



**20-YEAR STRATEGY
FOR THE IRISH LANGUAGE
2010 – 2030**

Government of Ireland

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1. THE VISION

Despite centuries of language shift from Irish to English, the Irish language continues to survive as a living community language in some traditional Gaeltacht heartlands and it is also in use on a daily basis by many people outside the Gaeltacht.

The last hundred years has also seen a flowering of literature and other art forms through the medium of Irish, such that Irish is now a fully-fledged modern European language.

The objective of Government policy in relation to Irish is to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. Specifically, the Government's aim is to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English. It is an integral component of the Government's Irish language policy that close attention be given to its place in the Gaeltacht, particularly in light of research which indicates that the language's viability as a household and community language in the Gaeltacht is under threat.

The aim of Government policy is also to:

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

Irish is part of the culture and heritage of Northern Ireland and the promotion and protection of the language there is also a priority for the Government.

The Government recognises the tremendous advantage to its citizens of fluency in English, the most widely used language in international affairs. The Government commits to ensuring that this advantage is retained through the development of a bilingual society, where as many people as possible can use Irish and English with equal ease and facility. However, the Government also recognises that the focus of policy in the Gaeltacht needs to be on maintaining the linguistic identity of the community in the Gaeltacht as a distinctive language region, rather than one of bilingualism.

While strengthening the position of the language within our education system is a key focus of this Strategy, the transmission of Irish as a living language within the family and between the generations is critically important. Our overall approach is to create a supportive framework and the opportunities in which Irish can be passed on in a natural way within households and communities. This is of special importance in the context of the Gaeltacht.

The future of the language depends on people who make a positive choice to embrace the opportunities that this Strategy will create. This is the challenge for all of us.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland states that:

“The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.”

This *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* is built on the foundation of the Constitutional status of the language and follows on the *Government Statement on the Irish Language*¹ published in December 2006. That Statement affirmed the Government’s support for the development and preservation of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht and set out 13 policy objectives to that end:

Objective 1: The special status given to the Irish language in the Constitution and in legislation such as the Official Languages Act 2003, the Education Act 1998, the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Broadcasting Act 2001², will be upheld.

Objective 2: The Official Languages Act will be fully implemented. The right of the public to use Irish in dealings with the State and with other bodies will be developed and the appropriate arrangements to deliver this will be put in place.

Objective 3: The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.

Objective 4: The Gaeltacht will be given special support as an Irish-speaking area.

Objective 5: Irish will be taught as an obligatory subject from primary to Leaving Certificate level. The curriculum will foster oral and written competence in Irish among students and an understanding of its value to us as a people. This will be supported by enhanced investment in professional development and ongoing support for teachers, as well as in provision of textbooks and resources, and support for innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Objective 6: A high standard of all-Irish education will be provided to school students whose parents/guardians so wish. Gaelscoileanna will continue to be supported at primary level and all-Irish provision at post-primary level will be developed to meet follow-on demand.

Objective 7: Irish language pre-school education will continue to be supported and third-level education through Irish will be further developed.

Objective 8: The State will continue to support Foras na Gaeilge in the context of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999.

Objective 9: High quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish will be ensured, especially through the continuous development of RTÉ, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4.

Objective 10: Every assistance and support will be given to the European Union in implementing the decision to make Irish a working and official language in the EU from 1 January 2007.

Objective 11: In order to promote Irish nationally and to preserve and strengthen it in the Gaeltacht, the work being done by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and by agencies and bodies which come under its aegis will continue to be reinforced.

Objective 12: The use of the Irish language by An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces will be continued and developed.

Objective 13: The Government recognises the vital role of the Irish language voluntary sector and will continue to support it.

It is also an objective of Government to support the promotion and teaching of Irish abroad, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. Particular emphasis has been placed on supporting the teaching of Irish in third-level colleges in a range of different countries.

1. <http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/StatementontheIrishLanguage2006/>

2. Now the Broadcasting Act 2009

In broad terms, therefore, the elements that make up the modern-day context for the Irish language include the following:

- Ireland is a bilingual State in which Irish is the first official language in accordance with article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland;
- In the context of our European heritage, Irish is the oldest spoken literary language in Europe;
- According to the 2006 Census of Population, 42% of the population of Ireland have a certain ability to speak Irish - that equates to some 1.66 million people aged 3 years or more out of a total resident population of some 4.2 million;
- Irish is the main community and household language of 3% of the country's population;
- According to surveys and opinion polls, most of the population believes that Irish is of particular importance for themselves personally and/or for the country as a whole; and
- Irish was afforded official and working language status at EU level with effect from 1 January 2007.

This Strategy seeks to build on the foregoing context and objectives by setting out a series of areas for action to benefit the language and the Gaeltacht over the next 20 years. The Government believes that the Irish language is of particular importance for the people, society and culture of Ireland. As a spoken community language, Irish is unique to this country and is, therefore, of crucial importance to the identity of the Irish people and to world heritage. In this context, particular importance is attached to the preservation and promotion of Irish in the Gaeltacht in relation to conserving and protecting the heritage, culture and richness of the language where it remains as a household and community language. It is also recognised that the Strategy's objective of widening the use of the language nationwide is conferred with greater authority by the Irish language's status as a community language in the Gaeltacht.

This Strategy is underpinned by an analysis³ of the situation facing the Irish language, undertaken on behalf of the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs by a team of international consultants with expertise on language issues, led by Fiontar, DCU. In relation to the Gaeltacht, the approach in this Strategy has been informed by recommendations in the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht*⁴, undertaken on behalf of the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs by Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, NUI Galway.

The Strategy has also been supported by a study undertaken by Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil and Fergal Rhatigan of the Department of Sociology NUI Maynooth on *Attitudes towards Competence in and Use of the Irish Language 2007-2008*. The study results show that positive attitudes and aspirations for Irish have been maintained at very high levels since the author's previous studies in 1973 (*Prejudice and Tolerance In Ireland*) and 1996 (*Prejudice in Ireland Revisited*). The results show overwhelming support for preservation of Irish: 52.5% want Irish preserved in the Gaeltacht and revived for use in arts and culture outside, while 40.9% want Irish revived and used for public purposes throughout the State.

International Perspectives

The value of linguistic diversity is recognised internationally. Languages are humankind's principal tools for interacting and for expressing ideas, emotions, knowledge, memories and values. Languages are also primary vehicles of cultural expression and intangible cultural heritage, essential to the identity of individuals and groups. The key role of language in the expression and transmission of cultural heritage is recognised in the 2003 *UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*.⁵

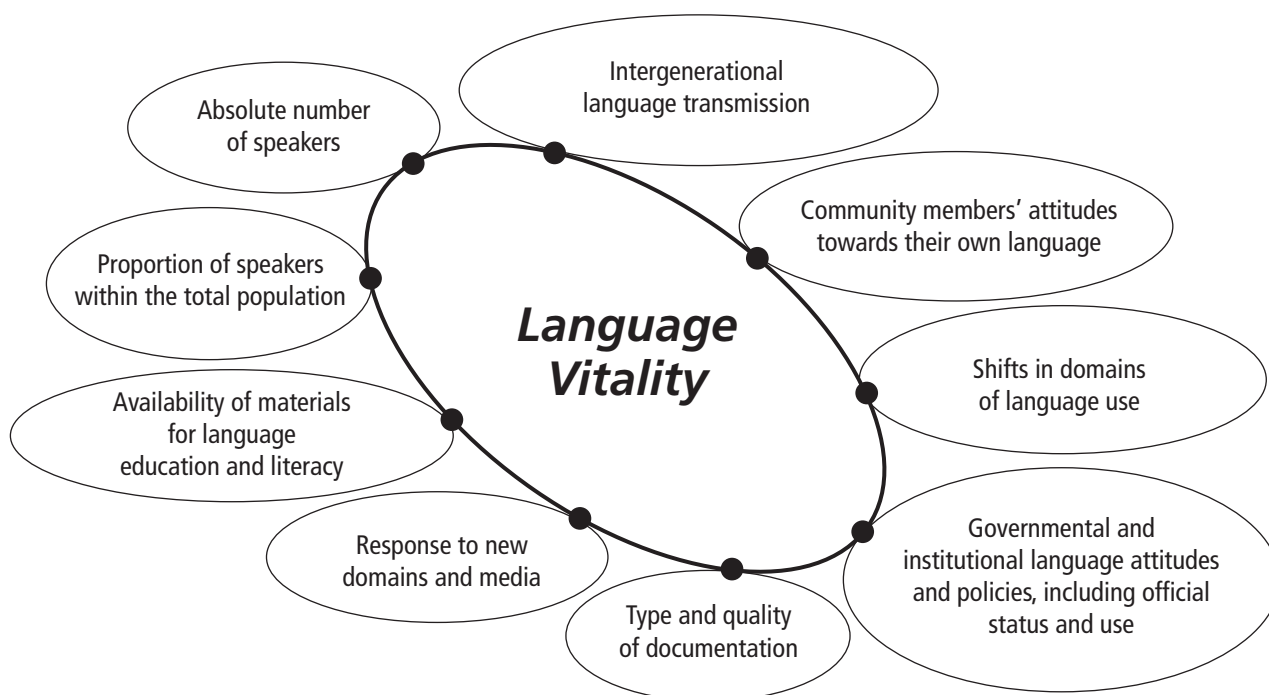
3. <http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/>

4. <http://www.pobail.ie/en/AnGhaeltacht/LinguisticStudyoftheGaeltacht/>

5. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006>

Safeguarding languages such as Irish is thus a crucial task in maintaining cultural diversity worldwide. UNESCO⁶ reports that half of the 6,700 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing before the century ends, a process that can be slowed only if urgent action is taken by Governments and speaker communities. UNESCO's Endangered Languages Programme mobilises international cooperation to focus attention on this grave situation and to promote innovative solutions from communities, experts and authorities. The most recent edition of UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*⁷ classified Irish as "definitely endangered". This status has since been improved to "vulnerable", in the light of information about the measures taken by Government to support the language in recent years.

The 2003 *UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*⁸ recognises the vital role of language in the expression and transmission of living heritage. All intangible cultural heritage depends on language for its day-to-day vitality and for being passed on to the next generation. In relation to oral traditions, whether it be song, poetry or folklore, language is not only the vehicle that contains the cultural heritage, it is its very essence. As well as analysing the situation of languages under pressure the world over, UNESCO has developed a framework for determining the vitality of a language in order to assist Governments and others in policy development, identification of needs and appropriate safeguarding measures. This framework⁹ based on the following nine criteria has also informed the development of this Strategy:



6. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00136>

7. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00136>

8. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

9. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00142>

The Government's Strategy as set out in this document is organised around:

- increasing the knowledge of Irish;
- creating opportunities for the use of Irish; and
- fostering positive attitudes towards its use.

We know from the situation that faces Irish that language use does not follow automatically from ability to speak the language. Actual language use results from the co-presence of *ability, opportunity, and positive attitudes*. This Strategy seeks, therefore, to create positive circumstances for greater use by our people of the language ability that they have and for a real increase in that ability over time.

The Strategy demonstrates the Government's support for the development and preservation of the Irish language by a long-term commitment to a coherent and comprehensive approach to the future of the language as a living, spoken language with a firm position in the education system, at the highest levels of the political system, in public administration and in the Gaeltacht.

As already stated, Irish is part of the culture and heritage of Northern Ireland and the promotion and protection of the language there is a priority for the Government.

In the context of the Government's continuing commitment to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, it will continue to support Foras na Gaeilge, an agency of the North/South implementation body charged with promoting the language on an all-island basis, and to ensure its continued effective operation. The Government's Strategy will have a beneficial impact on speakers of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. The Government will also continue to press for the full implementation of commitments relating to the Irish language, which fall to the British Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, including the introduction of an Irish Language Act and the enhancement, protection and development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

3. A PHASED STRATEGY

As already referred to, the *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006* identified key policy objectives through which support for Irish and the Gaeltacht will be advanced. The areas for action set out below are associated and grouped in relation to those objectives and will be addressed in phases as follows:

Establishment Phase

The initial phase will be devoted to the communication of the goals and content of the Strategy and setting up the required organisational and operational structures. In addition, the overall resources required will be allocated and the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and modification procedures will be agreed and established. Operational plans will be requested and received from all implementing public agencies. Key priority measures will be established.

Implementation Phase I - Laying the Foundations

During the first years of the Strategy, long-term measures will be put in place so that the supply of qualified teachers and other specialists are available, or the systems for their preparation are in place, early in the Strategy. In addition, a considerable number of measures will be fully implemented or commenced in this phase, including the preparation of materials for language education and literacy.

Implementation Phase II - Expanding and Deepening

This phase can be seen as having three sub-phases, but overall it involves: implementation of relevant measures; undertaking of rolling evaluations; and conducting of campaigns for promotion and fostering of positive attitudes to the language. The first graduates of revised teacher education programmes will be produced and these will be deployed to schools and other education institutions.

During this phase, Ireland will celebrate the 100th anniversaries of the Easter Rising and of our independence and these occasions will be linked to this Strategy, showcasing results attained, undertaking a major review of outcomes, and mobilising public involvement and support around the goals, spirit and vision of the Strategy.

Implementation Phase III: Consolidating

The consolidation phase will be directed towards mainstreaming all measures. It will build on the increased abilities in Irish among our people, expanded opportunities to use Irish and the active encouragement of positive attitudes towards Irish achieved in previous phases.

The provision of appropriate resources and support will be crucial to the implementation of the Strategy. Provision will be overseen by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and functions will be allocated to an existing agency (or agencies), or sourced from the private sector, as appropriate.

Arrangements will be put in place to:

- monitor, support and adapt practical language planning activities from other societies;
- initiate, survey and review materials which facilitate the use of Irish;
- host a central database of Irish medium materials, templates and IT applications;
- prepare guides and materials to assist individuals and voluntary organisations to promote Irish;
- provide a national public helpline;
- put in place a national information centre and clearing house for translation services and other language-related services;
- hold a national database of good practice activities in language planning;
- help develop supports for local area initiatives and the capacity to develop and manage such initiatives; and
- promote the development of language management systems in a variety of contexts.

Many of the priorities for action in this Strategy depend on the availability of such supports and resources and their organisation is, therefore, a high priority for early attention.

4. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

Following on from the *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006*, the headline goal has been set of increasing over 20 years:

- the number of people with a knowledge of Irish from the current 1.66 million to 2 million; and
- the number of daily speakers of Irish from the current level of approximately 83,000 to 250,000.

The achievement of these ambitious goals has been the overriding consideration in formulating the decisions on areas for action in this Strategy.

The specific objectives involved in the preparation of the Strategy are to:

- increase the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000;
- increase the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis in the Gaeltacht by 25% in overall terms as its invigoration will be critical to the overall Strategy. It is envisaged that specific targets for individual Gaeltacht areas will be set out in the proposed local language plans; and
- increase the number of people that use State services through the Irish language and can access television, radio and print media through the language.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

The 20-Year Strategy will be integrated across the routine operations of the agencies of the State, with strong Government direction and leadership. All sections of public administration and key national and local stakeholders have a role to play in its implementation.

“Normalisation” of the language is required in order to expand the use of Irish. This term draws on the experience of other languages whose roles have diminished. Irish will only attain a more secure social position through a campaign of active awareness and positive attitudes aimed at reversing its marginalisation, as well as greater unself-conscious use of the language for mainstream and routine purposes of communication. This task requires that all relevant agencies co-operate in pursuing the goals and programmes of the Strategy and that a coherent and effective management structure be in place for the Strategy. It also requires a focus on developing expertise and skills among the teaching profession - given the critical importance of the school in influencing language awareness and behaviour - as well as in the wider society, in highlighting the cultural value and importance of Irish to the Irish people.

The following will be the key Government structures to deliver the Strategy:

- The Cabinet Committee on Irish and the Gaeltacht, chaired by An Taoiseach, will maintain oversight of progress and report to Government as necessary.
- A Senior Officials Group made up of high-level officials from relevant Departments will support the Cabinet Committee.
- There will continue to be a senior Minister and a Government Department (the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs) with central responsibility for Irish language affairs.

Planning and implementation of the Strategy will be directed from a Strategy Unit within that Department, with dedicated staff and the function of assigning duties and implementation roles to implementation agencies, as necessary.

The Strategy Unit will be responsible for:

- overseeing the strategic planning process;
- monitoring the development of resources;

- ensuring cross-departmental implementation of initiatives;
- providing expert advice;
- overseeing operational plans as developed by the implementation bodies; and
- publishing updates and relevant documentation for public information.

A small number of seconded staff with expertise in public administration management, language planning and education may be assigned to the Unit for specific tasks, if necessary. Evaluations, as required, or specific services may be commissioned by the Unit from existing agencies or from the private sector. Sectoral plans and commitments will be delivered through relevant Departments and agencies.

With regard to the main implementation agency to be responsible for delivering the Strategy, it is proposed to establish an Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority (Údarás na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta) that will function on a national basis, incorporating relevant functions currently performed by Údarás na Gaeltachta, and other State and non-Governmental organisations, as appropriate. While the implementation of certain Gaeltacht policies and plans will continue to be the responsibility of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, it may, however, devolve functions to the Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority, as appropriate. The specific role and functions of the proposed new Authority will be set down in draft legislation, to be published in 2011.

Foras na Gaeilge will continue to deliver on its statutory responsibilities in relation to Irish. These include undertaking supportive projects and grant-aiding bodies and groups to support the language as appropriate, developing terminologies and dictionaries, supporting Irish-medium education and the teaching of the Irish language on the island of Ireland, and generally facilitating and encouraging the use of the language in public and private life. In fully carrying out its remit, Foras na Gaeilge will remain a key element of the support structure for the language in both parts of the island.

6. AREAS FOR ACTION

The Strategy sets out areas of action under nine key headings:

- Education
- The Gaeltacht
- Family Transmission of the Language - Early Intervention
- Administration, Services and Community
- Media and Technology
- Dictionaries
- Legislation and Status
- Economic Life
- Cross-cutting Initiatives

6.1 AREAS FOR ACTION - EDUCATION

Recent reports in regard to Irish in schools indicate the following:

- Inspectors judged that Irish was taught to a good or very good standard in only half of the primary classrooms inspected, and that in a third of classrooms, Irish was taught through the medium of English. Pupils in just over half of lessons were able to express themselves satisfactorily in Irish;
- The Harris report (July 2007) indicated that in English medium and Gaeltacht primary schools, there was a fall of 36.1% and 40.5% respectively in the numbers of pupils achieving mastery in the development of listening, vocabulary and comprehension skills between 1985 and 2002. While a little over half of pupils mastered fluency of oral description and communication in 1985 in English medium schools, less than one third mastered them in 2002. The study also found a marked decline in teachers' confidence, with almost 25% of teachers in English medium schools rating their own standards of spoken Irish as weak;
- At post-primary level, reports on a third of schools refer to limited oral ability among

students at junior cycle. Steps have been taken in the interim to increase the marks available for the voluntary oral at junior cycle and the national oral in the Leaving Certificate to 40% for all new entrants who began second-level schooling in 2007/8.

While the foregoing facts indicate the scale of the challenge, the actions proposed in the area of education are designed to achieve the underlying principles of the Strategy to:

- enhance and extend ability in Irish more deeply and among larger numbers of people;
- reverse negative attitudes towards Irish language usage and foster positive attitudes in their place; and
- expand the available opportunities for use of Irish within the education system by extending Irish as a medium of instruction, as well as a subject, and by linking school language learning to the informal use of Irish in recreational, cultural and other out-of-school activities.

The *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006* contains three education objectives:

Objective 5: *Irish will be taught as an obligatory subject from primary to Leaving Certificate level. The curriculum will foster oral and written competence in Irish among students and an understanding of its value to us as a people. This will be supported by enhanced investment in professional development and ongoing support for teachers, as well as in provision of textbooks and resources, and in support for innovative approaches to teaching and learning.*

Objective 6: *A high standard of all-Irish education will be provided to school students whose parents/guardians so wish. Gaelscoileanna will continue to be supported at primary level and all-Irish provision at post-primary level will be developed to meet follow-on demand.*

Objective 7: *Irish language pre-school education will continue to be supported and third-level education through Irish will be further developed.*

Links to out-of-school usage

The education system is one of the critical engines for generating the linguistic ability on which this 20-Year Strategy is premised. In formal schooling, the State can actively assist the development of the linguistic capabilities of our population. The achievement by the education authorities of a more systematic and intensive national focus on the universal learning of Irish is therefore a central goal.

The critical need to give life to the Irish language outside the classroom for the young people who study it in the formal education system is a widespread conclusion of language revitalisation efforts throughout the world. Fostering the creation of youth culture and identity, and their appropriate Irish language forms, involves providing opportunities for its natural use and creating ICT mediated networks of speakers. The education sector will work in partnership with relevant agencies in this regard.

The Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, in cooperation with the Department of Education and Skills, will continue to progress the development of the Irish summer college system in the Gaeltacht. Particular emphasis will be placed on assisting the colleges and the householders that provide accommodation for language learners to maintain and increase the effectiveness and standard of the services provided. In partnership with CONCOS - the umbrella organisation for the colleges - and the households in the Gaeltacht, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs will work to ensure an Irish-speaking experience throughout, where students will come into contact with Irish as a living spoken language in everyday life. In this regard, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs will assist with the development of a family language learning experience so that networks of natural use of Irish can be promoted, with mechanisms for their continuation throughout the year. Programmes targeted at trainee primary teachers will benefit from being restructured and enhanced, and this will form part of wider reforms that the Teaching Council will be promoting in initial education courses for primary teachers.

Partial Immersion

From as early as possible in Implementation Phase II, it is proposed to move towards a situation where partial Irish language immersion will be offered to all children. This will be implemented on a phased basis in line with the progress made in strengthening teachers' competences in this area through a comprehensive investment programme of professional development for teachers. This could be delivered through the teaching of some mainstream subject matter in Irish in the infant classes, and be complemented by the preparation in Phase II of designated subject areas to be taught through Irish in the middle and upper years in primary schools. Ultimately, the aim will be that by Implementation Phase III, all students in mainstream schools undertaking the Irish language as a core subject will be offered the experience of partial immersion education in other subjects. These measures will be achieved on a phased basis, supported by investment in the upskilling of teachers. Use will be made, as appropriate, of incentives such as the GLEO (Gaeilge Labhartha san Earnáil Oideachais) award scheme to encourage schools in this area. The strategy will be supported by the development and provision of resources and materials for schools.

It will continue to be national policy to promote immersion education through Irish in all subjects other than English in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools (gaelscoileanna) and pre-schools (naíonraí).

National Assessment

National assessment of aural and oral competence in Irish will be implemented at both junior cycle and senior cycle level for all recognised second-level schools. It is recognised that oral assessment at junior cycle can only realistically be achieved in the context of a model of local assessment by class teachers with external moderation. Standardised test instruments at primary level are being developed at present in Irish.

Innovations in curriculum require the development of appropriate instruments and procedures for the assessment of learning Irish. A beneficial linkage can be made with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for defining the linguistic and communicative standards that the assessment procedures will verify.

Curriculum for teaching of Irish

At primary level, the curriculum is relatively new and there would appear to be consensus that it is in keeping with good practice and current thinking on language teaching. In this context, there will be greater focus on more explicit articulation of the linguistic objectives at the various levels of primary schooling and the development of high-quality materials to support the implementation of the curriculum.

At primary level, a separate Irish curriculum for Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna has been developed which takes into account the different developmental language requirements of students in English and Irish-medium schools. The curriculum in Irish-medium schools will be adjusted to provide for a strengthened emphasis on the role of Irish in promoting children's cognitive and affective development generally.

At post-primary level, differentiation will continue to be provided by offering Irish at three levels in the Junior and Leaving Certificates and there will be a strong emphasis on fostering oral, aural and written competence in Irish, and on ensuring a significant shift in emphasis towards Irish as a spoken language, where students can communicate and interact in a spontaneous way, and where Irish is spoken every day in schools.

A revised syllabus in Leaving Certificate Irish is being implemented in all schools for initial examination in 2012 and is designed to provide for increased oral interaction in the classroom and to allow for an increase to 40% in the marks for oral assessment. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will undertake a review of the implementation of the syllabus in the light of the experiences of the first cohort of candidates under the revised assessment system. Among the issues to be considered in that review will be the success of the syllabus in addressing appropriately the learning needs of all students, including those with a high proficiency in Irish, particularly in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools. If necessary, further development of the syllabus may be undertaken in the light of the findings of the review.

Pre-school and parental support programmes

Pre-school and non-formal learning are important dimensions of Irish language revitalisation. All the research in this area has shown that it is easiest to acquire a new language in the earliest years. As such, it is intended that some level of pre-school Irish language education will be offered in all localities.

Childcare and pre-school facilities will be facilitated to offer an Irish language dimension and create a language-friendly environment for children, for example, through provision of supports such as Irish language DVDs geared for young children, and teaching of nursery rhymes and games in Irish. The focus, in particular, is to ensure that there is Irish-medium pre-school provision (naíonraí) in every area where there is an Irish-medium primary school, and in other areas where there is a demand.

Parents need to receive active reinforcement of their Irish literacy so that they are able to continue to support their children's increasing learning in Irish in the primary school years. Such training is important for other education and care-giving professionals and will be extended to day care workers, crèche workers and members of community associations, especially in areas where a moderate percentage of the population are Irish speakers.

Specialist Subject Provision

Services in recreational education (such as visual and performing arts) outside the formal curriculum of schools will be included in local area language plans during primary school years.

Teacher Education

Generating the teacher force to achieve objectives regarding competence in the Irish language is critical, as are links between schools, recreation and youth centres, clubs and activities. In this regard, it is noted that the Teaching Council, as the statutory body charged with determining standards for the teaching profession, has responsibility for the review and accreditation of initial teacher education programmes at primary and post-primary level.

The Teaching Council will be consulted with a view to implementing the two-pronged approach proposed in this Strategy to prepare the teaching force to meet the proposed objectives. To achieve Objective 5 of the *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006*, discussions will be entered into with the Teaching Council with a view to working progressively to raise the standard of Irish language competency for teaching the subject of Irish. Specific initiatives are proposed which include the following:

Mainstream Education – Primary System

In order to ensure that the professional Irish standard (Gaeilge Ghairmiúil) is achieved in all teacher education colleges, it is envisaged that the Teaching Council, as part of its aforementioned review, will strengthen and set standards for the teaching of professional Irish across all initial teacher education provision.

It is proposed that:

- Steps will be taken to encourage the use of Irish generally inside and outside the classroom;
- Other subjects of the initial teacher education programme, in addition to professional Irish, will be delivered through the medium of Irish;
- In the area of teacher education, student teachers will follow a defined programme of language teaching in the Gaeltacht. The tuition time and attendance of student teachers who attend Gaeltacht courses will also be increased;
- A new Gaeltacht scholarship scheme will be introduced for primary teachers to attend intensive courses in the Gaeltacht;
- Colleges of Education will be encouraged to put in place initiatives to attract students of high ability in Irish from Gaeltacht, Irish-medium and other schools. Up to 20% of places in Colleges of Education will be retained for students educated through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna, with students in English-medium schools also being eligible, subject to a high performance threshold in Irish in the Leaving Certificate;
- An extended Gaeltacht placement will be put in place for a significant proportion of trainee teachers in which students will follow a defined programme of language teaching;
- The Irish language and Irish-medium teaching components of the Bachelor of Education degree course will be bolstered, including the provision of intensive Irish courses as appropriate in consultation with the Teaching Council; and
- A new specialisation in Irish-medium primary teaching (partial or total immersion) will be introduced in Colleges of Education.

Irish-Medium Education – Primary System

A post-graduate programme specifically targeted at the needs of Irish-medium schools will be introduced. This new post-graduate programme for a Diploma in Irish Language Education (Primary Teaching) will provide specialised skills in Irish to those who have already completed a teacher education programme.

Irish-Medium Education – Post-Primary System

A new Post-Graduate Diploma in Education delivered in full through the medium of Irish will be introduced.

To further assist the realisation of Objective 5 and Objective 6 of the *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006*, a National Centre for Irish-medium Teacher Professional Development will be established in an existing educational institution. This will be a centre of excellence, aiding and advising the Colleges of Education in preparing teachers for the entire cycle of Irish-medium schools through consultancy, professional development activities, accredited training programmes and resource development. The National Centre will work in conjunction with the Colleges of Education and mobility of professional staff between all education providers and systems and the National Centre will be encouraged. There will be a formal qualification available for all primary and secondary school teachers to support them to teach in Irish-medium schools.

This will be an attractive and desirable additional qualification for those seeking to work in Irish-medium schools and a useful indicator for employers that applicants have the necessary linguistic competency.

The new academic programmes - Bachelor of Education, Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary Teaching), and Post-Graduate Diploma in Education - as well as the operation of the National Centre for Irish-medium Teacher Professional Development will be offered for open public competitive tendering among the relevant existing educational institutions.

The professional development opportunities identified above will be supplemented by significantly increased investment in the provision of short cycle and on-line professional development options for serving teachers provided through the curriculum support services and the Education Centre network at primary and post-primary level.

In further support of these measures to augment the position of the language in the education system at all levels, special recognition will be given to schools where there is good practice in teaching Irish. A wide range of textbooks, new technology materials and resources to support the teaching of Irish and teaching through Irish will be developed and provided.

A scholarship scheme for children from disadvantaged areas to attend courses in the Gaeltacht, as well as funding for Irish summer colleges throughout the country, will be provided.

The arrangements for exemption from studying Irish in schools will be reviewed to ensure that exemptions are based on objective language criteria.

Higher-Level Education in Ireland

University level and non-university adult programmes in Irish will continue to be supported and developed and professional specialisations provided.

In furthering the development of third-level education through Irish, the Government will take the following into account:

- There has been significant recent investment by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and Údarás na Gaeltachta in this sector both inside and outside the Gaeltacht, including in particular support for Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge in NUI Galway and Fiontar in Dublin City University; and
- There is an existing statutory framework for third level education in Irish, including the obligation on the Higher Education Authority (HEA) under the Higher Education Act 1971 to: “bear constantly in mind the national aims of restoring the Irish language and preserving and developing the national culture and shall endeavour to promote the attainment of these aims”. This is further strengthened in section 12 of the Universities Act 1997, which provides that the objectives of all universities include “[promotion of] the official languages of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language and the preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland”. The special role of NUI Galway in the provision of third-level programmes through the medium of the Irish language is recognised in the University College Galway (Amendment) Act 2006.

Third-level education through the medium of Irish needs to be of high quality and delivered in a strategic and coordinated way to ensure:

- opportunities for students to avail of significant periods of placements/study in the Gaeltacht to enrich their command of the language in an environment where it is the normal spoken language;
- diversification in the range of disciplines offered, with a particular focus on market requirements for people competent in Irish;
- an output of highly qualified graduates with specific skills needed to serve the national and EU status of Irish;
- development of particular specialisation in each college and restriction of duplication of provision to no more than one or two locations;

- value for money and quality assurance in research and teaching, also avoiding duplication or fragmentation; and
- development of courses and accreditation in Professional Irish for as many professions as possible.

Funding will be provided to enable the Higher Education Authority to put in place a specific programme to strategically develop this sector.

The accessibility of Irish language classes and activities and the creation of an atmosphere on campus, which recognises that the language is an integral part of college social as well as academic life, is important to normalisation of its use. Third level institutions have an important role in influencing whole of life language choice and use among students and in supporting local language initiatives in the wider community and will be encouraged to do so.

Adult Language Learning

Additional opportunities will be afforded to adults interested in learning the language or in increasing their ability to speak Irish. An accredited adult Irish language learning programme, catering for all levels, will be recognised as the agreed national Irish language-learning programme.

To foster excellence at a high academic level in the study of Irish, the Government will build on the work of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and the universities in the development of research and teaching of Celtic Studies and strengthen Ireland's position as a world centre of excellence in this discipline.

Advice and Support Services

Information and resource materials will be produced for various categories of school professionals such as speech therapists, guidance counsellors, careers advisors and others promoting the benefits of bilingualism (and especially of Irish language learning). Specific advice will be addressed to the following groups:

- **Children whose first language is Irish and/or children attending Irish-medium schools.** It is important that all professional and para-professional staff consistently support the

maintenance of Irish. These professional groups will be made aware of the vast literature supporting the intellectual, speech, and career benefits of bilingualism. Specific advice will be offered to support the bilingual needs of children with special needs.

- **Children whose first language is English and/or children attending English-medium schools.** Similarly for such children, school staff concerned with special needs will be provided with information supporting the intellectual, speech and career benefits of bilingualism - and specifically the advantages of learning and using Irish.
- **Immigrant children in Ireland.** Newly-arrived immigrant children in Ireland will also be afforded the opportunity to participate in all Irish language activities and specific attention will be paid to their language learning needs.

Education in the Gaeltacht

All the above measures apply equally to the Gaeltacht. In addition to these, the Government acknowledges the specific difficulty of accommodating the needs of pupils with diverse linguistic abilities in Gaeltacht schools. This can be complicated further depending on the status of the Irish language within the school community. It is acknowledged that teaching resources are a major issue for Gaeltacht schools, both at primary and second-level. It may be noted that, with investment by Foras na Gaeilge and An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), there has been a considerable improvement in the availability of teaching resources in Irish, although there needs to be sustained investment in this area. The needs in this area apply also to gaelscoileanna. In addition, there is a critical need to provide resources for Irish in English-medium primary schools.

At the same time, the Government is fully aware of the importance of the education system in the maintenance of the language in the Gaeltacht and this objective was encompassed in the Education Act 1998. In addition to those initiatives already outlined, the Government has decided to progress a number of actions in the Gaeltacht as part of this Strategy:

- A review of the Gaeltacht scholarship scheme operated by the Department of Education and Skills will take place with the aim of increasing its effectiveness as an Irish language support mechanism;
- Measures will be taken to progress the development of the Irish language education resource centre in Baile Bhuirne, Co Cork;
- A new language acquisition unit at primary level will be developed in each of the three main Gaeltacht regions;
- Provision will also be made for intensive summer/evening courses in Irish for post-primary pupils in the Gaeltacht who need additional support;
- Designated inspectors will continue to be deployed by the Department of Education and Skills for Gaeltacht schools and for gaelscoileanna;
- The present approach to Gaeltacht Summer Colleges will be reviewed with a view to more coherent State involvement in the regulation and development of these colleges, increasing the effectiveness and standard of the services provided, and ensuring an improved and more consistent curriculum design process;
- It will continue to be national policy to promote immersion education through Irish in all subjects other than English in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools and in pre-schools (naíonraí);
- A review of immersion provision at post-primary level in Irish-medium schools (gaelscoileanna) and in the Gaeltacht will be carried out;
- Schemes operated by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs which support the education system in the Gaeltacht (such as supports for Irish language assistants and other supports in Gaeltacht schools, as well as the system of home visits for linguistic support purposes) will be strengthened in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills;
- All Gaeltacht students will continue to have the opportunity to receive their education through the medium of Irish. The Department of Education and Skills, in consultation with the Department of Community, Equality and

Gaeltacht Affairs, will examine and implement suitable arrangements for such provision in the varying circumstances of each Gaeltacht area; and

- Appropriate structural arrangements will be made, in the context of any review of VEC structures nationally, for the provision of all-Irish secondary school education throughout the State, including in the Gaeltacht, and to ensure that all staff in Irish-medium schools are capable of carrying out their daily business through Irish and that an integrated approach is taken to the provision of back-up, support and advisory services to Irish-medium schools so that such services are provided in Irish where possible. Educational supports such as Irish language textbooks and audio-visual material will be made available to such schools.

Establishment of Schools

The Education Act 1998 places specific obligations on the system to contribute to the realisation of national policy and objectives in relation to Irish, to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas, and to promoting the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents.

The promotion of the Irish language has been an important aim of successive Irish Governments and the Department of Education and Skills has responded to the increased demands for Irish-medium schooling in recent years. At primary level, this is evidenced in the increased numbers of gaelscoileanna established outside Gaeltacht areas. Since 2005, a total of 17 new gaelscoileanna have been recognised by the Department to give a total of 138 recognised Irish-medium primary schools. At post-primary level, the number of gaelcholáistí (Irish-medium second-level schools) has grown to 45 (of which 13 have been established since 2000) and this provision is supplemented by 10 aonad (specialised Irish-medium units attached to an existing second-level school) and 10 sruth (stream or Irish-speaking class within an English-medium school). Both the aonad and sruth structure facilitate the provision of Irish-medium education in cases where there is significant demand for education in Irish but where this demand would be insufficient for an independent Irish-medium school.

The population increase over the past ten years or so has resulted in a requirement to provide significant additional school places in some areas of the country and this increase is expected to continue in the short to medium term. There are increasing demands for diversity of provision of school type, including Irish-medium education, distributed throughout the country in areas of both static and growing population. These growing demands have required a revision of the procedures for the recognition of new primary schools. Pending the outcome of the review, the Department of Education and Skills has had to adopt an interim strategy whereby it is only allowing new primary schools to be established to cater for demographic growth in order to deliver on the overall priority that every child has a school place available to them. The review, which is well advanced, is being undertaken by the Commission on School Accommodation and all the education partners are involved. The outcome of the review will result in the consideration and adoption of new arrangements for the recognition of new primary schools. The demands to extend the provision of Irish-medium education at primary level will be considered in the context of the new arrangements for the recognition of new schools being put in place.

At post-primary level, new arrangements for the recognition of second-level schools were established in July 2010. These provide for a new framework involving the setting out of clear criteria against which new second-level school applications are to be assessed. These criteria envisage that new schools will only be established where there is demographic demand and that new schools will typically be in a size range of 800 to 1000 pupils. The criteria also set out that a lower threshold of 400 will apply for gaelcholáistí having regard to the alternative of establishing an aonad within a school.

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta will play a key role in the implementation of the Strategy in the education sector working in collaboration with existing agencies. The Council will be

appropriately staffed and resourced to carry out its existing remit:

- to plan and co-ordinate the provision of textbooks and aids to learning and teaching through Irish;
- to advise the Minister on policies relating to the provision and promotion of education through the medium of Irish in recognised schools generally and in schools located in a Gaeltacht area;
- to provide support services to those schools through the medium of Irish;
- to conduct research into any or all of these matters; and
- to plan and co-ordinate the provision of textbooks and aids to the learning and teaching of Irish and to conduct research into and to advise the Minister on strategies which have as their objective the enhancement of the effectiveness of the teaching of Irish in recognised schools and centres for education.

The role of COGG will be strengthened to reflect the need to address various issues particular to the teaching and learning of Irish in schools operating through the medium of Irish, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht and the teaching of Irish in all recognised schools. COGG will play a strong role in directly advising Irish-medium schools on best practice in the provision of education through the medium of Irish.

With regard to the larger issue of the specific needs of Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, a high-level group will review existing policies and explore possible changes, including the development of a new policy for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools. Other possible functions for COGG will also be considered in the context of these discussions.

The high-level group will have representation from relevant stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, Foras na Gaeilge and the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority.

Third-Level Irish Courses Abroad

In 2006 the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs established a dedicated fund to support the development of Irish language courses in third-level institutions overseas. The objectives of the fund are to promote and foster goodwill for the Irish language and indeed for Ireland and Irish culture in general across Europe, North America and Canada and to provide a platform from which the Irish language can be assessed and showcased as an international language. This increases awareness of the Irish language and culture outside of Ireland and leads to links between Ireland and the countries in which these institutions are located, resulting in positive long-term impacts on the language. It also provides an excellent opportunity to present the Irish language to the academic community worldwide and gives the Irish language equal status to other European languages being taught abroad. In addition, many students who study Irish in their own countries continue their studies here in Ireland and as a consequence students from all over the world attend courses in the Gaeltacht. This results in bonds of friendship and a lifelong interest and understanding of the rich language and culture of this country.

Currently over 30 third-level colleges and universities in the USA, in European countries and further afield are actively providing Irish language and Celtic Studies' programmes within their own institutions.

These measures by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to support the teaching of Irish overseas (including the joint programme with the Fulbright Commission and the Ireland Canada University Foundation) will be maintained as a vehicle to expand the teaching and learning of Irish in universities outside Ireland.

6.2 AREAS FOR ACTION - THE GAELTACHT

In its *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006*, the Government affirmed its policy to strengthen the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking community and ratified Government support for the Gaeltacht. The Statement contains three objectives that refer to the Gaeltacht:

Objective 3: *The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.*

Objective 4: *The Gaeltacht will be given special support as an Irish-speaking area.*

Objective 11: *In order to promote Irish nationally and to strengthen it in the Gaeltacht, the work being done by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and by agencies under its aegis will continue to be reinforced.*

The *2007 Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* recommends that the main strategic focus of language policy in the Gaeltacht should be on supporting and empowering future generations of young Gaeltacht parents to raise their children through Irish. The Study reinforces in particular the importance of maintaining and increasing the proportion of active Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas.

It is against this background that the major changes outlined in this Strategy are being implemented by Government. The development of a comprehensive language planning system at community level in the Gaeltacht is central to the strategy that will be put in place to ensure that Irish survives as the community language in the Gaeltacht.

Linguistic status of Gaeltacht communities – new legislation

The Government accepts the broad thrust of the recommendations in the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* with regard to Gaeltacht status being based on linguistic criteria. This will be given statutory status through a new Gaeltacht Act. The legal definition will be broadly based on the criteria outlined in the Study with some fundamental modifications.

As already referred to, an Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority with responsibility for Irish language matters throughout the State will be established. Its headquarters will be in the Gaeltacht and it will assume responsibility for relevant functions currently performed by Údarás na Gaeltachta, as well as other State and non-Governmental organisations, as appropriate. Legislation will be prepared in 2011 for the establishment of this Authority. Regard will be had to both its Gaeltacht and wider national remit. The need for expertise in the area of minority language planning will also be addressed when establishing its governing structure. The new authority, Údarás na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta, will retain the functions currently carried out by Údarás na Gaeltachta, including an enterprise function.

For language planning and implementation purposes, the various types of language maintenance and strategic interventions (including integrated language plans) will be based on the identified linguistic needs of the various communities with the intention of increasing the numbers of daily Irish speakers.

In the case of majority Irish-speaking communities, the emphasis will be on protecting and strengthening these strong language communities by ensuring the linguistic sustainability of Irish as the community language of these regions. In the case of other Gaeltacht regions where daily Irish speakers are a significant minority, the emphasis will be on strengthening the Irish language community networks that continue to exist there.

Communities that cannot comply with the criteria in the new legislation will be afforded a period of two years to develop plans to ensure that they maintain their status as Gaeltacht communities. Communities who fail to develop

acceptable sustainable plans within the two-year period will no longer be included in the Gaeltacht.

Plans will be reviewed every seven years and areas that do not achieve the linguistic criteria for the Gaeltacht set down in the new Act will cease to have Gaeltacht status. New areas may also be included in the Gaeltacht if they meet the linguistic criteria laid down in the new Act.

Language Planning in the Gaeltacht

Under the new Act, a language planning process will be instigated whereby a language plan will be prepared at community level for each Gaeltacht district. These plans will integrate the approach in relation to linguistic issues, education, physical planning, and social and community development. Community co-operation and participation will be critical. Resources will be made available to implement the language plans.

These plans will be first and foremost language-centred, incorporating all aspects of community life in these districts. In order to address the threat to the sustainability of the Gaeltacht as a linguistic entity, priority will be given to language planning activities necessary to stabilise the position of Irish as the community language. These language plans will comprise activities/plans under the following headings:

- Education Planning;
- Family Support Services, including childcare services, pre-school services, language advisory services for families, after-school services, networks for Irish-speaking parents and children, pre-marital and ante-natal advice services, language awareness programme for families, speech therapy and psychological services, and public health services;
- Youth Services, including the promotion of language awareness among the young in the Gaeltacht, Gaeltacht Summer Colleges and camps;
- Local Government Services;
- Local and Physical Planning, including infrastructural development, economic development, housing and settlement policy;

- Community Development;
- Planning for economic, industrial and local business development, including the promotion of language awareness among business service providers in Gaeltacht districts;
- Development of Cultural/Educational Tourism;
- Religious Services;
- Care for the elderly;
- Care of children with special needs;
- Health Services; and
- Sport.

Future State expenditure on the language in the Gaeltacht will be determined by reference to its linguistic impact and particular priority will be afforded to linguistic supports for families and young people so as to ensure the continued transmission of the language from generation to generation.

Particular emphasis will be placed on the promotion of an Irish language youth culture in the Gaeltacht, which will see further development of Gaeltacht youth services and a linkage through the Gaeltacht Summer Colleges with national youth organisations.

The State will also develop a comprehensive set of supports for Irish-speaking families in the Gaeltacht in consultation with parents of young children and infants, and expectant parents.

Planning and Development in the Gaeltacht

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government will prepare extensive planning guidelines to assist local authorities with regard to the implementation of the Planning and Development Act in the Gaeltacht so as to ensure the protection of the unique linguistic identity of the Gaeltacht.

In recognition of the need for greater collaboration between national and local government and between various sectors in delivering a more integrated efficient service, the Department of Environment, Heritage and

Local Government, in co-operation with the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and City and County Managers, will aim to develop new shared services with appropriate and specialised expertise for all Gaeltacht areas in the planning arena.

Gaeltacht area plans will have the same status as town plans. As well as being approved by the local authority, Gaeltacht area plans will be approved by the proposed new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority to ensure adequate input from the perspective of the sustainability of the language into the plans.

Delivery of services to Gaeltacht communities

As many non-language services as is practicable will be delivered in the Gaeltacht by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority, in recognition of their focused ability to deliver services through Irish.

6.3 AREAS FOR ACTION – FAMILY TRANSMISSION OF THE LANGUAGE – EARLY INTERVENTION

The actions proposed in the area of family transmission of the language are of critical importance. The *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006* contains the following objective in this area:

Objective 3: *The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.*

Language transmission in the family is a crucial element in the language planning process and a vital building block in the efforts to increase the number of fluent speakers.

Language transmission within the family is increasingly being recognised worldwide as one of the key issues which need to be explored if

lesser-used languages are to survive. Families where parents speak Irish need advice and guidance on how to raise their children as balanced bilinguals, especially if only one parent speaks the language.

The home, family and neighbourhood - this stage of daily, informal, oral interaction between grandparents, parents and children - is crucial to the maintenance of Irish as a living language. The family is the building block of such transmission. Above all, it is in the family that a deep bond with language and language activities is fostered, shared and fashioned into personal and social as well as cultural and linguistic identity.

Parents may not fully understand the economic, employment and educational advantages of speaking Irish to their children. Therefore, the proposed interventions in this area are partly about encouraging and supporting parents to raise their children bilingually, and partly about providing factual information and raising awareness of the inherent advantages to the child's development of speaking more than one language.

The aim of State supports in the promotion of language transmission in the family will therefore be to:

- provide advice, guidance and support for families where Irish is spoken in the home; and
- promote a greater understanding of practical bilingualism in a family environment.

In practical terms this will entail:

- raising awareness among parents, prospective parents and the public at large of the advantages of bilingualism;
- supporting the changing of language patterns of families where one parent speaks Irish, in order to increase the number of children who speak both Irish and English in the home; and

- bringing the message of the advantages of bilingualism into the mainstream work of the health and social services' providers who give advice to new parents.

There is considerable experience in other jurisdictions, including Wales and the Basque Country, of supporting families raising children with two languages. Building on experiences in Ireland, particularly in supporting networks of Irish-speaking families and providing language support for children in Gaeltacht schools, and on international best practice, a range of practical measures will be put in place to support the transmission of Irish in the family:

- The Language Assistants' Scheme operating in Gaeltacht schools will be extended to all Irish-medium schools;
- Enhanced support for networks of Irish-speaking families will be provided at a local level;
- Programmes to assist grandparents and other older people to pass the language on to the new generation will be supported;
- Targeted language learning opportunities will be put in place to assist families where only one parent speaks Irish;
- The Gaeltacht Summer Colleges will place more emphasis on family language learning experiences so that networks of natural use of Irish can be promoted with mechanisms for their continuation post-Summer College in families and among friendship groupings;
- Awareness of the advantages of bilingualism in the mainstream work of health and social care professionals that work with young families will be raised; and
- The functions of county childcare committees for the Irish language crèche/playschool sector throughout the State will be discharged in future through the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority.

6.4 AREAS FOR ACTION - ADMINISTRATION, SERVICES AND COMMUNITY

The actions proposed in the area of administration, services and community are designed to support achievement of ability, opportunity and attitudes conducive to the expansion of Irish. The *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006* contains five objectives related to these areas:

Objective 3: *The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.*

Objective 8: *The State will continue to support Foras na Gaeilge in the context of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999.*

Objective 11: *In order to promote Irish nationally and to strengthen it in the Gaeltacht, the work being done by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and by agencies under its aegis will continue to be reinforced.*

Objective 12: *The use of the Irish language by An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces will be continued and developed.*

Objective 13: *The Government recognises the vital role of the Irish language voluntary sector and will continue to support it.*

Structural Changes

A number of significant structural changes are to take place:

- New legislation will be introduced for the establishment of the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority with national responsibility for Irish language matters throughout the State;
- Foras na Gaeilge will continue to be supported in providing resources and supports to the language on an all-Ireland level;

- A further category of language community will be recognised in the new legislation to allow for targeted initiatives to develop new language communities/networks outside the Gaeltacht. These will be predominantly in urban communities that have achieved the essential critical mass of community and State support for the Irish language;
- In recognition of the need for greater collaboration between national and local government and between various sectors in delivering a more integrated efficient service, the relevant players will co-operate in aiming to develop new shared services with appropriate and specialised expertise for all Gaeltacht areas in the planning arena; and
- The feasibility of the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority carrying out, on an agency basis, functions through Irish for other public bodies, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht, will be considered.

Measures for Irish in the Public Service

Language awareness and language training programmes need to be developed and strengthened so that a higher proportion of public service staff are truly functional in Irish and can deliver services in Irish to customers who seek them. The Department of Finance and the Public Appointments Service will devise appropriate arrangements to increase the cohort of public servants who are functional bilinguals. These arrangements will be put in place over time, recognising the present constraints on public sector recruitment. They will be supported by the development, within the existing overall national qualifications framework, of an independent, standards-based accreditation system for Irish language competency within the public service. A National Diploma in Bilingualism and Language Practice will be designed and offered, so as to support the delivery of quality services to the public in both Irish and English.

The Official Languages Act has adopted the “language scheme” as a core instrument by which bilingual services are to be provided. Future language schemes will specify the posts within an organisation that require an Irish language competency requirement.

Local Language Initiatives and Plans outside the Gaeltacht

The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* recommended recognition of distinct types of language communities within the Gaeltacht for which targeted, appropriate language planning interventions would be devised. The Government considers it appropriate that a new type of “network Gaeltacht” be recognised in the new legislation. This category will allow for targeted language planning initiatives to develop new language communities/networks outside the Gaeltacht. These will be predominantly in urban communities that have achieved a basic critical mass of community and State support for the Irish language, such as childcare facilities through Irish, gaelscoileanna, second level education through Irish, Irish language youth clubs and other services, including mother and toddler groups, Irish language religious services, etc. Specific criteria to be developed for this category will relate to public attitudes, language ability, provision of Irish-medium education and the willingness to actively participate in Irish language initiatives.

The Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority will provide supports for such language plans. Support will also be available from Irish language officers employed by local authorities and other experts within existing bodies.

The aim of a local action plan will be to draw together local people and public/voluntary groups to facilitate the use of Irish locally. This will be done through increased co-ordination and public awareness of existing activities. The approach will be to map and identify Irish language vitality in the local area. It will be supplemented by a language audit process which will identify ongoing strengths and weaknesses and provide time-series evidence of the impact which language-related policies and reforms would have on actual language use. These plans will be integrated with County Language Plans and will include the development of social and resource centres.

In the long-term, the local action plans will;

- create social conditions that will nurture positive attitudes towards Irish and an increase in its general use;
- normalise the use of Irish as a medium of social and institutional communication; and
- emphasise the close relationship between language and attitudes which relate to quality of life issues, the environment and the local economy.

A key role of local Irish language plans will be to foster learning and usage opportunities across schools and between individual schools and recreational, trade, library and community activities. The Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and the new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority will undertake an active facilitative role in supporting local Irish language-centred activities that link school language learning to related fields of cultural, recreational, trade and entrepreneurial/enterprise activity. Adult, continuing and life-long education and training activities will be included in integrated local area activities to extend initiatives in Irish language support from school and community domains into adult literacy, recreational and vocational training programmes.

Local language initiatives will include the establishment of “one-stop community shops” to:

- provide advice to new parents who wish to raise their children bilingually;
- offer guidance on the range of Irish-medium educational opportunities which are available;
- assist public and voluntary organisations who wish to increase their use of Irish; and
- encourage businesses who wish to offer a bilingual service to their customers.

Activities could focus on providing or enhancing social and learning opportunities for children and young people to use their Irish outside the classroom in a range of cultural, social, leisure and sporting activities.

County Language Plans

All counties with designated Gaeltacht areas, including “network Gaeltacht” areas, will be required to prepare and implement County Language Plans. Each such plan will contain initiatives to increase the percentage and number of daily Irish speakers on a yearly basis through specific targeted initiatives for that county. These measures will be delivered by stakeholders with assistance from language planning experts. Following an evaluation, this approach may be extended to other counties.

Language Plan for Dublin City and County Councils

A substantial number of daily Irish speakers live in Greater Dublin and in its catchment area. The presence of the Irish language in the capital city is of great symbolic importance, both to the people of Ireland and to visitors arriving in Dublin on business or for pleasure. A major Irish language promotion plan for Dublin City and its surrounding environs will be developed and implemented in the first period of Implementation Phase II. The key target of this plan will be to increase the proportion of daily Irish speakers in Dublin year on year by increasing the visibility of the language and by providing opportunities for normal daily use of the language in the city.

The Important Role of the Voluntary Sector

The local voluntary sector will have a strong role to play in the development of local language initiatives and plans. It is important, therefore, that the sector be accorded a voice and an opportunity to contribute to policy at local level, and that support be provided to groups that want to engage with the language at national and local levels in line with the aims and content of this Strategy.

The Irish language is a central part of the ethos of national voluntary organisations, such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. The Government recognises their key role in promoting the language. The State will develop and intensify its support for these organisations in promoting our language.

Other voluntary sporting and cultural organisations have the potential to play a central role in widening the use of the Irish language beyond the schoolroom. The Government will proactively engage with such organisations to unlock the potential of their community-based sporting and cultural activities to contribute significantly to the Strategy.

At present the State provides funding for many diverse Irish language organisations. A more integrated “cradle to old age” approach will be taken with a radical re-organisation of State-funded language organisations being undertaken to provide comprehensive language support services on an area basis.

Physical resource centres

Dedicated resource centres will be developed in the centre of Dublin and other major urban areas. Such centres may include theatre space, coffee shops and restaurants, bookshops, offices for Irish language organisations, internet centres, historical materials, meeting and conference rooms, display areas, and research and development start-up units. In other areas, existing resource centres, including the regional resource centres established by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann with public funding and centres run by other cultural, sporting and local development bodies, will, with the agreement of the body concerned, serve as centres for Irish language promotion and activities.

An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces

The maintenance and development of the position of the Irish language in An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces is important, both because of the symbolic importance of these forces in our national life and because of the services, particularly in the case of An Garda Síochána, provided to the public. Measures already in train under the Official Languages Act to strengthen the position of Irish as an internal working language in Gaeltacht areas and among other Irish-speaking units in services to the community and in the symbolic role of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces in national life and on state occasions will be further developed.

6.5 AREAS FOR ACTION - MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

The 2006 *Statement on the Irish Language* contains one objective addressing media and technology:

Objective 9: *High quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish will be ensured, especially through the continuous development of RTÉ, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4.*

General

The Irish language in the twenty-first century is already charting its course in new directions. The traditional sectors of education, community, arts and media are no longer discrete domains in which separate individual policies can be formulated and implemented. Languages which were previously disadvantaged by their dispersed community base are now well-positioned to benefit from opportunities for innovation through new communications and media technologies. These developments have immense potential for resource building in the arts and education and open up new channels for individuals and communities to increase their knowledge and regular use of Irish.

Reading, Writing and Speech

Building ability in reading and writing Irish requires new thinking beyond the limitations of the printed word reproduced on paper. Future policy must take account of the opportunities for linking developments in the arts, media, technology and education, as well as building on the traditional models of creating and disseminating content. Opportunities for reading and writing in Irish, which includes the production of all print media and literature in the language, and its application in education, culture and leisure, need to be exploited by a combination of traditional and innovative means. This includes those modes of communication that make little use of written language. New media and technologies should also be employed to increase public participation in reading and writing Irish in new ways and places.

Traditional products like printed newspapers, magazines and books will continue to be produced and supported where effective distribution channels and reasonable sales can be established and verified. Support limited mainly to production of these single-media materials is ineffective without distribution and marketing supports, and a reasonable threshold of public demand. Easy public access to printed materials in Irish in newsagents, bookshops and on the internet is essential if literature and print journalism are to be sustainable into the future.

As technologies and marketing techniques are continually evolving, the most effective strategy for developing reading and writing in Irish is likely to change significantly in the coming years and will need to be constantly reviewed. The reading and writing of Irish will be supported through CDs, DVDs, audio books and print media in the short to medium-term through:

- development of literary events and activities in public libraries throughout the year (and not solely during Seachtain na Gaeilge) - author readings, launches, reading and listening clubs, and literary programmes for schools;
- guided reading programmes in schools at specific points of intervention (e.g. fifth class in primary school, transition year in post-primary and in Irish Summer Colleges, where listening to and reading of books and other materials in Irish would be led by an author or critic to support development of individual reading habits);
- prominent display of new materials in Irish in selected designated leading bookstores, with suitable promotional materials, stands, bookmarks, promotional events, window displays and author presence (with the collaboration and support of relevant public agencies if necessary);
- development of a modern on-line stock and order management system, managed by the main distribution agency for CDs/DVDs/books in Irish, where orders can be placed electronically 24/7, and tracked by booksellers, Irish-language publishers and individual purchasers awaiting orders;

- development of an attractive on-line store for Irish materials, showcasing new titles, authors, reviews, blogs and other resources, which could also be used in schools and classes for adult learners;
- promotion and development of book clubs in Irish as a priority in local community language initiatives, and provision of appropriate on-line support for book clubs;
- development of at least one physical literary Irish-language venue or space in Dublin, including a CD/DVD/bookshop, a programme of literary events, and facilities like a coffee shop, where individuals and families could enjoy meeting;
- development of a literary promotion brief by RTÉ and TG4, with a key role in literary awards, book programmes, profiling of authors and contributing to their visibility and media status, and cultivation of stronger links between writing for the media and for book publication as “complementary” activities; and
- development of initiatives to encourage writing in Irish by young people in a range of media - journalism, blogging, creative writing, drama and film scripts.

Oireachtas na Gaeilge, as the primary national Irish language festival, will be encouraged and supported to allow it to continue to grow. The growth needs to be carefully managed, however, in an organic manner, so that the festival will remain an Irish language festival.

RTÉ, as the national public service broadcaster, will normalise the use of Irish and English in their broadcasts, building on the success of Irish Language Week (Seachtain na Gaeilge). RTÉ will continue to support and develop Raidió na Gaeltachta so that a broad spectrum of high standard programmes will be delivered to those communities that listen to this service.

A youth-focused radio to target young people will be developed using both the internet and conventional radio broadcasting.

TG4 will be further supported to provide television services through Irish. TG4 now has a target of a six-hour daily Irish language schedule, up from a current level of

approximately 4.58 hours. Sufficient funding is vital for TG4 to carry out its statutory remit and to retain its market share as an independent statutory body in an increasingly competitive environment.

The continued development of TG4 will also ensure that the independent production sector in the Gaeltacht continues to provide varied employment opportunities.

The Broadcasting Act 2009 sets a framework for both RTÉ and TG4 in the coming years.

Section 25 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 imposes an obligation on the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to endeavour to ensure:

that the number and categories of broadcasting services made available in the State by virtue of this Act best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity,

and an obligation to:

promote and stimulate the development of Irish language programming and broadcasting services.

A number of detailed changes in the legislative framework enhance the position of the Irish language through the activities of the public service broadcasters. These include:

- allowing more favourable charges, terms and conditions in respect of archive schemes by public service broadcasters for the purpose of Irish language broadcasts;
- increase in the allocation of licence fee money from RTÉ to the Broadcasting Funding Scheme (from 5% to 7%), of which TG4 is a main beneficiary;
- continuation of a “free hour” of Irish language television from RTÉ to TG4 (valued at circa €10m);
- deepening RTÉ's remit in relation to the Irish language;
- Irish language programmes now free from the “peak hours” restriction in the case of the Broadcasting Funding Scheme;

- TG4 has been given specific powers to provide on-line non-linear services in Irish; and
- the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to consider multi-annual funding requirements of TG4.

In fulfilment of the obligations created by the Broadcasting Act, the Government will specifically ensure that the support provided to the Irish language services of the public service broadcasters is further strengthened.

Subtitling options will be substantially increased in order to offer the option to have subtitles in Irish, English, or both, or no subtitles, thus significantly reinforcing the accessibility of TG4 to learners and non-proficient users of Irish as well as fluent speakers.

The Good Friday Agreement provided that the British Government would work with the relevant British and Irish broadcasting authorities to make TG4 more “widely available” in Northern Ireland. The Government will continue to work with the relevant British authorities to ensure that this will be achieved in the context of the switchover to digital television by 2012.

All Irish language initiatives with a specific arts remit, to include drama and traditional arts, will be planned and developed as part of an integral arts strategy between the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport in tandem with the Arts Council.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The Government will request the inclusion of Irish in all EU-developed ICT programmes. It will also actively engage with major IT suppliers to license and distribute Irish-medium IT programmes. An IT strategy will be developed, to include IT terminology and lexicographical resources; localisation and open source applications; switchability of interface and language attributes; additional content creation aids to supplement spellcheckers and computerised dictionaries; diacritic markers; multilingual web pages; terminology for computer-aided translation; multilingual content/document management systems; language technology issues and corpora; speech

technology, speech synthesis, speech recognition, adaptive technology and embedding issues; capacity building for end users and technology specialists; e-learning and the Irish language; call centre software; back end databases and bi/multilingualism; metadata; mobile devices; optical character recognition; and handwriting recognition.

Such IT developments need also to be embedded in educational, social and work-related practices to become effective means of enhanced communication.

6.6 AREAS FOR ACTION - DICTIONARIES

A number of measures are already in place to ensure that:

- up-to-date dictionaries, both English-Irish and Irish-English, will be developed with provision for updating/revising them periodically and for deriving shorter dictionaries from them;
- such dictionaries will be published in both print and electronic formats;
- corpus resources and lexical tools for development of Irish language lexicography will be created, supporting both monolingual (historical) and bilingual (contemporary) dictionaries;
- the Historic Dictionary of the Irish language being developed by the Royal Irish Academy will be completed by 2037;
- modern terminology in Irish will be developed and disseminated; and
- the Official Standard for Irish spelling and grammar will be revised periodically.

These measures will continue to be developed and supported to ensure that the needs of the language in the modern age are met.

A new Central Translation Unit has been established in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to implement a strategy for the translation of Statutory Instruments. It will also complete a review of the Official Standard for Irish in 2011.

6.7 AREAS FOR ACTION – LEGISLATION AND STATUS

The *Government Statement on the Irish Language 2006* contains three objectives related to legislation:

Objective 1: *The special status given to the Irish language in the Constitution and in legislation such as the Official Languages Act 2003, the Education Act 1998, the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Broadcasting Act 2001 will be upheld.*

Objective 2: *The Official Languages Act will be fully implemented. The right of the public to use Irish in dealings with the State and with other bodies will be developed and the appropriate arrangements to deliver this will be put in place.*

Objective 10: *Every assistance and support will be given to the European Union in implementing the decision to make Irish a working and official language in the EU from 1 January 2007.*

Legal Standing

The Irish language has been included in many pieces of legislation enacted by successive Governments since the foundation of the State. The status of Irish as the first official and national language in the Irish Constitution has been given effect in the Official Languages Act 2003. All provisions of the Act are in effect.

EU status

Irish has the status of a EU working and official language since 1 January 2007. The agreement on the introduction of this status gives the EU institutions a derogation from the obligation to translate all EU laws and texts into Irish, subject to periodic reviews of the continuing need for this derogation. The Government will work to create the circumstances in which a sufficient number of qualified graduates are in place to meet EU recruitment needs so that this derogation can be ended during the lifetime of this Strategy.

New Legislation

As already stated, new legislation will be enacted to give effect to the actions set out in this Strategy, including measures to:

- provide a new definition for the Gaeltacht based on linguistic criteria; and
- repeal the *Údarás na Gaeltachta* legislation and establish a new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority.

Northern Ireland

As noted earlier, the Government will continue to press for the full implementation of commitments relating to the Irish language, which fall to the British Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, including the introduction of an Irish Language Act and the enhancement, protection and development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

6.8 AREAS FOR ACTION – ECONOMIC LIFE

Voluntary Language Schemes

Irish Language Schemes - modelled on Language Schemes for the public sector provided for in the Official Languages Act - will be introduced on a voluntary basis into the private sector. The aim will be to encourage private sector companies, who value linguistic diversity in general and the Irish language in particular, and wish to be involved in the national programme to deliver quality customer services in both Irish and English. Exemplary initiatives in Irish language support will be publicly acknowledged and celebrated.

Bilingual Labelling and Packaging

The Government will examine the feasibility of introducing a voluntary code for bilingual labelling and packaging of all goods sold in Ireland. This activity could be used as a mechanism to develop the range of areas available in which people can choose Irish as a language of exchange.

Economic Activity

A series of initiatives and State supports will be put in place to encourage entrepreneurship and economic activity among the Irish language speaking community on a company, sectoral or local basis. The approach will be threefold:

- Encourage entrepreneurship through training programmes, business incubation, campus companies and the creation of economic networks;
- Support and develop the language economy that can provide the required services to the State and to the EU in areas such as translation, interpretation, language teaching, publishing, language consultancy, and project management. Measures will include start-up support, mentoring services, product development, marketing and promotion advice, and management development services; and
- Position Ireland as a leader in the provision of technological solutions to providing multilingual services on a cost-effective basis.

The new Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority will facilitate the creation of a Business Network for Gaeltacht and other Irish language businesses. The Business Network will work to support businesses providing services through Irish or working through Irish and to raise awareness throughout the business community of the link between the language and economic development, including the link between the economic interests of Gaeltacht areas and the status of the language in those areas as well as the language dimension to the success of individual companies.

6.9 CROSS-CUTTING INITIATIVES

A number of initiatives will be taken across all the areas of action already set out.

Think Tank

A high-level think tank of creative thinkers and innovators will be constituted on an ad hoc basis from time to time, to develop new approaches to language maintenance and to promote developments in the ICT sector.

Portal Site

A portal site for Irish will be developed. This will be designed to provide easy open access to all materials and resources for and in Irish, to include e-learning materials, publications, media, terminology, placenames, academic publications, language networks, digitised sources, and social and professional networks.

EU role for Irish

The Government will ensure that the Irish language is included, as an official working language, in all EU and domestic research and in development programmes in the areas of natural language processing, language learning and language technologies. Areas identified as crucial for development include machine translation, optical character recognition, speech technology, language learning programmes, and speech recognition. The Irish language will also take advantage of platforms already developed through research and development programmes for other languages.

Digitisation Programme

A national programme will be created, as part of the celebration of the 1916 Easter Rising, to digitise major Irish language works of national importance with a view to making them accessible by publication on-line. This will build on the work already in hand by Irish Script on Screen and the Digital Humanities Observatory. The Irish language is a source of inspiration for many modern art forms, including literature, music and theatre. However, access to many of the most important manuscripts is not easily available as some are held in repositories in different parts of the world and other important works of literature are out of print. This programme will allow central access to Irish language materials held in archives, repositories, libraries and universities all over the world.