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L&RS NOTE

The Irish language – a linguistic crisis?
September 2016

Introduction

This *Note* has been drafted in the context of the Programme for a Partnership Government and the recent establishment of a Joint Oireachtas Committee focussing on the Irish language. It examines the situation of the Irish language from a national perspective and outlines the special situation of the Gaeltacht and the socio-linguistic crisis unfolding there.[1]

Languages are affected by, and affect, the entire range of socio-economic issues. It is not the intention to address all issues relating to the language but to focus on providing context and outlining the role of the State in supporting the continued use of the national language as a vernacular.

The *Note* is structured as follows:

- Executive summary;
- Introduction to linguistic diversity;
- Use of and public support for the Irish language;
- Gaeltacht and 'Galltacht';[2]
- Overall State policy towards the Irish language;
- Conclusion.

Executive summary

The Irish language has been spoken on the island of Ireland from sometime in the first millennium BC.[3] It was the primary vernacular language until the late 18th century but experienced a collapse in its population of native speakers, particularly during the second half of the 19th century.

Support for the use of the Irish language has been a consistently stated aim of the Irish State since its establishment. However, the most recent research makes it clear that, on current trends, use of Irish as the primary community language (i.e. the normal language of discourse in the range of everyday interactions / settings) in the Gaeltacht will not continue beyond 2025. By contrast, there has been a consistent growth in the number of Irish-speakers in the State overall. Despite this growth, populations of active speakers (daily/weekly speakers outside of the education system) in the Galltacht have not reached what might be regarded as a relatively significant population density (> 5%)[4] in all but a small number of Electoral Districts (EDs).

Based on a range of surveys conducted over recent years, support for the Irish language does however retain broad public support. It also enjoys significant constitutional protection (as the national and first official language)[5] as well as having become a working language of the European Union in 2007. The United Nations has recognised language rights as a component of human rights.[6] Finally, evidence of the potential benefits of bilingualism have been growing since the 1960s - an increasing body of research suggests that bilingual populations may enjoy significant cognitive and health advantages over monolingual ones.

Despite its official status comparatively little research has been carried out into the use of Irish (particularly in the Galltacht) or the importance of the 'isolation index' (the likelihood of one speaker meeting another at random) as developed in Wales.

There have been significant developments with regard to both the language and the Gaeltacht since the turn of the 21st century. These developments have corresponded with increasing awareness of the projected demise of Irish as a community language by 2025:

- ✓ The implementation of a national 20-Year strategy for the language up to 2030;
- ✓ The Gaeltacht has been re-designated as a socio-linguistic entity;
- ✓ The enactment, and proposed review of, official languages legislation setting out the obligations of public bodies when dealing with citizens;
- ✓ An ongoing review of the Gaeltacht education system;
- ✓ The recognition of Irish as a working language of the European Union.

Introduction to linguistic diversity and bilingualism

The preface to UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* sets out the implications for the ongoing and forecasted global loss of linguistic diversity:

> "Language loss entails an impoverishment of humanity in countless ways. Each language – large or small – captures and organizes reality in a distinctive manner; to lose even one closes off potential discoveries about human cognition and the mind. The death of a language inevitably leads to the disappearance of various forms of intangible cultural heritage such as performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, traditional crafts and the priceless legacy of the community's oral traditions and expressions, such as poetry and jokes, proverbs and legends."

The Atlas characterises the Irish language as "definitely endangered".

Reversing Language Shift (RLS)

With regard to the theoretical basis for effectively intervening to maintain and promote endangered languages the work of Professor Joshua Fishman is widely accepted as having established the legitimacy and carried out the background research to the present international policies which are known as Reversing Language Shift (RLS).[7]

Language Shift is defined as the process whereby populations who have one native language cease speaking it after switching to another language. Any attempt at RLS must involve establishing the degree to which a particular language has been 'dislocated' (by reference to the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) or another suitable model) and thereby determining the optimal way to revitalise the language.

Research is ongoing into models based on the GIDS. For example, the EGIDS (Expanded GIDS)[8] includes some additional factors at both the stronger and weaker levels of the scale and thus adds some levels not included in the original scale.

Evidence would suggest that Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and attempts to address language policy requires action across the full range of public policy areas. This was a point stressed by the Welsh Language Commissioner[9] in her opening remarks to the Oireachtas sub-Committee on the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language on 25 November 2014:[10]

> "[I wish to] draw the attention of the committee to some lessons I have learned, of which the first and probably most important which has become apparent to me as Welsh language commissioner is that it is dangerous to leave the language in a policy silo. If one sees the language as something which is absolutely discrete and it is dealt with solely as such, there is danger. That approach gives status to the language, but it also means that as one plans for economic, social, employment, education and health policy, it sits outside the debate. In Wales it has been and

continues to be critical for us that we integrate consideration of one of the official languages we use into all policy debates. That is a key issue for me as [C]ommissioner. As we look at planning and health legislation, it is key that I ask how the language has been considered in the policy proposal, decision or legislation. That is a key message to share with the committee as it considers new or amending legislation in terms of how it can use the opportunity to integrate the Irish language into the mainstream of policy and politics. That is something that I have learned is critical. If one allows the language to sit in a box with "Irish Language" written on the front which is opened occasionally and then shut again, that will not mean productive policy decisions will be made."

The most successful and widely-known example of language revival is that of Hebrew, the use of which as a community language had largely ceased in the first century AD. The language continued to be used for literary and religious functions, as well as a common language among the Jewish diaspora. During the mid-nineteenth century the first efforts were made to revive Hebrew as a vernacular and it is now an official language of Israel, along with Arabic. It is used in public and private, in the media, and in literature, and is the main medium of instruction in schools, where children are also required to learn Arabic and English. Immigrants to Israel are expected to learn Hebrew and lessons for adults are provided in intensive schools.

It has been noted that disparities may exist between a community's expressed desire to revitalise their language and,[11]

"deep-rooted, or even unconscious, fears and biases about their language, often stemming from colonial attitudes, all of which can be serious impediments to revitalization. In general, it is not uncommon to find a general sense that revitalization would be a good idea, without a full understanding of or commitment to the sustained level of effort required to actually achieve it."

## Use of and public support for the Irish language

According to the 2011 Census figures, the percentage of the population in the Republic who reported being able to speak Irish was 41%. In Northern Ireland, 11% of the population claimed to have some knowledge of Irish. An ESRI (2015) research report addressed attitudes to, and use of, the Irish language on the island of Ireland. It noted that attitudes towards the Irish language among primary and post-primary students in the Republic are often negative. However, the report finds widespread support for the language among the adult population – 67% of the respondents in the Republic (and 45% from Northern Ireland) felt positive about the Irish language. The analysis shows that attitudes to, and the use of the

Irish language are influenced by a combination of factors including the education system, attitudes and language behaviour at home as well as opportunities to speak the language.

The use of the Irish language (Census 2011)

In the country as a whole, the percentage of the population who reported in the 2011 Census that they could speak Irish rose by 7.1% between censuses 2006 and 2011, and now stands at 1.77 million. Further national detail by gender and frequency of speaking is given in Figure 1 (below). However, the reasons for this 7.1% increase are unclear.

Figure 1 – Irish speakers (nationally), census 2011[12]

Figure 32 Irish speakers as a percentage of total population by sex
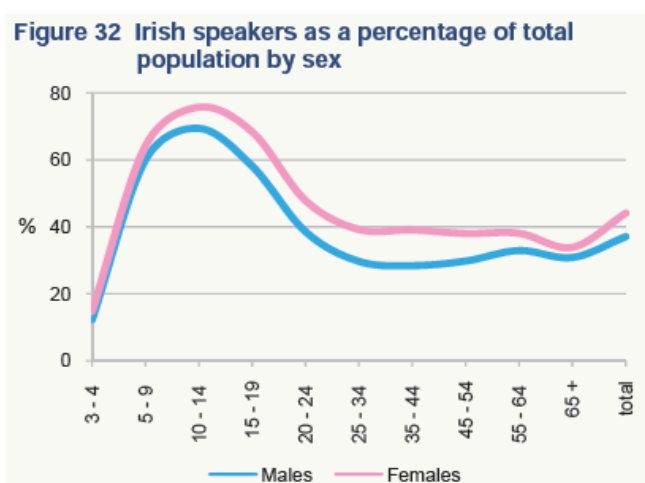
Can you speak Irish?

The question on Irish language ability is broken into two parts; the first part asks a simple "*Can you speak Irish?*" while the second asks about frequency of speaking the language.

The total number of people who answered '*yes*' to being able to speak Irish increased by 7.1 per cent between 2006 and 2011 to reach 1.77 million in April 2011. This represents 41.4 per cent of respondents compared with 41.9 in 2006.

Almost 1 in 3, (30.9 per cent) 10 to 19 year olds answered "*no*" to the question "*Can you speak Irish?*"

Tables pages 98 - 103

Women and men

Results on ability to speak Irish consistently show that more women than men identify themselves as being able to speak Irish; the results from this census bear this out.

44.9 per cent of women were able to speak Irish compared with just 37.9 per cent of men. These percentages are identical to the results found in 2006. The data is illustrated by age group in the graph above,

How often

Of the 1.77 million who indicated they could speak Irish, 77,185 said they speak it daily outside the education system. A further 110,642 said they spoke it weekly, while 613,236 said they spoke it less often. One in four said they never spoke Irish.

The numbers speaking Irish on a daily basis outside the education system increased by 5,037 persons since 2006 from 72,148 to 77,185; the numbers speaking weekly showed an increase of 7,781 persons, while those speaking Irish less often showed the largest increase of 27,139.

Figure 33 Population aged 3 years and over by frequency of speaking Irish
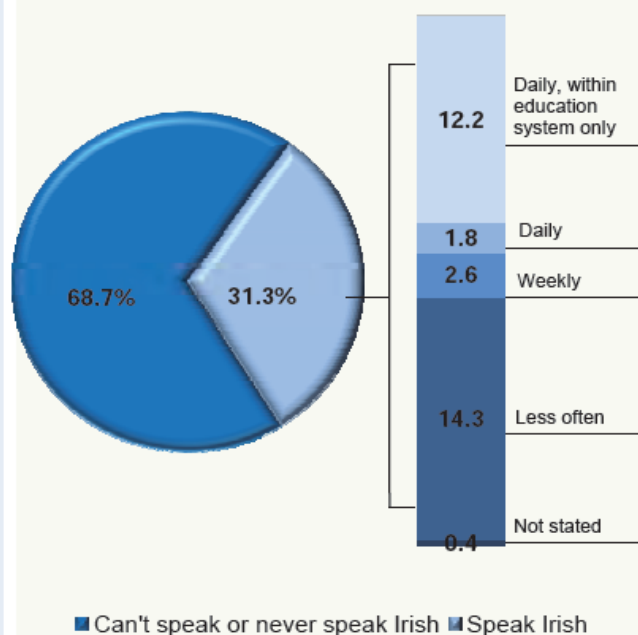
With respect to the use of Irish in the Galltacht the Census figures do not convey the dispersed nature of the Irish-speaking population (as compared, for example, to Category A Gaeltacht areas which would have a high density of Irish-speakers – see text box 2, p.11).

The language is spoken regularly by approximately 158,000[13] people throughout the Galltacht (outside of the education system on a daily/weekly basis) but only by households and/or in certain social contexts. Given that the total population of the Galltacht is 4,487,536[14] this indicates that of every 100 people in the Galltacht, on average 3.5 speak Irish regularly outside the education system. The dispersed nature of the Irish-speaking population in the Galltacht is clearly illustrated in the map (no.6) of the Census 2011 results compiled by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht available online here.

Given the concentrated level of Irish-speaking in western Gaeltacht areas the preliminary results of Census 2016 showing continuing de-population in counties such as Donegal and Mayo is of significance and concern.[15] Members can explore the level of Irish speaking in Electoral Districts within their constituencies by utilising the Library & Research Service Constituency dashboards available via the Plinth or the L&RS intranet site.

Language knowledge/use and the concept of the 'Isolation Index'

In Wales, by contrast, there is no equivalent of the statutorily-defined Gaeltacht though an equivalent language population exist on a greater scale and in an urban setting (including towns such as Caernarfon), than now remains in existence in Ireland. However, a significant body of statistical/spatial analysis work has been carried out in relation to Welsh-speaking and the distribution of speakers.[16] This has led, for example, to the development of the concept of the 'Isolation Index', which has been defined as "the probability that a Welsh speaker will meet another speaker".[17] The basis to this index is that the higher the density of speakers within a defined area the higher the index and the more likely it is that speakers will interact with each other and make use of their shared language.

A similar theme and a proposed solution (in the form of the *fáinne*) to the dearth of opportunities (outside of the education system) to use the Irish language was identified and proposed by the Commission for the Restoration of the Irish Language in 1963 (p.19):[18]

> "One such way is the wearing by all Irish speakers of a badge such as the Fáinne …We are convinced that, if all Irish speakers would adopt this simple expedient immediately, the amount of Irish to be heard in all public places would greatly increase almost overnight, for the Irish-speaker would immediately recognise that he is no longer the "odd man out " in any company. To be fully effective, however, such a badge would have to be worn by a few hundred thousand people throughout the country…"

Gaeltacht and 'Galltacht'

Historical context

The Gaeltacht was until the 17th century effectively the island of Ireland. The Galltacht (districts that were principally English-speaking) was restricted to districts within some cities and towns and parts of Fingal (north-east county Dublin) and Forth (south-east Wexford).

Legislation in pre-independence Ireland, from a very early date, was aimed at outlawing the use of the Irish language and impoverishing those who spoke it:[19]

> "The Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 commanded that 'if any English, or Irish living among the English, use the Irish language amongst themselves, contrary to this ordinance, and thereof be attainted, his lands and tenements, if he have any, shall be seized into the hands of his immediate Lord…' "

This approach of marginalising and denying any official status to the Irish language generally continued until an independent state was established in 1922 - one significant concession (on practical grounds) being the employment of court interpreters in cases where an individual involved in a case was a monoglot Irish speaker.[20]

Text Box 1 – The Placenames of Ireland

This historical linguistic relationship between the Irish and English languages is reflected, for example, in the townlands of Ireland and their placenames which are overwhelmingly of Irish language origin in most districts. The mapping exercise[21] carried out by the Ordnance Survey during the years 1829-1842 resulted in the phonetic anglicisation of most Irish placenames (over 51,000 townlands) thereby obscuring their meaning/origin.[22] Work is ongoing to re-establish the correct Irish language form of these placenames and their historical / cultural context and to make this information available on a dedicated website.[23]

In 1812, it was estimated that Irish was the native language of 3 million of the island's population of 6 million (the majority of whom were monoglot Irish speakers) and that it still had native speakers in every county on the island.

As late as 1841 it was estimated that Irish remained the language of half of the population.[24] In 2016, however, the Gaeltacht is restricted to 155 Electoral Divisions, some of which are non-contiguous, in seven counties.

The following series of maps illustrate the westward retreat of the Gaeltacht from 1851 to 2011. It is generally acknowledged that the range shown in respect of 1851 is an under-estimate of how widely Irish was still spoken (especially in Leinster).

Map 1 – Minimum range of the Irish-speaking area 1851   **Map 2 – Gaeltacht enumeration 1926**   **Map 3 – Updated linguistic study (2011)**
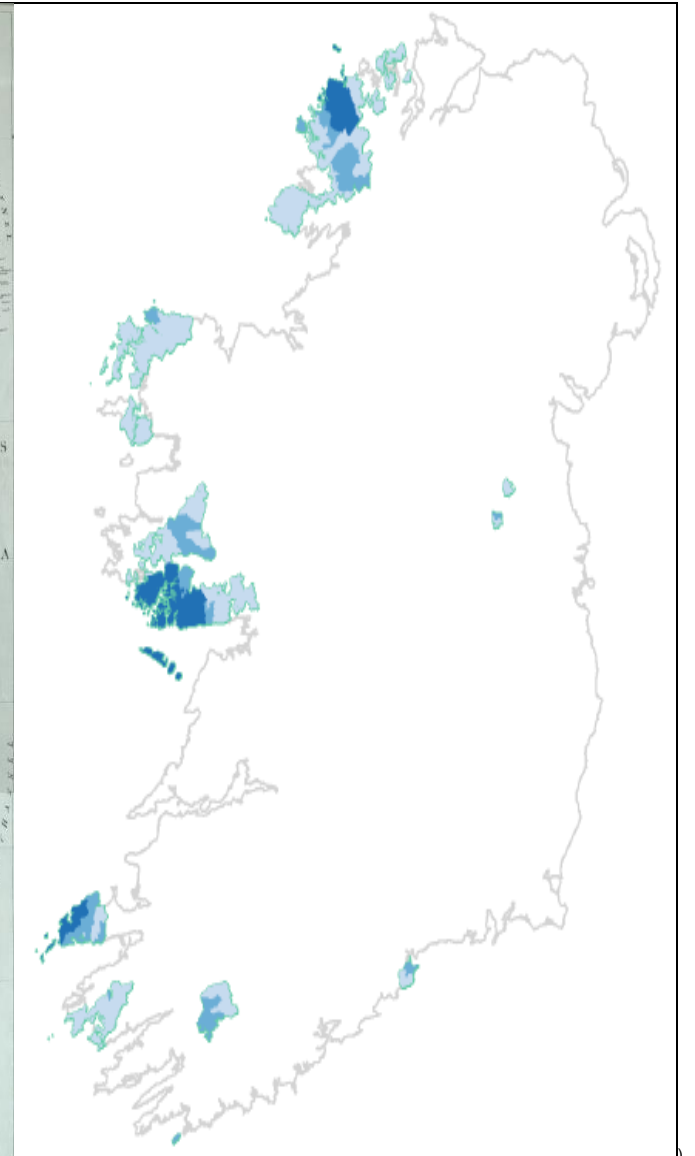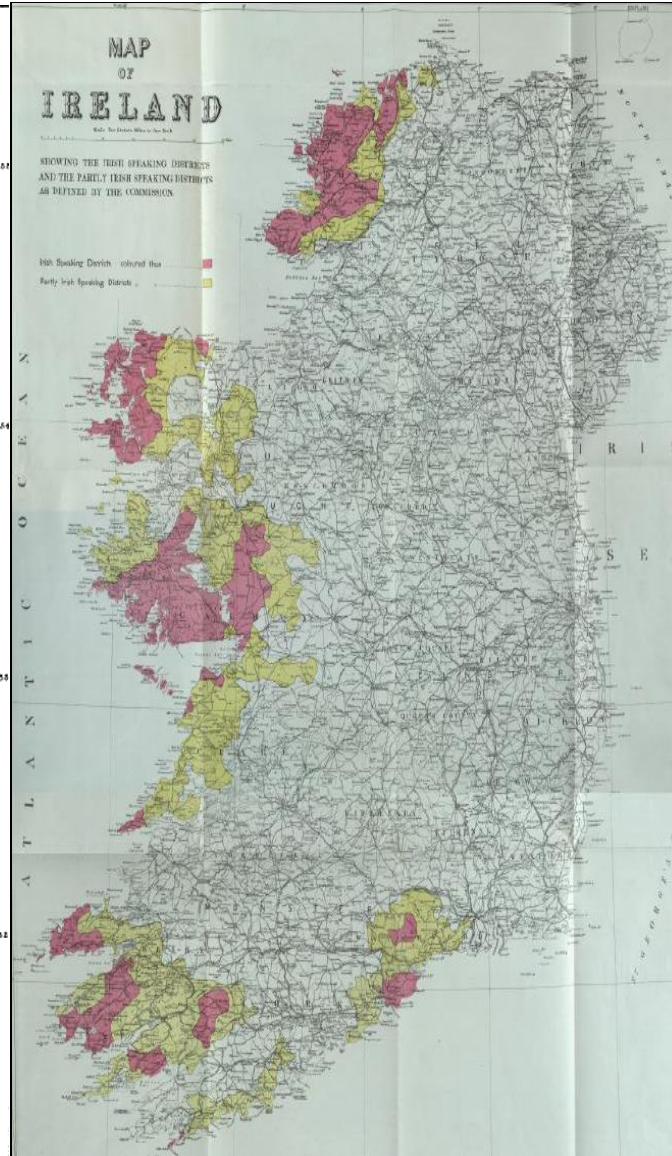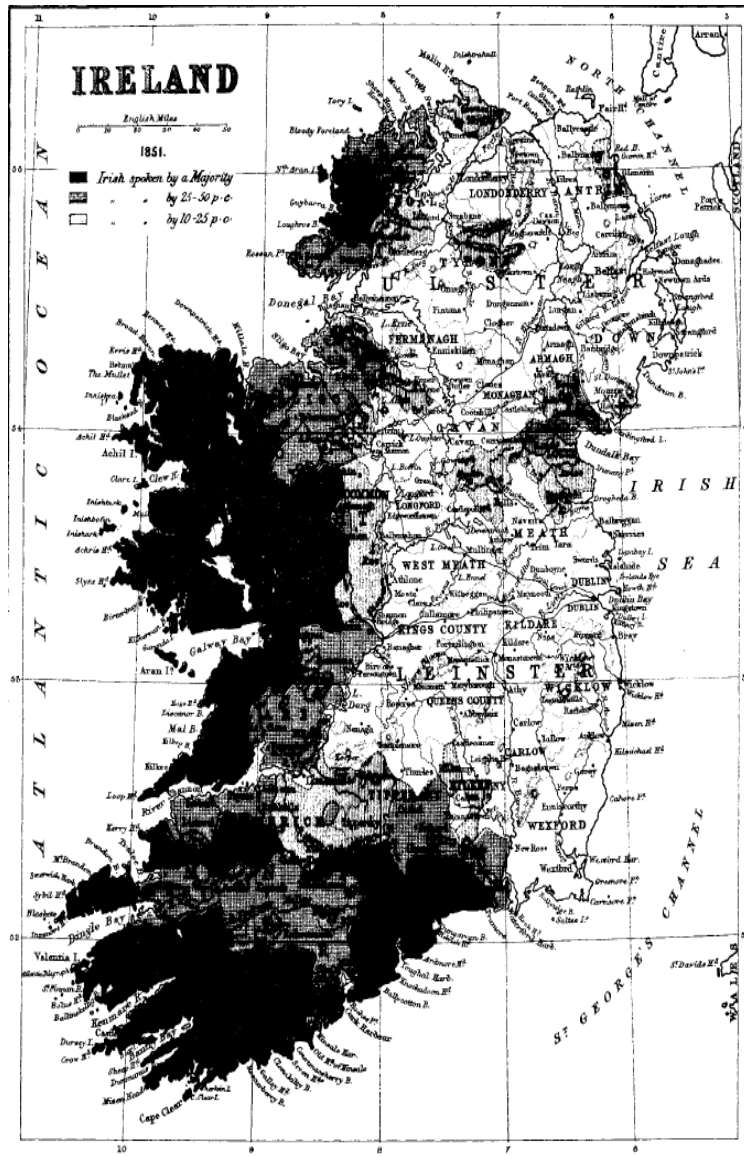
The contemporary Gaeltacht

Even within the officially designated Gaeltacht only 21 Electoral Districts (EDs) contain communities where Irish is spoken daily by a significant percentage of the population, i.e. where the isolation index (if calculated) would be high.

Minority languages and the linguistic tipping point

It is generally accepted that a linguistic tipping point is reached where the density of daily speakers of the minority language drops below approximately 2 in 3 of a district's population.

This tipping point has also, for example, been acknowledged and previously set as a benchmark in Wales:[25]

> "These are communities where the density of Welsh speakers means that the language is more likely to be spoken in social, leisure and business activities and not be confined to the home, chapel and school. In these areas Welsh is a living, everyday language, spoken, heard and seen in the community; it is part of the fabric of the community. Censuses and surveys over recent decades have shown a continuing decline in the number of communities where more than 70% of the population speak Welsh. Continuing decline could arguably threaten the existence of the Welsh language since it would no longer have a natural environment in which it was spoken as a matter of course in the range of social contexts."

Údarás na Gaeltachta published an *Update Report to the Comprehensive Linguistic Study on the Usage of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006-2011* on 29 May 2015. The report outlines the current state of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht. The analysis in the report shows that the rate at which the Irish language is being eroded as a community language in the Gaeltacht has not abated since the original *Linguistic Study* (in 2007). According to the authors, erosion is now taking place at a faster rate than was predicted in the original study. They conclude by stating (p.142) that it will soon become clear that it will be difficult for the Irish State to support the Irish language in the absence of a community that speaks it as its vernacular language, an outcome they forecast (p.6) is likely to come about within 10 years (i.e. by 2025).

The 2007 and 2011 reports categorised Gaeltacht Electoral Districts, by the relative weakness of the language (see Map 3 above), as being either A, B or C (with A the least weak, i.e. where at least 67% of the population speak Irish daily). Based on the results of Census 2011, the 2015 Update indicates that there are now only 21 EDs in category A; there are 26 in category B and 108 in category C (the weakest). These 21 Category A districts are

isolated from each other; in the west of Connemara, the northwest of county Donegal and in the northwest of the *Daingean* (Dingle) peninsula of county Kerry. They have a combined population (3+ years of age) of 20,068 – of which 16,148 are daily speakers of Irish.

The single largest population is located in contiguous EDs in west Connemara / the Aran islands and has a combined population of 11,911 – of which, 9,921 are daily speakers of Irish. The ED with the highest concentration of daily speakers is *Garmna* (89%).A full description of the categories is given in the text box 2 (below).

Text box 2 - Categorisation of Gaeltacht areas by linguistic vitality[26]

Category A Gaeltacht Areas:

These refer to EDs where more than 67% of the total population (3 years+) are daily speakers of Irish. These EDs evidence the broadest spectrum of Irish language use and exhibit stable levels of Irish language use except in the language behaviour patterns of the younger age groups.

Category B Gaeltacht Areas:

Electoral divisions where between 44% and 66% of the total population (3 years+) are daily speakers of Irish. Although English is the predominant language, these areas still contain some relatively strong Irish-speaking networks. It is usual that the number of daily speakers of Irish is higher among the school-going age cohorts than in the adult age cohorts. This implies that the use of Irish has declined as a communal language in the area and its use among young people occurs predominantly in an educational context. The statistical data indicate that Irish is still used as a community language to a certain degree, but this tends to be limited to specific age groups, and/or specific institutions, and/or specific social networks.

Category C Gaeltacht Areas:

Electoral divisions where less than 44% of the total population (3 years+) are daily speakers of Irish. This category includes a majority of Gaeltacht electoral divisions and of the Gaeltacht population as a whole.

In general, school-going age cohorts report the highest level of usage of Irish in these areas, indicating weak communal use of the language. Some EDs in Category C may contain small Irish-speaking enclaves which do not readily conform with the sociolinguistic traits common to the rest of Category C. In some areas the data show that Irish is still used in some social networks and in community and educational institutions.

The challenges to the predominance of the language even in Category A districts include:[27]

> "[The] language shift away from Irish is being driven by social dynamics. Gaeltacht communities are linked into regional, national and international networks which gradually influence the linguistic composition of the Gaeltacht community. Additionally, the linguistic composition of some Gaeltacht areas has been transformed due to their location: their physical proximity to developing urban centres makes them attractive for suburban settlement. Other Gaeltacht areas are coming under pressure from demographic factors of a similar type due to their attractiveness as tourist destinations, with non-Irish language speakers taking up temporary or permanent residence…the proportion of active, integrated Irish speakers needs to be maintained above 67% for the use of Irish in a community to be sustainable. The statistical evidence clearly indicates that Irish-speaking communities yield to the pressures of language shift when the proportion of active speakers in a community falls below this threshold."

Several official reports were commissioned, inquiring into the status of the Gaeltacht, since the foundation of the State. The *Gaeltacht Commission Report 2002* highlighted the need to make linguistic data available as part of the review process of the status of the Gaeltacht.

Accordingly, the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* was commissioned by the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and published in 2007. The primary aim of the research project was to provide up-to-date data and cogent analysis with regard to the use of the Irish language in the contemporary Gaeltacht. The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study* summarises the fundamental threat to the future of the Irish language as the predominant language in the Gaeltacht as:[28]

> "The total number of families raising children through Irish in the Gaeltacht nationally is very low. This is especially true in Category B and C Gaeltacht districts. In Category A Gaeltacht districts, the proportion of families raising native speakers of Irish is insufficient to guarantee the continuation of Irish as the predominant community language…there is evidence that even when Gaeltacht parents choose to raise their children through Irish, the complexities of their own linguistic background, the context in which they initially met, and the linguistic diversity of the communities in which they live pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of that decision."

The differentiation between the linguistic vitality of different categories of Gaeltacht area emphasises that there are different usage rates of the language within the Gaeltacht and a case has been made that resources would be used most effectively where they could be expected to have the most impact on the continued community use of the language:[29]

> *"The current undifferentiated status of the statutory Gaeltacht does not adequately facilitate the various State and community organisations with responsibility in the Gaeltacht…in pursuing language planning interventions appropriate to the different sociolinguistic communities which exist within the Gaeltacht categories..."*

Overall State policy towards the Irish language

Bodies responsible for the Irish language

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has overall national responsibility for the Irish language. Foras na Gaeilge is one of two agencies within the North/South body (An Foras Teanga) and it oversees the promotion of the Irish language within the Galltacht on the island of Ireland. The work of An Foras Teanga is overseen by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and thereby by the relevant Ministers. Údarás na Gaeltachta is the regional development authority which promotes the linguistic, cultural, social, physical and economic development of the Gaeltacht with the overall objective of maintaining Irish as the main community language. In addition to the above, the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga was established as an independent one in 2004.

An overview and timeline of the State's policies

From the foundation of the State to the end of the 20th century, legislation relating to the Irish language generally dealt with education (for example, the *Education Act 1998*) and the Gaeltacht (particularly, the geographical definition of the Gaeltacht as set out by secondary legislation in 1956 and the corporate governance of Údarás na Gaeltachta). This educational/Gaeltacht focus was interrupted in 2003 by the Official Languages Act which was intended to provide a framework for improvements in the delivery of public services through Irish throughout the State. This development was, however, hastened by a legal case taken by a citizen.[30]

Significant developments in the official status of Irish since the establishment of the State are set out in Appendix 1.

State policy towards the Irish language in the Gaeltacht

The then Minister of State stated, in June 2011, that final decisions had been taken by the Government regarding the new definition of the Gaeltacht and the implementation structures for the 20-Year Strategy. The new definition of the Gaeltacht would be based on:

1. The 20-Year Strategy; and

2. The recommendations made in the Comprehensive Linguistic Study.

The *Gaeltacht Act 2012* was subsequently enacted and this divided the existing Gaeltacht into 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (GLPAs). The approach taken in the Act is that all those GLPAs that agree a language plan with the Minister will be on an equal statutory

footing, whereas under the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study's* recommendations Gaeltacht areas would have been differentiated by linguistic vitality and received support accordingly (i.e. according to whether they were Category A, B or C areas).

The *Gaeltacht Act 2012* has two primary objectives:

1. Provide for a new definition for the Gaeltacht; and

2. Make amendments to the structure and functions of Údarás na Gaeltachta (including dispensing with the requirement for elections to the board).

Under the Act, the Gaeltacht will in future be based on linguistic criteria instead of on geographic areas. Community-level language planning will be central to the new definition. The Language Planning Guidelines (2014, pp.5-6) envisage that the language planning process will involve the following benefits:

➕ The public, through the community organisations, will be given an opportunity to play a central role in the language planning process;
➕ The wide range of activities provided by community and public organisations which support he Irish language in the various areas to be recognised under the Act will be drawn together in a more effective manner;
➕ Learning opportunities will be enhanced by the sharing of best practice in language planning among the various areas to be recognised under the Act;
➕ As a result of the integrated approach, a greater demand for services through Irish will be created in the various areas to be recognised under the Act.

It should be noted that ultimately, should the language planning process be unsuccessful the GLPA concerned can be excluded from the Gaeltacht by Ministerial Order under either of sections 7(5), 7(10)(b), 7(13)(b) or 8(7) of the Act, as appropriate.

Areas located outside the existing statutory Gaeltacht will be given the opportunity to achieve statutory recognition as Irish Language Networks or as Gaeltacht Service Towns. Gaeltacht Service Towns are defined as those towns situated in, or adjacent to, GLPAs, that play a significant role regarding the provision of services to GLPAs. A further provision in the Act relates to the designation of Irish Language Networks as language communities in the Galltacht. No Networks have been selected to date but applications are anticipated from groups based in Clondalkin, Co.Dublin, Ennis, Co.Clare and Loughrea, Co.Galway.[31]

The L&RS published a Bills Digest in advance of the second stage debate of the *Gaeltacht Bill 2012* and that Digest is available on the L&RS intranet site - in Irish and in English.

Education policy (Gaeltacht and Galltacht)

- Number of schools in the State teaching through the medium of Irish[32]

There are a total of 143 schools at primary level (45,184 pupils) and 41 at secondary level (13,848 pupils). Of these, 76 and 12 at primary and secondary levels respectively are classified as DEIS schools.

- Gaeltacht education policy

The *Education Act, 1998* recognises the role of the education system in general, and of Gaeltacht schools in particular with regard to supporting the Irish language as the community language in Gaeltacht areas. That additional responsibility in relation to schools is specified in Section 9(h) of the Act which states that one of the responsibilities of schools in Gaeltacht areas is to "contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language." The responsibility of institutions providing educational support is specified in Section 6(j) of the same Act, which states that it is the responsibility of "every person concerned in the implementation of this Act...... to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas."

The Department of Education and Skills noted that there is a prevalence of small schools in Gaeltacht areas:[33]

> "Over two thirds of Gaeltacht primary schools are 1-3 teacher schools and 79% of schools are one to four teacher schools, which is significantly higher than the proportion of small schools in the state nationally. The average enrolment of the 132 primary schools in the Gaeltacht is 77…the smallest schools are situated in the Gaeltacht areas where Irish is more widely spoken and that these schools have the highest proportion of pupils whose first language is Irish. The size of post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas varies greatly; for example, the enrolment in Gaeltacht island schools is very small (i.e. 4 and 26) while the enrolment in schools in some Gaeltacht service towns may be between 450-500. The average enrolment of the 26 post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht is 207".

Based on a review of Gaeltacht education carried out in 2014 a policy on Gaeltacht education is being drafted by the Department. The Brief for the incoming Minister for Education and Skills states that (2016, p.42):[34]

> "The Policy on Gaeltacht Education aims to set out the vision…for the provision of a quality education through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and the commitments…for the enactment of that vision for the period 2016-2021. It recognises the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht…and the increasingly fragile status of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and schools…Gaeltacht schools face considerable challenges to cope with students who come from homes with very varied levels of Irish-language skill. Children raised through Irish are now a minority within Gaeltacht schools. There is increasing use of English in Gaeltacht communities and pressure on schools to move to English-

medium instruction. The 5 Year time-frame for the implementation of the Policy takes account of the need for immediate action if the Gaeltacht as an Irish speaking entity is to survive. The policy also complements the language planning processes that are being implemented in Gaeltacht communities in accordance with the Gaeltacht Act"

There was a cautious welcome[35] from stakeholders to the proposals set out in the draft policy when it was launched in May 2015. An 'Open Policy Debate on Gaeltacht Education' was organised for stakeholders in October, 2015. It has been reported that the policy proposal may cost between €2 and €3 million annually and that it is being discussed in the context of budgetary discussions.[36]

The Brief for the incoming Minister (2016, pp.42-43) also summarises, in the context of the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for Irish, other areas for action:

- Primary Language Curriculum

A new language curriculum (English and Irish) for infants to second class has been published and will be implemented over a period of two years, beginning in September 2016.

The new language curriculum allows Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools, to implement a period of immersion education in Irish until the end of senior infants' class.

- Irish specification at Junior Cycle

Work is ongoing on the development of a new specification for Irish at junior cycle as part of the new Junior Cycle. Provision will be made in the new specification for assessment of oral language.

Following consultation with stakeholders,[37] it is intended that there will be separate specifications for Irish for students in English- and Irish-medium schools in order to enrich the Irish language development and support the capacity to learn through Irish of students in Irish-medium schools. This aims to meet the needs of native speakers of Irish.

- A range of issues in relation to Irish language education

Amongst the other issues which have been the subject of research and debate are:

- o The status of Irish as a core subject in the Leaving Certificate;
- o Exemptions from studying Irish – particularly at secondary level;
- o The lack of availability of schools/school places at primary/secondary level; and
- o The possible implications of s.64 of the Education (Admissions) Bill 2016.[38]

The delivery of public services through Irish

The *Official Languages Act 2003* was intended to provide a framework for improvements in the delivery of public services through Irish over time. A review (April 2014) was undertaken of the Act in accordance with a commitment in the *Programme for Government 2011-2016.* The terms of reference for the *Review of the Official Languages Act 2003* ('the Review') included:

- Consider if the provisions of the Act should be amended to ensure that the public services to be provided through Irish are those which are most in demand;

- Consider if the obligations placed on public bodies under the Act are appropriate, having regard to the foregoing and to the constitutional status of the Irish language;

- Consider if the provisions of the Act should be amended to ensure that it better supports the preservation and promotion of Irish:

  o as the community language in Gaeltacht areas; and

  o as the language of choice of others throughout the State;

- Consider if the language rights confirmed in the Act continue to be appropriate.

However, the Review (as published) did not appear to explicitly discuss the issues set out in its terms of reference. The Review included a public consultation process, comprising an online survey and written submissions.

The General Scheme of the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill 2014 was drafted in the context of the review of the *Official Languages Act 2003* and then referred to the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht for pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS). The Committee published a report on its pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme in 2015. The Bill was not published before the dissolution of the 31st Dáil but has been re-instated as a non-urgent Bill on the Legislation Programme (June 2016).[39]

An Coimisinéir Teanga has highlighted his concerns over how few posts requiring Irish are being identified by Government Departments and the negative implications this has for the provision of public services through Irish (27 June 2016, on the publication of his Office's 2015 Annual Report). The Coimisinéir recommended that the *Official Languages Act 2003* be strengthened in line with the suggestions made by his Office and by the Oireachtas Joint Committee in its PLS report.[40]

Prior to the Department's review of the Act in 2014, the Office of the Coimisinéir Teanga [reviewed](#) the Act (July 2011). The importance of providing public services through Irish, on a statutory basis, in the Gaeltacht was one of the recommendations made by the review (p.12) and was placed in the context that imposing services through English undermined the credibility of the State's language policies and the basis of the Gaeltacht.

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language

The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (available in Irish [here](#) and in English [here](#)) was launched in December 2010 and addresses the challenges facing the language from a national perspective while highlighting the special situation of the Gaeltacht.

The 20-Year Strategy sets out a number of aims for government policy, including 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 society, both as a spoken language by citizens and also in areas such as signage and literature.

In addition, it highlights the protection and promotion of the Irish language in Northern Ireland as a priority.

With regard to Northern Ireland, the UK Government committed to an Irish Language Act in the St Andrews Agreement but this was not given legislative effect in the [2006 Act](#). Responsibility for the enactment of language legislation was subsequently devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. No legislation has been enacted.

The UK Government has however signed [The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#). Part II (Article 7) and Part III (Articles 8-14) relate to the promotion of the Irish language within the United Kingdom. The text of the Charter is available online [here](#).

In achieving its aims, the Strategy has three specific objectives:

1. To increase the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000;

2. To increase the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis in the Gaeltacht by 25% in overall terms. Invigoration of the Gaeltacht is "critical to the overall Strategy"; and

3. To increase the number of people that use State services through the Irish language and can access television, radio and print media through the Irish language.

Nine areas for action are presented: education; the Gaeltacht; family transmission of the language – early intervention; administration, services and community; media and technology; dictionaries; legislation and status; economic life; and cross-cutting initiatives.

The Programme for Partnership Government (2016, p.146) focuses on the Irish language under three themes:

1. The 20-Year Strategy;

2. The Gaeltacht – linguistically and economically;

3. Irish as a full working language of the EU (i.e. ending derogations).

Implementation of the 20-Year Strategy

A Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach oversees the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 across Government Departments.[41] The Government (2011 – 2016) published a progress report on the implementation of the Strategy from 2010 to July 2013. Individual government departments have published their own implementation progress reports for the period up to 2015. In November 2015 plans to commence an 'open policy debate' were announced. Various strategic issues were highlighted to focus the consultation process being held as part of the open policy debate. Further information is available in this discussion paper.

It may be noted that, shortly before his early resignation from the post of An Coimisinéir Teanga, Seán Ó Cuirréain told an Oireachtas Joint sub-Committee that it was unclear whether the Strategy is being implemented, "as there is no independent audit or review being conducted on the implementation of the Strategy" and quoted linguistic experts who had serious doubts as to the efficacy of its implementation.[42]

Conclusion

The Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016, p.146) states that:

> "The Irish language is of crucial importance to our heritage and culture. The new Government needs to systematically implement the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language, increase the number of people using Irish in their daily lives and ensure that Irish becomes a more visible language in today's society, both as a spoken language and also in areas such as signage and literature."

The updated Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht (2015) provides a very detailed analysis of the state of the contemporary Gaeltacht and states that it is not, as matters stand, a viable socio-linguistic entity and that it has a lifespan of no more than 10 years. The authors of that report also draw attention to the way in which bilingualism has become the norm in the Gaeltacht and that this is leading to a steady and swift erosion in the capacity of the community to transmit Irish to the next generation.[43]

The majority of regular speakers of the Irish language now live in the Galltacht but are generally dispersed and do not (in terms of population density and therefore oral interaction) form a traditional language community comparable with that which remains in the Gaeltacht (Electoral Districts in Category A, especially).

Notwithstanding the constitutional position of the language, its status as a working language of the European Union and the increased numbers of Irish speakers reported in Census 2011, various historical, social, economic and State Institution factors are combining to threaten its continued existence as a vernacular in the Gaeltacht and, by corollary, eventually on a national level.

Appendix 1 - Significant legislative, legal and policy developments in relation to Irish

Year	Event
1937	*Bunreacht na hÉireann* adopted by the people by plebiscite – Irish, as the national language, is recognised (Article 8) as the first official language. English is recognised as a second official language.
1956	The contemporary Gaeltacht is statutorily defined as a geographical entity. Some EDs are subsequently included, for example, Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib, county Meath.
1972	Raidió na Gaeltachta begins broadcasting.
1973	No longer necessary to pass Irish in order to pass the Leaving Certificate examination.[44]
1974	End of the requirement for proficiency in Irish for those seeking employment in the Civil Service.
1988	Enactment of the *Education Act 1988* the objectives of which included contributing to the realisation of national policy and objectives in relation to the extension of bilingualism in Irish society and the achievement of a greater use of the Irish language at school and in the community; contributing to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in the Gaeltacht.
1993	The government published guidelines prepared by Bord na Gaeilge (the then state body for the Irish language) on the services through Irish which were to be provided by the public service. These guidelines had no statutory basis nor was there any effective monitoring system to ensure that they would be implemented. Very few state bodies operated in accordance with them.
1996	Establishment of the TG4 television station (as TnaG).[45]
1998	Government commits to the enactment of a Language Equality Bill.
2001	The judgment of the Supreme Court in *Ó Beoláin v Fahy*. The Supreme Court granted a declaration that under Article 25.4.4 ° the State has a constitutional duty to issue the official translation of an Act when the President signs the text of a unilingual bill.[46]

2002	Publication of the *Gaeltacht Commission Report 2002 which* highlighted the need to make linguistic data available to the State as part of the review process of the status of the Gaeltacht.
2003	Enactment of the *Official Languages Act 2003.* The Act seeks to give legislative effect, insofar as the delivery of public services through Irish is concerned, to Article 8 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* which states that the Irish language as the national language is the first official language. The Act was intended to provide a framework for improvements in the delivery of public services through Irish over time. The Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga was established under the Act in 2004. A Library & Research Service Note[47] provides an overview of the official status of the Irish language and the main statutory obligations of public bodies under the *Official Languages Act 2003*. The functions and powers of An Coimisinéir Teanga are also set out.
2004	Establishment of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga as provided for in the *Official Languages Act 2003*. The Office is a fully independent one. The duties are specified in sections 20 – 30 of the *Official Languages Act 2003.* The latest annual report relates to 2014 and is available here.
2006	The Government publishes the *Statement on the Irish Language 2006.*[48]
2007	The publication of the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* which was commissioned by the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
2007	Irish gained recognition as an official working language of the EU in 2007.[49] However, it was placed under what is known as 'derogation'. This has meant that the European institutions have not been obliged to provide full translation or interpretation services, as it does with the other 23 languages. Translation is only mandatory when it comes to co-decisions made by the European Parliament and the European Council. The Maltese language was placed under a similar derogation when Malta joined the EU in 2004, but that was lifted in 2007, giving it equal status with the other 22 languages.
2010	Publication of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*

2011	The *Programme for Government 2011-2016* undertook to "review the Official Languages Act to ensure expenditure on the language is best targeted towards the development of the language and that obligations are imposed appropriately in response to demands from citizens."
July 2011	The then Coimisinéir Teanga, Seán Ó Cuireáin, publishes a report under s.29 of the *Official Languages Act 2003* in relation to the review of that same Act.
2011	The Government decision, in its Public Service Reform Plan of 2011, to merge the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga with the Office of the Ombudsman (reversed in 2014).
2012	The *Gaeltacht Act 2012* provided for a new definition of the Gaeltacht and made amendments to the structure and functions of Údarás na Gaeltachta.
2013	A service level agreement (SLA) is put in place between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) transferring responsibility for facilitating the training and proficiency assessment of staff in the use of the Irish language in the civil service from the former to the latter Department.
March 2014	The Supreme Court decides by a majority of 4 to 1 that a native Irish speaker in the Connemara Gaeltacht is **not** entitled to a judge and jury who are Irish speakers [Ó Maicín v Ireland & ors. [2014] IESC 12]. It is noted during the proceedings that this arrangement **is** afforded French-speakers in British Columbia, Canada. The dissenting judgment also urged that a jury region be created in the Gaeltacht to facilitate further trials.[50]
April 2014	Publication of the *Review of the Official Languages Act 2013*.
May 2015	Publication by the Minister for Education & Skills of the Policy Proposals for Educational Provision in Gaeltacht Areas.
December 2015	The Council of the European Union announced that it would draft a Regulation that would increase the number of areas in which Irish translation is required, with the aim of ending the derogation on a phased basis by the end of 2021.

[1] For a succinct description of what many experts view as a socio-linguistic crisis in the Gaeltacht see Dr.Conchúir Ó Giollagáin's article (29 June 2015) 'Irish in crisis – we need a New Deal to revitalise the language'. Irish Times. Available here.

[2] The 'Galltacht', as defined by Niall Ó Dónaill's Irish-English dictionary (An Gúm, 1998 edition), are those districts in Ireland which are now primarily English-speaking, i.e. most of which changed from monoglot Irish-speaking or bilingual to monoglot English-speaking during the course of the 19th century.

[3] Mac Giolla Chríost, D., (2005), The Irish Language in Ireland: From Goídel to Globalisation. Abingdon, Routledge: p.64.

[4] In Census 2011 the national average was of 1.8% daily and 2.6% weekly speakers of Irish outside of the education system, i.e. 4.4% of the population spoke Irish 'regularly'.

[5] Article 8.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, available here.

[6] See relevant UNESCO webpage available here.

[7] Fishman, J., (1991), Reversing language Shift: Theory and Practice of Assistance to Threatened Languages. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

[8] For a description of the EGIDS model see here. See also Lewis, P. & Simons, G., (September 2009) Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's, a paper submitted to the Revue Roumaine de Linguistique for the special issue on endangered languages available here.

[9] The website of the Welsh language Commissioner is available here.

[10] Public hearing available here.

[11] Grenoble, L. (2013). 'Language Revitalization' in Bayley, R., Cameron, R. & Lucas, C. eds, The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics, pp.792-811. Oxford, Oxford University Press: p.793.

[12] Source: This is Ireland, Highlights from Census 2011: p.40.

[13] Daily/Weekly speakers of the language nationally are 187,827; in the Gaeltacht 29,988 (Census 2011). For the basis of combining daily and weekly speakers see Donncha Ó hÉallaithe's letter of 4 April 2014 to the Irish Times available here.

[14] The total population of Ireland (Census 2011) was 4,588,252 of whom 100,716 lived within the official Gaeltacht.

[15] See the preliminary Census 2016 results in respect of geographical population changes on the CSO website here.

[16] See, for example, data/maps available here. Please note that only the Welsh-language version of the website contains the full range of material.

[17] Translation from the Welsh language paper by Jones, Hywel (2007). Gwerddon, Cyf.1, Rhif 2, Hydref, The implications of changes in the ages of Welsh speakers and their spatial distribution: p.15. Available online here.

[18] The report of the Commission for the Restoration of the Irish Language is available here.

[19] The Politics of the Irish Language Under the English and British Governments (2007, p.115), Center for Irish and Irish-American Studies, Glucksman Ireland House, NYU, available here.

[20] Phelan, M., (2013), PhD Thesis DCU, 'Irish language court interpreting 1801-1922'. Reference here.

[21] As described by Ordnance Survey Ireland at the following link: http://www.osi.ie/products/professional-mapping/historical-mapping/

[22] A more detailed description of this historical situation is provided by Ordnance Survey Ireland here.

[23] Available at the Placenames website – in Irish at: http://www.logainm.ie/ga/ and in English at: http://www.logainm.ie/en/

[24] Hindley, R., (1990). The death of the Irish language: a qualified obituary. London & New York, Routledge: p.15

[25] Iaith Pawb | A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales (2003), Welsh Assembly Government: p.5.

[26] Source: Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht – Principal Findings and Recommendations (2007, p.13).

[27] Ibid (2007, p.10).

[28] Ibid (2007, p.29).

[29] Ibid (2007, p.29).

[30] Bohane, C. (2005) Cork Online Law Review (2005). The Official Languages Act 2003: p.2. Available here:

[31] Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs press release of 5 July 2016, available here.

[32] Statistics provided by Gaelscoileanna on request from the L&RS.

[33] Review of Education in the Gaeltacht (September 2013, p.3)

[34] Minister's Brief – Overview, Department of Education & Skills (May 2016, p.42).
[35] See article entitled, 'Aghaidh tugtha ag moltaí na Roinne Oideachais ar na dúshláin is mó roimh scoileanna Gaeltachta, published on Tuairisc.ie on 5 May 2015 available here. See also the press release issued by Foras na Gaeilge on 5 May 2015 available here.
[36] 'An polasaí oideachais nua don Ghaeltacht ag brath ar chainteanna buiséid', 21 July 2016. Tuarisc.ie. Available here.
[37] With regard to stakeholder consultation and reaction see, for example, the report from Tuairisc.ie on 15 December 2015 entitled, 'Aighneacht ón ngrúpa Meánscoil Lán-Ghaeilge do Chonamara á scrúdú ag an Roinn Oideachais', available here.
[38] ' 'Imní' ar Chearta Oideachais go mbeidh ar pháistí le Gaeilge ó dhúchas freastal ar scoileanna Béarla'. 11 July 2016. Tuarisic.ie. Available online here. 'Bhí láncheart ag Gaelscoil diúltú do dhalta mar gheall ar easpa Gaeilge – cinneadh Ard-Chúirte'. 29 July 2016. Tuairisc.ie. Available online here.
[39] It was reported in Tuairisc.ie on 19 July 2016 that the Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs intends to review the proposed legislation, 'Kyne chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar reachtaíocht 'le bonn níos láidre' a chur faoi chearta teanga'. Available here.
[40] The press release issued by the Coimisinéir Teanga on 27 June 2016 is available here.
[41] See Department of the Taoiseach webpage available here.
[42] Translation of speaking notes on the occasion of the Former Coimisinéir Teanga, Seán Ó Cuirreáin, uasal, speaking to the Joint sub-Committee on the Implementation of the Twenty-year Strategy for the Irish Language on 23 January 2014: p.3. Available here.
[43] Ó Giollagáin, C. & Charlton, M. (2015). Nuashonrú ar an Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: 2006–2011. Údarás na Gaeltachta: p.66. Available here.
[44] Watson, Iarfhlaith., Nic Ghiolla Pádraig, M., Linguistic Elitism: the Advantage of Speaking Irish Rather than the Irish-speaker Advantage, *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter, (2011). University College Dublin: p.440. Available here.
[45] http://www.tg4.ie/en/corporate/background.html
[46] Mac Cárthaigh, D. (2007). Interpretation and Construction of Bilingual Laws: A Canadian Lamp to Light the Way? Available here.
[47] Published 12 March 2014 and available on the L&RS intranet here.
[48] Available online here.
[49] Up to 31 December 2006, Irish was not included in the working languages of the EU institutions. Pursuant to an Agreement made in 1971 between Ireland and the Community, Irish was considered an official Community language, it being understood, however, that only primary legislation was drawn up in that language. On 1 January 2007, Irish became a full EU official language, with a temporary derogation for a renewable period of five years (see Council Regulation (EC) No 920/2005 of 13 June 2005 (OJ L 156, 18.6.2005, p. 3)) stating that 'the institutions of the European Union shall not be bound by the obligation to draft all acts in Irish and to publish them in that language in the Official Journal of the European Union', except for regulations adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council. This derogation was extended until 31 December 2016 by Council Regulation (EU) No 1257/2010 (OJ L 343, 29.12.2010, p. 5). It was extended again by Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2015/2264 (OJ L 322, 8.12.2015, p. 1), but it is to be gradually reduced in scope and eventually brought to an end by 31 December 2021. Source: Europa inter-institutional style guide available here.
[50] Ó Conaill, Dr. Seán. (March 12, 2014). Judicial Pragmatism at the Expense of Language Rights: The Ó Maicín Decision. Constitutionproject.ie. Available here.