

## Foreign language skills will contribute to the successful development of enterprise in Ireland

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs launches its Report Languages & Enterprise

Foreign language skills will be important to the successful future development of enterprise in Ireland, with any deficit in this area resulting in firms failing to achieve their full potential. This is a key finding from a report launched today (8 June 2005) by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs which considers the role of languages skills in Ireland's future enterprise development.

While the report finds that there is currently no evidence of a deficit in the availability of language skills, it highlights the prospective future benefits for exports and FDI, flowing from an increased emphasis on language skills by the State and enterprise.

"If we neglect to ensure adequate availability of foreign language skills in Ireland, the opportunities of the global market will not be realised," commented Anne Heraty, Chairperson, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

"We must also continue to develop our foreign language skills to ensure that we are not at a competitive disadvantage in terms of our ability to attract foreign direct investment of the future," continued Ms Heraty.

The Enterprise Strategy Group's report stressed the importance of greater understanding of international markets. In this context the ability of Irish-based enterprises to communicate effectively with other nationalities and cultures can enhance their success. In addition, the availability of an internal supply of foreign language skills will enhance the attractiveness of Ireland as a location for foreign multi-nationals wishing to engage in international service activities.

The report also highlights the fact that current profile of languages being studied in the public education system, which is dominated by French at post-primary level, has arisen in an ad hoc manner and owes more to historical factors than any analysis of the needs of learners and the State.

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## Key Findings

The report considers the importance of foreign language skills for two key sectors of the Irish economy, namely exporting indigenous firms and foreign-owned firms engaged in international service activities.

- Many indigenous firms do not ascribe great value to foreign language skills. This may be a chicken-and-egg scenario where SMEs do not export to foreign language markets because they do not have language skills, and conversely they do not invest in language training because they are not exporting to those markets;
- Internationally-traded services is a growing component of FDI; as effective communication with customers is at the heart of service provision, the availability of an internal supply of foreign language skills will enhance the attractiveness of Ireland for foreign multi-nationals wishing to establish such activities;
- In 2004 the breakdown of all foreign language papers taken in the Leaving Certificate was French 75%, German 20%, Spanish 4% and Italian 0.5%. This language profile has not been aligned with that of the foreign markets offering the most potential for the future;
- Future policy on languages should take account of patterns of migration into Ireland. The pool of foreign language capability created by immigration should be recognised and utilised as a resource.

## Key Recommendations

- A National Languages Policy should be formulated by the Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), to provide an integrated and coherent approach to language education;
- The [Modern Languages in Primary Schools](#)<sup>1</sup> pilot programme should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum and made available to all primary schools;
- The [Post-Primary Languages Initiative](#)<sup>2</sup> should also be expanded and the existing language provision at post-primary level should be reviewed in the light of the lessons learnt, to increase the quality and value of the language learning experience for students;
- IBEC and Enterprise Ireland should build on the success of the Export Orientation Programme and consider how it might be expanded.

The report can be downloaded in full at <http://www.skillsireland.ie>

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<sup>1</sup> The **Modern Languages in Primary Schools** pilot programme was launched by the Dept. Education & Science in 1998 to introduce primary school children to foreign languages and is now operational in 390 schools nationwide.

<sup>2</sup> The **Post Primary Languages Initiative** was launched by the Dept. Education & Science in 2000 to diversify and enhance the teaching of languages in second level schools, with Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Russian as the target languages. It is now operational in over 400 schools.