



CNMM Ráiteas Tosaigh

Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge

Méitheamh 2021

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Introduction

Founded in 1909, the ASTI is one of the oldest education unions in the state and has a long and distinguished historical record of support for the Irish language in the curriculum and the wider education system. Education performs multiple roles in any society and our schools are central to the wider intergenerational cultural process of preserving, transmitting and enriching the Irish language. The establishment of Gaelscoileanna has been absolutely critical in this regard while the wider 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 has provided a supportive external environment. More recently, the policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is proving to be an innovative and effective approach to supporting the teaching and learning of Irish in Gaeltacht schools, not least because it is premised on an acknowledgement of multiple pressures on the language in Gaeltacht communities. The current concerns around the model of teaching Irish in senior cycle are, in some respects, not unexpected. They emanate from a number of contexts and are also reflective of the profound commitment of teachers of Irish to the language. In this submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee, the ASTI will set out its understanding of the context for current concerns around Leaving Certificate Gaeilge and posit some solutions to same.

Context

The review of the senior cycle curriculum commenced in 2017 and is a work-in-progress. At this point in time, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment/NCCA has submitted an Advisory Report to the Minister for Education on issues to be considered in future senior cycle policy. It is not a set of recommendations: the latter will only emerge following further research, piloting and consultation. At the same time, the NCCA has been updating subject specifications (formerly known as syllabus) concomitant with changes taking place in the junior cycle curriculum. In September 2017, revised Gaeilge specifications commenced in second-level schools based on the Teanga 1 and Teanga 2 model.

The rationale for this model emanated from an acknowledgement in the NCCA's consultation process that students in Irish-medium schools should have a curriculum which reflected their learning needs and was sufficiently challenging. on the draft JC Gaeilge specification. The NCCA subsequently prepared the draft T1 agus T2 specifications which were accepted by then Minister for Education and Skills. The main concerns of Gaeilge teachers with the new specifications are similar to that of other subject teachers: insufficient guidance re content/depth of treatment; multiple and overlapping learning outcomes; insufficient guidance on realising key skills and formative assessment practices. Notwithstanding the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle in September 2015, teachers continue to identify these issues as problematic and the profession as a whole has experienced increased workload arising from curriculum change. The disruptions of the pandemic have, of course, added to this difficult situation.

Specific concerns around the draft Leaving Certificate Gaeilge specifications

The publication of draft T1 agus T2 specifications for Leaving Certificate Gaeilge has led to a high level of debate among Gaeilge teachers and the wider Irish language education agencies. The reason for this is simple: the Leaving Certificate is a high-stakes examination. Following discussion with a number of Irish language education agencies, including Greasán na Múinteoirí Gaeilge, the ASTI hosted a consultation event with its members followed by a survey. The primary concerns emerging from the ASTI consultation process are:

Need to extend the consultation period: This issue has now been addressed and the period extended to the end of 2021. This is a welcome and necessary development.

Need to review the implementation of T1 agus T2 model in junior cycle before proceeding to implementation of similar model in senior cycle: As noted above, teachers continue to struggle with implementation of the new model of curriculum represented by the subject specifications. There is concern across the profession that research on the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle must be conducted in advance of change to the senior cycle curriculum. Gaeilge teachers are particularly concerned that the complexities of the T1 agus T2 model require research in order to ensure that current problems are not replicated in the Leaving Certificate programme and its high-stakes examination.

Gaeltacht Schools Recognition Scheme: There is widespread concern that schools receiving additional resources within the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme/Gaeltacht Education Strategy 2017-2022 will be required to provide T1 and, where necessary, T2 specifications. In theory, students being taught Irish could be considered as having the necessary range of language skills for T1. In practice, teachers have pointed out that there is significant diversity among the student cohort in Irish-medium schools and T2 will also be required. In these circumstances, teachers are concerned that teaching two specifications will be problematic. The Department of Education must engage with schools in the Scheme to address these legitimate concerns.

Need to re-introduce Foundation Level Gaeilge: Foundation Level Gaeilge at junior cycle was discontinued when the Framework for Junior Cycle was introduced. Four years into the Gaeilge specification, teachers remain more convinced than ever that this additional level should be retained at senior cycle. Differentiation in teaching is almost impossible given the negligible Irish language skills of some students, low level of interest in learning the language and subsequent disengagement in the classroom.

Proposal to reduce marks for Oral Competency from 40% to 35%: The vast majority of teachers are opposed to this proposal, not least because no increase in the marks for aural competency is contained in the draft specifications. Their opposition emanates from their belief that the current marking structure serves as a strong motivation for students to develop their communicative skills even if they find the reading and writing aspects of the course and the written examination challenging.

Need to address the concerns around specifications: All subject teachers are continuing to struggle with the specification model. There is need to address their concerns re depth of treatment, range and coherence of learning outcomes, approaches to key skills in the current draft Gaeilge specifications.

ASTI recommendations

1. Need for research on junior cycle Gaeilge curriculum: In the feedback to the ASTI's survey and seminar, a strong message came from the Gaeilge teachers that, in the absence of research on the implementation of the T1 agus T2 at junior cycle, they are not supportive of introducing this model at senior cycle. This perhaps the strongest message ASTI received. A key strand of this research should focus on the range and coherence of the learning outcomes; differentiation in the classroom; and how to develop students' communicative skills. As regards the latter, teachers still state that there is too much focus on the literature in the specification.

2. Retain 40% of marks for Oral competency in the Leaving Certificate examination: The rationale for decision in 2007 by the then Minister for Education to increase the marks for the Oral examination from 25% to 40% was to promote and improve students' communicative competency. Teachers are unanimous that this decision has had hugely positive results in terms of students' motivation in the classroom and achievement in the Leaving Certificate examination. They are not convinced by arguments that other language subjects have lower mark allocation. The Irish language in the school curriculum has an acknowledge complex, dynamic and challenging external socio-linguistic environment. It is a language, moreover, which needs protection and support given this environment. Innovations such as the current marking system are necessary to sustain motivation, engagement and learning for what is, for most students, a core compulsory subject.

3. Gaeltacht Schools Recognition Scheme: The Department of Education needs to engage with schools in this scheme to provide the additional resources to enable maximum uptake of T1 while also facilitating provision of T2 to students.

4. Need to re-introduce Foundation Level Gaeilge: Foundation Level Gaeilge was introduced in ?? to enable students who struggled with learning Irish at Ordinary Level. Foundation Level fulfilled matriculation requirement but did not generate CAO points. Teachers believe that it is time to revisit this intervention in order to meet the needs of students who are struggling.

5. Teacher CPD and resource availability: A core problem for teachers in terms of CPD is time. Teachers have for some years now been finding it extremely difficult to be released from school for non-mandatory inservice training. (The latter refers training to support the introduction of new specifications.) Problems in teacher supply are impacting on schools. Increasingly, teachers are expected to engage in non-mandatory learning exclusively out of working hours. This situation is becoming untenable. ASTI research in 2018 found that teachers were working an average of 40+ hours per week. * They simply do not have time to engage in further learning outside of working hours. This is an issue which is impacting on the whole profession. The ASTI believes that the Department of Education must engage with the teacher unions to address core and pressing issues such as workload, professional time/time for non-teaching work, including training. * <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/teachers-work-work-demands-and-work-intensity-march-2018/>

Conclusion

The ASTI is extremely concerned that solutions be found to the current set of concerns around the draft Leaving Certificate Gaeilge specifications. The extension of the consultation period provides a space for the emergence of deeper knowledge and understandings which will inform such solutions. Irish is a core subject and lingering concerns or uncertainty around the nature of the subject specifications or the high-stakes Leaving Certificate examination would be demoralising for teachers and students alike. It would also represent a failure of leadership at Departmental level. Timely and practical solutions can be found.

Leagán Gaeilge

Réamhrá

Is é Cumann na Meánmhúinteoirí in Éirinn, a bunaíodh i 1909, ceann de na ceardchumainn is sine sa stát, le stair fada inmholta ag tacú leis an Gaeilge sa churaclam agus sa chóras oideachais i gcoitinne. Tá an-chuid ról ag an oideachas i ngach sochaí agus tá páirt lárnach ag ár scoileanna sa phróiseas leathan chultúrtha idirghlúine chun an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú, a shaibhriú agus a scaipeadh. Bhí ról an-thábhachtach ag bunú na nGaelscoileanna sa phróiseas seo agus cothaíonn an Straitéas 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 comhshaol seachtrach tacúil don obair seo.

An Comhthéacs

Sa bhliain 2017, thosaigh an t-athbhreithniú ar an gcuraclam don tsraith shinsearach atá fós idir lámha. Faoi láthair, tá Tuairisc Comhairleach curtha ar aghaidh ag an An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (CNCM) chuig an Aire Oideachais ag díriú ar ábhair mhachnaimh a bhaineann le polasaithe don tSraith Shinsearach amach anseo. Ní sraith moltaí é an Tuairisc seo, tiocfaidh na moltaí in am tráth nuair a bheidh níos mó fianaise ar fáil de bharr thaighde, tástáil phíolotach agus comhairliúcháin. Ag an am céanna, tá an CNCM ag uasdátú sonraíochtaí ábhar (an siollabas mar a bhí) i bpáirt leis na hathruithe atá ar siúl sa churaclam don tSraith Shóisearach. I Meán Fómhair 2017, tugadh isteach na sonraíochtaí athbhreithnithe don Ghaeilge bunaithe ar an gcóras T1 agus T2 i scoileanna dara leibhéal.

D'éascair bunús an chórais seo as an aitheantas i bpróiseas comhairliúcháin an CNCM nár mhór curaclam dúshlánach go leor a chuir a riachtanais fhoghlama san áireamh sa dréachtsonraíocht don Ghaeilge don tSraith Shóisearach a chur ar fáil do dhaltaí i scoileanna lánghaelacha. Ina dhiaidh sin, d'ullmhaigh an CNCM na dréachtsonraíochtaí T1 agus T2 lenar ghlac an t-Aire Oideachais. Tá múinteoirí Gaeilge buartha faoi ghnéithe na sonraíochtaí nua díreach mar atá múinteoirí na n-ábhar eile – easpa treorach ar mhéid an ábhair/easpa doimhneachta i láimhseáil an ábhair; torthaí foghlama iomadúla ag teacht trasna ar a chéile; easpa treorach chun bunscileanna agus cleachtais a bhaineann le measúnú múnlaiteach a chur i gcrích. Cé gur tosaíodh an Creat don Sraith Shóisearach i Meán Fómhair 2015, aithníonn múinteoirí na deacrachtaí a bhaineann leis na gnéithe seo agus an méadú mór ar an ualach oibre a tharraing na hathraithe seo sa churaclam ar mhúinteoirí agus ar bhaill ghairm na múinteoireachta i gcoitinne. Ar ndóigh, chuir srianta na pandéime leis na deacrachtaí seo.

Imní ar leith faoi dhréachtsonraíochtaí na Gaeilge don Ardeistiméireacht

D'éascair leibhéal ard díospóireachta i measc múinteoirí Gaeilge agus gníomhaireachtaí oideachasúla eile Gaeilge as foilsíú na ndréachtsonraíochtaí Gaeilge T1 agus T2 don Sraith Shinsearach. Ríthábhacht na hArdeistiméireachta mar scrúdú is cúis leis seo. Tar éis dul i dteangmháil le roinnt gníomhaireachtaí oideachasúla Gaeilge, Gréasán na Múinteoirí Gaeilge san áireamh, d'eagraigh Cumann na Meánmhúinteoirí in Éirinn ócáid chomhairliúcháin le baill an Chumainn agus rinne an Cumann suirbhé de na baill ina dhiadh sin. Is iad siúd na cúiseanna imní is mó a nochtáíodh sa phróiseas seo:

Gá le síneadh ama ar an tréimhse comhairliúcháin

Tá an CNCM tar éis tréimhse ama an chomhairliúcháin a shíneadh go dtí deireadh na bliana. Cuirimid fáilte roimh an gcinneadh riachtanach sin.

Gá le hathbhreithniú ar fheidhmiú an chórais T1 agus T2 sa tSraith Shóisearach roimh dhul ar aghaidh le feidhmiú chórais den chineál céanna don tSraith Shinsearach

Mar a phléamar níos luaithe, tá múinteoirí fós ag streachailt le feidhmiú an chórais nua curaclaim a léirítear sna dréachtsonraíochtaí do na hábhair éagsúla. Tá imní forleathan ar bhaill ghairm na múinteoireachta go gcaithfear taighde a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú Chreat na Sraithe Sóisearaí sula ndéanfar aon athrú ar churaclam na Sraithe Sinsearaí. Tá imní ar leith ag cur as do mhúinteoirí Gaeilge go bhfuil gá le taighde ar chastacht an chórais T1 agus T2 chun a chinntiú nach ndéanfar fadhbanna reatha na Sraithe Sóisearaí a mhacasamhlú i gclár na hArdteistiméireachta agus an scrúdú ríthábhachtach sin.

An Scéim Aitheantais do Scoileanna Gaeltachta

Tá imní forleathan ann go mbeidh dualgas ar na scoileanna a fhaigheann acmhainní breise faoin Scéim Aitheantais do Scoileanna Gaeltachta/ An Straitéis d'Oideachas sa Ghaeltacht 2017-2022 sonraíochtaí T1 agus, nuair is gá, sonraíochtaí T2 a chur ar fáil. Go teoiriciúil, bheadh an raon riachtanach de scoileanna teanga do T1 ag daltaí ag foghlaim na Gaeilge sna scoileanna sin. Go réalaíoch, áfach, tharraing múinteoirí aird ar an éagsúlacht suntasach idir daltaí i scoileanna lánghaelacha ionas nach mór T2 a sholáthar leis. Sa chás seo, tá imní ar mhúinteoirí go gcruthóidh an dá shonraíocht fadhbanna. Caithfidh an Roinn Oideachais dul i dteangmháil leis na scoileanna sa scéim chun dul i ngleic leis an imní seo.

Ní mór an Bonnleibhéal sa Ghaeilge a chur a thabhairt ar ais

Cuireadh deireadh leis an mBonnleibhéal sa Ghaeilge ag leibhéal na sraithe sóisearaí nuair a thosaigh Creat na Sraithe Sóisearaí. Tá an dréachtsonraíocht don Ghaeilge ann le ceithre bliana anuas anois agus tá múinteoirí níos cinnte ná riamh faoi ghéarghá an leibhéal breise seo a choimeád ag an leibhéal sinsearach. Tá sé nach mór dodhéanta idirdhealú a chleachtadh sa mhúinteoireacht mar gheall ar na scoileanna fánacha teanga atá ag daltaí áirithe, an leibhéal íseal suime i bhfoghlaim na teanga agus an neamhshuim sa seomra ranga a leanann é.

An moladh faoi na marcanna a laghdú d'inniúlacht sa teanga labhartha ó 40% go 35%

Tá tromlach mór múinteoirí an Chumainn i gcoinne an mholta seo, go háirithe toisc nach luaitear aon ardú sna marcanna d'inniúlacht sa teanga labhartha sna dréachtsonraíochtaí. Eascraíonn an cur in aghaidh seo as a dtuairimí daingne gur spreagadh láidir do dhaltaí is ea an struchtúr marcála mar atá chun a scoileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt, fiú má tá na gnéithe scríbhneoireachta agus léitheoireachta den chúrsa agus an scrúdú scríofa dúshlánach dóibh. Tá sé suntasach gur theastaigh ó thromlach na múinteoirí sa suirbhé na marcanna d'inniúlacht sa teanga labhartha a ardú os cionn 40%.

Ní mór dul i ngleic leis an imní faoi na dréachtsonraíochtaí

Tá múinteoirí na n-ábhar go léir fós ag streachailt le córas na ndréachtsonraíochtaí. Ní mór dul i ngleic lena n-ábhar imní a bhaineann leis an easpa doimhneachta i láimhseáil an ábhair, raon agus comhleanúnachas na dtorthaí foghlama, agus an cur chuige i leith na mbunscileanna sa dréacht is déanaí de na sonraíochtaí Gaeilge. Cúis mhór gearáin i measc múinteoirí is ea an méid iomarcach litríochta éigeantach atá ar an gcúrsa faoi láthair. Cruthaíonn sé brú ama sa seomra ranga agus laghdaíonn sé an t-am atá ar fáil don chleachtadh ar scileanna cumarsáide. Is ábhar mór frustrachais é do mhúinteoirí Gaeilge a thuigeann go maith an tábhacht a bhaineann le deiseanna a thabhairt do dhaltaí a gcumas labhartha sa teanga a chur i gcrích mar bhunchloch do mheon dearfach i leith na teanga le linn a saol fásta.

Moltaí Chumann na Meánmhúinteoirí in Éirinn

1. Ní mór taighde a dhéanamh ar churaclam na Gaeilge don tSraith Shóisearach

San aiseolas ón ócáid chomhairliúcháin agus ón suirbhé, tháinig teachtaireacht láidir ó na múinteoirí Gaeilge nach dtacaíonn siad, gan taighde a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú T1 agus T2 don tSraith Shóisearach, leis an gcóras a thabhairt isteach don tSraith Shinsearach. B'é sin an teachtaireacht ba láidre a seoladh chugainn. Ba chóir go ndíreofaí bunshnáth den taighde seo ar raon agus comhleanúnachas na dtorthaí foghlama, idirdhealú sa seomra ranga, agus modhanna chun scileanna cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Maidir leis an bpointe deireanach, chuir múinteoirí in iúl go bhfuil an iomarca béime fós ar litríocht sa sonraíocht.

2. 40% de na marcanna a choimeád d'inniúlacht sa teanga labhartha don scrúdú Ardteistiméireachta

Sa bhliain 2007, bunaíodh an cinneadh a rinne an t-Aire Oideachais ag an am na marcanna don Scrúdú Béil a ardú ó 25% go 40% ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fheabhsú agus a chur chun cinn. Tá múinteoirí d'aon ghuth gur tháinig torthaí iontacha dearfacha ón gcinneadh sin maidir le spreagadh na ndaltaí sa seomra ranga agus na torthaí a bhain siad amach sa scrúdú Ardteistiméireachta. Ní ghlacann siad leis na hargóintí go bhfuil marcanna níos ísle ag dul do theangacha eile don Scrúdú Béil. Baineann comhshaol casta, síorathraiteach, seachtrach, dúshlánach, sochtheangeolaíoch leis an nGaeilge sa churaclam scoile. Teastaíonn cosaint and tacaíocht ón teanga sa chomhshaol seo. Tá nualaíocht cosúl leis an gcóras marcála mar atá sé faoi láthair riachtanach chun spreagadh, spéis agus foghlaim na ndaltaí a chothú, san ábhar búnúsach seo atá éigeantach don chuid is mó daltaí.

3. An Scéim Aitheantais do Scoileanna Gaeltachta

Ní mór don Roinn Oideachais dul i dteangmháil le scoileanna sa scéim seo chun acmhainní breise a sholáthar chun an méid is mó daltaí a mhealladh isteach sa chóras T1 chomh maith le T2 a sholáthar go héasca do dhaltaí.

4. Ní mór an Bonnleibhéal sa Ghaeilge a thabhairt ar ais

Bunaíodh an Bonnleibhéal sa Ghaeilge sa bhliain 1996 chun cabhrú le daltaí a bhí ag streachailt le Gaeilge sa Ghnáthleibhéal. Chomhlíon an Bonnleibhéal na riachtanais máithreánacha ach níor thuill sé pointí don Oifig Lárnach Iontrála.

5. Forbairt Leanúnach Proifisiúnta do mhúinteoirí agus soláthar acmhainní

Fadhb bhunúsach ama do mhúinteoirí is ea an Fhorbairt Leanúnach Proifisiúnta. Le blianta anuas, tá sé an-dheacair do mhúinteoirí scaoileadh ón scoil a fháil i gcomhair thraenáil inseirbhíse neamhéigeantach. (Ciallaíonn traenáil éigeantach an tacaíocht a thugtar chun dréachtsonraíochtaí nua a thabhairt isteach). Cruthaíonn an ganntanas múinteoirí fadhbanna i scoileanna. Tá an t-ionchas ar mhúinteoirí I gcónaí ag méadú chun dul i mbun foghlama neamhéigeantach go hiomlán lasmuigh d'uaireanta oibre. Ní féidir leanúint le cúrsaí mar atá faoi láthair. Rinne Cumann na Meánmhúinteoirí in Éirinn taighde i 2018 a fuair amach go raibh múinteoirí ag obair níos mó ná 40 uair sa tseachtain ar an meán. Go simplí, níl an t-am acu dul i mbun foghlama breise lasmuigh d'uaireanta oibre. Tá na cúrsaí seo ag dul i bhfeidhm ar ghairm na múinteoireachta i gcoitinne. Creideann an Cumann go gcaithfidh an Roinn Oideachais dul i dteangmháil le ceardchumainn na múinteoirí chun dul i ngleic leis na ceisteanna bunúsacha, práinneacha seo cosúil leis an ualach oibre, am proifisiúnta/am d'obair lasmuigh den mhúineadh, an traenáil san áireamh. <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/teachers-work-work-demands-and-work-intensity-march-2018/>

6. Dréachtsonraíocht tomhaiste a chinntiú

Ag eascairt as Moladh 2 thuas, ní mór don CNCM dul siar ar na dréachtsonraíochtaí chun a chinntiú go mbainfear amach cothromaíocht cuí idir scileanna cumarsáide labhartha, léitheoireachta agus scríbhnoireachta, i.e. an méid litríochta. Tá múinteoirí an-bhuartha cé go dtugtar tús áite go hoifigiúil do labhairt na teanga go bhfuil an lámh in uachtar sa seomra ranga ag an méid litríochta atá le clúdú ar an gcúrsa.

An Críoch

Tá Cumann na Meánmhúinteoirí in Éirinn an-bhuartha go bhfaighfí réiteach ar na húdair inmí a bhaineann leis na dréachtsonraíochtaí do Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta. Tugann an síneadh ama ar an tréimhse comhairliúcháin deis agus spás chun teacht ar eolas agus tuiscint níos doimhne a ligfear do réitigh teacht chun solais. Ábhar bunúsach, croílár is ea an Ghaeilge agus thioctadh lagmhisneach ar dhaltaí agus múinteoirí araon dá ligfí don éiginnteacht agus inmí a bhaineann leis na dréachtsonraíochtaí nó an ríthábhacht a bhaineann le scrúdú na hArdteistiméireachta fanacht. Teip cinnireachta ag leibhéal na Roinne a bheadh ann. Ní mór teacht ar réitigh phraiticiúla in am cuí.