and engagement with parents and community links)	COGG in collaboration with the CSL, NCCA, National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NAMBSE), ISS-SESS; PDST Technology in Education
		Advancing the sharing of Irish-medium resources and research capacity for the further development of such resources on an all-Ireland basis	DES (CAP & International Section) COGG Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland NEPS & Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) in Northern Ireland
		In accordance with identified priorities, continuing to extend and update Irish-medium materials for all aspects of the curriculum and in the SEN context, including where possible, the development of additional assessment tools specific to the needs of native speakers and the Irish-medium context	COGG in collaboration with relevant agencies such as CCEA and NEPS Educational Research Centre (ERC)

Improving language resources and supports	Introducing measures to support the language development of native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish	Carrying out a review of the effectiveness of the Language Assistants' Scheme (<i>Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga</i>) to explore its potential for expansion and for greater quality service from Q4 2017	DAHRRGA with support from DES
		Providing access to support the provision of a high quality Irish-medium education by providing language support in all recognised Gaeltacht schools in accordance with specified criteria	DES (Teacher Allocation Section)
		Piloting a modified bilingual 'Bridging' Programme in two Gaeltacht post-primary schools that provide full instruction through Irish, to support the transition of L2 students to full Irish-medium education from Q1 2018	DES (Planning and Building Unit; Forward Planning Section; Teacher Allocation Section)
	Increasing awareness among professional and para-professional staff of the literature supporting the intellectual, speech and career benefits of bilingualism and in particular, the specific bilingual needs of pupils with special educational needs in Gaeltacht contexts	Providing guidance on support for the bilingual needs of children with special educational needs in Gaeltacht areas and disseminate among professional and para-professional staff in Gaeltacht areas	COGG NEPS ISS/SESS Department of Health
	Enhancing support services through Irish	Increasing the capacity of professional and administrative personnel within the Department of Education and Skills, including inspectors, psychologists, and staff in school support services to deliver services through Irish in Gaeltacht schools	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit) DES (TES responsible for national professional development support services) Inspectorate NEPS
		Increasing the capacity of other professionals working in the educational domain to deliver services through Irish in support of the educational needs of students in Gaeltacht schools	Government Departments and Agencies e.g. Department of Health and others

5.6 SUPPORT PILLAR 6: Strengthening early-years' educational provision

Quality early-years' education has the potential to socialise children in the Irish language

There is a general recognition of the importance of early-years' education, the period from birth to six years, in supporting later learning and social development. There is also a recognition that the quality of early-years' educational provision is key to the realisation of expected benefits for children, including those relating to language development. In the case of Gaeltacht areas, quality Irish-medium early-years-educational provision has the potential to socialise children in the Irish language, enhance their cognitive and affective development through Irish and support their transition to learning through Irish in primary school.

The important role of *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas

Irish-medium early-years' settings, or *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas, play an important role in supporting children's language development in Irish and impact on parents' use of the language in the home. The transition of young learners from *naíonraí* to primary education supports the work of Gaeltacht primary schools in advancing children's proficiency in Irish, both native speakers and learners of the language, and in enabling the children access the curriculum through the Irish language. The extension of early-years' educational provision under the universal Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)¹⁷ programme from one to two years from September 2016 has further enhanced the opportunity for children attending *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas to develop their proficiency in the Irish language to a high level.

Given the importance of the contribution that early-years' educational provision can make to language proficiency and usage in Gaeltacht areas, it is important that the potential of the *naíonraí* to support the Irish language development of young learners in Gaeltacht areas is harnessed as much as possible. In particular, it is important that children in *naíonraí* have enriched immersion experiences in the Irish language that will support their language development and educational development generally and their ability to engage actively in Irish-medium education.

Early-years' in the Gaeltacht – current context

There are currently 127 early-years' educational settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in Gaeltacht areas, of which 59 are Irish-medium and supported by Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG). CNNG is funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta. The Irish-medium early-years' educational settings supported by CNNG are either part of services located in Childcare Centres¹⁸ or are community based. The provision of English-medium early-years' education on this scale in the Gaeltacht has obvious implications for the pedagogical challenge experienced by primary schools and the capacity of Gaeltacht communities to sustain Irish as a spoken language.

Consolidating the supports provided for early-years' settings operating through Irish

It is important that additional supports are put in place to enhance Irish-medium provision in existing *naíonraí* and to support other early-years' educational settings participating in the ECCE programme that may wish to deliver their services fully through Irish or to support the establishment of new *naíonraí*, where there is demand for such. There are already a range of administrative, structural and professional development supports provided

¹⁷ The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is the scheme of payments to early-years settings that provides free early-childhood care and education for children aged 3+ years.

¹⁸ Childcare Centres in Gaeltacht areas may include crèche (*naíolann*), early-years' setting (*naíonra*) and after-school services.

by CNNG that should be consolidated and extended with a view to enhancing provision in existing *naíonraí* as well as supporting settings that wish to move to the provision of services through Irish.

As the responsible agencies for Irish-medium early-years' settings, DAHRRGA and Údarás na Gaeltachta should support services participating in the ECCE programme that are affiliated to CNNG and meet criteria for recognition as a *naíonra* as laid down by the DAHRRGA and Údarás na Gaeltachta and monitored by CNNG. Such support would enable individual *naíonraí* to provide additional staff and resources to promote the delivery of differentiated Irish-language learning and educational experiences through Irish to meet the needs of children from different language backgrounds.

Strengthen transitions between early-years' settings and Gaeltacht primary schools

Another way of improving the impact of early-years' Irish-medium educational provision in the Gaeltacht is to strengthen links and the transition between *naíonraí* and primary schools that are recognised as Gaeltacht schools. Such strengthening of links would help to ensure progression in the Irish-language development of both native speakers and learners of Irish as they move from Irish-medium early-years' settings to primary school. With the support of the ECCE programme, strong links between *naíonraí* and primary schools have the potential to support a sustained period (of up to four years) of early total immersion in Irish and linguistic continuity in the language at a critical stage of children's language development.

Fostering links between *naíonraí* and Gaeltacht primary schools

Links between *naíonraí* and primary schools in the Gaeltacht may occur through activities such as communication, sharing of resources, sharing of information on learners as they transfer to primary school, and collaboration between the *naíonra* and infant classes on joint initiatives and activities. Many primary schools have established useful and mutually beneficial links of this nature with their local *naíonraí*. Such good practice should be disseminated to schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools and inform the establishment of links between these schools and their local *naíonraí*. Schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools would be expected to establish such links as part of the Gaeltacht school-recognition process.

Recognition of *naíonraí* in the Gaeltacht

Many *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas under the aegis of CNNG already foster links with local primary schools, particularly in relation to the sharing of information on learners to support their transition to primary school. In the interest of extending such links and ensuring progression in the language development of children, one of the criteria for recognition as a *naíonra* in Gaeltacht areas will include the establishment of links between the *naíonra* and a primary school that is recognised as a Gaeltacht school. The NCCA will be asked to give particular consideration to this issue in the work that it is carrying out on support for transition, including transfer of information about learners, from early-years educational settings to primary school.

Enhancing the professional development of practitioners in *naíonraí*

Early-years' educational provision in Gaeltacht areas can also be strengthened through enhancing the professional development of practitioners in *naíonraí* in terms of their proficiency in Irish and their understanding of language pedagogy, including immersion education in early-years' educational settings. Personnel employed in *naíonraí* under the aegis of CNNG must meet the requirements of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in terms of the Child Care Regulations and the ECCE programme contract. The director of each *naíonra* under CNNG is required to have a FETAC Level 6 programme qualification and the

assistant director is required to have a FETAC Level 5 qualification. In addition, each director of a *naíonra* under CNNG has completed a module on Irish-language enrichment, and on sociolinguistics and the child.

Opportunities on how to further enhance the qualifications and CPD opportunities available to practitioners working in *naíonraí* will be explored by DAHRRGA and Údarás na Gaeltachta in consultation with relevant agencies such as the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Options for consideration will include facilitation of access to relevant child-care courses through the medium of Irish and the provision of bespoke courses that focus on areas of educational provision (e.g. immersion education) specific to the needs of the Irish-medium early-years' educational sector. Consideration will also be given to the feasibility of providing a bespoke qualification in Irish-medium early-years' education for practitioners and prospective practitioners working in *naíonraí* that will both meet regulation requirements and the needs of personnel working in early-years' Irish-medium settings.

Early-years' services through Irish

It is also important that services available to *naíonraí* are delivered through Irish. The Department's Inspectorate is committed to the delivery of education-focussed inspections in *naíonraí* through the medium of Irish. TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, currently takes into account the desirability of facilitating Irish-based inspections in Gaeltacht areas in its recruitment process. The potential to extend such provision and deliver other inspection and support visits, such as those under the aegis of Pobal, and the Better Start Quality Support Service, through the medium of Irish will be a matter for relevant bodies.

In collaboration with other agencies, the Policy will seek to deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 6 to strengthen early-years' educational provision.

Table 8: Support Pillar 6: Goal to strengthen early-years' educational provision

SUPPORT PILLAR 6: Strengthening early-years' educational provision			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Strengthening early-years' educational provision	Strengthening the impact of Irish-medium provision in the early-years' educational context in Gaeltacht areas	Providing guidance for <i>naíonraí</i> and primary schools on the development of links between <i>naíonraí</i> and primary school to include exemplars of good practice	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit) NCCA COGG Údarás na Gaeltachta
		Providing additional funding and staffing resources to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing <i>naíonraí</i> in enhancing their provision - other early-years' educational settings that may wish to deliver their services through Irish - the establishment of new <i>naíonraí</i> in the Gaeltacht where there is demand for same - increasing the number of Irish-medium <i>naíonraí</i> under the auspices of Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta 	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta

Strengthening early-years' educational provision	Identifying and delivering opportunities to support the training and professional development of practitioners in Irish-medium early-years' educational settings in Gaeltacht areas e.g. develop a Level 6/7 Programme on Irish-medium and Gaeltacht early-years' education for early-years' practitioners	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta DCYA HEI Institute
	Enhancing the delivery of inspection services through Irish in <i>naíonraí</i>	DES (Inspectorate) DCYA TUSLA: the Child and Family Agency Pobal

5.7 SUPPORT PILLAR 7: Building awareness, communicating with, and supporting parents

Raising awareness of the importance of supporting Irish-medium education _____

The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* aims to ensure that there is Irish-medium education of the highest quality available to learners in Gaeltacht areas. Achievement of this aim will serve to reassure parents of children in Gaeltacht schools in the language choices that they make and will also support Irish-language usage in local communities. The extensive consultation engaged in with Gaeltacht schools and communities during the development of this Policy has informed the Department's vision of Gaeltacht education, the recognition process for Gaeltacht schools, and the model of support for schools as outlined in this Policy.

Given the fragile status of Irish in Gaeltacht communities and the increasing numbers of families that are moving from Irish to English-speaking norms, the successful implementation of the measures in this Policy will require buy-in from Gaeltacht schools and communities, and particularly from parents and students. The implementation of this Policy and its measures will also require commitment from all relevant State departments and agencies, particularly in the context of their responsibilities under the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, the Education Act, 1998 and the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Communicating the value and benefits of Irish-medium and immersion education _____

There will be a need to communicate the value of Irish in a modern society and the benefits of Irish-medium and immersion education. There will also be a need to engage with relevant parties regarding the rationale and key features of the Policy and the range of measures that will be implemented. A communication strategy in support of this Policy will be required that incorporates engagement with different stakeholders, including parents and students, regarding these two important aspects and that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of different parties including Government departments as well as State agencies and schools. In particular, students will need to be facilitated in seeing themselves as key agents in speaking and promoting the Irish language as their daily language of communication.

Community links and links between educational settings

The fostering of positive school-community links can make a significant contribution to the promotion of Irish within and outside Gaeltacht schools. Such links can extend opportunities for students to use Irish and to enrich their language proficiency, to enhance their ability to learn through Irish and use Irish as their daily language of communication. They may include links between schools and cultural, sports and language organisations, between primary and post-primary-schools, and between early-years' educational settings and primary schools.

Progression and continuity in language-learning experiences

The establishment of strong links between early-years settings and primary schools and between primary schools and post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht is critical to progression and continuity in students' Irish-medium language and educational experiences as they transfer from one setting to another. Links between educational settings may occur through communication opportunities, sharing of resources, sharing of information on learners as they transfer between settings, and collaboration between settings on joint initiatives and activities. Such links may also involve the establishment of supports to facilitate the transfer of students between settings, including the provision of language supports and a transition programme for incoming learners.

There is much evidence of positive school-community links and links between educational settings in Gaeltacht areas. It is important that such effective practice is shared among all educational settings in Gaeltacht areas, possibly through guidelines or through teacher or school networks.

Participation in the language-planning process

Schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools will be required to co-operate with and participate in the Gaeltacht language-planning process taking place in their local community. It is important that the role of schools in contributing to the language-planning process is clarified, that structures and the approach for facilitating effective participation by schools are identified, and that the tangible outcomes to be expected from this participation are delineated. It is also important that the role and responsibilities of organisations nominated to lead the language-planning process for liaising with Gaeltacht schools, and the structures to facilitate such liaison are clarified. Clarification of all of the above should be prioritised in consultation with DAHRRGA and Údarás na Gaeltachta and other relevant parties and included in guidelines that are disseminated to schools, lead organisations and Gaeltacht communities during the early stages of the implementation of this Policy.

Supporting and involving parents

The establishment of positive partnerships and relationships between schools and parents is particularly important in the case of Gaeltacht schools. It is also important in the case of *naíonraí*. On the one hand, parents in Gaeltacht areas, regardless of their language backgrounds, need to be assured of the benefits of Irish and of Irish-medium education for their children in terms of their current and future learning, their capacity to learn languages, their personal and social development, and their career opportunities. Parents who are raising their children through Irish need to be assured that their efforts to do so are of value to their children and their community. Parents also need support to enable them to assist with their children's Irish-language development and their learning through Irish. On the other hand, parental support for the language policy and the medium of instruction in individual schools is critical to the effective delivery of Irish-medium education in those schools and in fostering positive attitudes and the co-operation of their children with their school's language policy.

Enhancing engagement with parents

Gaeltacht schools and *naíonraí* will require support in managing engagement with parents, particularly where there are competing demands. Capturing parental support for the work of Gaeltacht schools or *naíonraí*, and enabling parents to support their children's learning at school or in the *naíonra*, need to be prioritised. Research and practice in Gaeltacht schools indicate a range of effective communication, planning and participation strategies that schools can usefully employ to enhance engagement with parents. Similarly, there are many good practices and strategies of this nature employed in *naíonraí*. It is important that such practice is shared among leaders and teachers in Gaeltacht schools. Opportunities for doing so include professional networks, professional development events, and the provision of guidelines on policy and practice for Gaeltacht schools.

Provision of additional Irish-language supports for parents

It is also important that parents in Gaeltacht areas who are not native speakers have opportunities to improve their own proficiency in Irish and are encouraged to do so.

Parents raising their children through Irish in the Gaeltacht also need support. The growth of Family Support Centres in some Gaeltacht areas is a positive development in this regard. These centres can provide essential services and advice for parents living in the Gaeltacht who wish to raise their children through Irish. These centres promote language-awareness issues as well as provide family-support services such as childcare services, early-years' educational services, language-advisory services, pre-marital and ante-natal advisory services, public-health services, speech therapy, psychological services and other youth services. It is envisaged that the further development of such centres in Gaeltacht areas, encompassing a strong Irish-language policy, would greatly assist Gaeltacht schools in meeting the language challenges outlined in this Policy.

In collaboration with other agencies, the Policy will seek to deliver the following actions in support of Pillar 7 to build awareness, communicate with and support parents.

Table 9: Support Pillar 7: Goal to build awareness, communicate with and support parents

SUPPORT PILLAR 7: Building awareness, communicating with and supporting parents			
Goal	Objective	Actions	Lead organisation
Building awareness, communicating with and supporting parents	Increasing awareness of the <i>Policy on Gaeltacht Education</i>	Developing and implementing a communication strategy and publicity campaign to support the dissemination of the <i>Policy on Gaeltacht Education</i> and foster local community commitment through the language-planning process to opt for Gaeltacht school status in line with specific language criteria	DES (Gaeltacht Education Unit); DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta
	Sharing best practice regarding the fostering of positive school-community links	Providing and disseminating guidance on fostering school-community links and links between educational settings, including exemplars of effective practice	COGG

Building awareness, communicating with and supporting parents	Clarifying the role that education and schools will play in complementing the language-planning process taking place under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 and the structures that will facilitate such engagement	Prioritising the preparation of guidelines on the participation of schools in the language-planning process and the engagement of lead organisations with schools	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta COGG
	Supporting parental engagement and participation	Building awareness among parents and communities in Gaeltacht areas of the value of the Irish language and culture and of high quality Irish-medium education through information booklets for parents, seminars and social media	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta COGG
		Developing guidelines for Gaeltacht schools on parental engagement and participation	COGG National Parents' Council – Primary National Parents' Council – Post Primary
		Identifying and increasing opportunities for enhancing the Irish-language competence of parents in Gaeltacht areas	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
		Further develop Family Support Centres in the Gaeltacht to support Gaeltacht parents who wish to raise their children through Irish	DAHRRGA Údarás na Gaeltachta

6. Implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

Dedicated structures will be put in place to support the implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*.

Gaeltacht Education Unit and Dedicated Gaeltacht Inspectorate Team

A Gaeltacht Education Unit will be established within the Department to manage the recognition process for Gaeltacht schools and liaise with Gaeltacht communities and schools. The new unit will oversee the allocation of initial resources and supports to such schools in collaboration with relevant sections of the Department, and other agencies. The new unit will also monitor the implementation of the recognition process in schools in collaboration with the Department's Inspectorate.

Each Gaeltacht school that participates in the recognition process will be required to develop an action plan as part of its school self-evaluation process. This action plan will outline how the school is meeting the criteria for recognition and the actions that it is taking to strengthen Irish-medium educational provision. Each primary and post-primary school will report the progress made in its provision of Irish-medium education and its fulfilment of recognition criteria through its school self-evaluation processes.

A dedicated Inspectorate team will oversee and externally monitor the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* implementation process. The Inspectorate team will advise and support each Gaeltacht school in reflecting on the effectiveness of its Irish-medium educational provision and the actions that it has put in place to identify and respond to the first and second-language learning needs of its students, and will help it to advance its agenda for improvement. Inspectors will work closely with the staff of COGG and the staff of the school support services that will collaborate with COGG in supporting improvement in the schools. The provision of a second tranche of additional resources to an individual school will be contingent on the extent to which the school is delivering Irish-medium provision, deploying its resources and building its capacity, and implementing its Irish-medium action plan, as evidenced in the monitoring carried out by the Inspectorate. Monitoring by the Inspectorate will also inform the Department on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Policy and the recognition process in individual schools and across Gaeltacht schools.

The Department's Gaeltacht Education Unit will liaise closely with other agencies, with regard to the delivery of measures in the Policy that are under their aegis and oversee the development of an annual action plan in consultation with other agencies.

The Department's Gaeltacht Education Unit will also play a lead role in developing a communication strategy that will support the dissemination of the Policy and clarify roles and responsibilities for engagement with Gaeltacht schools, parents and communities. The new Unit will be populated by personnel that can deliver the services of the Unit through Irish.

Co-ordination of the delivery of supports - COGG

The Gaeltacht Education Unit will be supported in its work by COGG and will liaise closely with COGG in this regard. In light of its remit for advising on and co-ordinating the provision of teaching resources, provision of support services and research for Irish and Irish-medium education and advising on the provision of Irish-medium education in general, COGG will have an extended role that will involve co-ordinating the delivery of

particular supports and initiatives for Gaeltacht education in collaboration with national support services and other agencies. In particular, COGG will be responsible for:

- Co-ordination of dedicated CPD provision for teachers and principals in Gaeltacht schools in addition to the CPD programmes provided by national support services. Such dedicated CPD provision to include support for engagement by schools in the Gaeltacht language-planning process and implementation of immersion-education approaches
- Development and management of an on-line resource portal for Gaeltacht schools that is linked to Scoilnet
- Development of good practice guidelines for Gaeltacht schools.

Steps will be taken to ensure that COGG has the capacity and resources in terms of accommodation and staff with relevant educational experience to execute this co-ordination role in addition to its current responsibilities. In particular, arrangements will be put in place, subject to the approval of the Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to amend the authority of COGG on a statutory basis so that it is enabled to recruit staff. Protocols will also be developed to clarify roles and relationships between COGG and the new Gaeltacht Education Unit and relevant support services and agencies. The resources necessary for the implementation of Gaeltacht specific measures by COGG will be funded through the Gaeltacht Education Unit.

Governance

The implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* will be monitored over time and adjustments made as necessary. To this end, an interdepartmental partnership group chaired by the Department, and including DAHRRGA, DCYA and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENI) and other relevant agencies such as COGG, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge will be put in place.

Evaluation and research

An evaluation and research programme will be also put in place to review the effectiveness of the overall implementation of the Policy and its measures during the five-year timeframe of the Strategy. Such an evaluation programme will involve the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the Department's Inspectorate.

7. Conclusion

This *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* recognises the key role that schools and the educational system can play in tandem with other domains in supporting Irish-language usage in Gaeltacht communities at a time when the status of the language as the language of the family and the community is increasingly under threat.

The Policy clarifies the criteria that schools need to comply with if they are to be recognised as Gaeltacht schools into the future. The Policy also sets out the range of supplementary measures and supports that will be made available to Gaeltacht schools to enable them to provide a high quality Irish-medium education experience for their students that meets their linguistic and other educational needs. Through the implementation of the actions identified within the seven Pillars which underpin the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* over its five-year lifespan, the Department aims to support and enhance the role of Gaeltacht schools and early-years' educational settings.

The overarching goal of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for all young people living in Gaeltacht areas and in this way to support the use of Irish as the main language of families and of Gaeltacht communities.

It is expected that the implementation of the Policy alongside the language-planning process under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012, and in collaboration with all relevant parties, will help to create a new vibrancy around the Irish language in Gaeltacht schools and the communities that they serve.

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