



**Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland)
(UCETNI)**

Response to the Independent Review of Education

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

1. International recognition of the importance of teachers and teacher education

The importance of teachers has been long-recognised as central not only to the educational and personal development of children, but also to societal wellbeing and economic growth (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2005, 2018; Larsen, 2010). The OECD goes so far as to say that, ‘the quality of an education system depends on the quality of its teachers’ (2018:20). It follows therefore that the knowledge, processes and practices of initial and continuing professional learning are fundamental in ensuring the highest quality teachers are in place to meet these individual and societal aspirations.

With this in mind, in most international contexts, there has been an increasing ‘problematism’ of teacher education focussing on the extent to which it is perceived to support academic and economic development. The subsequent policy focus has promoted increased prescription and a focus on ‘evidence-based ‘best’ practice’ (Helgetun and Menter, 2020). In England for example, the policy trajectory has led to the development of a discourse on teacher learning as a process of ‘training’ (DE, 2010), accompanied by ongoing deregulation of the process by moving this training

increasingly into schools and out of colleges and universities (Mayer, 2021). There is a strong emphasis on the achievement of 'professional standards' and more recently, a complete market review of the teacher training providers along with the implementation of a Core Content Framework for Initial Teacher Training (DE, 2022).

2. Teacher Education in Northern Ireland

The situation in Northern Ireland (NI) is different, particularly from that in England. Firstly, the discourse is not one centred on 'Training', but rather 'Teacher Education' and more recently a move towards 'Teacher Professional Learning' (TPL). This perspective on the teaching profession was established by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2007:5) and it is fundamentally one of teaching as an intellectual and values-based profession. They state,

teaching can never be reduced to a set of discrete skills to be mastered in some mechanical process of assimilation. To adopt such a reductionist approach would be to deny the intellectual basis of our work, and the richness of the ongoing dialogue and learning that enhances our professional practice.

Secondly, there is a much greater simplicity in terms of the structure of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) with only two routes (4 year BEd and 1 year PGCE) through the two universities (Queen's University, Belfast [QUB] and Ulster University [UU]). In the case of QUB, the BEd programmes and some PGCE programmes are provided by two colleges of the university (St. Mary's University College [SMUCB] and Stranmillis University College [SUC]), both of which are specialist institutions of teacher education, providing 100% of undergraduate teacher education in the region. As long-standing, specialist institutions, the colleges provide a particular form of ITE which is much less representative of that to be found across the rest of the UK landscape, but which is still apparent across many European countries (ETUCE, 2008). It is one in which student teachers, from the outset, are inculcated into a values framework and a way of thinking, in terms of developing their knowledge and understanding of teaching as a profession and their role as practitioners.

Thirdly, there is very robust regulation of the system through accreditation, by the GTCNI¹, an inspection process conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), and finally, because all of teacher education is university based, there are rigorous quality assurance procedures and processes related to higher education such as external examining, annual programme review and in-depth periodic review in accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2014). Effective and appropriate quality assurance measures are obviously of extreme importance, but the processes adopted in NI are based on self-evaluation, working collaboratively and in partnership in a shared enterprise.

Issues around the recruitment and retention of teachers in NI have never been as challenging as in other regions of the UK and indeed in many international contexts also. Whilst there are some variations and challenges related to specific subject areas, in general, recruitment to ITE programmes is highly competitive, attracting well-qualified students with a strong sense of vocation. Similarly, retention has never been a critical issue or a problem in this region with teachers who come into the profession, tending to stay.

Effective partnerships and collegial relationships are central to quality teacher education (Lillejord and Børte, 2016). With regard to relationships across all the key stakeholders in education, these have grown in strength, particularly in recent years where collaboration and collegial working has become increasingly evident. It should be pointed out that the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) and the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, Northern Ireland (UCETNI) have been particularly effective in supporting this trend. Of key significance are the relationships between the universities and university colleges and the schools which operate differently to other regions in that they are non-contractual. Schools support student teachers as part of a professional commitment which may be conceived in terms of a 'relational contractualism' (Rawolle, Rowlands and Blackmore (2017:114) based on collaboration, trust and core values. It could be argued that this characteristic of the system emanates from its relatively small scale and the shared understanding that the vast majority of practising teachers will have with their mentees, having come through the same route/s and/or institutions themselves.

¹ In 2021, the General Teaching Council was stood down by the Minister of Education but its functions remain operational under the Department of Education (DENI, 2021).

In contrast to other regions, there is no prescriptive curriculum for ITE in NI. Fundamentally, ITE programmes are designed to reflect the Core Values and Competences of the GTCNI Competence Framework (GTCNI, 2007) in order to prepare students to teach the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) and the relevant subject areas of the post-primary curriculum. Competences are different from Standards in that they see TPL as an ongoing and developmental process rather than a standard to be achieved. As such, they are not prescriptive but rather, allow for individuality to support teachers in developing knowledge, understanding and professional practice within their specific contexts.

3. Key issues for consideration

Whilst it is clear that there is much to be proud of and to cherish in the overall effectiveness of teacher education in NI, particularly at the ITE phase (OECD, 2014), UCETNI holds the view however that there remain challenges which require careful consideration in the context of the Independent Review.

ITE in NI is under the authority of both DENI (which determines the number of students allocated to each institution) and the Department for the Economy (DfE) (which funds the provision). Working across two departments presents challenges, particularly in relation to the allocation of student numbers which, at time of writing (late May), have yet to be determined for the academic year 2022-2023. This leaves a sense of insecurity for the ITE providers in terms of year-on-year planning, medium-term planning to develop appropriate strategic plans for development in provision and in terms of continued sustainability.

Whilst recruitment for ITE programmes in both universities and the university colleges has been largely non-problematic to this point, there are signs of potential challenges ahead. Under-recruitment has become an issue for ITE courses in specific Post-Primary subjects and schools are expressing concerns over their ability to hire teachers of Maths, Science, Computing/IT, Technology and Home Economics. Further, it could be argued that the status of the teaching profession has diminished in recent years with trade unions presenting an ever-growing list of issues relating to stress, working conditions and complaints of low levels of pay awards which negatively impacts remuneration. It is of the utmost importance that the teaching profession remains attractive to prospective applicants at both undergraduate and postgraduate

levels and to achieve that will require collective and collaborative new efforts in a changing landscape.

Effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers has been widely recognised as a key characteristic of mature systems of teacher education (Hargreaves, 2000). Connectivity and continuity of professional learning, post-ITE and across the profession has been a long-standing problem in NI however. As far back as 2010, the two government departments with responsibility for teacher education (The Department of Employment and Learning² [DEL] and DENI) suggested that CPD is reactive rather than strategic; has no agreed definition; has no single coordinating body; and no systematic approach to its implementation and development (DEL and DENI, 2010:21). Despite this acknowledgement however, little has changed to address the issues identified.

The process of teacher education review has proven to be painstakingly slow, beginning in 2003 and not culminating until 2016 with the publication of *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning* (DENI 2016). A variety of reasons may be postulated for this. At one level, the political instability which has been characteristic of the devolved coalition government in this region has undoubtedly challenged effective policy implementation across many aspects of social life. Another perspective (Hagan and Eaton, 2010:6-7) has suggested that a continued focus on the infrastructure of both the school and initial teacher education systems has prevented necessary and appropriate attention being paid to key issues related to TPL at all levels because it is underpinned by,

a complex web of interrelationships and interdependencies of historical, social, cultural, political and religious aspects of social life which for many, frame, and for some, even define, their core sense of individual identity.

When individual and collective identity is threatened, when there is a lack of agreement that a problem actually exists and there is insufficient recognition of the deep-seated nature and complexity of the issue in question, the likelihood of successfully addressing the most pressing issues related to teacher development in a coherent and collaborative way, is inevitably diminished.

² The Department for Employment and Learning has now become the Department for the Economy.

4. Next Steps?

In this paper, UCETNI contends that currently, ITE in NI operates differently to elsewhere in the UK, and because of the particular approach taken, it is successful, effective and appropriate for the region. In terms of the overall system including CPD however, we are clear, that there is much which can be done to improve the current offering.

The publication of the *Learning Leaders Strategy* (DENI, 2016), and the subsequent work which has taken place to develop a new *Teacher Professional Learning Framework*³ (currently in consultation) presents the best opportunity for all concerned to genuinely examine teacher education in this region since the publication of 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' in 2007. The *TPL Framework* and the *Learning Leadership Lens*, should become the central mechanism by which all provision is examined and the stimulus to affect the necessary improvements to transform what is already a very good teacher education system into one which has the potential to rank amongst the best internationally.

To ensure that this happens, we must continue the excellent collaboration amongst the key stakeholders to ensure that the future direction of teacher education is a fully shared enterprise which is exclusionary to no one and which recognises, respects and celebrates the positive dimensions of the current system with a view to building on the existing and well-recognised strengths we have. In the past, concerns around infrastructure have proven only to distract and prevent the issues of central importance to the improvement of the system being addressed. Rather than continuing this focus, what is required is enhanced collaboration and sharing across the teacher education providers with each playing to their individual strengths and specialisms, to optimise the support that can be made available to teachers working in the system.

Finally, to ensure the future sustainability and effectiveness of the system, consideration needs to be given to the political oversight of teacher education with a view to moving it to a single department. This would help develop the overall coherency of approach across the whole education system and would also help alleviate the insecurities currently in place due to the issues around the allocation of student numbers.

³ A full explanation of the new framework can be found at <https://f.io/Kar9XLlc>

The Independent Review of Education is taking place at a crossroad point for teacher education in NI. If fresh thinking can emerge in terms of recognising meaningful key priorities along with coalescence around the new strategy and proposals for TPL, there is a seminal opportunity to promote meaningful change which has the potential to impact positively upon the lives of children, their families and society as a whole.

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Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland) (UCETNI)

Response to the Independent Review of Education

SHARING AND COLLABORATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Sharing and Collaboration in Education in Northern Ireland

In 2005, *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* was published (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister [OFMDFM]). Central to this policy was that it shifted the focus from a move towards integration in education to one of enhanced sharing and collaboration instead (Community Relations Council [CRU] 2005, 33). Hansson, O'Connor Bones, and McCord (2013) suggest that as the concept of sharing does not threaten individual or collective affiliation or identity, 'Shared Education' (SE) has achieved support not only from the disparate political parties, but also from the education community itself.

Building on this concept, the vision for the new strategy for teacher education, *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning* (Department of Education for Northern Ireland [DENI], 2016:4) states that,

Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people.

To achieve this vision, the strategy focuses on five areas, one of which is,

Building Professional Learning Communities – supporting closer collaboration between practitioners, schools and school clusters and professional learning providers.

Given the international research evidence supporting the benefits of implementing collaborative and shared approaches to education (Connolly, Purvis, and O'Grady 2013), the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland),

(UCETNI) is of the view that these two policy priorities, sharing and collaboration, provide not only a focus, but also great opportunity and potential for the future development of teacher education in Northern Ireland (NI).

2. UCETNI and NIHELG

Already, there is evidence of strong existing collaboration between the teacher education providers in a range of ways. Firstly, UCETNI provides a successful forum for cooperation and collaboration. The forum has representation from Queen's University (QUB), Stranmillis University College (SUC), St. Mary's University College (SMUCB), Ulster University (UU) and the Open University (OU). Meetings take place three times per year and are also attended by the Executive Director of UCET (UK). The Chair of the UCETNI meetings operates on a rotational basis across the membership of the group and members are also entitled to attend the annual UCET Conference. UCETNI also has representation of the UCET Executive Committee, and each UCETNI institution is entitled to representation of each of the UK wide UCET forums (ITE secondary, ITE primary and early years, post-compulsory ITE, CPD and Research and International).

Following each UCETNI meeting, the members of UCETNI are joined by representatives from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI); The Department for the Economy (DfE); The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI); the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland⁴ (GTCNI); The Education Authority (EA); and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for the Northern Ireland Higher Education Liaison Group (NIHELG) meeting. This forum is extremely important in ensuring good communication, connectivity and transparency across all the key stakeholders with regard to issues pertinent to teacher education.

3. DENI

In terms of the relationships and collaboration between the teacher education providers and DENI, these have developed significantly in recent years and currently operate in a highly collegial and supportive manner. In order to develop and subsequently support the implementation of the *Learning Leaders Strategy* (DENI,

⁴ In 2021, the General Teaching Council was stood down by the Minister of Education but its functions remain operational under the Department of Education (DENI, 2021).

2016) for example, DENI established a range of steering and working groups focussing on Induction and Early Professional Development, the development of a new Leadership Competence Framework and a working group on standards related to Quality Assurance, all of which included representation from the teacher education providers, who in some cases also acted as Chairs of these groups.

With the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, DENI also established a designated Initial Teacher Education (ITE) working group to promote collaboration and coherence of approach in response to the placement of students in schools during the pandemic situation. It has been agreed that this group has proved to be extremely valuable and will continue to operate post-Covid.

DENI have also established a range of other groups to consider key aspects of policy development which have also included representation from the teacher education providers. These include, CPR training in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to support curriculum policy; Post-primary Irish Medium Education; The review of Irish Medium Education; SEN, particularly, Speech, Language and Communication Needs; and Shared Education.

4. Other key stakeholders

Under the auspices of DENI, other groups have been established which also include teacher education representation. Working with CCEA for example, there is a work stream with regard to a *Fair Start* (DENI, 2021); a research group to develop language framework for children in Primary Irish Medium Education (IME); the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Programme Board; the MFL Primary Working Group; the Irish Medium Programme Board;

In conjunction with EA, groups have been established to consider Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) related to Induction/Early Professional Development and preparation for principalship. Teacher education is also represented on the Early Years Intervention Research Steering Group.

Teacher educators also participate and have roles with other stakeholder organisations including the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); The Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC); and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

5. The University Colleges and QUB

Both SMUCB and SUC are recognised providers of higher education in the UK and offer collaborative provision with QUB. SMUCB is an autonomous institution in terms of ethos, governance and finance whereas SUC operates as a DfE Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). Under the Memoranda of Agreement, the University has overarching responsibility for academic quality and standards and has granted authority to the two institutions to offer programmes which lead to the awards of the University.

The Principals of both Colleges are ex-officio members of the Academic Council of the University and the University Education Committee. Each institution is also entitled to nominate membership to the Directors of Education Forum and the Education Committee (Quality and Standards). Students of the Colleges, are registered as students of the University and have access to the University's Library, IT, sports and Students' Union facilities.

6. Collaboration between the University Colleges

For many years, the two University Colleges have collaborated closely in a range of different ways. Primarily, there is the joint programme focussed on 'Diversity and Mutual Understanding' (DMU), which involves students from both colleges engaging in an annual programme of events aimed at raising awareness, and developing understanding and professional competence related to issues of diversity and community-building. This programme involves all students engaged in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and has,

- a 'home' dimension, based in both Colleges and aimed at supporting students to engage together on a range of relevant issues and topics related to diversity and mutual understanding;
- an extra-mural dimension which has involved students working with different NI-based organisations e.g. Forest Schools, Corrymeela and the Pushkin Trust;
- a school-based dimension which facilitates students from both Colleges to work together with children from local schools e.g. this academic year, in collaboration with the Saphara charity and its '*Be the change*' programme, students from both Colleges were provided with the unique opportunity to work together with newcomer children in Northern Ireland;

- an international dimension which has involved student participation in extremely successful joint professional learning projects in Israel, the United States of America and India.

Relationships are very strong and collegiate and recent discussions have taken place between senior staff from both institutions as to how these can be built upon and developed further. A good example of this is the way the colleges collaborated very closely to facilitate the SMUCB Certificate in Religious Education course (which allows graduate teachers to teach in Catholic Maintained Primary Schools), to be delivered at SUC for those students who wish to take it.

Similarly, the university colleges are aware of the legislation on Integrated Education (2022) which highlights the role they may be asked to play in preparing teachers for work in the integrated education system. The colleges view this as potentially providing further opportunities for collaborative working.

Building upon this work with ITE students, both Colleges have also developed a programme for practising teachers to support them at classroom, whole school and community level, in addressing issues related to identity, diversity, inclusion and community cohesion. The programme which was entitled, *'Classrooms Re-imagined: Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers'* (CREDIT), benefitted from significant funding from the International Fund for Ireland and operated from 2011-2013. The ETI carried out an evaluation of the programme and highlighted its benefits in terms of enhanced motivation and involvement amongst teachers which in turn supported better teaching and learning for pupils.

In addition to the undergraduate and postgraduate collaboration, members of staff from both colleges have engaged in joint research projects and in a range of informal ways to discuss key issues on a range of operational matters relevant to both institutions.

The collegial approach currently adopted by the two University Colleges to enhance provision and the ensuing positive outcomes in terms of closer collaboration and sharing, stands in sharp contrast to the strategy adopted in 2015 which, without the agreement or consent of all the relevant stakeholders, sought to establish an integrated ITE infrastructure in NI. That approach eroded trust and damaged the relationships necessary to strengthen and improve high quality ITE.

7. Collaboration between Ulster University, Queen's University Belfast and the University Colleges

There is strong collaboration between the School of Education at UU and the other HEIs in Northern Ireland. Colleagues from UU collaborate with staff from SMUCB, SUC and QUB on a wide range of research projects, through the SCOTENS network and through UK funding councils, such as ESRC. UU staff also liaise with careers staff at SMUCB and SUC by providing information relating to PGCE primary and PGCE post-primary PE courses for those undergraduate students considering applying for these courses. A culture of research is cultivated across the institutions; for example, the School of Education at UU is first in the UK for research impact.

Members of the UU PGCE team are part of a working group with staff at SMUCB and QUB who are responsible for coordination of the IME provision. There is ongoing collaboration between the mathematics and numeracy specialists within the HEIs and other educational stakeholders, such as CCEA, to develop and encourage TPL in the area of primary mathematics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UU collaborated with SMUCB, SUC and QUB as part of the DENI Working Group in Teacher Education to manage some of the challenges around school placements during lockdown and wider restrictions. Strong collaborations enabled ITE providers to troubleshoot ideas which facilitated virtual tutor observations.

The strength of research at UU and QUB was demonstrated in the recent UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) results. Overall, both institutions improved their research position in UK rankings in relation to research outputs, research impact and research environment.

The institutions have a well-established track record of wider collaboration, engaging with partners across statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sectors. The strength of this engagement lies in the cross-cutting and inter-disciplinary contribution of teacher education to a wide range of social, health, economic and cultural influences that can affect schooling in NI. One example of this is the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Advisory Forum where UU and QUB are collaborative partners.

8. Collaboration with schools

School placements are an essential element of the professional formation of student teachers and very good partnership relationships are well established between all of the schools across NI and each of the providers. The Teacher Tutor Partnership Project, funded by DENI until 2017, helped in the development of a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the partnership between the providers and the schools. Similarly, the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook (DE, 2010) and more recently, the Learning Leaders Strategy (DE, 2016) are the starting point for partnership arrangements with schools as they define the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the ITE partnership.

Unlike other regions, the partnership relationships between the ITE providers and the schools are non-contractual, with schools, teacher tutors and host teacher supporting students as part of their professional commitment. As many of the practising teachers in schools across NI have followed the same route into the profession as their mentees, there is a shared understanding which can have a very positive effect upon the partnership and the support the students receive.

In addition, the providers have always actively engaged with partner schools in other numerous ways including: consultation in relation to programme developments and changes; local area partnership meetings held throughout Northern Ireland, considering particularly the role of the class teacher in supporting students; working with teachers who volunteer to participate in the interview processes for prospective students; evaluation of aspects of the placement experience; and the development of Host Teacher Handbooks.

9. Next steps?

At the outset of this paper, it was proposed that the two principles of sharing and collaboration should underpin the future development of teacher education in this region. Examples have been cited above which highlight positive, existing practice but there is currently a genuine willingness amongst all the providers to see this develop further both in terms of undergraduate provision and also, with regard to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and other educational professionals. We believe that this would have the potential to promote the principles and practice of Shared Education (OFMDFM, 2005) and TPL as outlined in the Learning Leaders Strategy (DENI, 2016) and the TPL Framework⁵ (in consultation).

⁵ A full explanation of the new framework can be found at <https://f.io/Kar9XLlc>

To achieve this, the roles played by DENI and UCETNI are particularly important as they act as agents of facilitation to enable and encourage continued partnership working and collaboration. The existing collaboration outlined above has already proven to be extremely successful and so it is necessary for the teacher education providers to work together and continue to enhance collaborative activity to build upon individual and collective strengths.

It is hoped that the mechanism for this can be the new TPL Framework, particularly, the Learning Leadership Lens and Competence Framework along with a coherent approach to developing high quality, Shared Education practice (such as that exemplified by the CREDIT programme) to model good practice for schools and communities.

It is important that specific roles across each of the teacher education providers are established around CPD provision, both accredited and non-accredited. This can be on an individual basis, cross-institutional and also in collaboration with the other key stakeholders involved in non-university teacher development. To achieve this in the most effective way however, demands that the current good collaboration affected by DENI, UCETNI and the institutions themselves, is continued and developed. As such, in terms of teacher education it is hoped that the Independent Review of Education, will provide an opportunity for UCETNI, in partnership with all other key stakeholders to explore appropriate mechanisms by which to make this happen. By so doing, it will help to consolidate the existing good practice which underpins the high-level of teacher professionalism and expertise which is currently apparent in this region and enable the collective vision of teacher education in NI to be brought to life, namely, to inspire, educate and nurture caring and passionate professionals who are leaders of learning, driving positive, life-changing opportunities for children, families, communities and society.

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Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland) (UCETNI)
Response to the Independent Review of Education
Continuing Professional Development

1. Current Offering

'Learning Leaders' (DENI, 2016) provides a welcome addition to the teacher education landscape and as an overarching strategy, it provides the potential for greater connectivity between the different phases of the teaching profession aspired to by the GTCNI Competence Framework (GTCNI, 2007) and a coherent approach to the provision of CPD based on the principles of collaboration and sharing. However despite the potential of this framework there has been little evidence of any substantial change to teacher professional learning in practice since its publication in 2016. In reality, schools and teachers can currently only access professional learning through three main routes: Masters courses, short courses and private provision bought in by schools.

- Master's level courses

There is a wide range of M level provision provided in Northern Ireland by the universities and University Colleges covering a diverse range of specialist areas. M level study by teachers is normally undertaken on a part-time basis and takes at least 2 and up to 5 years to complete. Costs are in the region of £6 to 8k and the vast majority of teachers undertaking such study, self-fund, taking a postgraduate loan if required. While there has been a recognised international move to increase M level qualifications in the teaching profession since the Bologna Agreement of 1999 there has been little appetite in Northern Ireland to pursue this as a policy objective and no government funding available to support teachers to avail of further M level qualifications, beyond the M level component of PGCE study. Masters level study accessed by local teachers includes:

The School of Social Science, Education and Social Work at **Queen's University Belfast**, offers several Master's programmes that are specifically tailored to the needs of the teaching profession or those who work in local or international educational contexts. These programmes include the broadly based MEd Education Studies which offers students an opportunity to select modules from a wide range of topics including: learning and teaching, assessment, educational leadership, inclusion and special educational needs.

Other programmes are more specialist and include: MSc in Educational leadership; MSc in Autistic Spectrum Disorders; MEd in Inclusion and Special Needs; and MSc (TESOL).

Ulster University has a long history of providing M-level courses to schools and teachers, including the Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership that is undertaken by many teachers seeking middle and senior management positions in schools, as well as the Masters in Education, which was established over 40 years ago, allowing existing teachers to obtain a Level 7 postgraduate qualification, with specialisms in areas like educational management and educational technology.

The **Open University** offers a flexible Master's degree providing a choice of specialisms which will enrich knowledge, professional practice, academic development and increase transferable skills. Specialisms include: applied linguistics, inclusive practice, leadership and management; learning and teaching. The OU is also a provider of free, high quality open educational resources at scale and breadth: [Open Learn | Open Educational Resources at The Open University | Open University](#)

Stranmillis University College offers three master's level programmes. The Master's in Education has specialist options in Education Studies, Pastoral Care, and Special Educational Needs: Literacy. Drawing on up-to-date research, the programme focuses on how we learn, from early childhood through compulsory schooling and into adulthood, and offers a rigorous analysis of broader educational systems such as curricula, policies and schools in their societal context. It also offers a Master of Teaching with a blend of learning opportunities for the developing teacher or leader in education who aims to advance their practices while working. Finally, a Master of Arts: Early Childhood Studies is a route for those who wish to specialise in early childhood.

St Mary's University College provides teachers and education-related professionals with a stimulating, welcoming and supportive environment in which to work alongside a strong community of like-minded professionals. Postgraduate awards include Master of Education (MEd), Postgraduate Diploma in Education Studies (PgDipEd), and Postgraduate Certificate in Education Studies (PgCertEd).

- Courses are on a part-time basis, flexibly structured, and taught in a range of modes of delivery including summer school, distance learning, evening classes and Saturday courses.
- Specialist options include: Curriculum Development and Primary Education; Developing Physical Education, School Sport and Coaching Science; Early Years Education; Effective Teaching; English and Literacy in the Curriculum; Irish and Irish-Medium Education; Leadership for Catholic Schools; Leadership for Learning; Pastoral Issues; Special Education

- **Short courses provided by educational organisations or universities**

There is a multiplicity of short courses available to teachers and schools. Some examples include:

Collaboration and Sharing in Education (CASE) programme

This provides a collaborative model for teacher professional learning programmes. It is funded by European Union's PEACE Programme, managed by the Educational Authority and offers short professional learning courses which are delivered by ITE providers. Further information including courses currently being advertised can be found [here](#)

Short Professional Development Courses and support provided directly by ITE providers and other organisations

Some examples include the [Education Authority](#) providing free courses on a range of areas and CCEA providing curriculum related support. [Stranmillis University College](#) offers an extensive range of courses for teachers and related professionals available for whole school development or for individual teachers, including leadership and professional practice. Similarly, St. Mary's University College provides a range of professional development courses for teachers working specifically in the Irish Medium sector.

At Queen's University, Since 2018 a short course has been available through the Open Learning Programme entitled: "Teaching English to Migrants, Refugees and Asylum-Seekers". While it has a community focus, we have had a number of teachers take it to support with Newcomer pupils or in homework clubs. Also within the Open Learning programme, the EA Intercultural Education Service runs short courses entitled "the Intercultural School" (both face-to-face and online).

Private providers of CPD

There are a number of private providers of teacher development who offer in-person courses to teachers in Northern Ireland. The growth of online provision has also meant schools can access programmes from a much wider range of providers nationally.

2. Analysis

The multiplicity of provision has strengths in that it offers a wide range of choice to schools and individual teachers in terms of accessing courses tailored to their need at a specific point in time. However, lack of access to funded training risks professional development becoming the domain of those schools and individuals who can afford to pursue it and at a time of very challenging financial circumstances for organizations and households there is a serious concern that professional learning will be a casualty. Lack of coherence and collaboration in this area across the sector can also lead to resources unintentionally being duplicated while key areas of professional development can be overlooked. Quality assurance of provision is also a key component of any effective system and this becomes extremely difficult without an agreed collaborative model for development. The focus has too often only been on early stages of a teacher's career with no clear path for those beyond this stage. In addition, the expert practitioners delivering ITE who have so much to offer in building teacher education across a career and bringing the latest research into effective practice, deliver Master's level provision but often, do not have the opportunity to contribute more widely across the full range of available teacher development.

3. Vision

UCETNI have been working with the Department of Education to produce a vision for Teacher Professional Learning in Northern Ireland, which will be undergoing consultation during 2022. Building on "Learning Leaders" this addresses many of the challenges presented above, to propose a coherent collaborative model of teacher professional learning based on the principles of Choice, Continuity and Collaboration. It provides the Learning Leadership Lens illustrating an updated competence framework for the leadership of learning with five dimensions encompassing core values and a strategic vision as well as competences and a continuum for leadership.

In addition to the vision for the system the new proposals also set out practical steps to ensure that Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) becomes fully embedded in the Northern Ireland teacher education system. Recognising the importance of building professional learning communities of practice, a greater involvement of the ITE providers can better

support the career long development of teachers to ensure greater coherence and consistency. The new framework also proposes *“that to facilitate the teachers’ professional learning experience, a database of quality-controlled, up-to-date and accredited opportunities could be compiled and maintained, offering teachers options for their professional learning.”*

We would therefore recommend that TPL be identified as a critical area to ensure a continually improving and more effective education system and that support be given to the proposals outlined above, specifically:

- Greater collaboration across the stakeholders involved in teacher education, particularly with regard to the role of the ITE providers in supporting career-long TPL
- The ongoing investment and further development of a suite of accredited professional learning opportunities, including credit bearing courses up to M level
- Sufficient funding, including bursaries, to allow teacher and schools, to effectively engage in professional learning.

Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland) (UCETNI)

Response to the Independent Review of Education

Vision for how Initial Teacher Education can support Modern Languages on the Northern Ireland Curriculum

In this paper, 'modern languages' refers to language education in instructed settings. It does not include Irish Medium Education. The paper also does not address the linguistic needs of newcomer pupils, nor the need to widen the teaching and learning of British and Irish Sign language. Of course, these issues overlap with modern languages and UCETNI suggests that the Independent Review of Education considers IME, newcomers' linguistic needs and BSL and ISL.

Languages in the UK

Like in most Anglophone countries, languages have been described as being in a state of crisis (Lanvers, 2017). Over the past five years, many academics and policy makers have been working to find solutions to the decline. This excellent work is now complete and it is time to put the evidence-based solutions into action.

The University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) is the overarching national organisation which represents the interests of Modern Languages, linguistics, and cultural and area studies in Higher Education in the United Kingdom. On behalf of UCML, Álvarez et al. (2018) conducted a survey of all Higher Education Institutions in the UK to look at the provision of language modules (i.e. modules whose object of study is language) in Modern Foreign Language (MFL) departments, and on models of collaboration between MFL departments and Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP), often taught through university language centres. The survey included all MFLs as well as regional languages Irish, Scots Gaelic and Welsh.

The report found that languages are taught in 69 of the UK's 130 universities. This 69 includes the 24 Russell Group universities. Languages have fared poorly in the new universities post-1992 and where departments did open, they have now invariably closed. Within the 69 universities, a total of 52 languages are taught. Of these 52 languages, French is offered at 68 out of 69 institutions (99% presence), Spanish at 65 (94% presence), German at 50 (72% presence), Italian at 40 (58% presence), Chinese at 34 (49% presence),

Portuguese at 23 (33% presence), Japanese at 20 (29% presence), Russian at 17 (25% presence), Arabic at 15 (22% presence) and Catalan at 13 (19% presence). Combined, these 10 languages account for 79% of the total MFL presence at UK universities.

Collaboration between MFL departments and IWLP is patchy across the sector. With declining student numbers, it is suggested that there is a need for cross-phase unification for languages. It is suggested that terms and labels such as ‘ancient’ ‘modern’, ‘foreign’, ‘community’ and ‘heritage’ are unhelpful; rather the discipline should be ‘languages’ and we should all be working inclusively for the common good.

Critchley et al. (2021) ascertained that modern language provision is available in 91 UK institutions, of which 71 offer degree programmes and 81 offer institution-wide language programmes, so there is some discrepancy between the two reports.

At the time of writing, a team of researchers at the Centre for Language Education Research (CLER) at Queen’s University Belfast, led by Dr Ian Collen and funded by the British Academy, is conducting the first UK-wide survey of language provision in Further Education. The results of this work are expected in autumn 2022.

The Decline of Modern Languages at A level in the UK

	2002-2003 baseline	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
French	15531	10328	9672	9648	8713
German	6950	4009	3842	3663	3058
Irish	290	330	331	333	332
Spanish	5781	8674	8460	8601	8255
Total Fr/Ger/Ir/Sp Presentations	28552	23341	22305	22245	20358
Total Presentations	750537	850749	836705	828355	811776
Fr/Ger/Ir/Sp as % of total	3.8%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.5%

UK Presentations					
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Table 1: A level entries in French, German, Irish and Spanish across the UK

The data in Table 1 show that the number of entries for A level languages has declined alarmingly since 2003 across the UK. Entries for French almost halved between 2003 and 2018, despite a small increase in total presentations across all A level subjects. In the same time period, German has more than halved. In 2003, German was the second most widely taught language, after French. In 2018, it became the fourth most taught language in the UK, after French and Spanish and having been overtaken for the first time by Mandarin Chinese. Spanish has seen considerable growth from a base of 5781 in 2003 to 8255 in 2018.

In updating the figures for 2019, it is noted that at A level, Spanish entries have increased by almost 5% from 2018, overtaking French as the most popular language for the first time since A levels began, just as previous *Language Trends* reports from the British Council predicted. Data for 2020-2021 are not presented due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The *Language Trends England 2020 report* (Collen, 2020) found that compared to French and German, Spanish also enjoys a higher percentage of GCSE pupils continuing to A level: from the 2017 GCSE cohort, 6.3% of candidates in French and 6.9% of candidates in German converted to full A level in 2019; in Spanish the conversion rate was a healthier 9.3%. In other words, almost one in every ten candidates of GCSE Spanish chooses to continue with the language to A level.

The Decline of Modern Languages at A level in NI

	2002-2003 baseline	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
French	832	536	502	473	429
German	201	97	102	100	110
Irish	290	330	331	333	332
Spanish	419	534	524	529	434

Total Fr/Ger/Ir/Sp Presentations	1742	1497	1460	1435	1305
Total Presentations	28650	32390	31828	30684	29004
Fr/Ger/Ir/Sp as % of total NI Presentations	6.1%	4.6%	4.6%	4.7%	4.5%

Table 2: A level entries in French, German, Irish and Spanish in NI

Historically, and compared to the UK as a whole, NI has enjoyed healthier numbers at A level. The downward trend of A level French and German and upward trend of Spanish mirrors UK statistics as a whole. However, the growth in numbers in Spanish has not been enough to compensate for the sharp decline in French and German. Entries in Irish have remained reasonably consistent over time.

By comparison, around 70 per cent of pupils in the Republic of Ireland take a foreign language for the Leaving Certificate (age equivalent to A-Level).⁶ Seven languages can be examined at Higher or Ordinary level for Leaving Certificate, with other non-curricular 'heritage' languages also offered. The breadth of the Leaving Certificate curriculum, where students usually take seven or eight subjects, contributes to high uptake, as do university entrance requirements. The four institutions of the National University of Ireland stipulate a Leaving Certificate third language for most degrees; choosing not to study a language to this level can thus severely restrict higher education options. The Republic of Ireland also has a very clear modern foreign language strategy in place, 'Languages Connect', to develop the multilingual capacity of all of its citizens.

Current context in England (for comparison)

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc), a performance measure for schools rather than a qualification in itself, was introduced in 2010 and encourages all pupils to study GCSEs in English language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, a language (ancient or modern) and geography or history. The government's aim is to keep young people's options open for

⁶ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2020/2020-04-03_I-rs-infographic-education-in-ireland-a-statistical-snapshot_en.pdf

further study and future career. The government's ambition is to see 75% of pupils studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022, and 90% by 2025, for award of qualifications in 2027.

The Teaching Schools Council (2016) commissioned a review of current teaching and effective pedagogy of foreign languages at secondary school level in Key Stages 3 and 4. The results, finding that less than half of the then pupils sat a GCSE in a language, and a set of recommendations were published in the 'Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review'. The £4.8 million pilot National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP)⁷ was set up in December 2018 with an aim to improve language curriculum design and pedagogy, leading to a higher take up and greater success at GCSE. NCELP is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and co-directed by The University of York and The Cam Academy Trust. It supports 45 schools, training and providing French, German and Spanish teaching resources to teachers for free. It currently covers Key Stage 3 and will expand to Key Stage 4 for over 1,350 teachers nationally.

In November 2019, the DfE announced that it would be convening an independent expert panel to test and develop potential changes to the subject content for French, German and Spanish GCSEs. The panel's subsequent recommendations were subject to a 10-week public consultation between March 2021 and May 2021 and the government has now published its response to the consultation. At the same time, Ofsted⁸ (2021) published its Curriculum Research Review (OCRR) for Languages with a focus on the three 'pillars' of phonics, vocabulary and grammar. For first teaching from September 2024, with first award in Summer 2026, linguistic content for GCSEs in French, German and Spanish will focus on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language, with 1700 words at Higher Tier and 1200 words at Foundation Tier. Vocabulary and grammatical requirements for each tier will be clearly defined in the specification. Pupils will be expected to know and use the linguistic content specified receptively and productively, in the oral and written modalities, with an approximately equal emphasis on each. This new approach to defined word lists GCSEs in French, German and Spanish has never been tried anywhere else in the world and, together with the OCRR, has come under criticism from subject associations, some practising teachers and academics such as Milton (2022) and Woore et al. (2022). There is continued investment in the £16.4 million Mandarin Excellence Programme, a unique yet intensive language programme which now has over 6,500 pupils from 75 schools

⁷ See: <https://ncelp.org/>

⁸ Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

in England on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese. It is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the University College London Institute of Education in partnership with the British Council. From September 2022, a similar £4 million programme will run for Latin, delivered by Future Academies, with an aim of 'levelling-up' and allowing more state school pupils to learn the ancient language.

Languages remain strategically important for the future of all of us in the UK. A recent study (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2022) found that languages play a significant role in international trade and that not sharing a common language acts as a non-tariff trade barrier. A key finding of the study is that investing in languages education in the UK will most likely return more than the investment cost, even under conservative assumptions. The benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin or Spanish education, meaning that spending £1 could return approximately £2.

Current context in Scotland (for comparison)

Of the four countries of the UK, Scotland has the most distinct education system. Children attend a seven-year primary school followed by a five or six year secondary phase. Scotland appears to have embraced the most far reaching and ambitious approach of all UK nations to primary language provision. In 2012 the Scottish government introduced a '1+2 Approach' to primary languages, recommending a 1st additional language (L2) from Primary 1 and a second additional language (L3) from Primary 5. Full implementation is planned by 2021 (Scottish Government: Learning Directorate, 2017). Gaelic as an additional language is recognised as a potential L2 subject for some pupils. The strategy incorporates positive recognition of young people with a community language mother tongue: where both the acquisition of English and the continuation of mother tongue learning are anticipated. There are various initiatives to upscale teacher competence, such as the Open University courses for primary practitioners in French, German, Mandarin and Spanish, (Open, 2020) offered in cooperation with the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (SCILT), a partner of NICILT. Whilst the strategy seems laudable, its feasibility has been questioned (Murray, 2017) not least since funding is unsecure beyond 2021.

At post-primary, pupils are entitled to learn a language in the first three years, and they are to be provided with opportunities for full course certification at National 5 / Scottish Highers in years 4 and 5. National 5 specifications in Modern Languages available in eight languages (French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Spanish, Italian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Urdu). Modern Languages for Work Purposes and Modern Languages for Life and Work units are available in 10 languages, including Polish and Russian; these are particularly

suitable for the accreditation of L3. The same 8 languages are also available at National levels 2-4. In the senior Phase (S5-S6, Age 15-17), Scottish Higher qualifications which provide access to Higher Education are available in 8 languages (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2018). Advanced Higher qualifications, (Level 4 equivalent age 17-18) are available in 7 languages (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2015a), however these are not essential for University entrance. The Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages which, in addition to requiring linguistic competence in L2 and L3, has a vocational dimension which requires candidates to apply their skills in planning, implementing and evaluating a project (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2015b) is currently underdeveloped.

Current context in Wales (for comparison)

The approach throughout the school system in Wales is one of 'bilingual +1'; that is, all pupils are expected to learn English and Welsh (Education Reform Act, 1988) plus at least one Modern Foreign Language from Year 5 (Welsh Government, 2015). There is a commitment to increasing the number of pupils studying a modern foreign language at GCSE and A level and MFL is to be made available to all pupils for GCSE. The Welsh Bacc has no ML requirement, however the 'Individual Project' could comprise cross-curricular modern languages (Qualifications Wales, 2014).

Across Wales there continue to be decreases in the number of pupils studying A level French (-6% on 2017), German (-33%) and Spanish (-12%). Over one third of schools with post -16 provision have no pupils for MFL. The number of schools which have more than 6 pupils undertaking MFL has decreased since 2017.

In terms of government policy, the Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2021 – 2026 explicitly commits to expanding the teaching of international languages in schools, as well as increasing Welsh across all stages of education. Indeed, it is the Welsh government's ambition to push forward towards a million Welsh speakers.⁹

The new Curriculum for Wales will be introduced in primary schools for first teaching from September 2022, and thereafter rolled out in secondary schools in successive years. The Welsh Government's implementation plan, 'Curriculum for Wales: The journey to 2022' establishes shared expectations as to how schools should develop their new curriculum in the coming academic year.¹⁰

⁹ Welsh Government (2021)

¹⁰ Welsh Government (2020d)

Building on the Successful Futures (2015) review, the new Curriculum for Wales reconceptualises and integrates 'traditional' subjects into six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). Under this reform, 'modern foreign languages' are relabelled 'international languages' and integrated with Welsh and English as part of the AoLE 'languages, literacy and communication'. The implications of this are that primary school teachers across Wales will not be obligated to offer a language other than Welsh or English as part of the Key Stage 2 curriculum; the whole country will need to develop capacity to meet the new statutory curriculum.

Currently, the study of at least one international language is compulsory at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14) and offered as an option at Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 16). However, under the new Curriculum for Wales, schools will be required to ensure that learners make progress in at least one other international language from primary school. A non-statutory framework for Key Stage 2 is currently available to support schools.¹¹

However, despite the fact that at least one international language is compulsory at Key Stage 3, Wales is in the weakest position in terms of the uptake of international languages¹² at both GCSE and A level when compared to England and Northern Ireland. The uptake of Welsh as a second language (Welsh L2) at GCSE has evinced rapid growth in recent years.¹³ A contributing factor is the statutory status of Welsh across the entire period of compulsory education (ages 3 – 16).¹⁴

Current context in Northern Ireland

Whilst other UK nations have been investing in language learning on the school curriculum, Northern Ireland has been decreasing investment in language learning.

Language learning in Northern Ireland is only compulsory at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) and this is the shortest time for compulsory language learning in any country in the continent of Europe; the absence of languages on the primary curriculum is most notable. Like for all Areas of Learning at Key Stage 3, there is no guidance from government on how much time should be spent on language learning; it is at the discretion of individual School Principals to decide how time is allocated across the curriculum. We know from recent research (Collen,

¹¹ Welsh Government (2021a:121, §8.275)

¹² This analysis only compares the 'Big 3' – French, German and Spanish

¹³ Henderson and Carruthers (2021)

¹⁴ Jones (2019:5)

2021) that some non-selective schools offer less than one hour of contact time for languages at Key Stage 3.

In 2012, the Department of Education published the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy. The final strategy document fell short of calling for statutory primary languages, rather proposing in recommended action 2.1:

‘that pupils have the opportunity to study at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue from the earliest possible age and that all secondary pupils have the opportunity to study throughout their school career at least one language other than English’ (DE, 2012: 17).

The Northern Ireland Languages Strategy made eighteen key recommendations; to date none has been implemented at a system-wide level and UCETNI would go as far as to say that it is now redundant. Jones et al. (2017) more recently completed a review of primary languages in Northern Ireland and found that the majority of the school principals and teachers involved in the study believed that additional language learning should be included in the statutory curriculum. In this study, there was also criticism from some school leaders in relation to the Primary Modern Languages Programme. Several principals mentioned that poor communication between visiting peripatetic tutors and classroom teachers had hampered pupil progress. In particular, lack of joint planning with the classroom teacher was seen as a drawback to the programme, and in general, they highlighted a lack of progression in language learning. Recent research has also highlighted the need to value the home languages spoken by pupils in the primary school (Carruthers and Nandi, 2020, Jones et al., 2018, MuMullen et al., 2021).

There have been UK-wide proposals in 2020 from the British Academy, working with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK, for a National Languages Strategy¹⁵, including a number of proposals that relate specifically to Northern Ireland, to tackle the crisis in language learning.

In January 2020, a ‘New Decade New Approach’ (NDNA) agreement, endorsed by all of the main political parties in Northern Ireland, brought about the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly after three years of stasis. It comes at a significant period of uncertainty for Northern Ireland in terms of its place within the UK, and on the island of Ireland, and with

¹⁵ See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/>

international partners following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. Within the NDNA agreement, a commitment is given to introducing legislation to create a Commissioner to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language and to provide official recognition of the status of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland, as well as a further such Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition and to provide official recognition of the status of the Ulster Scots variety in Northern Ireland. The legislation also places a legal duty on the Department of Education Northern Ireland to encourage and facilitate the use of Ulster Scots in the education system (NDNA, 2020). The out-working of this agreement remains to be seen, and at the time of writing the two Commissioners are yet to be appointed.

A review of GCSE grading in Modern Foreign Languages (Ofqual, 2019) led to grade adjustments for GCSE French and German, but not Spanish, as of summer 2020 from awarding bodies in England. In late autumn 2019, the Department of Education commissioned CCEA¹⁶ Regulation to carry out a review of grading in French, German, Irish and Spanish at GCSE and A level. As part of the review, CCEA Regulation designed a student survey to gather views on GCSE and A level languages and their grading. They also invited individuals and organisations who have an interest in languages to submit their views. The GCSE review has been carried out; however, at the time of writing the results of CCEA's 2019 research are yet to be made available. The CCEA review of grading in A level French, German, Irish and Spanish has not started.

At Queen's University Belfast, AHRC-funded research as part of the Priority Area Leadership Fellowship for Modern Languages has highlighted the importance of supporting home languages in the NI primary system (Carruthers and Nandi, 2020) and the extent of the variation in uptake of languages in selective and non-selective schools and across different FSME quartiles (Henderson and Carruthers, 2021).

Jones (2021) argues that recent political developments in NI have opened a window of opportunity to foster needed curriculum development in regional, classical and international languages across all educational stages. Moreover, Brexit; the region's increasingly

¹⁶ CCEA: Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, a non-departmental public body funded by and responsible to the Department of Education.

multilingual demography; the impact of Covid-19 pandemic; and concerns about educational underachievement all serve to sharpen urgency.

Collen (2021) conducted a Northern Ireland-wide survey of primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, including surveying 1,528 young people from 38 schools, and found:

- Language teaching in primary schools all but collapsed due to Covid-19;
- The majority of Year 9 pupils found language learning online harder than their other subjects;
- Although motivation for language learning in Year 9 is high, almost all pupils do not see the potential for languages to be a part of their future careers;
- Grammar schools continue to devote much more time to compulsory language learning than secondary schools;
- Spanish is now the most popular language at A level and if current trends continue will soon overtake French for the top spot at GCSE;
- If current trends continue, it is likely that Irish will replace French in the next few years as the second most popular language at A level.

Initial Teacher Education for Modern Languages (11-18 age range) is delivered by Queen's University Belfast through a 36-week Post Graduate Certificate in Modern Languages, with an average of 20 student teachers annually across French, Irish and Spanish. It has become increasingly difficult, though not impossible, to recruit Germanists. The PGCE in Modern Languages at Queen's benefits from close and effective links with the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICILT), based at Queen's and funded by the Department of Education Northern Ireland.

- NICILT informs and supports post-primary teachers of modern languages; primary schools currently teaching or seeking to teach modern languages in primary schools; a range of other education-related parties and organisations; language learners; researchers; consultants and members of the general public who have a language-related query.
- NICILT supports educators in delivering the curriculum and in enhancing the learning experience of pupils. NICILT seeks to highlight the relevance of Key Stage 3 Areas of Learning within the broader European context, the importance of languages in Europe and the importance of Europe and the international world. We support

learning beyond Key Stage 3 and the development of pupils' cross-curricular skills of ICT and Communication and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

- NICILT supports the students and staff of the PGCE Modern Languages course at the University through the Resource Centre, professional advice and Teacher Professional Learning days.
- NICILT seeks to support teachers in raising the profile of modern languages in schools and colleges. NICILT provides events for pupils of languages in school and at the University. NICILT tailors its events and services to suit pupils and schools.

The PGCE in Modern Languages at Queen's also benefits from close and effective links with the School of Arts, English and Languages (AEL) at Queen's, where degrees, from undergraduate to doctoral, are offered in French, Irish, Portuguese and Spanish, as well as well-conceived Masters' and Doctoral programmes in Translation and Interpreting.

For many years the BEd (Primary) programme at Stranmillis University College has offered a specialist optional module in primary languages. Undergraduate student teachers taking this module must have a prerequisite qualification of a minimum of a very good language qualification at GCE AS level or equivalent. Many students enter the BEd programme with excellent language qualifications at A level, including, in recent years, in French, Irish, German, Spanish and Latin. These students are encouraged to develop their language skills throughout their course of study by taking courses at QUB Language Centre and Colleges of Further Education or online. They also have the option of spending a semester abroad developing their language skills while studying education in a partner institution. Stranmillis University College benefits from a strong suite of longstanding valued partnerships with universities across Europe, the United States and Asia. The college benefits from very successful global incoming and outgoing placement and exchange programmes funded by government and by the Erasmus and Turing schemes, while college-wide international staff mobility programmes are also very active. This infrastructure offers valuable scope for building vital teacher capacity in terms of developing language education provision in primary schools.

In autumn 2021, the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) inaugurated a Modern Languages Programme Board (PMLB) with representatives from business, HEIs, primary and post-primary schools. The PMLB currently has four key streams of work: (i) primary languages; (ii) languages at Key Stage 3; (iii) Qualifications; and (iv) an exploratory group specifically for Irish. It will be important that the Independent Review of Education seeks out the findings of this ongoing work.

Vision

UCETNI's vision chimes with the strategy set out in the British Academy's (2020) *Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills*.

UCETNI believes that Modern Languages need to be revitalised on the Northern Ireland Curriculum. This can only be achieved with proper funding through:

1. Primary languages becoming a statutory part of the Key Stage 2 Curriculum. This will require the development of levels of progression and other appropriate curricular and cross-curricular guidance for teachers and schools, as well as age and stage appropriate resources. Primary school pupils mainly learn implicitly, particularly younger learners. It is acknowledged this is a slow process requiring plentiful and high-quality language input. We know from recent research (Graham et al., 2017) that the ideal conditions for teaching languages in primary schools are a minimum of one hour of contact time per week, delivered by a teacher with degree-level proficiency in the language. However, the Northern Ireland Curriculum in Primary follows a skills-infused framework model and is unique among the four UK nations. Jones et al (2017) argue that successful language teaching in Northern Ireland's primary schools will require 1) a robust understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in Primary; 2) specialist pedagogical expertise relevant to the primary school context; **and** 3) a high level of teacher language competence. Therefore, a class teacher within the school, with relevant pedagogical knowledge and appropriate language competence is best placed to lead the development of provision across the school. In light of this, current provision in Initial Teacher Education (primary) including the specialist modules should be built upon strategically. Northern Ireland needs a funded specialist pathway for student teachers in primary with strong A-level qualifications in a language upon entry. Given the skill set of these students, such a pathway would be well placed to include preparation for working in multilingual classrooms with pupils with English as an Additional Language including newcomer pupils and refugees also;
2. A clear strategy for progression from primary language programmes to post-primary language provision;
3. A review of pedagogy of language teaching at Key Stage 3-level, including better guidance on the curriculum time required for young people to make progress in a language;
4. An overhaul of the CCEA GCSE specifications in French, German, Irish and Spanish, together with consideration of the introduction of GCSE qualifications in Polish and Portuguese;

5. Development and extension of the successful Modern Languages mentoring project for Year 10 pupils, currently run by NICILT in co-operation with undergraduate students of French, Irish and Spanish at Queen's University Belfast.
6. A German Excellence Programme and a Latin Excellence Programme, similar to programmes currently extant in England, to redress the imbalance in languages currently offered in schools here;
7. The introduction of a premium amount of funding to allow schools and Area Learning Communities to run languages classes with small numbers at A level.

UCETNI welcomes the Independent Review of Education's commitment to looking in more detail at modern languages. Colleagues from modern languages at Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College would be happy to meet with the review panel to further discuss the contents of this paper.

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