

Information Sheet on Other National Language (ONL) Irish in the European Schools system

7 July 2011

This information sheet on the teaching of **Other National Language (ONL) Irish** is a response to various queries regarding the teaching of Irish in European Schools (ES), following the Board of Governors' approval, on 15 April 2011, of the document 2011-01-D-33-en-7 which relates to the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools.

Prior to the approval of this document, the Department of Education and Skills was involved in lengthy discussions with the Office of the Secretary General regarding the ONL proposal and had conducted research into the situation regarding the teaching of Irish in the European Schools. Issues regarding the teaching of Irish in ES to date have included problems in relation to time allocation, especially in a context of relatively low numbers of students taking Irish and pressure on schools to maximise their use of teaching time. There has been a lack of clarity around the regulations concerning Irish provision over the years and an absence of uniformity in the applications of these regulations, with the result that provision for Irish in the European Schools has been varied. Sometimes owing to pressure in schools in relation to subject demands on the timetable and organisational arrangements, Irish lessons have often been arranged outside of normal teaching hours, which has not proved to be satisfactory in the long term. Added to these considerations, uptake of Irish in the European Baccalaureat examination has been low, with an average of 5 students taking Irish exams at all three levels combined over the past 12 years.

With the ONL option, the provision of Irish for Irish students is guaranteed from nursery to Baccalaureat level. Classes are 'protected' in that classes will be formed for any number of students. The current issues regarding timetabling provision will be addressed through regular timetabling of Irish into the curriculum. In situations where very small numbers require year groups to be amalgamated into one class group, it has been specified that this will involve no more than two consecutive year groups. Lessons will be within the timetable and class-contact time has been clearly set out for each year group. Provision will be harmonised among the different schools. A syllabus is being prepared for the ONL which will offer continuity of study of Irish throughout ES schooling and will reflect a level which will fulfil third-level requirements in Ireland. L2, L3 and L4 options will still be available for Irish, although normal rules will apply for the creation of these groups (i.e. 7 students in years S2-S5 and 5 in years S6 and S7).

Regarding the ONL Baccalaureat examination, students will be able to opt for either an oral or a written examination. The Board of Inspectors will be discussing the 'weighting' of the ONL, reflecting 14 years of study, as part of their deliberations in October 2011. Further information will be provided at this stage.

The ONL is being introduced into the system in September of this year. At secondary level, the ONL will come into force in different phases and there will be a transitory period of two to three years. At levels S1 and S2 the ONL new provisions will come into force on 1st September 2011. The following guidelines clarify procedures, during this introductory phase, in relation to students who are already studying Irish at the different levels:

The course in year 4 will take as its starting point the standard expected by the end of year 3 – i.e. it is not a beginners' course.

All pupils who are enrolled for the former 'extra' courses for years 1, 2 and 3 will automatically be assigned to the ONL course.

All pupils who have opted for language 3 Irish in the coming year 2 will be enrolled in the ONL course and must choose a different 3rd language, from those currently available.

All pupils who have opted for language 3 or 4 Irish in year 6 will be automatically enrolled in the ONL option. The 'extra' courses in year 4 and 6 will be cancelled but pupils or their parents can discuss the possibilities of taking the ONL option with the school.

As an interim arrangement those pupils enrolled for L3 Irish and currently in years 2,3 or 4 can continue this course until the end of year 5 and need not start a different third language. The same applies to those following L4 Irish in years 4 and 6; they can continue with this same course in years 5 and 7. In the same way, those presently following 'extra' Irish in years 4 and 6 can continue this course in years 5 and 7 combined, as before, with remaining L3 and L4 groups.

The ONL will also be offered to students who have not chosen Irish as 'extra language' or L3 at present.

As in the past, these courses are all subject to reduction and vertical combination where the numbers are small, and timetable constraints mean that they will frequently be placed during 'free' afternoons.

Document 2011-01-D-33-en-7 states the following:

2.4. Other National Language

The **Other National Language (ONL)** – Irish, Maltese², Finnish/Swedish – must be taught to category I and II pupils from the nursery (Finnish/Swedish from primary year 3) up to secondary year 7. For those pupils who request these courses, Finnish is taught to category I and II Finnish pupils in the Swedish section and Swedish is taught to Finnish-speakers in the Finnish section in those schools which have Finnish/Swedish sections.

The Other National Language Irish/Maltese is available for Irish/Maltese nationals only.

There should be a specific syllabus for the ONL.

Other National Language groups shall be created with fewer than seven pupils.

In the nursery, the ONL is taught 3 x 30 minutes per week.

In primary years 1-2, the ONL is taught 3 x 30 minutes per week.

In primary years 3-5, the ONL is taught 2 x 45 minutes per week.

In secondary years 1-3, the ONL is taught 2 x 45 minutes per week.

Starting from secondary year 4 and up to secondary year 5, the ONL is a 4-period option. Pupils choosing the ONL cannot choose L4.

For secondary years 6 and 7, the ONL is a 4-period option. Pupils choosing the ONL cannot choose L4.

This decision will change the primary school harmonised timetable as follows:

Primary school harmonised timetable Subject	Years 1 and 2	Years 3, 4, 5
Mother tongue (SWALS L1)	8 hours (2 hours 30)	6 hours 45 (3 hours 45)
Mathematics	4 hours	5 hours 15
Language 2	2 hours 30	3 hours 45
Music		

Art	5 hours	3 hours
Physical Education		
Discovery of the World	1 hour 30	3 hours
European Hours		1 hour 30
Religion/Ethics	1 hour	1 hour 30
Recreation	3 hours 30	2 hours 30
Total	25 hours 30	27 hours 15
ONL - Irish/Maltese*	1 hour 30	1 hour 30
ONL - Finnish/Swedish*		1 hour 30
*ONL is taught during the school year day		

In relation to the teaching of languages in general, the document further states:

L2 is compulsory up to the Baccalaureate. The L2 is normally one of the working languages (DE, EN or FR) but pupils may request a different L2 for secondary years 6 and 7. This may be accepted subject to the rules relating to a change of L2 and to the rules governing the creation of groups.

The new L2 may be any official language of the EU countries not yet being studied as L2. The starting point of this new L2 will be a standard consistent with ten years of continuous and progressive teaching of the language, equivalent to the standards for the rest of the working languages

L3 is a 4-period option course and the teaching takes as its starting point a standard consistent with four years of continuous and progressive teaching of the language.

L4 is a 4-period option course and the teaching takes as its starting point a standard consistent with two years of continuous and progressive teaching of the language.

It is possible for a pupil to choose as L3 in secondary years 3, 4 or 6 or L4 in secondary year 6 an EU language which has not been studied previously in a European School, provided that the pupil has passed an attainment test (written and oral) at the required level, administered under the responsibility of the teacher concerned.

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