

Steering Committee

Policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht

Minutes of Meeting 5

Date: Wednesday, 21 June 2023

Venue: Room G13/14, Department of Education, Marlborough Street

Meeting Time: 3:00p.m. to 5:00p.m.

In attendance:

Lisa Nic Dhoinnléibhe (Acting Chairperson) – *Principal Officer, Gaeltacht Education Unit, Department of Education*

Muireann Tóibín, Pól Mac Cathmhaoil, Naoise Ó Faoláin – *Gaeltacht Education Unit, Department of Education*

Yvonne Ní Mhurchú – *Inspectorate, Department of Education (Online)*

Toby Wolfe – *Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)*

Aislinn Duffy – *Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)*

Jacqueline Ní Fhearghusa – *An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)*

Cathy Connolly – *National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (Online)*

Stella Ní Shé – *National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (Online)*

Seosamh Ó Coinne – *Foras na Gaeilge*

In attendance (for items 2 and 3 of the agenda only):

Pádraig Ó Duibhir, Aisling Ní Dhiorbháin, Colin Flynn & Jacqueline de Brún – *Sealbhú, DCU*
Members of the intradepartmental working group for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht – *Department of Education*

In attendance (for item 6 of the agenda only):

T.J. Ó Ceallaigh – *University College Cork*

Muiris Ó Laoire – *Munster Technological University, Tralee*

Máire Uí Chonghaile – *Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

Apologies

Gavan O'Leary – *Assistant Secretary, Department of Education*

Aodán Mac an Mhíle – *Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media (DTCAGSM)*

Arlene Forster – *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)*

Phil Fox – *Teaching Council*

1. Welcome

The Acting Chairperson welcomed the various members to the fifth meeting of the Steering Committee for policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht. The Chairperson also welcomed Pádraig Ó Duibhir, Aisling Ní Dhiorbháin, Cóilín Ó Floinn and Jacqueline de Brún from Sealbhú, DCU. It was indicated that some members of the intradepartmental working group would be present remotely via Webex for items 2 and 3 of the agenda.

2. Update on the review of international research – Finland and Hawaii

As part of the review of international research on minority language education Sealbhú, DCU had completed further research on two other minority languages - Swedish in Finland and Hawaiian in Hawaii. LNicD invited the DCU Sealbhú team to outline the initial findings from these jurisdictions.

Following the presentation, questions were asked in relation to the following:

- the impact of the state court ruling, which stated that every child in Hawaii has the right to be educated through Hawaiian;
- teaching methods in Finland in terms of the bilingual approaches used;
- research conducted on the advantages/disadvantages of the 'one teacher for one language' model;
- the use of minority languages as a social language outside the classroom; and
- research into pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in these jurisdictions.

3. Report on the data collected in Phase 1 of the consultation

(a) Phase 1: Analysis of the questionnaire

Sealbhú, DCU, have submitted two reports to the Department on the analysis of the responses received to the questionnaire used in the first Phase of the public consultation process:

- (i) A comprehensive report outlining details of the analysis of the different sections of the questionnaire;
- (ii) A short report summarising the most important aspects of the above analysis.

PÓD made a presentation to the Committee on his analysis of the questionnaire responses and on the most common themes that emerged in the analysis. Arising from those themes, PÓD outlined twelve conclusions/recommendations.

There was particular interest in what was reported on SEN. For example, the difference between the opinions of teachers and those of pupils in terms of SEN provision and meeting SEN needs in the Irish-medium system was noted. The Committee was interested in finding out if the same difference would apply to data in English-medium settings.

JNíF welcomed the research and LNicD thanked PÓD for his work on the reports.

(b) Phase 1: Analysis of the submissions

The chairperson invited JdeB to describe the analysis she had conducted of the written submissions related to the first phase of public consultation. JdeB provided details of the various types of submissions to the Department. NVivo was used to analyse the qualitative data in the submissions. JdeB outlined the key themes that had emerged during the analysis

and she presented a number of recommendations to the Committee based on these key themes.

FNíM congratulated Sealbhú, DCU for the wonderful work on the analysis. LNicD stated that this work was very worthwhile and would provide a solid foundation for the development of the policy. She thanked the researchers from Sealbhú, DCU, for their work to date and for their presentations at the meeting. Sealbhú, DCU, and the members of the interdepartmental working group left the meeting at that point.

4. Welcome to the Steering Committee

LNicD welcomed two new members to the Steering Committee - Pól Mac Cathmhaoil (AOG) and Seosamh Ó Coinne (Foras na Gaeilge). She also mentioned that Jacinta Regan would henceforth be the NCCA's representative.

5. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The meetings of meeting 4 were discussed and adopted without amendment. There were no matters arising.

6. Updates on Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the public consultation – focus groups and bilateral meetings

(a) Phase 2: Focus groups

LNicD informed the Steering Committee that all focus group meetings from Phase 2 of the consultation had now been completed. A total of 25 focus group meetings were convened (9 primary school groups, 10 post-primary school groups and 6 groups with adults). It was stated that Máire Ní Ghealbháin was currently analysing all focus group meetings and that the outcomes of the analysis would be shared with the Committee in due course.

LNicD summarised what had emerged in the last focus group meeting of 7 June 2023 on the theme of schools that altered their medium of instruction from English to Irish. There was a discussion on the challenges of transitioning from an English-medium school to an Irish-medium school.

(b) Phase 3: Bilateral meetings

LNicD indicated that the bilateral meetings were currently being held and that she expected them to conclude in early July. 48 organisations were invited to attend the meetings, including members of the Steering Committee, organisations/institutions that had made submissions in Phase 1 of the consultation, and other relevant educational and/or Irish language stakeholders.

7. Update on research on the Aonaid/Sruthanna (Units/Streams)

T.J. Ó Ceallaigh, Muiris Ó Laoire and Máire Uí Conghaile have completed the field research on Aonaid/Sruthanna (Irish-medium units/streams). The field research included 49 interviews with teachers, principals and other stakeholders. The researchers are currently analysing the data that has been gathered.

MÓL provided an overview of some of the initial findings emerging from the analysis, including specific challenges relating to the Aonaid/Sruthanna setting. Following the presentation, the Committee had a brief discussion on the following matters:

- The definition given for an Aonaid;
- The difference between Sruthanna and Aonaid;
- Participation of Aonaid students on school councils;
- Parental expectations when choosing Aonaid for their children, etc.

LNicD commended the research underway and mentioned that it was important to get an accurate perspective of the current situation of all Aonaid/Sruthanna as a basis for the development of the policy.

8. Actions and next steps

The following are some of the other actions and next steps that emerged from the meeting:

- Members of the Steering Committee to share feedback on Sealbhú's short report (on the analysis of the questionnaire) with the AOG before the end of day on Friday, 30 June 2023.
- Focus group reports to be shared with Committee members before the next meeting of the Steering Committee.
- AOG to complete the bilateral meetings and analyse the themes that emerge in discussions with stakeholders.
- Aonaid/Sruthanna researchers to complete their analysis before the end of the summer.

***Gaeltacht Education Unit
Department of Education
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