'Overcoming the fear': the story of the Irish language in a programme promoting diversity in the primary teaching profession

Gareth Burns, Aoife Ní Ghloinn, Jerry O'Neill, Caroline Ní Ghallchobhair, Katie Whelan & Máire Nic an Bhaird

Published online: 10 Nov 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ⍄

Article views: 203

View related articles ⍄

View Crossmark data ⍄

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

'Overcoming the fear': the story of the Irish language in a programme promoting diversity in the primary teaching profession

Gareth Burns [a], Aoife Ní Ghloinn [b], Jerry O'Neill [c], Caroline Ní Ghallchobhair [b], Katie Whelan [b] and Máire Nic an Bhaird [d]

aSchool of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland; bLárionad na Gaeilge: Taighde, Teagasc agus Tástáil, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, Maigh Nuad, Éire; cDepartment of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland; dFroebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland

ABSTRACT

Maynooth University's Level 6 Think About Teaching Foundation Certificate (Foundation Cert) is a central part of a widening participation project (Turn to Teaching) which provides preparation for, and pathways into, initial teacher education (ITE). A key dimension of the Foundation Cert has been the development of an alternative Irish language curriculum which provides support and equivalence to Leaving Certificate Irish for entry to primary ITE.

Drawing on the experiences of students and staff gleaned from open ended focus groups and biographical interviews, we, as members of a community of Higher Education staff, offer, as part of the project's cycle of evaluative research, a reflexive account and analysis on the diverse outcomes, issues and aspirations emerging from the on-going development of this innovative Irish language curriculum. We also draw on the project's quantitative data on recruitment and retention to highlight the most visible signs of the Irish language programme's efficacy.

It is clear from both qualitative and quantitative data that the programme's communicative and critically reflexive approach to Irish language teaching and learning plays a pivotal role in transforming many students' relationships with the language.

Introduction

In this paper, we (a collective of university educators and researchers) will present the critically evaluative, and emerging, findings from the ongoing Irish language curriculum development work of Maynooth University's (MU) Turn to Teaching – a project that aims to enhance diversity in the teaching profession. Turn to Teaching adopts a lifelong, continuum approach in supporting students from diverse and under-represented groups into, through, and beyond initial teacher education (ITE) across a range of educational sectors (early childhood, primary, post-primary and further education [FE]) (Figure

---

1). At the heart of Turn to Teaching is a Level 6 access programme, the Think About Teaching Foundation Certificate (Foundation Cert), which provides preparation for, and pathways into, ITE. While the Foundation Cert adopts a cross-sectoral focus, it has placed a particular emphasis on responding to the distinct challenges experienced by those from diverse and under-represented groups in terms of accessing primary ITE, the least diverse of the teaching professions in Ireland (Darmody and Smyth 2016).

It has been argued that Irish language requirements for entry to primary ITE act as a barrier for many (DE 2023; Keane, Heinz, and McDaid 2023; O'Doherty and Harford 2018; O'Donoghue and Harford 2011). However, recent research and public debate has also highlighted the systemic issues contributing to this problem, including a system of exemptions from the study of Irish, which aims, in the short term, to accommodate those with additional learning needs or from diverse language backgrounds, but which may contribute further to their exclusion in later periods of education and career transition (Comhchoiste Oireachtais na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge 2024; Ó Duibhir 2020; Ó Duibhir et al. 2019; Tynan 2018). Rather than positioning Irish as a barrier, a key dimension of the work of Turn to Teaching has been the development of an alternative Irish language curriculum (Cumas na Gaeilge) as part of the Foundation Cert which not only provides support and equivalence to Leaving Certificate Irish for entry to primary ITE but strives to enable students to positively transform their relationship with Irish language education.

This longitudinal widening participation initiative is grounded in participative and critically reflexive epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies (Brookfield 2017; Cooper 2014; Crean and Lynch 2011; Heron and Reason 1997; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2014; Mountz, Moore, and Brown 2008; O'Neill and Burns 2020) and consistently works to collapse the distinctions between critical pedagogy, project management and evaluation. As such, the critically reflexive analysis on the Irish language dimensions of the Foundation Cert presented in this paper can be
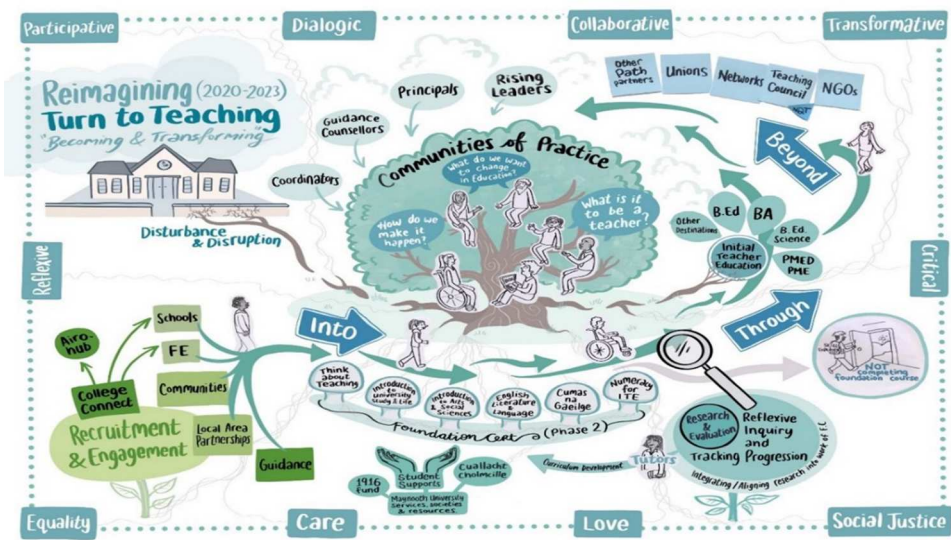

Figure 1. Vision for Turn to Teaching (Phase Two, 2020–2023).

seen as just one aspect of the various reflexive and evaluative activities and processes that contribute to the wider and ongoing growth of this 'responsive' initiative (Nwanze 2024). Although we will present some quantitative data relating to participation and progression, a strong emphasis is placed here on giving voice to the lived experiences of the programme's students and staff, while also considering how their experiences can help inform the future development of the work.

The paper continues below with a contextual discussion on the State's efforts to enhance Irish language proficiency in Irish society since the foundation of the State and, more specifically, the role of compulsory education in achieving that goal. Noting the Irish language entry requirements for primary ITE, we will then discuss the broader issue and challenge of diversity within the primary teacher profession in Ireland. After this, we will introduce the work of MU's Turn to Teaching which grew from a state-funded commitment to address this lack of diversity. After outlining the methodological dimensions of the strand of the work associated with the Irish language, which is the focus of this paper, we will note the participants involved in the research before presenting emerging quantitative and qualitative findings. Bearing in mind, as already noted, that we position this critically reflexive work as part of the ongoing growth of the project, we conclude by considering some of the emerging challenges and opportunities, not just for the work of Turn to Teaching, but for anyone involved in the work of widening participation more generally and, more specifically within the Irish context, for those interested in enhancing opportunities for Irish language learning as part of progression pathways into the primary teaching profession.

The Irish language

It is important to provide some context about the Irish language in Irish society in terms of its usage and curricular centrality across compulsory education. While English is the mother tongue of the vast majority of Irish people, Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland. Various studies have shown that the majority of Irish people have positive attitudes towards the Irish language (Conradh na Gaeilge 2021; Darmody and Daly 2015; MacGréil and Rhatigan 2009). These positive attitudes are likely to reflect the importance people attach to the language in relation to national identity and heritage (Darmody and Daly 2015, 90), and yet the use of Irish is not in line with attitudes (Conradh na Gaeilge 2021; Ó Riagáin 2007). According to the 2022 Census of Population (CSO 2022), 40% of the Irish population stated that they could speak the language. However, within this cohort 55% reported that they did not speak it well, while almost one in four indicated that they never spoke it, and a further 29.5% indicated that they only spoke it within the education system. The reality is that the number of people speaking Irish daily outside the education system stands at 71,968, representing 1.4% of the total population. Furthermore, there is a greater concentration of daily Irish speakers living in Gaeltacht areas, where Irish survives, to a certain degree, as a community language (CSO 2016).

There have been concerted efforts by the Irish government over the last century since the foundation of the State to increase the number of Irish language speakers. Among the headline goals of a more recent intervention, the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030* (Government of Ireland 2010), was the commitment to increase the number

of daily speakers of the language to 250,000. However, the 2016 census of population (CSO 2016) reported a decline of 4.4% on the number of daily speakers of the language on the previous 2011 census (CSO 2011), and the 2022 census (CSO 2022) has shown a further decline in these figures.

The public education system has played a key role in efforts to preserve and revive the Irish language over the last 100 years since the foundation of the State. Irish is a compulsory subject at primary and post-primary level. Whereas there are designated subject specialists in post-primary schools, all primary school teachers are required to teach Irish and are also encouraged to use Irish informally in the classroom throughout the school day. There are on-going concerns about the quality of Irish teaching and learning at both primary and post-primary level. A recent Chief Inspectorate's report (Inspectorate of Department of Education 2020) found that while students' learning outcomes in relation to Irish in all-Irish primary schools were 'good', achievement in Irish was deemed 'very concerning' in English medium schools which educate the vast majority (approximately 92%) of Irish students. Inspections of Irish in post-primary schools indicated that the quality of teaching and learning in Irish was good or very good in the majority of schools (Inspectorate of Department of Education 2020); however, it was considerably below the standards achieved in the other core subjects of maths and English. A report into student attitudes towards the Irish language suggested that Irish is not considered as interesting or useful as some other subjects in English-medium schools (Darmody and Daly 2015). Efforts have been made to address these issues, with varying success, through curricular reform at Primary and Junior Cycle level (DES 2017b; DES 2019; Mac Gearailt and Ó Duibhir 2023). A review of the Leaving Certificate Irish curriculum specifications has been underway since 2018; however, this work was paused in 2023 to allow time for further consultation and research on potential models of provision (NCCA 2023). In this context, research may be useful to ascertain the role the curriculum, class sizes and opportunities to engage in language immersion play in students' learning outcomes and attitudes towards the language.

Diversity in the primary teaching profession and the Irish language

Mirroring the international context, diversifying the teaching profession in Ireland has become a priority in education policy in recent years. The 'Celtic Tiger' era of the mid 1990s to the late 2000s described a period of rapid economic growth which resulted in a dramatic increase in inward migration and resultant exponential growth in the diversity of Ireland's school populations (Devine 2011; Smyth et al. 2009). Precipitated by recession, Ireland re-entered a phase of significant net emigration in the late 2000s and early 2010s (McGinnity et al. 2023). However, since 2015, and despite fluctuations linked to COVID-19 restrictions and border closures, the number of immigrants has been larger than the number of emigrants (McGinnity et al.), and recent research continues to highlight the diversity of student profiles in Irish schools (Carroll, McCoy, and Ye 2024). Despite these demographic shifts, Ireland's primary and post-primary teacher population has remained homogeneous, being predominantly white, female and of majority-group social class and ethnic backgrounds (Keane and Heinz 2015; 2016; Heinz and Keane 2018). While this pattern is reflected across primary and post-primary teaching professions, research by the Economic and Social Research Institute

(Darmody and Smyth 2016) noted the slightly less diverse profile of entrants to primary ITE in comparison to the post-primary profession, in terms of entry via FE or mature routes, receipt of higher education (HE) grants, and parental socio-economic group.

In contrast to many other jurisdictions, teaching remains a profession of choice in Ireland (Clarke and O'Doherty 2021) and entry to ITE remains highly competitive. However, the increase in the cost of teacher education programmes, the growing casualisation of the profession and easier access to teaching posts abroad have led to a teacher supply crisis (OECD 2020) which has the potential to erode its status within Irish society. At undergraduate level, access to primary ITE has, traditionally and predominantly, being based on applicants' performance in the Leaving Certificate, the Irish State terminal exam taken by students at the end of second level education. Overall performance in the Leaving Certificate is calculated using a points system, and applicants must obtain a specified number of points for entry into third-level courses. Entry points for primary ITE have remained high in recent decades[1], and entrants must achieve minimum entry requirements in Irish, English, and maths, with a relatively high grade in Irish required (DES 2020).[2] At postgraduate level, access is based on a combination of undergraduate degree performance and relevant experience and/or further qualifications, with specific entry requirements in relation to Irish language proficiency.[3]

While we acknowledge that there are many other social, economic and cultural barriers to teaching, is it likely that Irish language requirements for entry to primary ITE acts as a context-specific barrier for many in terms of accessing primary ITE (DE 2023; Keane, Heinz, and McDaid 2023; O'Donoghue and Harford 2011; O'Doherty and Harford 2018), and in particular for people of non-Irish origin (Hyland 2012; McDaid 2023; McDaid and Walsh 2016; Schmidt and McDaid 2015) and for some people with disabilities (Lodge 2012). Students may in specific circumstances be granted an exemption from the otherwise obligatory Irish instruction at school depending on the age of pupils when they first arrive in Ireland, or for specific learning difficulties that they may have (DE 2022). Indeed, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of exemptions being granted (Comhchoiste Oireachtais na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge 2024; Ó Duibhir 2020), thus excluding an increasing number of students from becoming primary teachers. Heinz and Keane (2018, 536) found that there is a significantly lower participation (and disclosure) rate of primary ITE applicants with learning disabilities compared to their post-primary postgraduate counterparts, and surmise that the exclusively academic selection criteria and additional Irish language requirements make access to primary ITE nearly impossible for students with learning disabilities in contrast to postgraduate post-primary ITE. Primary teaching is also made less accessible for many without the economic capital to attend Irish language immersion programmes or additional private tutoring known as 'grinds', which are specifically targeted by those students aiming to achieve the required Leaving Certificate Irish language grade for entry to primary ITE (McDaid, Keane, and Heinz 2023).

Previous research conducted with Turn to Teaching student participants into their experiences of Irish language learning in designated disadvantaged second-level schools, or what are known colloquially as 'DEIS'[4] schools, revealed that participants believed the communities they came from and schools they attended influenced the quality of teaching received (O'Sullivan, Bird, and Burns 2019). Teacher expectations

of their language capabilities, and consequently their language proficiency, also impacted upon their Irish language experiences. While Smyth and Darmody's (2016) study into attitudes to Irish as a school subject among 13-year-olds found no significant variation in levels of interest in Irish by DEIS status and social class, they did see some variation by social background in relation to the perceived difficulty of Irish, 'with young people whose mothers have tertiary education more likely to describe Irish as not difficult' (7). Smyth and Darmody also found that 'those from lone parent families are more likely to characterise Irish as difficult than those from two parent families', and 'those with immigrant mothers are less likely to describe Irish as not difficult than their peers' (7). Further research from this time found that students in DEIS schools were less likely to study higher level Irish for the Leaving Certificate than students in non-DEIS schools (Smyth, McCoy, and Kingston 2015). It would be useful to have up-to-date data on this but if this finding is still prevalent, it continues to have significant effects on the social mobility of students, particularly for those with aspirations to become primary school teachers.

Diversifying primary teaching in Ireland and Maynooth University's Turn to Teaching

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Strand 1 (Equity of Access to Initial Teacher Education) was established in 2017 to fund initiatives aimed at diversifying teacher education. As part of PATH 1, MU established the Turn to Teaching project. A key, but not exclusive, dimension to this work was the development of an access course, the Think About Teaching Foundation Certificate (Foundation Cert), which offers guaranteed and diverse pathways to ITE programmes for successful graduates. In the first three iterations of the programme, the course was split into three specific streams reflecting different ITE pathways (primary, post-primary, and science education ITE). Students on the primary stream of the course are offered modules in Irish, English, maths, critical perspectives on education, and a module focusing on preparing students for the academic, cultural, social and technological challenges of university study and life.

At the core of this primary ITE pathway is the alternative Irish language curriculum which was developed in partnership with MU's Lárionad na Gaeilge, the Centre for Irish Language Research, Teaching and Testing, and the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, and which provides support and equivalence to Leaving Certificate Irish. The curriculum and assessment for the Irish competency module is based on the Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (The European Certificate in Irish, commonly known as TEG). TEG is a suite of communicative syllabuses and general language proficiency tests for Irish, broadly aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2020) and developed and administered by MU's Lárionad na Gaeilge. TEG syllabuses and testing systems differ significantly from the Irish curriculum and exams administered at post-primary level in Ireland. The Leaving Certificate Irish exam could be described primarily as an achievement test, as it assesses students' mastery of prescribed course content. While the assessment of spoken communication and written composition is an important part of the exam, students are also assessed on their knowledge of prescribed literary texts. TEG exams, on the

other hand, are general language proficiency tests and measure only candidates' communicative language skills (reading comprehension, aural comprehension, writing and speaking), independent of any subject-related knowledge.

The Irish competency module developed for the Foundation Cert was based on the TEG syllabus and materials for lower intermediate (B1) level. B1 represents a level of language proficiency at which learners can participate, without prior preparation, in conversations on general topics that relate to their own lives and to subject matters with which they are familiar; understand the general meaning of spoken and written texts in clear, standard speech, on familiar, everyday topics; and write simple, short notes providing factual information about events or descriptions of experiences, feelings and opinions. Teaching was primarily through the target language and students were engaged in authentic collaborative communicative tasks related to the syllabus content. The TEG B1 exam is the programme's exclusive form of assessment for Irish, with a 50% grade in the exam required for progression to primary ITE. The module's assessment and progression thresholds to primary ITE were developed with, and agreed by, the State's Department of Education to provide a suitable foundation for further study of Irish in a primary ITE context.

Methodology

At the heart of Turn to Teaching is an interconnected theoretical and pedagogic framework (Figure 1) that brings together critically reflexive and participative values and practices associated with transformative education, research and widening participation projects (Brookfield 2017; Crean and Lynch 2011; Meaney 2019). So, for example, we draw from the likes of Nwanze (2024) to consider how her ideas about 'responsive' critical pedagogies (90-92) can converge with concepts and practices of 'participatory inquiry paradigms' (Heron and Reason 1997, 291) to imagine, and position, the work as a critically reflexive learning project (Senge 2006; Stevenson, McCaig, and Madriaga 2017) that is in a constant flux of cycles of inquiry, evaluation and growth as it responds to shifting participant, policy, social and structural needs and contexts. Indeed, we would argue that the multidimensional epistemological and methodological positions and processes of this longitudinal project collapse distinctions between pedagogy, curriculum development, project management, activism, and policy formation (Cooper 2014; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2014; Mountz, Moore, and Brown 2008; O'Neill and Burns 2020). As such, the strand of the reflexive research on the Irish language which we focus on in this paper needs to be seen, and, indeed, may only be methodologically coherent when positioned as part of the responsive and participatory whole of the wider learning project of Turn to Teaching.

In order to explore the development and impact of the Irish language curriculum on the Foundation Cert, we adopted a mixed methods approach which sits within, and complements, other pedagogic, research, and project management activities of Turn to Teaching. Ethical approval was granted from MU's Social Research Ethics Subcommittee (approval number: 2435072). Participants were inclusive of students (Table 1) and staff (Table 2) of the Foundation Cert and were purposefully selected. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the student participants' anonymity, while the academic staff are identified by their respective roles within the programme.

Table 1. Student participants' profiles.

Pseudonym	Prior Educational Attainment	Destination
	Current Foundation Cert Student Cohort	
Tara	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Bella	Level 8 Degree	Professional Master of Education (Primary)
Joan	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Cora	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Ava	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Jack	Level 8 Degree	Professional Master of Education (Primary)
Makena	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
	Graduates of Foundation Cert	
Sorcha	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Arts
Olivia	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Charlotte	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Alice	Level 5, Special Needs Assistant Training Programme	Bachelor of Arts
Ruby	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Fiadh	Level 9 Degree	Bachelor of Education (Deferred entry)
Nessa	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Sadie	Level 8 Degree	Graduate of Professional Master of Education (Primary)
Mia	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Chloe	Leaving Certificate	Bachelor of Education
Ellie	Further Education Award Holder	Bachelor of Education
Róisín	Level 5, Special Needs Assistant Training Programme	Bachelor of Education

It may also be useful to make clear that the staff cohort identified here as participants were, and are, also the people leading Turn to Teaching's development and research. Indeed, the collective and collaborative nature of the project in general is reflected in the research and authorship behind this paper which draws from a range of internal stakeholders across several departments which, in this instance, are very involved and engaged in programme development in general but in the curricular developments around the Irish language in particular. As a reflexive and responsive research project, the knowledge emerging is constantly emergent and co-constructed, inductively, from the inside of the work with participants, staff and partners. Scholarship associated with reflexive modes of evaluation such as Brookfield's (2017) four lenses or Cooper's (2014) ideas on participatory modes of transformative evaluation, allows us to constantly

Table 2. Staff participants' profiles.

Title	Role within Turn to Teaching
Director of Turn to Teaching	Overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the Turn to Teaching project, and contributor to the on-going development and evaluation of the Irish language programme.
Foundation Cert Co-ordinator	Overall responsibility for academic affairs on the Foundation Cert, and contributor to the on-going development and evaluation of the Irish language programme.
Tutor A	Tutor on the Irish language programme, and contributor to its on-going development and evaluation.
Tutor B	Tutor on the Irish language programme, and contributor to its on-going development and evaluation.
Director of Lárionad na Gaeilge/ The Centre for Irish Language Research, Teaching and Testing	Contributor to the on-going development and evaluation of the Irish language programme.
Lecturer in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education	Contributor to the on-going development and evaluation of the Irish language programme.

frame and re-frame what is emerging from different perspectives and mitigates against our own individual biases.

As required by participating PATH 1 projects, participants were asked to self-identity which target group(s) they belonged to when they applied for the course initially. The target groups for PATH 1 were those named in the 2015–2019 National Access Plan (HEA 2015), namely:

- entrants from socio economic groups that have low participation in HE;
- first time, mature student entrants;
- students with disabilities;
- part-time/flexible learners;
- FE award holders;
- Irish Travellers[5]

It is important to acknowledge that while these categorisations allow for a national targeted focus on those most under-represented in teaching, we must also be aware that the use of such uncritical, and one-dimensional categories risks the danger of dismissing differences between people in politically and socially damaging ways (Blackmore 2006, 191) and neglects to highlight the intersectionality and spectrum of inequality at play. In response to these concerns, the programme's application process and curriculum placed a strong emphasis on creating open-ended spaces for applicants to articulate their own identity(ies) and in this way challenged understandings and idealisation of race, gender and other social differences and categories as fixed identities.

Tables 1 and 2 provide a thin portrait of the 19 student participants' prior educational attainment prior to entry to the Foundation Cert and their destination on completion, and a profile of the six staff participants, who are also authors of this paper. While we primarily draw on the qualitative experiences of students and staff, we also draw on quantitative data on student retention and progression into, through, and beyond the Foundation Cert. This mixed-method approach to this evaluative and developmental research adds insights and understanding that might be missed when only a single method is used (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

To afford primacy to the voices and lived experiences of the programme's students and staff, open-ended focus groups and individual interviews were used (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Lichtman 2013). Two student focus groups were conducted: one focus group was conducted with seven students who were in the latter stages of their studies on the Foundation Cert, and the other student focus group was comprised of three graduates of the programme. As part of the project's wider research and evaluation processes, semi-structured research conversations were held with 12 graduates of the Foundation Cert (three of this cohort also participated in the student focus group comprised of graduates of the Foundation Cert). These research conversations also provided a rich insight into students' experiences of the Irish module and its influence on them as student teachers and emerging teachers of the language. Focus groups were held with the six academics involved in the development and teaching of the Foundation Cert and its on-going evaluation.

The focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data were thematically analysed by the research team. A second analysis and synthesis was then conducted

to identify common and contrasting themes in the participants' experiences across the student and staff cohorts.

Findings

The findings of this study are a product of its mixed-method approach which attends to reporting quantitative data on student recruitment, retention and progression, and the more qualitative, reflexive and participatory methods which articulate the lived experiences of the Foundation Cert's students and staff.

Quantitative data

Applications to the Foundation Cert have grown year on year. Ongoing and developing partnership work with community and FE settings has helped increase applicant numbers from mature and FE student cohorts, although school leavers continue to represent the programme's largest applicant cohort. Of the 500 applications received for the programme in its first four years of existence, 102 were recruited across the then three streams. The restrictions on numbers recruited was due to a limitation on destination pathways and Turn to Teaching's continuing commitment to ensuring meaningful and guaranteed progression opportunities for successful graduates of the course. A significant majority of these applications (circa 90%) indicated a preference for primary ITE.

The immediately visible signs of the primary stream's success are evident from the recruitment and progression data which identifies current students and graduates as of summer 2022 (Figure 2). The overwhelming majority of the 46 applicants who were recruited onto the primary stream of the Foundation Cert experienced intersectional and intergenerational socio-economic inequality. While the largest target group represented on the Foundation Cert was the 'entrants from socio-economic groups with low participation in HE' cohort (n = 21, 46%), participants recorded in the other target groups also experienced intersectional and intergenerational socio-economic inequality.
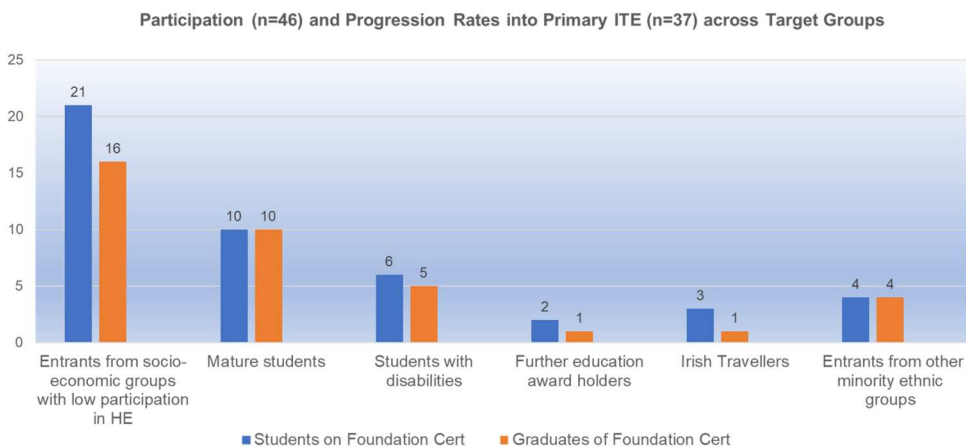

Figure 2. Participation and progression rates across target groups.

The majority of students (n = 29, 63%) recruited onto the primary stream of the Foundation Cert had not achieved the Irish language entry requirements for primary ITE.

The vast majority of students (n = 42, 91%) graduated from the Foundation Cert, and 80% (n = 37) of graduates were eligible to progress into primary ITE having achieved the required entry requirements for the three core subjects of maths, English and Irish (Figure 3). The majority of this cohort progressed into the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree (undergraduate). While the main emphasis of the primary stream of the Foundation Cert was on supporting first time third level students into the B.Ed., the programme was also committed to supporting the diversification of postgraduate primary ITE. Consequently, a small number of degree holders (n = 9) who had not previously achieved the entry requirement in Irish were recruited onto the programme, with 89% (n = 8) achieving the required results to progress to the Professional Master of Education (Primary). Many of the students that progressed onto Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees retain(ed) (primary) teaching aspirations and while a BA degree, in itself, will not lead to a teaching qualification, it is the first necessary step for application to a range of postgraduate teacher education programmes in the primary, post-primary and FE sectors.

While the respective student cohorts are small, it is encouraging that there are strong progression rates across all the target groups and it is particularly pronounced amongst some of the groups most under-represented in primary teaching, namely: mature students, students with disabilities, and students from minority ethnic groups (not including Irish Travellers, who are named as a separate cohort). While 'entrants from minority-ethic groups' were not originally included as a target group for widening participation, they have since been included (HEA 2022) – regardless of this rather late inclusion in national strategy, the Turn to Teaching team were always conscious of this cohort and decided to report on this category due to the evidenced patterns of under-representation of minority ethnic groups in ITE in Ireland (Keane and Heinz 2016).[6] It should also be
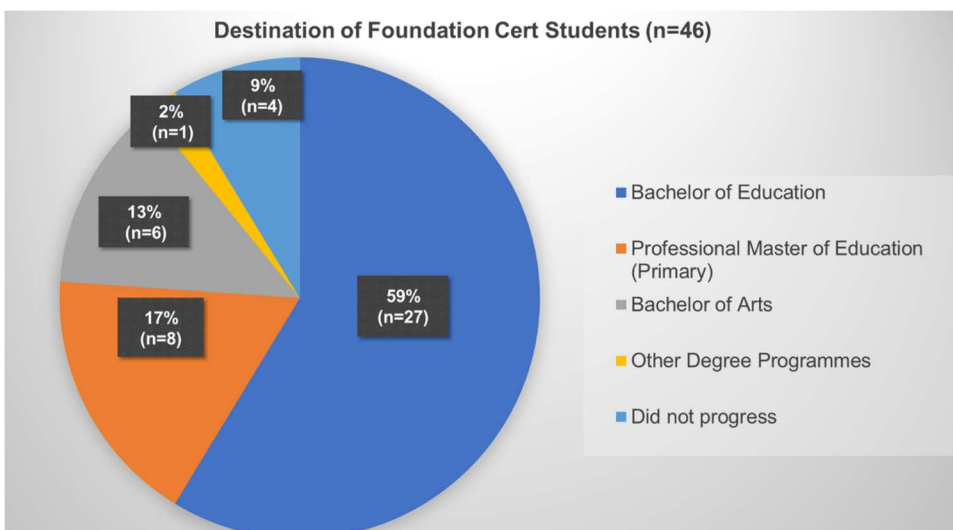
Figure 3. Destination of Foundation Cert primary stream students.

noted that all students in this cohort were also from socio-economic groups with low participation in HE. It is significant that these cumulative outcomes were achieved through a global pandemic, and the growing recognition of its disproportionate impact on already-disadvantaged groups that the Foundation Cert supports (Aontas 2020; Burke and Dempsey 2020; Burns, Colum, and O'Neill 2023; Crickley and Kenny 2020).

It is also becoming clear that the Foundation Cert and its Irish language competency module (Cumas na Gaeilge) puts its graduates into a strong position to succeed in primary ITE. The vast majority of the Foundation Cert graduates that started primary ITE (91%, n = 32) are progressing/have progressed successfully through their respective programmes.

Transformative experiences with the language

What emerged very strongly from the qualitative data is that student participants' experiences of Irish on the Foundation Cert contrasted with their previous experiences in school. In particular, students were enthused by the passion tutors had for the language, which for many contrasted with their perceptions of their post-primary Irish teachers. Many students felt that the Foundation Cert supported them to grasp the basics of the language for the first time, which they attributed to a teaching approach that fostered understanding, language awareness, and learner autonomy.

> I think in school, you're just literally learning stuff off … you don't actually understand what you're learning. Whereas now, like all the grammar, the origin of the roots … . I didn't do any of that before, for five years in school. I never knew half of it because you're just told what to learn. (Bella)

The use of engaging pedagogies and resources that encouraged active learning transformed many students' relationships with the language. Many students considered their tutors' investment in developing open, inclusive relationships with students as critical to their changing relationship with the language. Feeling comfortable to ask questions was an articulation of their growing confidence in their language skills.

> We are not afraid to ask her [tutor] stupid questions, whereas if we were in school and asked stupid questions, it would be like 'oh why do you not know that'. (Mia)

Both tutors on the programme were conscious of many participants' prior problematic experiences with Irish learning and focused on building their damaged confidence, and developed curricula, pedagogies and resources that were responsive to students' needs and helped alleviate some participants' 'fear' of the language.

> I had just finished the Leaving Cert, but I actually didn't understand any of that … … to have such a fear of a language that you have been learning for 12 years. I remember feeling very vulnerable, just sitting there that first time and I was like, if she [tutor] asks me a question, I'm going to have to go back to what I rote learned for the oral[exam] … But after the summer, if [tutor] called on me in a class, I had no worries about attempting anything. (Mia)

Central to the student experience was reimagining Irish as a living language that had relevance in their lives. Many participants felt that the content of the TEG-based Irish language module and its connectedness to their everyday lives sparked their interest in

the language, and helped them to develop the skills and confidence to use the language in everyday situations.

> You are talking about stuff you're interested in. Like you're talking about your past-times and stuff like that, stuff you're interested in … I think it just helped me being able to talk about things I was interested in and to get other insights from what everybody else is interested in. (Jack)

A number of participants referenced being encouraged to form their own opinions through Irish, and a growing confidence to engage with the language in a critical way.

> I think for the Leaving Cert … you're taught to pass [the exam] and give opinions that you might not necessarily have but that's what's going to help you pass. Whereas this year, I've been taught how to actually formulate my own opinion using the language. (Tara)

Influence of the Foundation Cert on emerging ideas about teaching Irish

The pivotal role the Foundation Cert played in creating opportunities for student participants to reflect on the teacher of Irish they wished to become in the future was highlighted by many student participants.

> I think from doing Turn to Teaching I've witnessed how to teach Irish well and how to not teach it well. I think when I was in Turn to Teaching, we were encouraged to speak the language, there was engagement, there were class discussions. You weren't just sitting in the classroom being spoken to and being told how to learn something. (Ellie)

Graduates of the Foundation Cert that had subsequently moved into primary ITE felt the Foundation Cert's student-centred curriculum and pedagogies influenced how they teach the language on school placement. For some participants, their (re)engagement with Irish on the Foundation Cert stirred up conflicting emotions, and Ellie spoke of her ongoing fear of not passing Irish exams in primary ITE yet describes the joy she gets from teaching the language. The complex and sometimes contradictory relationships some participants have with the language is illuminated in Alice's contribution. Despite the difficulties she experienced in passing exams at foundation cert and degree level, her determination to continue with her journey with the language has not wavered. She spoke about her unstinting desire to effect change as a teacher of the language, something she attributed to the space offered in the Foundation Cert to reflect on the type of teacher she would like to become in the future.

> It is like the process that I'm going through now, struggling with the Irish but really enjoying it … . I have plans … I don't want to just learn Irish and then just leave it and don't do anything about it, I want to make a difference … . I'm going to try and change, change it for other people. (Alice)

Shared starting points and the power of the group dynamic

The benefits of small class numbers, daily engagement with the language, and the programme's commitment to relational and participative pedagogies was commended by students and staff alike. Both tutors highlighted the greater investment in differentiated instruction that smaller group size facilitated. Both students and staff felt that the time

students spent together meant they were comfortable participating in class and taking risks with the language without fear of embarrassment. The majority of student participants came from similar social backgrounds, which Joan felt 'made it easier to relate to each other'. This peer support was critical in helping students navigate their way through the year and the various challenges they encountered along the way.

> When you do Turn to Teaching, you're like a family … Because there was so much blood, sweat, tears, happiness, joy, there were so many different emotions … the days were extremely long, it was intense, and we found out about each other and why people are here and we kind of understood our common ground … . There's just a different connection that you have with people when you do Turn to Teaching. (Ellie)

The move to on-line learning in response to the Covid 19 pandemic, a consistent feature of the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 programmes, was a challenging experience for many participants, and particularly for those with care and home-schooling responsibilities.

> It's been really hard at times … because we were all at home online. I was a student, I was a mam, I was a secondary school teacher, I was everything all thrown into one. So, it was really hard to juggle … but we got there. (Róisín)

For other students, feelings of isolation impacted on their motivation levels, and many spoke about the challenge of not having access to suitable learning spaces at home. Nessa described how college and the support of her classmates got her through what was such a challenging time for her and others.

> It was hard going but it [Foundation Cert] was a lovely distraction in a shitty kind of a year. The fact that we had the first few weeks on campus gave us the chance to build a few relationships and … even though we were online, it still continued … we were still having the craic. (Nessa)

Despite these challenges, participants felt the on-line Irish classes worked well, owing to the quality of the teaching, the development of a suite of on-line resources, and the positive group dynamic amongst students.

Challenges and areas for further development

As a programme still in its infancy, both staff and students identified some aspects of the Foundation Cert that require further development. In contrast to the traditional pathway into primary teaching, the Foundation Cert does not require minimum Irish language requirements for entry. This decision was positively received by the Turn to Teaching community of partner schools and advocacy groups and has contributed to the recruitment of a diverse student group. However, it also meant that students commenced the Foundation Cert with different levels of prior competency in Irish, a dynamic which created challenges for tutors in terms of how best to cater for students' individual needs. The challenge was accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its disruptive impact on Irish language learning in post-primary school. As a mature student, Ellie questioned if one year of Irish language learning was enough for some people, particularly for students who did not have a recent engagement with the language.

When considering this complex issue, the staff group spoke about the need to guard against judging people's capability with the language on whether they have studied the

language in the recent past. Evidence suggests that individual differences such as language learning aptitude and motivation (Dörnyei 2005) as well as factors such as intensity of the language learning experience (Collins and White 2011; Netten and Germain 2004; Serrano and Muñoz 2007) can all have a significant impact on progress in language learning, allowing some learners to make significant progress in a short period of time in a supportive learning environment.

> There are some people that wouldn't have had a recent engagement with Irish and have done very well … . There are always people who can thrive if the conditions are there for them to do so. I find that tricky, that line between standardising a programme and in the process actually losing the heart of it. (Director of Turn to Teaching)

The varied levels of prior competency made it challenging for programme developers to gauge how many teaching hours were necessary to support students to attain the required competency for entry to primary ITE. Owing to the challenges some students experienced achieving the progression standard in the first year of the Foundation Cert, there was a significant increase in teaching hours in later iterations of the programme. Teaching hours doubled from an initial four hours per week in 2018–2019 to eight hours per week in 2021–2022, which represented more than half of students' timetabled hours across the Foundation Cert. This increase in teaching hours ensured that students engaged with the language daily, something which the tutors felt supported their language development.

The Foundation Cert has a commitment to providing opportunities for language immersion, with a two-week funded placement in the Gaeltacht an integral part of the programme. However, as a result of the pandemic-related public heath restrictions, the Gaeltacht placements were cancelled for three successive years (2020–2022), which was significant considering that opportunities to speak the language is critical for actual language use (Government of Ireland 2010; Grin 2003).

> I believe in my heart of hearts that the best way to learn a language is through really intensive immersion … you could be learning Irish like so many people for 14 years in school and never really make any progress. But you could have two weeks in immersion … people could progress the same amount in two weeks as somebody else would in years … . The immersive experience works on two levels. There's the attitude, when people feel that they have a social connection or they have a personal connection, it alters people's perception of the language, and the second thing is just cognitively. (Director of Lárionad na Gaeilge, the Centre for Irish Language Research, Teaching and Testing)

The importance of creating opportunities for students to speak Irish on a regular basis is intensified in light of student concerns that they had limited opportunities to speak Irish away from the university campus. The Foundation Cert has tried to be responsive to these challenges by creating informal, social opportunities for students to converse in Irish. There was also a consensus amongst the staff cohort that immersion does not have to be confined to trips to the Gaeltacht that are challenging for many participants to attend due to work and care commitments. The importance of creating and integrating immersion experiences longitudinally into the student experience was also stressed.

Many participants spoke about wishing to achieve as high a competency level as possible so that they could teach the language well. A number of the staff group suggested that

observational opportunities in Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) could be incorporated into future programmes[7] and would serve the dual purpose of supporting language development within a pedagogical setting and provide invaluable opportunities for participants to begin to imagine themselves as future teachers of the language.

High-stakes assessment model

As stated previously, the Foundation Cert's assessment and progression thresholds to primary ITE were developed with, and agreed by, the State's DE. The TEG B1 exam is the programme's exclusive form of assessment and acts as a gatekeeper to progression, ensuring that students have a sufficient level of proficiency in Irish to successfully progress through ITE. Both students and staff acknowledged that this assessment provided an accurate barometer of students' language proficiency and motivated students to make progress, but the terminal, high-stakes nature of the exam was also a source of anxiety and stress for some students.

> The things that I was working against … they knew at the end of it that this B1 [exam] was the be all or end all … and as much as I tried to convince the students that the yearlong, continuous work would stand to them, I couldn't guarantee that. (Tutor A)

Jack and Bella felt the exam focus took 'the fun' out of the Foundation Cert, while Alice criticised what she perceived to be the 'pass or fail' dimension to the exam process. Charlotte talked about feeling 'devastated' when she failed the exam initially, but that the strength of her teaching ambitions was critical in sustaining her motivation during the resit process.

> I remember I failed it the first time, I thought that's it. I was devastated. And then I was coming in during July to prepare for the repeat, and I remember thinking to myself, like I knew there was the arts course [BA], and I was like, that's not what I want. I want to do this [primary teaching]. And I worked so hard … . I've never felt such relief in my life [when she passed the resit]. (Charlotte)

Students who failed to achieve 50% in the TEG B1 exam, and in preparation for the resit of the exam, were offered the opportunity to avail of an intensive Irish language summer programme that consisted of on-campus classes, on-line supports, and individualised/differentiated language learning supports and plans. If students of the Foundation Cert fail to reach the required standard in the resits, they have the option of moving forward in their educational journey by progressing into a Bachelor of Arts degree with the possibility of accessing primary ITE through the postgraduate pathway. Alice was one such student and spoke about how her love for the language sustained her when she failed to progress into primary ITE through the Foundation Cert pathway.

Some participants felt that there was a disconnect between the terminal nature of the assessment and Turn to Teaching's values. The staff group acknowledged that a tension currently exists between the diverse learning needs of the students and the need to satisfy entry requirements to primary ITE through exam performance only; however, they also felt it important to retain the TEG B1 exam and certification as it affirms students' competency in the language and ensures that students leave the Foundation Certificate with a sufficient level of proficiency in Irish to allow them to succeed as they progress through ITE and into their careers as primary teachers.

Charlotte, a Foundation Cert graduate who has moved on to a BEd in primary teacher education, felt that the current assessment model is limiting in its focus and because of its exclusive focus on assessing language proficiency. The programme staff, while highlighting the importance of valid proficiency assessment, acknowledged the limits of the current approach to capture student participation, attitudinal change and engagement with the language. There was a shared desire amongst students and staff to broaden the assessment approach and consensus that an appropriate balance could be achieved by moving towards a hybrid model that would retain a TEG B1 final exam for the assessment of language proficiency, but complement it with continuous, task-based assessment to monitor engagement and progress, and to provide opportunities for feedback and reflection throughout the academic year.

Discussion and conclusion

The strong retention and progression rates amongst the Foundation Cert graduate cohort in primary ITE indicates that the Irish language module puts progressing students into a strong position as they embark on primary ITE. In the context of the on-going redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Irish language curriculum (NCCA 2019; 2023), the student experience on the Foundation Cert points to the transformative impact of the communicative approach to language teaching, learning and assessment adopted on the programme. In line with research that identifies a low stress, highly motivating learning context as central to facilitating language learning and encouraging learner autonomy (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998; Ushioda 1996), the programme's engaging and 'caring' pedagogies were critical in supporting students to overcome their fear of the language. Undoubtedly, small class sizes and generous timetabling contribute to students' academic success and their attitudinal transformation towards Irish. The student participants recognised that the main goal of the Irish language competency module was not to solely prepare students for success in an examination, but to enable them to use the language effectively in their academic, professional, and social lives.

The Irish language work on the Foundation Cert was influenced in its development by the 20-year strategy for the Irish language (Government of Ireland 2010) which identifies the co-presence of ability, opportunity, and positive attitudes as critical for actual language use. While the findings highlight the on-going challenges the programme faces in terms of creating opportunities for students to engage with the language outside of the classroom, the reflexive spaces created on the Foundation Cert supported students to overcome the fear of the language that many had internalised during schooling and helped them to begin to see its relevance in their daily lives. However, a perceived tension between the Foundation Cert's orientating values associated with transformative education and the terminal nature of the programme's assessment, which is attentive to entry requirements to primary ITE, was also identified as an area requiring further consideration and development.

It is also apparent that the one-year Irish competency module is challenging, and the impact of the pandemic on language-based learning exacerbated this issue. One of the diversity-impacts of a challenging learning experience in Irish is that recruitment can be biased towards those who appear to have the best chance to succeed on the one-year programme. The 'safest bet' applicants are generally recent school leavers sitting

and doing relatively well in higher level Leaving Certificate Irish. However, the relaunched programme for 2023–2024 has already implemented some of the learning from this research with the creation of a recruitment and progression working group made up of partners across MU. One of the early achievements of this group has been to devise a Foundation Cert that is now exclusively focused on primary ITE progression. A new recruitment process was also piloted and developed for the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 cohorts and includes a carefully designed and participative 'taster' day, which allows staff to gain insights into applicants' existing ability in Irish, as well as their capacity and motivation to engage with the demands of the programme's Irish curriculum. This process models recruitment *as* widening participation through the innovative ways in which it incorporates aspects of guidance, language competency assessment, outreach and engaged pedagogy.

While there are high progression rates amongst mature students, up until 2022 the majority of this cohort were degree holders whose primary teaching ambitions had not been fulfilled previously due to challenges around attaining the Irish language entry requirements to primary ITE, and financial barriers associated with postgraduate ITE study for students from lower socio-economic groups (Keane and Heinz 2015). The one-year Irish competency module is a much more challenging achievement for mature students who have been out of education for some time, and out of reach completely for applicants with little or no Irish language experience (i.e. migrants).

The staff focus groups concentrated on developing solutions to alleviate this identified access bottleneck to primary ITE and move away from a 'one size fits all' approach. Drawing on evaluations of the Foundation Cert, recruitment processes over the past four years, and student and staff experiences; the creation of more diverse and differentiated pathways into primary ITE would benefit many applicants and potentially widen the diversity profile of this cohort. Pathways from FE and community spaces into the Foundation Cert and/or direct routes from FE into primary ITE would have the capacity to meet people where they are at with Irish and be responsive to those most under-represented of groups who may require a longer engagement with Irish than the current one-year programme. This approach would also move the work away from being so heavily focused in the Foundation Cert, which currently runs the risk of positioning it as 'make or break' opportunity and all the associated pressures and stress that student participants reported.

The need for such pathways to be flexible and responsive to individual needs and circumstances was also emphasised, amidst some concerns that a FE-ITE pathway would make the journey longer, more expensive, and more distant for the most under-represented of groups. In this regard, the staff group proposed that those with the required Irish language competency for entry to primary ITE could be supported to progress directly from FE into primary ITE through undergraduate and/or postgraduate routes. This proposed model feeds into current national policy discourses sparked by the ongoing NCCA's Senior Cycle Review, which in its Consultation Document, is critical of a current overemphasis on a single pathway and is advocating strongly for the need for more flexible and diverse pathways into HE (NCCA 2019). Indeed, diversification of pathways into HE is also a core strategic goal of the government's unified tertiary system policy (DFHERIS 2022).

Based on staff reflections on the recruitment process, and in line with studies into the student pre-university experience on PATH 1 projects (Burns, Colum, and O'Neill 2023;

Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2018; Kelly-Blakeney and Kennedy 2023; Ryan 2023), the type of guidance experienced by those from target groups in their prior formal education is frequently limiting. Such experiences are particularly problematic for people from diverse and under-represented groups, given their reliance on school-based guidance, as their families and wider social networks often have little or no experience or knowledge of HE (Finnegan et al. 2019). There was a consensus amongst the staff group that any future model of Irish language work should place language assessment and guidance at its core, so that people who hold teaching aspirations can reflect on the various pathways open to them and make well informed decisions about their educational and occupational future.

The work of this widening participation project is at an exciting juncture. Already, the Turn to Teaching community of practitioners are starting to learn from the findings of this research and are working to enhance student experience and success with Irish language learning by attending to developments, not just within the formal curriculum of the programme, but also around its edges through outreach with FE and the undergraduate population and through the development of robust, student-centred recruitment and pathway processes which ensure the widest possible engagement with a diverse range of people who aspire to becoming a primary school teacher.

Notes

1. CAO points for entry to the four largest Bachelor of Education programmes in 2023 ranged from 477 to 498, with an average of 490 points required in the Leaving Certificate exam to gain entry to one of these programmes (Careers Portal n.d.). Only 26.9% of Leaving Certificate students in 2023 achieved 490+ points (CAO n.d.).
2. While the minimum Leaving Certificate grade required in English and maths is a H7 (30%+ on a Higher-Level paper) or O4 (60%+ on an Ordinary Level paper), the minimum requirement for Irish is H4 (60%+ on a Higher-Level paper).
3. 65%+ in a Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) oral Irish exam at lower intermediate level, B1 (Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge n.d.).
4. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) (DES 2017a) is the Irish State's action plan for educational inclusion and co-ordinates the services, supports and resources that target educational inequality in Irish education.
5. The most recent National Access Plan collapses the 'priority groups' into three core cohorts (social disadvantage; Irish Traveller and Roma communities; people with disabilities) but also broadens the widening participation perspective by expanding, within the first cohort, and naming specific groups that experience social disadvantage to include, for example, people from ethnic minorities, refugees, carers, victims of domestic violence, people with criminal convictions and more (HEA 2022).
6. It should also be noted that the overwhelming whiteness of the teaching profession across all sectors in Ireland has not explicitly been identified as a focus to be addressed in any iterations of these teacher diversity policy initiatives.
7. Such immersion experiences in Irish medium schools were introduced in the re-launched Foundation Cert in 2023/24.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Gareth Burns is an Assistant Professor in Education in the School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, and former Director of the Turn to Teaching Project, Maynooth University. His research focuses on students and teachers from diverse and under-represented groups and their lived experiences of becoming and being a teacher.

Aoife Ní Ghloinn is Director of Lárionad na Gaeilge/ The Centre for Irish Language Research, Teaching and Testing at Maynooth University, where she oversees a number of programmes and projects, including postgraduate programmes in translation and editing, Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge language proficiency testing and the Irish language resource hub, www.snas.ie. Her research focuses primarily on language assessment, learner corpus research and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Jerry O'Neill is co-director of an initial FE teacher education programme at the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University. He is interested in critical and creative reflexivity as a catalyst for individual and systemic transformative learning in, and across, teacher education.

Caroline Ní Ghallchobhair is an Assistant Lecturer of Irish Language and Literature in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education and a University Tutor with Lárionad na Gaeilge, Maynooth University. She specialises in adult language learning and has worked extensively with adult learners including at the University of Notre Dame as a Fulbright awardee. Her interests include second language literacy acquisition, teacher diversity and UDL.

Katie Whelan is an Irish language tutor, translator and presenter. She has just recently completed her PhD in University College Dublin on the female journalist in Irish language print media in the 20th century. This project was funded by the Irish Research Council under the Government of Ireland Scholarship Award.

Máire Nic an Bhaird, Associate Professor at Maynooth University, specialises in Irish Language Literature and Education for the Science-Society Nexus. She leads the Horizon Europe BioBeo and AgroCycle projects and publishes children's books promoting inclusivity and sustainable living.

ORCID

Gareth Burns http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0875-4726
Aoife Ní Ghloinn http://orcid.org/0009-0000-6134-4673
Jerry O'Neill http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1945-8922
Caroline Ní Ghallchobhair http://orcid.org/0009-0008-3573-0106
Katie Whelan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0473-3223
Máire Nic an Bhaird http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2752-108X

References

Aontas. 2020. *Mitigating Educational Disadvantage (including Community Education issues)*. Dublin: Aontas. https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/AONTAS-Research/MED%20Comm%20Ed%20paper.pdf.

Blackmore, J. 2006. "Deconstructing Diversity Discourses in the Field of Educational Management and Leadership." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 34 (2): 181–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143206062492.

Brookfield, S. 2017. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Burke, J., and M. Dempsey. 2020. *Covid-19 Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland Report*. Maynooth: Maynooth University. https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13001/1/Wellbeing%20and%20Leadership%20Report_Final.pdf.

Burns, G., M. Colum, and J. O'Neill. 2023. "No One Sees a Traveller at the Top of the Class." In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 155–165. London: Routledge.

Careers Portal. n.d. "*Careers Portal.*" Accessed March 24, 2024. https://careersportal.ie/.

Carroll, E., S. McCoy, and K. Ye. 2024. *Embracing Diversity in All its Forms: The Voluntary Secondary Sector in Irish Schools. Research Series Number 128*. Dublin: ESRI. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS182_0.pdf.

Central Applications Office (CAO). n.d. "Leaving Certificate Examination Points Statistics for 2023." CAO. Accessed March 24, 2024. https://www2.cao.ie/app_scoring/points_stats/lc23pts.pdf.

Clarke, L., and T. O'Doherty. 2021. "The Professional Place of Teachers on the Island of Ireland: Truth Flourishes Where the Student's Lamp has Shone." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 44 (1): 62–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1844660.

Collins, L., and J. White. 2011. "An Intensive Look at Intensity and Language Learning." *TESOL Quarterly* 45 (1): 106–133. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.240858.

Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge. 2024. *Córas Bronnta na nDíolúintí i leith na Gaeilge ag Leibhéal na Bunscoile agus na hIar-Bhunscoile.* CGGPL018/022024. Tithe an Oireachtais. https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/comhchoiste_na_gaeilge_na_gaeltachta_agus_phobal_labhartha_na_gaeilge/reports/2024/2024-02-07_coras-bronnta-na-ndioluinti-i-leith-na-gaeilge-ag-leibheal-na-bunscoile-agus-na-hiar-bhunscoile_en.pdf.

Conradh na Gaeilge. 2021. "Céard é an Scéal? Public Opinions on the Irish language: Annual Analysis 7." Conradh na Gaeilge. https://cnag.ie/images/Feachtais/C%C3%A9ard_%C3%A9_an_Sc%C3%A9al/06NO2021_C%C3%A9ard_%C3%A9_an_Sc%C3%A9al.pdf.

Cooper, S. 2014. "Transformative Evaluation: Organisational Learning Through Participative Practice." *The Learning Organization* 21 (2): 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-03-2013-0003.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4.

Crean, M., and K. Lynch. 2011. "Resistance, Struggle and Survival: The University as a Site for Transformative Education." In *Pedagogy, Oppression and Transformation in a 'Post-Critical' Climate: The Return of Freirean Thinking*, edited by A. O'Shea, and M. O'Brien, 51–68. London: Bloomsbury.

Crickley, A., and M. Kenny. 2020. "Travellers in Higher Education: Ambition and Obstacles." In *Ireland's Education Yearbook*, edited by B. Mooney, 265–269. Dublin: Education Matters.

CSO (Central Statistics Office). 2011. "Census 2011 Profile 9 What We Know – Education, Skills and the Irish Language." Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2011reports/census2011profile9whatweknow-educationskillsandtheirishlanguage/.

CSO (Central Statistics Office). 2016. "Census 2016 Profile 10 – Education, Skills and the Irish Language." Accessed April 10, 2024 https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016profile10educationskillsandtheirishlanguage/.

CSO (Central Statistics Office). 2022. "Census 2022. Profile 8 – The Irish Language and Education." Accessed April 9, 2024 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp8/census2022profile8-theirishlanguageandeducation/.

Darmody, M., and T. Daly. 2015. *Attitudes Towards the Irish Language on the Island of Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT294_Vol%201%20%281%29.pdf.

Darmody, M., and E. Smyth. 2016. *Entry to Programmes of Initial Teacher Education*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT299%20%281%29.pdf.

DE (Department of Education). 2022. *Exemptions from the Study of Irish – Revising Circular 0052/ 2019. Circular 0054/2022*. Dublin: Department of Education. https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/ 28b2b-exemptions-from-the-study-of-irish-primary/.

DE (Department of Education). 2023. *Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement: Reflecting on a Decade of Change and Creating a Vision for the Future*. Dublin: Department of Education.

DES (Department of Education and Skills). 2017a. *DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills. https://www.gov.ie/en/ policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/.

DES (Department of Education and Skills). 2017b. *Junior Cycle Irish: English Medium Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills. https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ 90e431e4-4c58-427d-96e1-d16b5a16fc5a/Specification-for-Junior-Cycle-Irish-English_ medium-schools-_L2-English.pdf.

DES (Department of Education and Skills). 2019. *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile: English Language 1 and Irish Language 2*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills. https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/2a6e5f79-6f29-4d68-b850- 379510805656/PLC-Document_English.pdf.

DES (Department of Education and Skills). 2020. *Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Primary Entrance Standards*. Dublin: DES.

Devine, D. 2011. *Immigration and Schooling in the Republic of Ireland: Making a Difference?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

DFHERIS (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science). 2022. *Progressing a Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge Public Consultation Report*. Dublin: DFHERIS. https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/ 225165/fff8a843-0df6-436a-ade1-ae060deadd45.pdf#page=null.

Dörnyei, Z. 2005. *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z., and K. Csizér. 1998. "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners: Results of an Empirical Study." *Language Teaching Research* 2 (3): 203–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 136216889800200303.

Finnegan, F., S. Valadas, J. O'Neill, A. Fragoso, and L. Paulos. 2019. "The Search for Security in Precarious Times: Non-Traditional Graduates Perspectives on Higher Education and Employment." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38 (2): 157–170. https://doi.org/10. 1080/02601370.2019.1567613.

Government of Ireland. 2010. *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030*. Dublin: Government of Ireland. https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/2ea63-20-year-strategy-for- the-irish-language/.

Grin, F. 2003. *Language Policy Evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230502666

HEA (Higher Education Authority). 2015. *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*. Dublin: HEA. https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Plan-for-Equity-of- Access-to-Higher-Education-2015-2019.pdf.

HEA (Higher Education Authority). 2022. *National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028*. Dublin: HEA. https://hea.ie/ policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2022-2028/.

Heinz, M., and E. Keane. 2018. "Socio-Demographic Composition of Primary Initial Teacher Education Entrants in Ireland." *Irish Educational Studies* 37 (4): 523–543. https://doi.org/10. 1080/03323315.2018.1521731.

Heron, J., and P. Reason. 1997. "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm." *Qualitative Inquiry* 3 (3): 274– 294. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300302.

Higher Education Funding Council for England. 2014. *Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation Toolkits for Practitioners 4: Evaluation*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England. https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe- document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/evaluation_3rd_0_1568036629.pdf.

Hyland, A. 2012. *A Review of the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland: Background Paper for the International Review Team*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Inspectorate of Department of Education. 2020. *Chief Inspectorate's Report: September 2016-Decemeber 2020*. Dublin: Inspectorate of Department of Education.

Johnson, R., and A. Onwuegbuzie. 2004. "Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time has Come." *Educational Researcher* 33 (7): 14–26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014.

Keane, E., and M. Heinz. 2015. "Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) in Ireland: The Socio-Demographic Backgrounds of Postgraduate Post-Primary Entrants in 2013 & 2014." *Irish Educational Studies* 34 (3): 281–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2015.1067637.

Keane, E., and M. Heinz. 2016. "Excavating an Injustice? Nationality/ies, Ethnicity/ies, and Experiences with Diversity of Initial Teacher Education Applicants and Entrants in Ireland in 2014." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 39 (4): 507–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1194392.

Keane, E., M. Heinz, and A. Lynch. 2018. "'Working-Class' Student Teachers: Not Being Encouraged at School and Impact on Motivation to Become a Teacher." *Education Research and Perspective* 45:71–97.

Keane, E., M. Heinz, and R. McDaid. 2023. "Diversity in the Teaching Profession in Ireland: Tracing Research and Policy Development." In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 36–53. London: Routledge.

Kelly-Blakeney, E., and P. Kennedy. 2023. "The Journey from Further Education to Teacher Education: A Step Too Far?" In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 135–143. London: Routledge.

Kvale, S., and S. Brinkmann. 2009. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Lichtman, M. 2013. *Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oakes, California: SAGE.

Lodge, A. 2012. "Policy Changes in Teacher Education: Implications for Inclusion." Keynote at the AHEAD Opening Access to Teacher Education and Practice for Students with Disabilities Conference, Dublin Castle, Ireland, March 2012.

Mac Gearailt, C., and P. Ó Duibhir. 2023. *Athbhreithniú Luath ar Chur i Bhfeidhm na Sonraíochtaí Gaeilge T1 agus T2 don tSraith Shóisearach / Early Enactment Review of Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. https://ncca.ie/media/5972/athbhreithni%C3%BA-luath-ar-chur-i-bhfeidhm-na-sonra%C3%ADochta%C3%AD-gaeilge-t1-agus-t2-don-tsraith-sh%C3%B3isearach.pdf.

MacGréil, M., and F. Rhatigan. 2009. *The Irish Language and the Irish People*. Maynooth: National University of Ireland.

McDaid, R. 2023. "Migrant Teachers in Ireland: An Untapped Reservoir." In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 144–154. London: Routledge.

McDaid, R., E. Keane, and M. Heinz. 2023. "Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Mapping Learning and Interrogating Tensions." In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 211–225. London: Routledge.

McDaid, R., and T. Walsh. 2016. "Challenging the Homogeneity of the Elementary School Teaching Force in Ireland." In *Diversifying the Teaching Force in Transnational Contexts: Critical Perspectives*, edited by R. C. Schmidt, and J. Schneider, 153–164. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

McGinnity, F., S. Sprong, E. Quinn, J. Laurence, K. Murphy, and S. Curristan. 2023. *Monitoring Report on Integration 2022*. Dublin: ESRI. https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-report-on-integration-2022.

Meaney, S. 2019. *Community Needs Analysis with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners: A Pilot Study as Part of College Connect*. Maynooth, Kildare: College Connect, Maynooth University.

Mountz, A., E. B. Moore, and L. Brown. 2008. "Participatory Action Research as Pedagogy: 2 Boundaries in Syracuse." *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 7 (2): 214–238.

NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). 2019. *Senior Cycle Review: Consultation Document*. Dublin: NCCA. https://ncca.ie/media/4024/sc-review-consultation-july-2019.pdf.

NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). 2023. *Consultation Report on the Draft L1 and L2 Specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish*. Dublin: NCCA. https://ncca.ie/media/6019/consultation_report_on_the_draft_l1_and_l2_specifications_for_leaving_certificate_irish_en_fv.pdf.

Netten, J., and C. Germain. 2004. "Introduction: Intensive French." *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 60 (3): 251–262. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.60.3.251.

Nwanze, L. 2024. "Un-silencing the Silenced: Using Black Migrant Women's Experiences of Racism to Propose a Critical Anti-racist Pedagogy for Irish Adult Education." PhD diss., Maynooth: Maynooth University.

O'Doherty, T., and J. Harford. 2018. "Teacher Recruitment: Reflections from Ireland on the Current Crisis in Teacher Supply." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 41 (5): 654–669. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2018.1532994.

O'Donoghue, T., and J. Harford. 2011. "A Comparative Review of Church-State Relations in Irish Education." *Comparative Education Review* 55 (3): 315–341. https://doi.org/10.1086/659871.

Ó Duibhir, P., et al. 2019. *Treo an Pholasaí sa Todhchaí maidir le Díolúintí ó Staidéar ar an nGaeilge Aighneacht arna haighniú ag SEALBHÚ: Lárionad Taighde DCU um Fhoghlaim agus Teagasc na Gaeilge*. SEALBHÚ: DCU. sealbhu_aighneacht_maidir_le_dioluine_o_staidear_ar_an_ngaeilge.pdf (dcu.ie).

Ó Duibhir, P.. 2020. "Exemptions from the Study of Irish: New Criteria are Damaging." *Intouch,* April 2020. https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/InTouch_April_2020_Archive.pdf

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2020. *Education Policy Outlook in Ireland*. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-policy-outlook-in-ireland_978e377b-en.html.

O'Neill, J., and G. Burns. 2020. *Becoming and Transforming: Towards Enhancing Diversity in Teacher Education and Development (Turn to Teaching Phase Two Proposal)*. Maynooth: Maynooth University.

Ó Riagáin, P. 2007. "Relationships Between Attitudes to Irish, Social Class, Religion and National Identity in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 10 (4): 369–393. https://doi.org/10.2167/beb450.0.

O'Sullivan, K., N. Bird, and G. Burns. 2019. "Students' Experiences of the Teaching and Learning of Irish in Designated Disadvantaged Schools." *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society* 4 (5): 87–97. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijecs.20190405.13.

Ryan, K. 2023. "Supporting Mature Students in Primary Teacher Education: A Framework of Care." In *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: Dimensions, Dilemmas, and Directions for the Future*, edited by E. Keane, M. Heinz, and R. McDaid, 198–208. London: Routledge.

Schmidt, C., and R. McDaid. 2015. "Linguistic Barriers among Internationally Educated Teachers in Ireland and Canada: A Critical Comparative Analysis." *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 38 (3): 172–183. https://doi.org/10.1075/aral.38.3.06sch.

Senge, P. M. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Serrano, R., and C. Muñoz. 2007. "Same Hours, Different Time Distribution: Any Difference in EFL?" *System* 35 (3): 305–321. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.02.001.

Smyth, E., and M. Darmody. 2016. *Working Paper No 525 February 2016: Attitudes to Irish as a School Subject among 13-Year-Olds*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2016-03/WP525.pdf.

Smyth, E., M. Darmody, F. McGinnity, and E. Byrne. 2009. *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS8.pdf.

Smyth, E., S. McCoy, and G. Kingston. 2015. *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS39.pdf.

Stevenson, J., C. McCaig, and M. Madriaga. 2017. *Evaluation of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs)*. London: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge. n.d. "Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge." Accessed March 24, 2024. https://www.teg.ie/.

Tynan, F. 2018. "Exemptions from Irish: An Inclusion Dilemma." *REACH: Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland* 31 (1): 89–102. https://reachjournal.ie/index.php/reach/article/view/28.

Ushioda, E. 1996. *Learner Autonomy 5: The Role of Motivation*. Dublin: Authentik.