



Expert Group on
Future Skills Needs

Languages and Enterprise

The Demand & Supply of Foreign Language Skills
in the **Enterprise Sector**

To the Minister for Enterprise,
Trade and Employment
and the Minister for Education
and Science

Forfás 

Languages and Enterprise

The Demand & Supply of Foreign Language Skills in the Enterprise Sector

A study for the

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

by Bridge Enterprise Development Limited

May, 2005

Foreword by Ms. Anne Heraty, Chairperson, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Discussions on skills in recent years have tended to be dominated by valid concerns in relation to the declining interest among young people in the pursuit of studies and careers in the fields of science, engineering and technology. This phenomenon has been the subject of much comment and scrutiny and a number of public and private initiatives have been introduced to address it. While this issue is still a source of concern, it is timely that a distinct and complementary skill-set should be assessed by the Expert Group to ensure that there is an understanding of the full range of skills that the enterprise sector will require in the future.

Over the past decade, Ireland's model of economic success has largely been an *inbound* one, focused on attracting investment into Ireland. For the future, we must develop an *outbound* model of engagement in which we globally market products and services originating in Ireland. The ability of Irish-based enterprise to communicate effectively with other nationalities and cultures will have a huge bearing on how successful we are in achieving this goal. Clearly, foreign language skills will play a crucial role here.

The recently published Enterprise Strategy report, "Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy", has stressed the importance for Irish enterprise of being "*closer to their customers*" in the future. Specifically, the report emphasises very strongly the need for enhancing Ireland's sales and marketing capability. To this end, the report observes that "*The ability to negotiate, transact business and develop customer relationships in languages other than English is also a basic requirement that must be addressed*". An important first step in addressing this issue is an assessment of the supply and demand of foreign language skills in the economy.

While the social and cultural importance of foreign language skills is well appreciated, less is known about its economic importance. Therefore this study has focused on the economic necessity of foreign language skills. Within this clearly defined scope, the study has concentrated on the demand-side of the equation so as to complement rather than duplicate a number of concurrent supply-side studies, principal among them being one undertaken by the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*.

Therefore, I am delighted to submit this report, on behalf of the *Expert Group on Future Skills Needs*, to Micheál Martin T.D., Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and to Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Education and Science.

I would like to thank all those from business, enterprise, education and public and private bodies who provided input to the study. Finally, I am particularly grateful to the members of the Steering Committee who generously contributed their time and expertise to guide this study through all its phases.



Ms. Anne Heraty
Chairperson

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
May, 2005.

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Executive Summary

A. Objectives

This study was commissioned by Forfás, on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, to investigate the importance of foreign languages for the future development of the enterprise sector of the Irish economy. Its objective was to assess whether Ireland is likely to experience a language-skills deficit that could impact adversely on key economic sectors, particularly in light of the growing importance of internationally-traded services for the economy. A key issue here is the extent to which English will suffice as a medium for future commerce.

B. Methodology

The research programme for this study comprised of an interview process, a questionnaire-based survey and national and international literature review.

Over 100 chief executives, senior human resources and technical managers in approximately 50 organisations within both the indigenous and foreign-owned sectors were consulted. A survey of IDA Ireland's client base was conducted and generated responses from over 150 companies; predominantly from companies with significant foreign language requirements in contact centres, shared services and internationally-traded services activities.

Demand from the indigenous sector was established primarily through interviews with a selected number of export-oriented companies and with a variety of enterprise and trade organisations, as well as with Enterprise Ireland.

Skills supply was established through a review of existing data and consultation with the Department of Education and Science, Forfás, Universities, Institutes of Technology and other supply-side experts.

C. Demand for Foreign Language Skills

C.1 Foreign-owned Sector

There are currently approximately 120 foreign-owned companies engaged in Shared Services, Contact Centre and Back-office Data Processing activities in Ireland (see Table A). Shared Service operations in Ireland cater for a wide range of functions including financial accounting and HR administration, typically for European sister companies within a US multinational, where English is the in-house language.

Table A: Multi-national Service Centres

Activity	Projects	Total Employment
Contact Centres (CCs)	56	14,000
Shared Services Centres (SSCs)	46	6,810
Back-office Data Processing Centres	18	2,470
Total	120	23,280

The international contact centres provide significant employment for Irish nationals in addition to the large numbers of non-nationals they employ. Typically, each contact centre will amalgamate coverage of a range of distinct regional markets, including English-speaking ones, in order to benefit from economies of scale. Clearly, Irish nationals are fully capable of filling those roles relating to the English-speaking markets. In addition, the front-office, “client-facing” activities are supported by a range of back-office functions such as IT, Accounting and HR, thus creating further employment opportunities for Irish nationals.

C.2 Survey of Foreign-owned Sector

Over 150 IDA Ireland client firms responded to the survey. A group of 20 companies, each employing more than 60 linguists, account for 80% of the overall number of employees among respondent companies using a foreign language for their work.

The key finding to emerge from the survey is that there is no evidence of a systemic problem in relation to the provision of foreign language skills for the FDI sector in Ireland at this time. The other findings were:

- Demand for foreign language skills is heavily concentrated in three areas:
 - i. Contact Centres;
 - ii. Shared Services Centres; and
 - iii. Customer Service/Technical Support functions within the ICT sector.
- Over 80% of demand in these language-intensive centres is for native speakers of foreign languages. In companies with 60 or more linguists, the proportion of native speakers exceeds 90%. Consequently, these roles are predominantly filled by non-nationals using their mother tongues rather than Irish people with foreign language skills;
- Native speakers of German, French, Spanish and Italian are increasingly being recruited from the pool of non-nationals now resident in Ireland. People with Nordic, Eastern European and Asian languages are largely recruited in their native country¹;
- Little evidence emerged of unsatisfied demand for Irish employees with language skills; ergo foreign nationals recruited for their native language skills do not displace Irish workers;
- The respondent companies expect to employ an additional 1,000 language workers by 2006². The fluency requirements will be predominantly at native speaker level;
- The major issue in growth considerations for these companies currently is the overall cost competitiveness of Ireland. In relation to recruitment, the main source of difficulty is the relatively high cost of living in Ireland, rather than the availability of potential employees with the requisite language skills.

C.3 Future Needs of the Foreign-owned Sector

IDA Ireland is now focusing on foreign investment that will create high quality employment in Ireland. Increasingly, services in all forms will be embraced by this strategy. Activities being targeted include Internationally-Traded Services; Sales and Marketing for the EMEA³ regions; Business Process Outsourcing and European headquarter functions. The requirement for a professional qualification, allied with foreign language capability, which need not be at native fluency level, means that these activities will offer high quality employment for Irish workers.

1 FÁS and private recruitment agencies support this international recruitment.

2 This increase in employment is based on the projected organic growth of the respondents to the survey; it does not account for growth across the full population of IDA Ireland client companies, nor does it allow for new green field investments.

3 Europe, Middle-East and Africa.

C.4 Trade and Foreign Languages

Irish exporters have fared appreciably better in English-speaking markets than in foreign-language ones in recent years. While 61.3% of overall Irish exports went to foreign language markets in 2003⁴, only 38% of Enterprise Ireland clients' exports went to foreign language markets⁵. Furthermore, overall exports to English-speaking markets increased by 54% over the period 1998-2003, whereas those going to foreign-language markets grew by just 37%.

Several factors could contribute to this pattern, including varying economic performances in the different markets, geographical distance to markets, profile of Ireland's manufacturing base, exchange rate movements *etc.* Nevertheless, the degree to which Ireland's poorer performance in foreign language markets may, at least in part, be attributable to weaknesses in foreign language skills, particularly within indigenous enterprise, warrants consideration. There is empirical evidence from a number of recent international surveys for a link between linguistic ability and export success⁶.

C.5 Future Needs of the Indigenous Sector

The foreign language requirements of the indigenous sector are quite distinct from those of the foreign-owned, multi-national sector. They stem principally from sales and marketing activities, particularly when directed at foreign-language markets. The key findings relating to this sector are that:

- Indigenous enterprise generally, with the exception of the Food/Drink and Engineering sectors, does not ascribe great value to foreign language skills currently;
- Where foreign languages are required, generally this does not need to be at native-speaker proficiency levels;
- When native level fluency *is* required, firms engage the services of local native speakers as translators;
- While cautioning about an oversimplification of the situation, it is possible that a chicken-and-egg scenario arises: SMEs do not export sufficiently 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.

While Enterprise Ireland (EI) believes that foreign language skills are important for increased penetration of the continental marketplace, they acknowledge that their clients do not at present tend to share this view. For example, an EI programme to develop greater language capability and cultural awareness among their clients attracted only 12 firms even though 1,000 were canvassed.

The importance of this issue is re-enforced by a 2003 survey⁷ of foreign managers based in Ireland of their views of their native Irish counterparts. The survey found that foreign managers considered lack of cultural awareness and language competency to be significant shortcomings in Irish management capability.

D. Supply of Foreign Language Skills

This section summarises the main sources of language skills supply in Ireland, from both the public and private sectors.

D.1 Primary Level

The national pilot project, Modern Languages in Primary Schools, is operational in 390 schools, and provides access to foreign language tuition to around 20,000 children. The embedding of foreign language provision in the primary curriculum is a hugely important foundational component of Ireland's language infrastructure.

4 CSO statistics.

5 Enterprise Ireland statistics.

6 *Languages at Work 2002*, Language Advantage Organisation, www.languageadvantage.com/surveys (April 2005).
The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business, British Chambers of Commerce, 2003.

7 *Can Irish Management Compete - A survey of senior expatriate managers in Ireland*, Torc Consulting Group, Cranfield University School of Management, November 2003.

This report recommends that the pilot programme should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum and made available to all primary schools.

D.2 Post-primary Level

The European Commission has identified post-primary education as being particularly critical for the development of language skills, for it is here that the core of an individual's foreign language ability is usually developed.

- Almost 42,000 foreign language papers were taken in the Leaving Certificate in 2004. This figure actually exceeds, in absolute terms, the numbers taking A-level language papers in the UK (33,000)⁸.
- Between 1999 and 2004, there was a decline of 16% in the number of foreign language papers taken at Leaving Certificate level due to demographic factors;
- In 2004 75% of students taking a foreign language choose French while 20% took German, 4.0% took Spanish and 0.4% took Italian.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative has been very successful in diversifying and enhancing the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools. The initiative is promoting Spanish, Italian, Japanese and, more recently, Russian. Over 200 schools and 15,000 students are participating in the pilot.

This report recommends that the Post-Primary Languages Initiative should be expanded and that 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.

The significant foreign language capability among young people completing second-level is not being utilised to good effect by enterprise, nor is it being developed at third level. Consequently there is a strong likelihood that individuals' language ability will atrophy within a short time of leaving school.

The high proportion of Irish students studying foreign languages at the end of the second cycle (significantly higher than that in the UK) is attributed⁹ primarily to the National University of Ireland's matriculation requirement for a foreign language. Thus, any relaxation of this requirement is likely to have a very detrimental impact on the take-up of foreign languages at second-level, and thereafter at third-level.

D.3 Third Level

Enrolment in third-level language courses has been in decline in recent years, particularly in institutes of technology. There was an 18% decline in the numbers accepting languages courses offered through the CAO system between 1999 and 2002. A number of business and language courses were withdrawn for 2003-4 due to the low number of applicants.

The EU Erasmus Programme is an important mechanism for developing language capability, concurrently with a professional third level qualification. The programme gives students the opportunity to spend up to a year abroad to improve their language skills and cultural awareness. However the number of third level students availing of the programme, at about 1,250 annually, is very small relative to the numbers taking foreign languages at Leaving Certificate.

D.4 National Language Policy

The 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, in the contemporary economic, social or cultural

⁸ A recent benchmarking exercise by the NCCA and their UK counterpart determined that a Leaving Certificate subject corresponded to 2/3 of an A-level one.

⁹ Languages in the Post-primary Curriculum, NCCA, 2003.

context. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative is a very worthwhile attempt to redress this imbalance. However, there is a pressing requirement for a national languages policy and a formal enunciation of the optimum language profile at post-primary. This concern motivates one recommendation of this report, namely that a National Languages Policy should be formulated by the relevant stakeholders.

D.5 Reference Frameworks

An issue that arose during the course of this study is the objective assessment and comparison of language proficiency levels. Terms such as 'fluent', 'intermediate' and 'basic' do not have a universal interpretation. The *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEF) for measuring language proficiency is a major advance in this regard. This report recommends linking the CEF with the National Framework of Qualifications as this would be an important step in developing a route-map to language learning with a flexible award system.

E. Other Sources of Foreign Language Skills

E.1 IBEC Export Orientation Programme

This programme is targeted at recent third level graduates and provides them with a placement abroad with an Irish company. IBEC short-lists about 200 applicants for the EOP per annum from graduates, but usually less than 100 are placed with sponsoring companies annually. IBEC marketed the programme more actively in 2004 with the aim of increasing placements to about 150 graduates.

E.2 Non-nationals

Since the late 1990's Ireland has experienced substantial inward migration of foreign nationals, the majority of whom are from countries where English is not the mother-tongue. The broad range of native and (non-native) languages spoken by these immigrants constitutes a largely untapped pool of language capability available to Irish enterprise.

F. The Business Case for Foreign Language Skills

Based on international research there is a substantial business case for developing foreign language skills. While it is difficult to quantify loss of business due to the lack of foreign language proficiency, UK experience suggests that language capability is a key factor in determining export success:

*"One in five businesses is aware of losing business as a consequence of a lack of language skills. One in two is encountering barriers to trade because of a lack of language or cultural skills. ... In a nutshell, doing nothing about languages is harming the competitiveness and profitability of UK companies."*¹⁰

A global survey entitled 'Languages at Work 2002' conducted by the Language Advantage Organisation in the UK, which involved 585 firms from 50 countries using 90 languages, revealed that 20% of respondents estimated that they had lost business because they did not have adequate language or cultural skills. Eight companies estimated they had each lost over \$1 million of business due to language and cultural mis-communication¹¹.

A recent report¹², based on a survey of 1,000 British exporters, established a positive correlation between the importance attached to in-house language skills firms and their performance. It went on to claim that *"poor language skills and a lack of cultural understanding of overseas markets are stunting UK growth"*.

¹⁰ Dr Anne Davidson Lund, Assistant Director, Business and Life Long Learning Strategy, CLT, the National Centre for Languages UK speaking at the Multilingual City Forum Conference, Sheffield, 2003.

¹¹ www.languageadvantage.com/surveys (Jan. 2005).

¹² The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business Part II, *British Chamber of Commerce*, 2004.

The REFLECT study¹³ found that 9% of Irish SMEs, who were already exporting, were aware that they had lost business as a direct result of a language or cultural barrier. This does not take account of the number of SMEs that had missed business opportunities as a direct result of a language or cultural barrier but were not aware of it.

75% of the world's population do not speak any English and 94% do not speak it as their mother-tongue. A firm that can interact with potential customers in their native tongue will automatically have a competitive edge over one who cannot.

Finally, a key element of an innovation-driven economy is the sharing and amalgamation of knowledge through international networking and collaboration. Linguistic fluency will greatly facilitate this process.

G. Conclusions

This study did not uncover evidence of an acute shortage of language skills in those sectors of the Irish economy within its scope at the present time. These sectors are the enterprise sectors represented by the clients of IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. However, it did identify some important considerations which, taken together, suggest that it would be short-sighted if either policy-makers, or businesses, wishing to promote international commerce from Ireland, were to adopt a complacent approach to this issue. These considerations flow from the future requirements of both the indigenous and foreign-owned enterprise sectors.

Foreign-owned Enterprise

- Services, and internationally-traded services in particular, will play an increasingly important role as a driver of future economic development in Ireland;
- Service transactions generally involve a high level of human interaction and therefore require sophisticated communication skills; for some markets, this will necessitate foreign language proficiency;
- Foreign language skills, sourced primarily from non-nationals, are already supporting an important component of foreign-owned enterprise, that contributes significantly to the Irish economy, both in terms of employment opportunities for Irish nationals, and revenue generated for the exchequer through personal and corporate taxation;
- The proven ability of multinationals to provide multi-lingual services from Ireland, in such a diverse range of languages augurs well for the growth of higher added-value activities, with a foreign language element;
- The availability of an internal supply of foreign language skills will bolster future efforts to attract FDI in activities such as Internationally-Traded Services; Business Process Outsourcing; Sales and Marketing for EMEA regions; and European Headquarters functions for US multi-nationals.

Indigenous Enterprise

- Indigenous firms, by and large, do not currently ascribe great value to foreign language skills. There is evidence, both national and international, to suggest that firms may be losing out on export opportunities as a result. Often, a chicken-and-egg scenario develops wherein 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;

- International business relationships will be crucial to indigenous enterprise in the future. Success in marketing and selling Irish goods and services will be contingent on the ability of the indigenous sector to establish and maintain close relationships with customers in global markets; in addition, partnerships and collaborations with foreign enterprises will be key drivers of innovation and growth;
- Irish firms with in-house language expertise will be at a considerable advantage in forging such relationships. Firms without such expertise will find it more difficult to move “*closer to their customers*”, as advocated by the Enterprise Strategy Group¹⁴;

S u p p l y

- There is a significant pool of foreign language capability present among those completing the Leaving Certificate currently; however, it is rapidly dissipated due to the failure of enterprise and the individuals themselves to capitalise on it. Furthermore, this resource is precarious; it is sustained by the matriculation requirements of the NUI and any further moves to relax this requirement¹⁵ are likely to be highly detrimental to the take-up of languages at second level;
- Significant public resources are already allocated to language tuition; furthermore students at all levels are already investing a significant amount of time and effort into the study of languages. What is required is a revaluation of existing language provision in order to ensure that both the State and the individual students are deriving the maximum benefit from their respective investments;
- Future policy on languages should take account of the extent and likely continuance of migration into Ireland. The pool of foreign language capability created by immigration should be viewed and utilised as a resource.

¹⁴ Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy, *Forfás*, 2004.

¹⁵ With effect from 2003/4, NUI Maynooth accepts any recognised subject in place of the third language for engineering courses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: National Languages Policy

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, in all learning contexts. This policy should be driven by the cultural, social and economic needs of learners and the state. In particular, it should be cognisant of the future requirements of the enterprise sector, as identified by the development agencies and industry associations.

Recommendation 2: Language Education

- i. The work of the NCCA in reviewing the senior cycle is strongly endorsed, in particular as it relates to a new approach to language education at second level;
- ii. The Modern Languages in Primary Schools pilot programme should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum and made available to all primary schools;
- iii. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative should likewise 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;
- iv. The importance of foreign languages as a life-skill, as a promoter of cultural awareness and as a means of enhancing the value of other skills, be they intellectual or vocational, must be reflected in the teaching of languages at all levels of the education system.

Recommendation 3: Language Careers

IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and IBEC should collaborate to build up a portfolio of case-studies of the range of career opportunities open to those with foreign language skills. This portfolio should be made available to career guidance teachers, with appropriate backup, for dissemination to students.

Recommendation 4: Frameworks

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), in collaboration with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the NCCA, and the State Examinations Commission (SEC), should reference language competency as measured by the Common European Framework of Reference to the *National Framework of Qualifications*.

Recommendation 5: Awards

Subsequent to the implementation of Recommendation 4, FETAC, HETAC, the universities, DIT and the SEC, in consultation with the NQAI, should devise an appropriate award matrix for language learning by referencing each of their own awards, including grading/classification within these, as appropriate, within the National Framework of Qualifications against the Common European Framework of Reference. A key benefit of this exercise would be a better awareness and appreciation among employers and students alike of the language value inherent in particular courses.

Recommendation 6: IBEC European Orientation Programme

IBEC and Enterprise Ireland should capitalise on the success of the European Orientation Programme to date and consider how it might be expanded. For students, it provides clear evidence of the link between language skills and career options, and for enterprise it demonstrates how language skills can contribute to export success.

1 Introduction

Forfás, acting on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, commissioned Bridge Enterprise Development Ltd. to undertake a study into the importance of foreign languages for the future development of the enterprise sector. Its objective was to assess whether Ireland is likely to experience a language-skills deficit that could impact adversely on the future development of key economic sectors. A key issue here is the extent to which English will suffice as a *lingua franca*¹⁶ for future commerce.

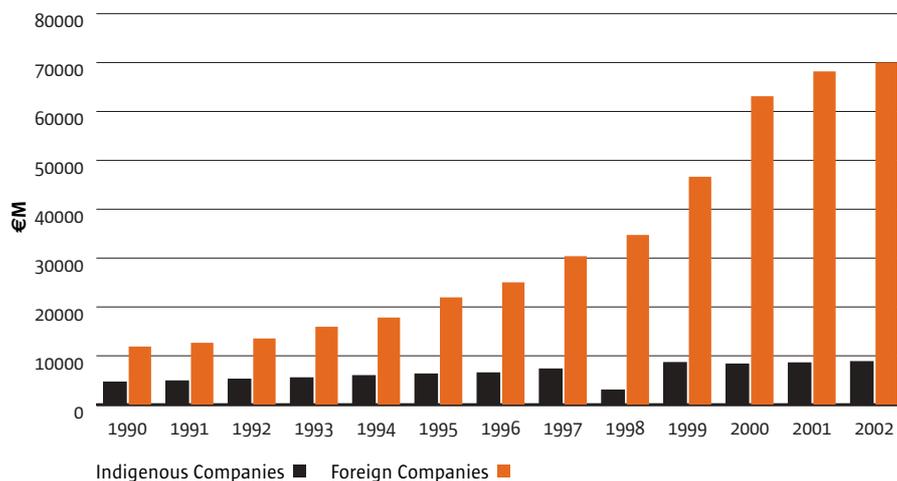
In undertaking this study, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) fully acknowledges the broad value of languages skills. Clearly, foreign language skills have extremely important cultural, social and personal development dimensions that extend beyond their strictly vocational and economic importance. In view of the mandate of the EGFSN however, the scope of the present study was largely limited to the role of foreign language skills in economic development. Some broader, life-skill benefits accruing from the acquisition of foreign language proficiency are considered in Section 5. These aspects were addressed comprehensively in a concurrent, supply-side study commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)¹⁷.

1.1 Background

The increasing importance of services to economic growth

The dramatic growth in Irish exports, particularly from the foreign-owned sector, over the course of the Celtic Tiger years is illustrated by Figure 1. Currently, these exports are dominated by high value products from the foreign-owned sector such as pharmaceuticals and software. However, over the coming decade exports in services are likely to constitute an increasingly more significant component of Irish trade.

Figure 1: Exports (Agency Assisted Companies) 1990-2002



Reproduced from "Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy", Forfás, 2004

¹⁶ A hybrid of European and Eastern languages spoken in the Mediterranean ports from the middle ages.

¹⁷ *Languages in the Post Primary Curriculum – a discussion document*. David Little, NCCA, 2003.

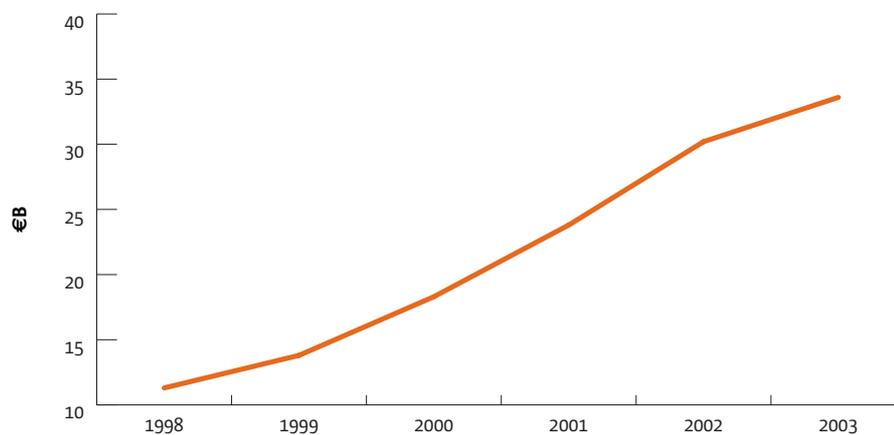
The report of the Enterprise Strategy Group¹⁸ notes that ‘over the period to 2015, internationally-traded service activity will become increasingly important for indigenous and foreign-owned operations in Ireland. Growth in the sector will be driven by reduced barriers to trade, advances in communications technology, and Ireland’s corporate tax regime’. The rapid growth in the value of Irish exports in services in recent years is already evident from Figure 2.

Furthermore, services already feature prominently in IDA Ireland’s strategy of attracting FDI for knowledge-intensive activities:

“If we are to continue that line of development, which is logical for the future, the swing towards knowledge-driven and innovation-based industries is essential. In effect that means Ireland gradually moving to be a high-value services economy rather than the traditional manufacturing base.”

Sean Dorgan, IDA Ireland CEO, June, 2003.

Figure 2: Nominal Irish Services Exports (1998-2003)



Source: Balance of International Payments, CSO

Communication a key characteristic of services activity

A service transaction generally involves a high level of human interaction. Providing a service is therefore, at its most elementary level, about communication and language competency is at the heart of effective communication. The English language is now ubiquitous in many aspects of contemporary international business and enterprise. The extent to which it will attain the status of a *lingua franca* in commerce in the years ahead however, is unclear. The more that such services are aimed at foreign language markets the greater is the likelihood of a need for foreign language skills supply within the economy.

A European Commission survey¹⁹ on the perceived importance of a second (non-native) language, among the 15-24 year old cohort in European countries, ranked Ireland second lowest (ahead of the UK). This finding accords with the recorded decline in interest in foreign languages at both second and third level in Ireland in recent years. These factors suggests that a view exists, at least within certain sections of the population, that English will indeed suffice for successful economic activity in the future and consequently for employment also. A corollary of this may be a belief among students, as well as their parents and guidance counsellors, that no material benefits will accrue to them from the study of a foreign language.

¹⁸ Ahead of the Curve: Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy, Forfás, 2004.

¹⁹ European Report on the Quality of School Education, European Commission, 2000.

The need to assess future foreign language skills demand

So against this backdrop of declining interest in languages, the internationally-traded services component of Ireland's economy is becoming ever more important. Therefore, it is vital that the future requirement for language skills necessary to support this activity is assessed and quantified, lest an inadequate supply of skills becomes a constraint on Ireland's future growth.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The principal objectives of the study were as follows:

- i. To identify any mismatch in the quantity or quality of the skill-base in foreign languages available in Ireland which would have implications for sustaining the current economic activity reliant on language skill and for the future development of specific sectors of the economy; and
- ii. To inform future strategy for the provision of language education in Ireland.

The consultants were asked to develop prescriptive solutions in respect of any identified current or forecast deficiency in the area of foreign languages supply. The study focused on establishing current and forecast demand, complementing the concurrent supply-side study carried out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

1.3 Methodology

The study comprised three elements: an interview process, a questionnaire-based survey and a literature review.

A series of direct consultations took place, involving over 100 individuals in more than 50 organisations. The level of contact was with chief executives, senior human resources and technical managers, identified in consultation with Forfás, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, recruitment consultants and through enterprise associations. The full list of organisations consulted is provided in Appendix 1.

In order to estimate the level of current and future demand in the foreign-owned sectors a questionnaire was designed to capture information on companies' language requirements – by language, business function and degree of language proficiency. The questionnaire was accompanied by the definition of language proficiency adopted by the Council of Europe²⁰. IDA Ireland distributed the Questionnaire and Language Proficiency definitions to its entire client base of over 1,000 companies.

Over 150 usable responses were received, mainly from companies with a significant foreign language requirement and predominantly engaged in Shared Services, Contact and Back Office Processing Centres activities.

In view of its size and diversity, the indigenous sector was investigated primarily by means of interviews with a selected number of companies that use foreign languages, with Enterprise Ireland, and with industry and trade organisations.

Existing data was used to establish the situation in regard to supply, supplemented by consultation with the Department of Education and Science, members of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Universities and Institutes of Technology and other supply-side experts. The study was also informed by an extensive review of relevant national and international literature.

This study focused specifically on the enterprise sector of the Irish economy, using the client base of IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland as a representative sample. Foreign language skills requirements in sectors such as hospitality and tourism, as well as the public service, were not explicitly considered as part of this study.

²⁰ From the *Common European Framework (CEF) of Reference*. It was developed and approved by Council member states as a reference framework to facilitate the assessment and benchmarking of language competence, from the most elementary to the most fluent. It is based on six levels within three broad bands relating to specialist, functional and foundation language skills - all of which carry a precise definition. The Language Proficiency Definitions are provided in Appendix 2.

2 Demand for Foreign Language Skills

This section examines the nature of the demand for foreign language skills in the Irish economy and presents the findings of the primary research. It uses the natural dichotomy between the foreign-owned (FDI) sector and the indigenous one, as the nature of demand in each is quite distinct. For the FDI sector, these findings are based on a combination of survey and interview processes; for the indigenous sector they are based solely on an interview process. Finally, the section comments on the complementary role of foreign language skills to other more job-specific skills within business and how such skills affect employability.

As outlined in Section 1, international services will become increasingly important to future Irish economic activity. These may be services with little or no connection to local manufacturing and involve several functions within the value-chain of a manufacturer, spanning supply-chain management to customer relationship management, including, marketing, sales, customer support *etc.* Alternatively, they could embrace the full range of corporate services (HR, treasury *etc.*) for the parent multi-national itself or, indeed for another multi-national who chooses to out-source such functions.

As communication, and hence language skills, are central to services, it is imperative that the State understands, and is in a position to satisfy, the requirements of the enterprise sector in relation to services aimed at foreign language markets.

In assessing overall demand, it is useful to make a distinction between foreign-owned enterprise in Ireland and indigenous enterprise. Given the relatively small size of the domestic Irish market, most Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country is motivated by access to European Union and wider international markets. In contrast, indigenous enterprise is initially focused on the Irish market and later moves into the UK as its natural first export destination. Any focus on Continental European markets by Irish companies usually follows on from success in the Irish and UK markets. The analysis of demand therefore begins with the foreign-owned sector in Ireland.

2.1 The Foreign-owned Sector

The importance of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the Irish economy is illustrated by a few key statistics from IDA Ireland's end of year statement for 2004: direct employment in 1,022 IDA Ireland supported companies was 128,946, with sales of €72.0 billion (2003) and exports of €68.0 billion (2003), which constituted 83% of all Irish exports for that year.

2.1.1 Identifying the sources of demand

When disaggregating demand for foreign languages in the foreign-owned enterprise, business function makes for a more useful unit of analysis than enterprise sector. Sectoral distinctions are less meaningful when comparing foreign language job specifications in teleservices businesses between say airlines, financial institutions and hotels. All three represent very different sectors but carry similar foreign language specifications in their customer service teleservices functions. What matters is the span of sophistication involved in the service provision. From the perspective of long-term viability in Ireland, the degree of value-added in the business is just as important for service businesses as it is within the manufacturing sector.

Internationally-Traded Services

Ireland positioned itself as an early mover into the emerging services activities during the 1990s. IDA Ireland recognised that advances in computing and telecommunications would facilitate and

accelerate centralisation of business services across borders and continents. Ireland followed a trend already established in the US and set out to build new economic activities around it. This strategy has proven to be a highly successful one.

There are currently approximately 120 foreign-owned companies engaged in Shared Services, Contact Centre and Back-office Data Processing activities in Ireland (see Table 1). Shared Service Centres operations in Ireland cater for a wide range of functions including financial accounting and HR administration, typically for European sister companies within a US multinational, where English is the in-house language.

Table 1: Multi-national Service Centres

Activity	Projects	Total Employment
Contact Centres (CCs)	56	14,000
Shared Services Centres (SSCs)	46	6,810
Back-office Data Processing Centres	18	2,470
Total	120	23,280

These international contact centres provide significant employment for Irish nationals in addition to the large numbers of non-nationals they employ. Typically, each contact centre will amalgamate coverage of a range of distinct regional markets, including English-speaking ones, in order to benefit from economies of scale. Clearly, Irish nationals are fully capable of filling those roles relating to the English-speaking markets. In addition, the front-office, “client-facing” activities are supported by a range of back-office functions such as IT, Accounting and HR, thus creating further employment opportunities for Irish nationals.

In summary, contact centres make a significant contribution to the Irish economy, both in terms of employment opportunities for Irish nationals, as well as revenue generated for the exchequer through personal and corporate taxation.

Languages and Business Process Outsourcing

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is a practice that is growing worldwide. The essence of BPO is that back-office support functions are subcontracted to an external contractor rather than being executed “in-house”. Traditional concerns about security, and cultural biases towards keeping all activity in-house, are waning. Most companies begin outsourcing of business processes in areas that are well removed from core competencies and are easily separated from other processes. Payroll, accounts payable, IT systems, and customer contact centres are examples of such processes.

The attraction of BPO for firms is that it offers the prospects of immediate cost savings due to the competitive tendering for contracts, it provides greater flexibility in its operations and allows firms to focus on their core competencies that directly create added-value.

One manifestation of this trend is the growth in Ireland of outsourced contact centre activity. Of the 56 overseas-owned contact centres in Ireland which together employ 14,000 people, nine are contract (i.e. outsourced) contact centres employing 2,300 people. Although on a smaller scale currently, the advent of contracted out Shared Services and Back-office Data Processing centres in Ireland is a further manifestation of the BPO trend.

2.1.2 The FDI Company Survey

IDA Ireland distributed a survey questionnaire and an explanatory note on the Common European Framework of Reference (Appendix 2) to approximately 1,000 companies, on their language skills requirements, across all the sectors that make up the population of IDA Ireland-assisted companies.

The majority of these firms do not have a significant foreign language dimension to their Irish activity; nevertheless it was decided to survey the full cohort of companies to ensure that all pockets of demand for languages were identified. The survey was followed up with an intensive telephone campaign, with a particular focus on known foreign language intensive companies.

Survey findings

Over 150 IDA companies responded to the survey. A group of 20 companies, each employing more than 60 linguists, account for 80% of the overall number of employees among respondent companies using a foreign language for their work. Some of the respondent companies, particularly those with small numbers of employees, indicated that some employees possess some foreign language ability not actually being used on a daily basis.

The key finding to emerge from the survey is that there is no evidence of a systemic problem in relation to the availability of foreign language skills for the FDI sector in Ireland at this time. The other findings of the survey were:

- Demand for foreign language skills is heavily concentrated in three areas:
 - i. Contact Centres;
 - ii. Shared Services Centres; and
 - iii. Customer Service/Technical Support functions within the ICT sector.
- Over 80% of demand in these language-intensive centres is for native speakers of foreign languages. These roles are predominantly filled by non-nationals using their mother tongues rather than Irish people with foreign language skills. In companies with 60 or more linguists, the proportion of native speakers exceeds 90%;
- Native speakers of German, French, Spanish and Italian are increasingly being recruited from the pool of non-nationals now resident in Ireland. People with Nordic, Eastern European and Asian languages are largely recruited in their native country²¹;
- Employee turnover among staff recruited overseas is a concern because of the associated recruitment costs;
- The requirement for foreign languages is significantly lower in Shared Services Centres than in Contact Centres. Specifically, only 30% of staff in the Shared Services sample required foreign languages, compared with 72% in the Contact Centre sample; This is attributable to the fact that Contact Centres, by their very nature, involve intensive telephone-based work, typically with external customers, whereas Shared Services Centres deal predominantly with internal customers in a multi-national, within which English is the working language;
- There is a small demand for Irish people with foreign language skills in management roles where native levels of fluency is not required;
- Little other evidence emerged of unsatisfied demand for Irish employees with language skills; ergo foreign nationals recruited for their native language skills do not displace Irish workers;
- The respondent companies expect to employ an additional 1,000 language workers by 2006²²;
- Longer-term, demand is difficult to predict because companies are reluctant to commit to specific projections at present;
- The major issue in growth considerations for these companies currently is the overall cost competitiveness of Ireland. In relation to recruitment, the main source of difficulty is the relatively high cost of living in Ireland, rather than the availability of potential employees with the requisite language skills.

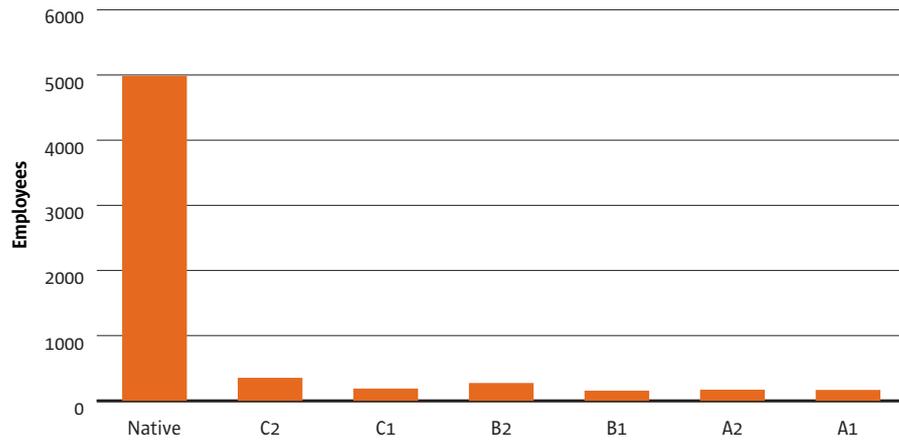
21 FÁS and private recruitment agencies support this international recruitment.

22 This increase in employment is based on the projected organic growth of the respondents to the survey; it does not account for growth across the full population of IDA Ireland client companies, nor does it allow for new green field investments.

Current levels of foreign language competency in respondent companies

The FDI survey data from respondent companies are analysed below by Current Language Proficiency; Languages in Use; and Projected Demand to 2006. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of language proficiency from the survey with respect to *Common European Framework of Reference*.

Figure 3: Foreign Language Competencies in FDI Companies



The competency levels A1 to C2 in the CEF are widely accepted for measuring language ability, as well as providing a single system for monitoring language progression across a wide range of learning methods. It is worth noting that while the CEF spans all the levels from beginner to accomplished linguist, the levels A1 and A2 are fairly basic for the purpose of a business application and would have limited real application. If they are eliminated from the competency ranges shown above then the dominance of native fluency is accentuated even further.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of languages among the cohort of current employees in the companies responding to the survey.

Figure 4: Languages by Employee Numbers – FDI Companies

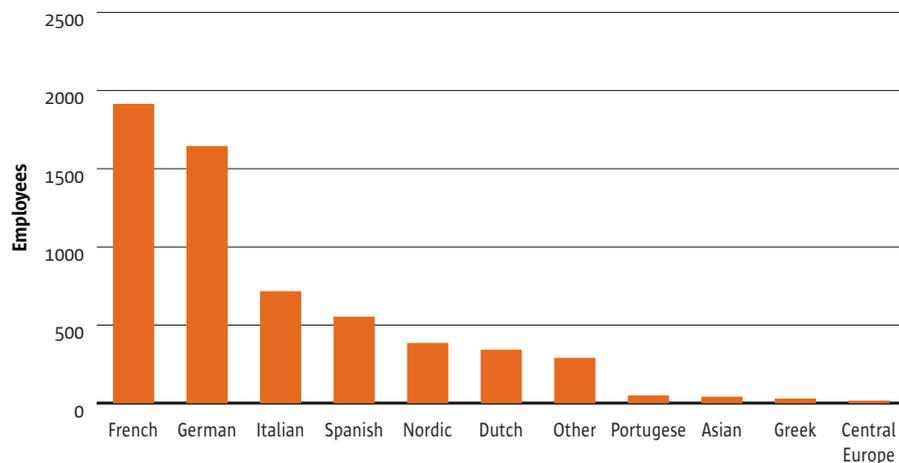
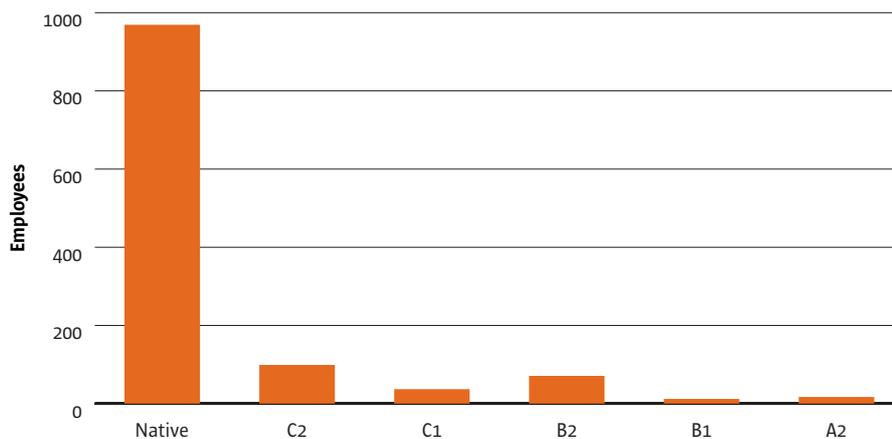


Figure 5 provides the breakdown of projected demand for language skills to 2006.

Figure 5: Projected Language Demand to 2006



The dominance of native standard in the competency requirement is striking; the requirement for other levels is insignificant in comparison. However, it must be emphasised again that most companies interviewed pointed to Ireland's international cost competitiveness as the single most important determinant of their employment levels over the medium-term.

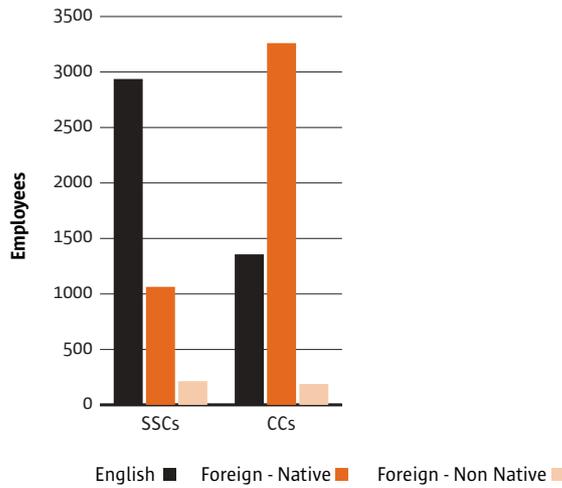
Differing Needs between Categories of Service Centres

There is an important distinction between Contact Centres (CCs) and Back-office/Data Processing Centres on the one hand, and Shared Services Centres (SSCs) on the other. Much of the activity in Contact Centres revolves around intensive telephone-based interactions with external customers. Similarly, back-office/data processing operations generally deal with external customers; examples include the insurance claim processing carried out by the Irish operations of Aetna, CIGNA and PacificCare or magazine subscription processing such as in McGraw-Hill's operation. However, most of the work in Shared Services Centres involves processing activities on behalf of affiliates in Europe, Middle-East and Africa (EMEA) or elsewhere, typified by the Irish operations of Citigroup and Xerox. They are dealing with colleagues, or internal customers, located in sister operations.

In order to establish if there are any differences in language needs between these categories of operations this study examined the responses from a set of larger companies collectively employing over 9,000 people, but breaking down as 4,200 in Shared Services Centres and 4,800 in Contact Centres.

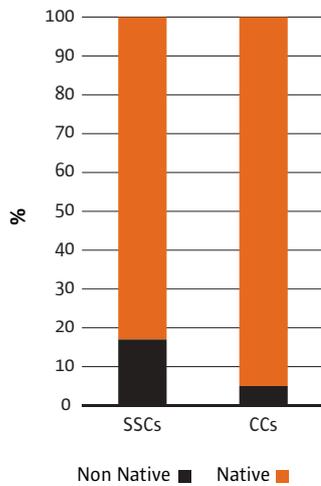
Two clear findings emerged. First, the requirement for foreign languages is significantly lower in Shared Services Centres than in Contact Centres. Second, where languages are required the proportion of native speakers is lower in Shared Services Centres than in Contact Centres. Shared Service Centres in Ireland look after a wide range of functions such as accounting and HR administration for European sister companies typically within a US multinational where English is the in-house language. The sample revealed that only 30% of staff in Shared Services Centres required foreign languages in contrast with 72% in the Contact Centre sample. These findings are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Foreign Language Requirements of SSCs & CCs



In relation to the level of proficiency, 83% of those using foreign languages in Shared Services Centres are native speakers by contrast with 95% in Contact Centres; this breakdown is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Irish Linguist Participation



2.1.3 Analysis of Findings

The significance of the key finding that demand is predominantly for native speakers is that from the viewpoint of the Irish educational system there is no demand/supply imbalance currently. The market requires native speakers and by definition, the Irish educational system cannot supply native speakers. This is not a shortcoming of the Irish educational system, it is simply a reflection of the nature of demand.

The demand for native language skills is being met from a combination of two sources. First, companies looking for French, German, Spanish and Italian are drawing upon the growing pool of non-national, native speakers resident in Ireland. Second, where companies fail to find the combination of skills required among this pool, they recruit abroad. For example, firms source native speakers for Nordic and Eastern European languages in their native countries²³. This ‘supply tap’ can be considered almost limitless and can be turned on and off, provided Ireland remains attractive from a cost of living perspective for such people.

²³ The International Employment Services function in FÁS support companies in these endeavours; a number of private recruitment agencies also specialise in international recruitment.

The dominance of native standard in the competency level is also evident in projections for future employment growth. The respondents to the survey project a need for almost 1,000 additional native speakers in the period up to 2006; the other levels are minute in comparison. However, this bias towards native speakers in the employment growth does not take account of potentially different i.e. lower, fluency requirements resulting from *future* foreign direct investments in shared services or European headquarters operations.

The survey has revealed that a much more fundamental issue for contact centres than the availability of foreign language skills in Ireland currently, is Ireland's competitiveness as reflected in the cost of housing/accommodation, insurances and services. A further erosion of Ireland's cost competitiveness could lead to a language-skills deficit. If resident foreign nationals find Ireland too expensive they may leave and those who might have been attracted to Ireland will be dissuaded. The issue is therefore largely unconnected to the supply of Irish people coming from Ireland's educational system.

2.2 Contact Centres

Contact centres were one of the first fruits of IDA Ireland's strategy of promoting international services in Ireland. A core of non-national workers in this sector are the catalyst for an enterprise activity that contributes significantly to the Irish economy, both in terms of employment opportunities for Irish nationals, and revenue generated for the exchequer through personal and corporate taxation.

Employment in Contact Centres

The foreign language element is only one component of the activity within multi-national contact centres. Generally, each contact centre amalgamates coverage of a range of distinct regional markets, including English-speaking ones, in order to benefit from economies of scale. Irish nationals are fully capable of filling those roles relating to the English-speaking markets. In addition to the front-office, "client-facing" activities, each contact centre requires a range of back-office support functions including IT, Accounting and HR leading to further employment opportunities for Irish nationals.

Perceptions of the Sector

Some of the new service industries have acquired a somewhat negative image in Ireland, in relation to the use of foreign languages in employment. The term 'Call Centre' in particular has acquired connotations of low pay and low skill. While it is true that Ireland does have some 'Call Centres' that incorporate relatively low added value activities, others are highly skilled, knowledge intensive, high-value added operations requiring a high proportion of third level graduates (for example, the study encountered earnings in excess of €100,000 per annum at the very high end of telephone-based sales functions within the ICT sector). Furthermore, contact centres established in Ireland by multinationals are increasingly assuming higher value functions, with the active encouragement and support of the development agencies, from their parent to augment the original low-skill activity. This trend is enhancing the quality of the employment opportunities available in these centres.

Third-level Graduates

The stereotype of the traditional call centre does not appeal to third level graduates due to low level of skills required, beyond the linguistic ability, and the limited opportunities for career progression. These graduates tend to enter the CEF at around C1; they would generally have taken business and a language, or a language in combination with another subject such as computer science or law, and have spent time studying abroad e.g. a year on the Erasmus Programme. The programmes undertaken do not match with the work content in many contact centres. Consequently, these graduates are not competing with foreign nationals for the jobs involved.

The aspirations of Irish graduates with foreign language skills are to the higher value-added end of the business, where languages may be part of the specification alongside professional qualifications: thus, for instance, there is some level of demand for Irish managers possessing foreign language skills in the contact centre sector.

Employee Turnover in Contact Centres

One of the secondary objectives of this study was to examine the rate of turnover of employees within the Contact Centre sector. There was a perception that this problem was connected to a lack of availability of Irish people with language skills. This study has found however that, while employee turnover is indeed an issue in contact centres in Ireland, it is not specifically connected to the supply of Irish people with language skills; it is a global phenomenon.

Worldwide experience of employee turnover in Contact Centres

The Contact Centre industry is characterised by high labour turnover, particularly at the contact agent level. This is a worldwide phenomenon, and is heavily influenced by the nature of the work. It is endemic in the sector and is proactively managed by HR managers to minimise its impact on their businesses. In India, turnover rates of 22-40% have been reported, for instance.

Factors contributing to high turnover rate

Amongst the native language group of workers, there is an inbuilt contributor to attrition in that many are foreign nationals already in Ireland or are young natives willing to come to Ireland for just a few years to improve their English. They are willing to work in a contact centre for 1-2 years where their native language skills are required but are not likely to remain beyond that period.

A recent survey²⁴ in India covering 1,000 employees, 19 companies and four cities, identified a wide variety of factors that contribute to the high attrition rates of up to 40 per cent. These factors include: poor motivation levels, unwillingness to recommend the employer to friends, dissatisfaction with the working climate and perceived negative image of the company.

Addressing employee turnover in Irish Contact Centres

The evidence from this study makes it clear that the foreign language requirement in Irish Contact Centres is overwhelmingly for native language standard. Native language standard, by definition, can only be achieved by natives. Recruitment abroad is an expensive process and high staff turnover after an investment in training is costly and inefficient. The operators in the industry are clearly familiar with the issues and mitigating actions have been taken by most of them. It seems that the soft-input issues of support, induction, social integration assistance, networks and advice are the most likely means of extending tenure. A US study²⁵ identified issues such as organisational structure; coaching and career planning; and on-going training opportunities as key to tackling the problem. In summary, proactive HR best practice appears to remain the most effective tool to mitigate its impact on the business model. Nevertheless, the cost of living in Ireland remains a fundamental challenge for Contact Centre operators.

2.3 The Indigenous Sector

Enterprise Ireland clients achieved exports of €9.6 billion in 2003, of which €5.9 billion went to English-language markets: €4.8 billion to the UK and €1.1 billion to US/Canada²⁶. The remainder, € 3.7 billion, went to foreign-language markets²⁷. The food sector accounts for 60% of overall exports.

Foreign language skills demand within the indigenous sector has a different profile to that of the FDI sector in Ireland. The key requirement for indigenous enterprise flows from direct sales and marketing activities, largely but not exclusively centred in foreign-language markets. Irish graduates with foreign

24 www.indiatelecomnews.com/newdetails.asp?newsid=249 (August 2004).

25 *Attrition in Call Centers Research Study*, Radclyffe Group, March 2000. www.radclyffegroup.com/resources/members/AttritionResearch2000.pdf (April 2005).

26 A comparatively minor share of exports, €91 million also went to Australia/New Zealand.

27 Annual Report and Accounts 2003, *Enterprise Ireland*. Figures exclude sales to the Irish Dairy Board.

language skills are an important element for such activities – typically someone who has been through the Erasmus Programme, on in-country language training, or through IBEC’s Export Orientation Programme (EOP).

2.3.1 Summary of Research Findings

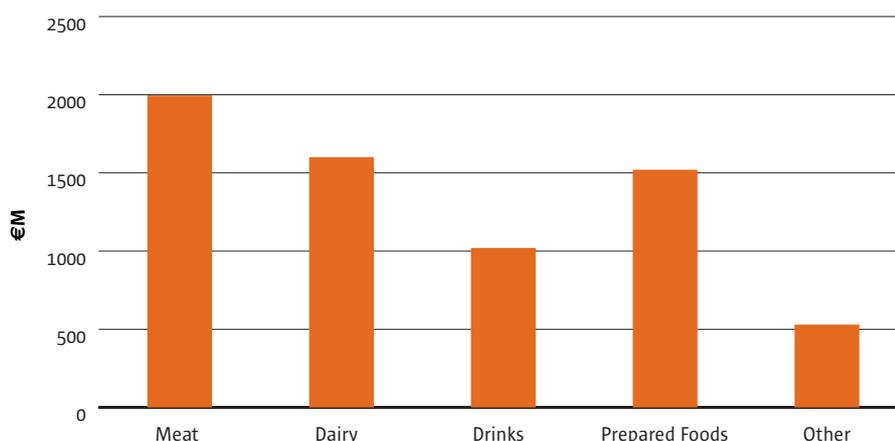
Establishing demand for foreign language skills within the indigenous sector in this study was achieved primarily through interviews with a selected number of Irish companies using foreign languages, together with a variety of enterprise and trade organisations. Discussions were also held with Enterprise Ireland managers with responsibilities across the range of client groupings from High-Potential-Start-Ups (HPSUs), SMEs to large Irish multinationals. A key finding of this research is that indigenous enterprise generally, with the possible exception of the Food/Drink Sector, does not, currently, place much real value in foreign languages.

The large retail chains have a very substantial purchasing capacity and diversity of stock lines, many of which originate in Asian countries. The need for language skills among the procurement teams is perceived to be minimal: “...when you’re buying everybody talks your language.” Yet it would appear that when roles are reversed, Irish exporters do not apply the same logic to the foreign buyer of Ireland’s goods and services. Irish exporters too often expect the foreign buyer to speak English.

2.3.2 The Food/Drink Sector

Total Irish Food and Drink exports were valued at €6.7 billion in 2003²⁸, disaggregated as in Figure 8. This is one of the most significant sectors for foreign language skills.

Figure 8: Irish Food & Drink Exports (2003)



Source: Bord Bia Annual Report 2003.

Over the past years, more Food/Drink companies than any other sector have availed of IBEC’s Export Orientation Programme. Companies such as Diageo, Irish Distillers, Kerry Group, Dawn Meats Group and Kepak Group have all used the programme to recruit and train graduates for their foreign-language markets. One group in the beef sector selling €350m into export markets employs around 15 linguists in marketing – mainly Irish graduates who have come through the Erasmus programme and, in some cases, also through the EOP Programme; another 50 people in the group have some language ability however, it is not used in their day-to-day activity. In contrast, a much larger group exporting to Europe, the Americas and Asia considers foreign language ability to be an advantage but not an essential requirement.

²⁸ Annual Report and Financial Statements 2003, Bord Bia.

Although participation in IBEC's EOP programme indicates an appreciation of foreign languages, the uptake from business is relatively small scale. Many of the same companies participate each year and there are low levels of new company participation. The annual number of graduates participating in the EOP in non-English speaking countries across all sectors including the Food/Drink sector varies between 50 and 100. IBEC short-lists about 200 graduates a year, from between 750 and 1000 applicants, but usually less than 100 get placed. Given the scale and market diversity of indigenous enterprise this is a very low uptake of what is effectively the best-qualified linguistic talent coming into the job market.

It is estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 immigrants (from South America and Central Europe) are working within the Irish meat industry. Effective communication with this group is important in relation not only to quality and performance but also to basic health and safety regulations. This raises the important issue of improving the foreign language capability of Irish supervisors and managers in these firms.

2.3.3 Enterprise Ireland Client Companies

Many Enterprise Ireland (EI) managers are of the view that languages are a vital component of increased penetration of the continental marketplace, but believe their client companies (in non-food sectors) do not really share this view. For example, an EI programme to develop greater language capability and cultural awareness among their clients attracted only 12 firms, even though 1,000 were canvassed.

High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs) are entrepreneurial start-ups, supported by EI, with good prospects for strong growth. The initial focus is on technology and finance, and foreign languages tend to be viewed as relatively unimportant at the startup stage. Many of these companies are in technology sectors, and first export markets tend to be in the US and UK. Languages only become an issue when the company decides to penetrate continental Europe, usually at a later stage of development.

2.3.4 SMEs

While multinational companies have the resources to acquire local firms in particular regions of operation, or to purchase expertise to bridge language skills gaps, SMEs generally do not and consequently they encounter acute difficulties when opening a new, foreign-language market.

Irish SMEs usually look to the UK as their first export market. Given the UK's market size, this is often as far as they go. However it is desirable for SMEs to lessen their dependence on the sterling area and to penetrate continental European markets. When expanding into mainland European, or other non-English speaking markets, from Ireland they must overcome language and cultural barriers, as well as geographical distance.

The importance of language will vary from product area to product area; for example, for technical and/or bespoke products, pre-sales engagement and after-sales support are critical. The more complex the customer requirements the more critical it is to deliver responsive service as well as to understand the direction in which customer needs are evolving.

In many situations a high level of fluency is not required; a sufficient grasp of the language to support basic communication in the context of the products and services provided by the firm will suffice.

Irish SMEs who are exporting and have been doing so for many years have developed strategies to deal with the issue of language. Some technology firms establish overseas sales offices, staffed by local nationals with the relevant technical skills. This is often the correct solution for their particular needs. A number of companies exporting to continental Europe in the engineering sector commented on the need to develop in-house solutions, to take a long-term view and to facilitate targeted training of specific personnel.

However, many SMEs do not have, nor do they appreciate the need for, foreign language skills. A chicken-and-egg scenario develops wherein these SMEs do not export to foreign-language markets because they do not have the requisite language skills and conversely, they do not invest in language training because they are not exporting to these markets. Furthermore, business people may be unaware of an opportunity lost as the potential customer often leaves it unsaid. Fundamentally, this is an awareness issue; all things being equal, language proficiency and associated cultural empathy can make a significant contribution to sales success.

2.3.5 Irish Multinationals

There are a small number of larger Irish multinationals which have grown to be significant players on the European and global stages. However, even among this group, a foreign language was only considered to be a definite advantage for a job applicant rather than an essential prerequisite. The recruitment focus tends to be on the particular skill set for the job, rather than on foreign language proficiency.

2.4 Related Research

The REFLECT SME Study

REFLECT²⁹ was an international initiative over a two-year period (2000-02) to promote the economic and mobility value of acquiring linguistic competences. The project³⁰ was co-funded by the European Commission, under the *Leonardo da Vinci Programme*, and designed to support European objectives of improving competitiveness in European companies by reviewing and measuring language and cultural needs, competencies and deficiencies. The main findings were as follows³¹:

- Language skills at some level were present in 67% of companies with 100 to 250 staff;
- In companies with less than 10 employees this dropped to 27%;
- 14% of companies had encountered barriers in dealings with overseas companies. 9% were aware of losing business because of language or cultural barriers;
- Only 17% of companies provided language training for employees in the previous three years; and
- 1 company in 6 had a language strategy – the most common being to deal with customers in their own mother tongue; some said it was sufficient to use the mother tongue at the introductory stage, and then use English.

IBEC Assessment of Demand

As part of its ongoing effort to foster foreign language capability in Irish business, IBEC carried out a *Languages in Business Survey* in 2001. A total of 111 companies responded, of which 56% were multinational subsidiaries; consequently a good mix of views between foreign and indigenous enterprise was elicited. The respondents were predominantly SMEs, with just 16% having more than 250 employees.

The results of that study were broadly in line with the findings of the present study and with other survey/study data in this report. The survey reflects some ambivalence towards foreign languages. There was no strong feeling that lack of in-house language skill was hampering export performance.

²⁹ www.reflectproject.com (Jan. 2005).

³⁰ The study was carried out in Ireland, UK, Poland and Portugal by a Consortium including Interresource Group (Ireland) Ltd, an Irish consulting company and InterAct International a UK management consultancy firm. It investigated the current use of, and future demand for, foreign language skills among exporting SMEs. Results for Northern Ireland and the Republic were amalgamated. The survey, conducted during October to December 2001, covered 233 SMEs who were already exporting in a range of sectors. Three-quarters of the companies were indigenous.

³¹ The findings are summarised in more detail in Appendix 3.

Management Skills and Languages

A 2003 survey³² asked foreign managers based in Ireland for their views on their native Irish counterparts. Significantly, the foreign managers identified lack of cultural awareness and language competency as major defects in Irish management. The report concluded that action is needed to enhance these capabilities among Irish managers.

2.5 Further Observations on Language Demand

Language as a Complementary Skill

For roles in which customer service is the predominant activity, as is the case in many Contact and Shared Service Centres, language competency outweighs other accomplishments and experience. In such cases, training is provided by the employer for job-specific knowledge and the recruitment process is focused on language competency.

The importance of language skills relative to other academic or vocational skills in a particular role is generally more difficult to gauge the more the role is driven by professional skills, such as in investment analysis, where technical know-how is at the core of the job specification. Companies with such needs will look for IT graduates, MBA graduates, Business/Finance graduates or other professionals; languages may be a background issue, noted and desirable, but not necessarily weighing heavily in the job specification: a second-level enabler.

In general, language proficiency requirements appear to be inversely proportional to the complexity of the overall job specification. Consequently, the business case for investment in language training is more difficult to articulate in many employment categories, particularly when professional skills and language competency are both considered important. Irish graduates using their language skills most often fall into this group: good levels of language competency may be needed, alongside higher-level educational attainment and relevant experience.

A complicating factor is that language competency may not be required for the initial role for which someone is recruited but may become relevant at a later stage in that individual's career, either with the same employer or another one. Companies often ascribe a low ranking to foreign language competency when recruiting staff, although this requirement may emerge as part of the job specification within a few years. Consequently, at the point of recruitment foreign language competency is viewed as a non-essential life-skill, rather than as a valuable job qualification.

Languages and Employability

The vast majority of employment opportunities in Ireland do not require foreign language ability currently; consequently the value of foreign languages is undermined by the perception that having a foreign language is not particularly beneficial in obtaining employment. The findings of a recently published, HEA-funded, study³³ on the importance of transferable skills for graduates of modern language programmes underscore this. Employers of such graduates ranked fluency in a second language as the *least* important of 23 transferable skills to a graduate's career, while the graduates themselves ranked it as the second least importance.

32 *Can Irish Management Compete – A survey of senior expatriate managers in Ireland*, Torc Consulting Group, Cranfield University School of Management, November 2003.

33 *The hidden value of higher education learning: transferable skills and their importance for graduates of modern language programmes*, Trinity College Dublin/Dublin City University/Waterford Institute of Technology, 2004.

Future trends in foreign language demand

Foreign language capability provides one means by which the multinationals based in Ireland can add value to their Irish operations. Greater control of, and participation in, the marketing function in Europe, Middle-East and Africa (EMEA) by the Irish operation is one way in which subsidiary operations can enhance their strategic significance to their parent. Increased collaboration with European-based research institutions is another possibility. Enhanced language capability and cultural awareness within multinational subsidiaries would contribute significantly to the achievement of both objectives. The IDA Ireland *Strategic Competitiveness Programme*, which aims to attract more value adding functions into multinational subsidiaries and enhance their strategic importance to the parent, thereby improving the prospects for longer-term survival of the Irish operation, could play a role here.

Companies need to consider their objectives for particular language markets and decide the depth of penetration required. A longer-term strategic approach, rather than a short-term opportunistic one, is vital. A shorter-term perspective will tend to favour English as the *lingua franca* for all markets while a longer-term approach will favour strategies incorporating language capabilities and cultural awareness.

Another perspective is provided by considering the difference between commodity wholesaling on the one hand and marketing of differentiated, value-added products and customer relationship management, on the other. The latter requires language and cultural awareness strategies to understand shifting nuances along the supply-chain. A sophisticated information feedback system from the market is required and this is difficult to achieve if there is an over-dependence on intermediaries and interpreters.

There is a trend among ICT companies in Ireland to gravitate towards higher-end corporate clients across the EMEA region and to be less reliant on more mass-market customers such as SMEs. This new customer base is more tolerant of non-native language fluency, as well as often having good English language ability. In these cases, staff need strong IT skills as well as some foreign language proficiency and the ability to develop longer-term client relationships. There is strong potential here for Irish linguists with the relevant IT background to make a more significant input, as the need for native level fluency is not as pronounced as it is in Contact Centres.

Developing these higher-level models is a gradual and complex process but is an important trend and one likely to offer attractive opportunities to Irish workers with good foreign language and IT skills.

3 Trade and Foreign Language Skills

This section examines foreign language skills from the perspective of international trade. It looks at the significance of exports to foreign language markets, assesses Ireland's relative performance within these markets and considers some implications in terms of potential lost business arising from lack of foreign language capabilities.

3.1 Irish Exports

Table 2, which presents Irish trade statistics from 1998 to 2003, illustrates that, for each of these six years, more than half of Irish exports went to foreign language markets, predominantly continental European countries.

Table 2: Breakdown of Irish Exports by Market Language

	1998 €M	1999 €M	2000 €M	2001 €M	2002 €M	2003 €M
Overall Exports	57,322	66,956	83,889	92,690	93,723	82,176
English-speaking Markets:						
Great Britain/N Ireland	12,921	14,690	18,870	22,630	22,431	14,870
USA	7,743	10,337	14,228	15,694	16,895	16,924
Total	20,664	25,027	33,098	38,324	39,326	31,794
% of overall	36.0%	37.4%	39.5%	41.3%	42.0%	38.7%
Foreign Language Markets:						
Other EU	26,121	28,770	33,417	34,947	37,287	35,470
Rest of World*	10,537	13,159	17,374	19,419	17,110	14,911
Total	36,658	41,929	50,791	54,366	54,397	50,381
% of overall	64.0%	62.6%	60.5%	58.7%	58.0%	61.3%

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2003

*Rest of world contains a small element of English-language markets such as Australia but represents mainly foreign-language markets in Eastern Europe, South America and Asia.

Within the category of 'Other EU', the major markets for Irish exports have been Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium/Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Destination of Irish Exports within Continental EU

	1998 €M	1999 €M	2000 €M	2001 €M	2002 ³⁴ €M	2003 €M
Germany	8,293	7,996	9,415	11,671	6,744	6,808
France	4,814	5,636	6,343	5,532	4,668	5,025
Italy	1,937	2,532	3,317	3,309	3,593	3,739
Netherlands	3,165	4,156	4,687	4,237	3,410	4,217
Belgium/Luxembourg	3,645	3,492	4,152	4,522	13,596	10,412
Spain	1,537	1,831	2,124	2,283	2,230	2,335
Sweden	1,089	1,094	1,336	1,354	1,185	1,185
Other Continental EU	1,641	2,033	2,043	2,039	1,861	1,749
Total Continental EU	26,121	28,770	33,417	34,947	37,287	35,470

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2003

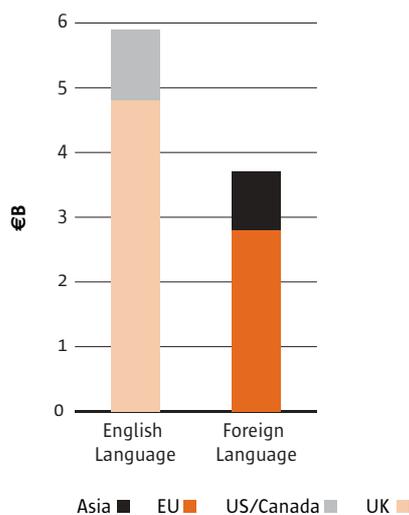
There are a number of points worth noting in relation to Ireland's export performance.

- The value of overall Irish exports grew by 43% over the period 1998-2003;
- Overall exports to English-speaking markets increased by 54% over the period 1998-2003, whereas those going to foreign-language markets grew by 37%;
- 61.3% of overall Irish exports went to foreign-language markets in 2003;
- A large proportion of Irish exports are accounted for by foreign-owned multinationals based in Ireland in high technology sectors trading with other international companies where English is more likely to be the language medium. Furthermore, the sales and marketing for these products is not carried out in Ireland; these activities are usually performed by a corporate affiliate in a different jurisdiction. For example, Intel reported that its requirement for foreign language skills in its Irish operations is minimal;
- Enterprise Ireland clients' exports to English-speaking markets totalled €5.9 billion (€4.8 billion to the UK and €1.1 billion to USA/Canada) in 2003, while exports to foreign language markets were €3.7 billion (€2.8 billion to Continental EU markets and €0.9 billion to Asia)³⁵. Thus, the proportion of Enterprise Ireland clients' exports going to foreign language markets, at 38%, is significantly lower than the 61.3% figure for overall exports;

Several factors could contribute to this pattern of better performance in the English-speaking markets, including varying economic performances in the different markets, geographical distance to markets, profile of Ireland's manufacturing base, exchange rate movements *etc.* Nevertheless, the degree to which Ireland's poorer performance in foreign language markets may, at least in part, be attributable to weaknesses in foreign language skills, particularly within indigenous enterprise, warrants consideration.

³⁴ There was a change in EU distribution/booking of exports in 2002 as between countries. The CSO are unable to elaborate on this for confidentiality reasons – however, trends in the group as a whole are unaffected by this.

³⁵ Annual Report and Accounts 2003, *Enterprise Ireland*.

Figure 9: Enterprise Ireland Clients – Export Markets (2003)

3.2 The Export Costs of Language Skills Deficit

It is difficult to quantify the extent to which inadequate language skills impacts on exports, but international evidence suggests that language capability is a real factor in export success:

“One in five businesses are aware of losing business as a consequence of a lack of language skills. One in two is encountering barriers to trade because of a lack of language or cultural skills. Yet fewer than one in ten has... a strategy as part of routine business planning, to help cater for this. And these are the companies that are aware which means that those figures are probably an underestimate... In a nutshell, doing nothing about languages is harming the competitiveness and profitability of UK companies.”³⁶

A global survey entitled ‘*Languages at Work 2002*’ conducted by the *Language Advantage* organisation in the UK covering 585 firms from 50 countries, involving 90 languages, revealed that 20% of respondents estimated that they had lost business because they did not have adequate language or cultural skills. Eight companies estimated they had each lost over \$1 million of business due to language and cultural miscommunication³⁷.

REFLECT study

The REFLECT study (summarised in Section 2.4) found that 9% of Irish SMEs, who were already exporting, were *aware* that they had lost business as a direct result of a language or cultural barrier. This does not take account of the number of SMEs that had missed business opportunities as a direct result of a language or cultural barrier but were not aware of it. Neither does it provide any sense of the scale of opportunity lost among those who have not attempted exporting at any level.

British Chambers of Commerce Study

In 2003 the British Chambers of Commerce, in conjunction with the UK Learning and Skills Council, published the first of a two-part study entitled ‘*The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business*’. This part was a qualitative assessment of how language learning influences the attitude and behaviour of British exporters when confronted with foreign markets. The key findings are summarised in Appendix 4. The survey uncovered a high degree of ambivalence towards foreign languages among exporters. However, it did uncover a cohort of proactive firms who are focused on market penetration and who did appreciate the value that a fluent linguist can bring to the sales process.

³⁶ Dr Anne Davidson Lund, Assistant Director, Business and Life Long Learning Strategy, CLT, the National Centre for Languages UK speaking at the Multilingual City Forum Conference, Sheffield, 2003.

³⁷ www.languageadvantage.com/surveys (April 2005).

The second, quantitative part of the study³⁸ was published in 2004 and surveyed 1,000 exporters and focused on the extent to which export business is being lost or gained as a result of language competency. The survey found that poor language skills and a lack of cultural understanding of overseas market were stunting UK growth. The survey revealed a positive correlation between the value placed on language skills by a firm and its turnover. It also revealed that those firms who attached the least importance to language skills were actually experiencing a decline in their exports sales whereas those who ascribed the greatest importance to language skills were recording increased exports.

3.3 Enterprise Ireland's Asia Strategy

Enterprise Ireland is adopting a policy of supporting companies to develop their capability rather than their production capacity to compete in the global market. The programme focuses on technology innovation, business development and internationalisation. Under this approach, financial assistance can be provided to EI client companies to upgrade their language and cultural skills.

Enterprise Ireland is implementing an elaborate strategy for exploiting the opportunities offered by the Asian region over the next decade³⁹, with the overarching goal of doubling exports by indigenous firms to the region by 2015. This objective is motivated by a number of plausible projections⁴⁰: By 2015 Asia will account for 50% of world economic growth and 50% of world trade; between 2004-2015, over \$1 trillion will be invested in infrastructure. Furthermore, in 2015 over 400 million Asians will have purchasing power comparable with that of Europeans today.

However, EI has identified language and cultural differences as key barriers to market penetration for their clients in Asia; these problems have the potential to undermine this strategy. A positive recent development in this regard is the new Irish Institute for Chinese Studies, outlined in Section 4.1.7.

³⁸ http://www.chamberonline.co.uk/press_centre/press_24052004 (April 2005).

³⁹ *Ireland – A Strategy for the Asia Century*, presentation by Michael Cantwell at the Forum on Japanese Language Education, Dublin, 3rd June 2004.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

4 Supply of Language Skills

This section summarises the main sources of language skills supply in Ireland, from both the public and private sectors. Within the public domain, it describes initiatives for fostering an increase in interest at primary and post-primary level; it outlines the significance of developments such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the National Framework of Qualifications, and the Erasmus Programme. The section also outlines other programmes for foreign languages acquisition, such as the Leonardo da Vinci programme, two IBEC programmes and provision in private language schools. Finally, the section considers the way in which technological developments can facilitate the acquisition of foreign language skills and the potential role to be played by non-nationals in Irish economic activities for which foreign languages are required.

4.1 Public Education System

4.1.1 Primary Level

The National Pilot Project in Modern Languages

This pilot programme was launched in 1998 and is now operational in 390 schools, providing access to foreign language tuition to around 20,000 children. Institúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann⁴¹ published an evaluation of the project in 2003⁴². This report assessed the initial period of implementation and described how the programme was perceived by teachers and pupils. It found that the pilot programme has been successful and a wide breadth of practical experience was acquired on the issues associated with the introduction a foreign language into the primary level curriculum. The evaluation was positive both at teacher and pupil level, and the report identified a range of issues to be addressed, including: curriculum, class-time, the interface with secondary schools, teacher training, training methodologies and use of Information Technology.

The Primary School project is relevant here not for its impact in the 2005-2010 timeframe, but as an unequivocal demonstration of a long-term commitment to language skills by the State. The embedding of foreign language provision in the primary curriculum is a hugely important foundational component in Ireland's language infrastructure and should be afforded a commensurate priority in terms of resource allocation.

4.1.2 Post-primary Level

The critical importance of post-primary education for development of language skills has been recognised by the European Commission:

"It is in secondary education or training that young people complete the essential core of language skills that will serve them throughout life. However, in some Member States, foreign language learning is not compulsory for certain groups of pupils and others propose to make foreign language learning optional. It is difficult to see how this approach will meet the Union's objective that every citizen should speak two languages in addition to his mother tongue."⁴³

Foreign language learning at post-primary is not compulsory in Ireland. Yet approximately, 42,000 foreign language papers were taken in the Leaving Certificate in 2004. This high take-up rate is widely attributed to the National University of Ireland's matriculation requirement for Irish and a foreign language. Should the National University of Ireland ever abandon the requirement for a foreign language it is likely to have very serious negative implications for the numbers of students studying foreign languages at post-primary. Indeed, in the UK there is growing concern within the business and educational communities about the expected negative implications of the UK Government's decision

41 Following a Government decision in 2004, ITÉ will close during 2005.

42 Modern Languages in Irish Primary Schools - an Evaluation of the National Pilot Project, *ITE*, 2003.

43 Commission of the European Communities, *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity – Consultation* (Commission Staff Working Paper, Brussels, 2002 p. 8.

to allow foreign languages to be optional rather than compulsory from age 14 onwards, rather than from 16 as it had been previously.

The total number of candidates sitting the Leaving Certificate examination has declined significantly since the late 1990s due to demographic trends. The total number of foreign languages papers taken is declining at the same rate, as Table 4 illustrates. Tables 5 and 6 disaggregate the number of foreign language papers taken by language.

Table 4: Foreign Language Papers Taken at Leaving Certificate

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Candidates*	57993	55907	51935	47789	48862	48456
As % of 1999 base	100%	96%	90%	82%	84%	84%
Language Papers**	49468	47837	44822	42713	42901	41680
As % of 1999 base	100%	97%	91%	86%	87%	84%
Ratio Papers Taken to Total Candidates	0.85	0.86	0.86	0.89	0.88	0.86

* Number of individuals sitting the Leaving Certificate subjects, not restricted to those taking languages.

** Excludes small numbers taking Russian and Arabic (75 and 143 in 2004, respectively).

Source: Department of Education & Science ('99-'01) / State Examinations Commission ('02-'04). The Total candidate excludes VTOS, External Candidates, Repeat Candidates and Applied Leaving Certificate categories.

Table 5: Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
French	17954	16785	16054	15212	15054	15165
German	6910	6410	5874	5170	5074	4982
Spanish	1007	820	871	963	908	1012
Italian	138	133	102	115	96	115
Total	26009	24148	22901	21460	21132	21274

Source: Department of Education & Science/State Examinations Commission

Table 6: Leaving Certificate – Ordinary Level

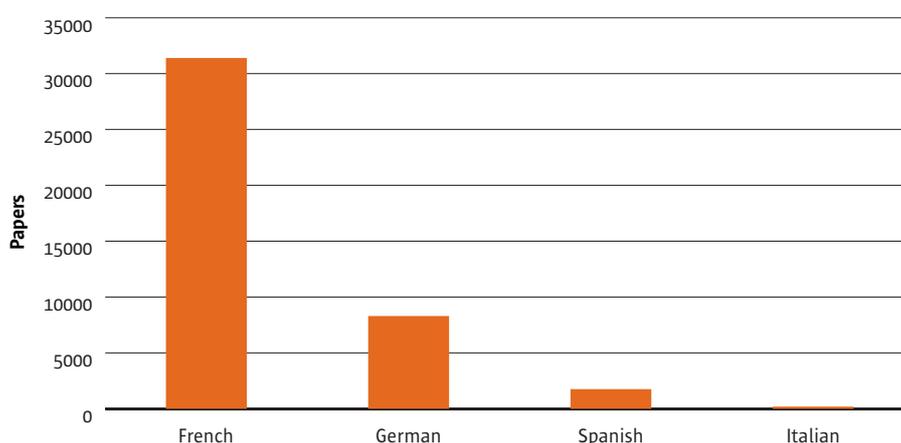
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
French	18917	19189	17764	16904	17437	16268
German	3918	3830	3505	3552	3618	3321
Spanish	552	603	612	739	643	743
Italian	72	67	40	58	71	74
Total	23459	23689	21921	21253	21769	20406

Source: Department of Education & Science/State Examinations Commission

Within the cohort of Leaving Certificate students taking foreign languages the dominance of French as the preferred foreign language is very clear from Figure 10. In 2004 the breakdown of all foreign language papers taken was French 75%, German 20%, Spanish 4.0% and Italian 0.5%.

This language profile has arisen in an *ad hoc* manner and owes more to historical factors than any analysis of the needs of learners, and the state, in the contemporary economic, social or cultural context. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative is a very worthwhile attempt to redress this imbalance. However, there is a pressing requirement for a more fundamental review of the national language skills leading to a national languages policy and a formal enunciation of the optimum language profile at post-primary.

Figure 10: Language Papers at Leaving Certificate 2004



4.1.3 Post-Primary Languages Initiative

Since September, 2000 the Post Primary Languages Initiative has worked to implement the policy of the Department of Education and Science of diversifying, enhancing and expanding the teaching of languages in second level schools, with Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Russian as the target languages. This is a five-year initiative and in an interim progress report⁴⁴, its core aims were summarised as follows:

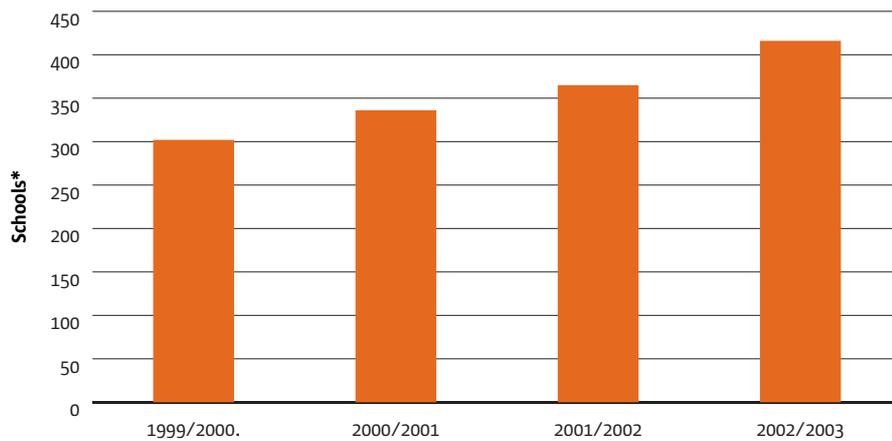
*“To **diversify** so that a wider choice of languages is available to students; to **enhance** by strengthening the position of these languages and offering support to teachers in the form of materials and in-service; and to **expand** them so that they are available to more students in more schools.”*

Spanish and Italian were chosen due to their poor uptake in comparison with French and German. A non-European language was included in recognition of the need to look beyond Europe. Japanese was chosen as the first non-European language in view of Ireland’s important trade links with Japan. Russian was added later to coincide with the creation of the Russian syllabus for the Leaving Certificate and also because it is spoken in many central and eastern European states, several of whom joined the EU in May 2004.

The success of the Post Primary Languages Initiative can be judged from the growth in the number of schools and students participating in the programme shown in Figures 11 and 12.

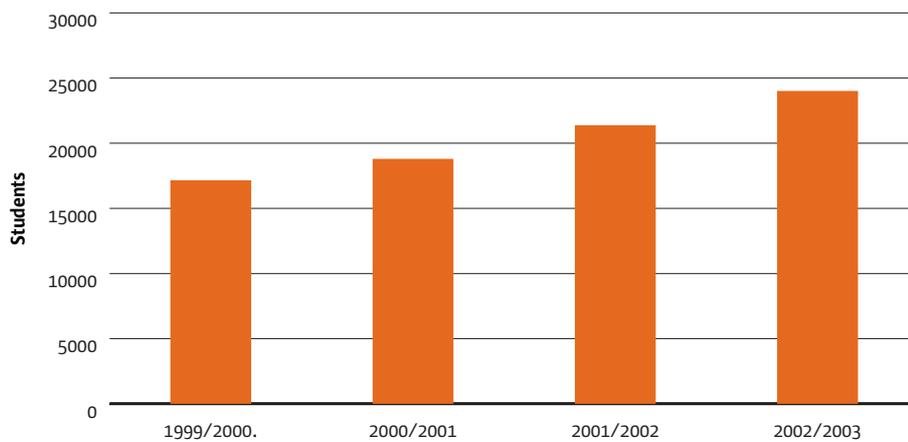
44 Post Primary Languages Initiative Interim Report, September, 2003.

Figure 11: Number of Schools Offering Spanish/Italian/Japanese



**The number of schools offering Spanish or Italian or Japanese under the programme; a small number of school offer two or more languages and are counted multiple times.*

Figure 12: Students Studying Spanish/Italian/Japanese



The recently announced support from the Dept. Education and Science for the appointment of 110 foreign nationals as post-primary Teaching Assistants in French, German, Spanish and Italian for the academic year 2005/06 is a welcome development. However, in view of the fact that there are approximately 750 second-level schools in the state, each of which is likely to teach at least two languages, this allocation will be spread fairly thinly across the country.

4.1.4 Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum

A discussion paper⁴⁵, commissioned by the NCCA, provides a review of the current provision for languages in the post-primary curriculum (English, Irish and foreign languages) and considers the challenges that the post-primary curriculum faces. The paper makes a number of relevant criticisms of the current curriculum:

- *“There is no overarching language policy that provides for the inclusion of languages other than Irish in the post-primary curriculum;*

⁴⁵ *Languages in the Post Primary Curriculum – a discussion document.* David Little, NCCA, 2003.

- *We do not have an integrated language curriculum, but a series of language curricula that are largely independent of one another. Arguably this leads to an impoverished educational experience; it certainly means that curriculum planning is haphazard and piecemeal;*
- *Because we have neither a language policy nor an integrated language curriculum we have no criteria by which to manage diversification, whether that involves introducing new foreign languages or accommodating the mother tongues of newcomer students.”*

Issues raised in the paper include “(i) the sustainability of foreign languages in the absence of a language policy; (ii) the levels of communicative proficiency achieved by school-leavers; (iii) current language teaching methods; and (iv) current forms of assessment.”

The paper proposed a number of actions, including:

- *“formulating a language policy on the basis of a thorough investigation of Ireland’s language needs;*
- *developing an integrated language curriculum based on a fixed amount of ‘curriculum space’;*
- *undertaking independent measurement of the communicative proficiency achieved by students in Irish and foreign languages at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels;*
- *experimenting on a small scale with projects that use the European Language Portfolio to (i) foster the development of learner autonomy, (ii) establish whole-school approaches to language teaching, and (iii) explore portfolio approaches to assessment;*
- *experimenting on a small scale with projects that teach other subjects through the medium of a foreign language.*

Irish Language

An international conference in 2003⁴⁶ examined the implications of teaching a third language. Evidence presented indicated that a third language is easier to learn than a second one, and that it builds on the framework established while learning the first two. Consequently, learning Irish was seen as very positive in terms of aiding the acquisition of a third language. This view was not confined to Irish language enthusiasts but was shared by representatives of other countries⁴⁷.

There was also a view that in the bilingual curriculum in Ireland (involving both Irish and English) the opportunity of gaining insights into the structure of language by virtue of learning two languages could be better utilised as a means of understanding a third language.

These findings underscore the need for, and benefits to be expected from, an integrated curriculum for all languages at post-primary as advocated in the NCCA languages paper.

4.1.5 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

An issue that arose during the course of this study is the objective assessment and comparison of language proficiency levels. Terms such as ‘fluent’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘basic’ do not have a universal interpretation. The *Common European Framework of Reference* for measuring language proficiency is a major advance in this regard.

The views of professional educators familiar with the *Common European Framework of Reference* were canvassed in an attempt to benchmark Leaving Certificate standards. Some argued that individual students will differ so much that any general conclusions about the degree of language proficiency conferred by the Leaving Certificate would be meaningless. Others took the view that, while acknowledging that individual students will have different capabilities, it is still valid to categorise them within a broad proficiency range. There was some degree of consensus amongst this latter

⁴⁶ *Third International Conference on Third Language Acquisition and Trilingualism*, Tralee, September 2003.

⁴⁷ For example, in the Basque region of Spain, English is often taken as a third language in addition to Spanish and the Basque language.

group that Leaving Certificate standard falls within the range of B1 to B2, depending on whether an ordinary or higher grade was achieved.

However, it must be emphasised that this view was based upon anecdotal comment rather than any empirical research data. There does not appear to be any such empirical research to calibrate the proficiency levels of foreign language students at second (or third level) against the *Common European Framework of Reference*. It is important that this be done and such an exercise is one of the recommendations of the current study. This would also help to promote wide adoption of the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP), the personalised life-long learning register associated with the *Common European Framework of Reference*. Students leaving secondary school should take their ELP forward to build upon at third level, whether formally taking languages or not, and later in their working lives. This links language learning across all modes of learning within a flexible and portable structure. It also defines language as a life-skill and facilitates individuals to avail of the opportunities presented by EU citizenship.

Europass

Europass is a European Union proposal to establish a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences. While principally being a transparency tool, the Europass framework will assist in enabling the recognition of qualifications. The five transparency tools to be incorporated into the Europass include the European Language Portfolio, as well as the European CV format, the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement and the Mobilpass. At present several State agencies and organisations are involved in implementing the transparency tools. These include the Department of Education and Science, FÁS, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education Authority, the universities and the institutes of technology. The Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment have decided that the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is the agency to be responsible for national co-ordination of the Europass framework.

4.1.6 National Framework of Qualifications

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), in association with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment launched the *National Framework of Qualifications*⁴⁸ in October 2003. The Framework is a structure of levels, designed to bring an increased clarity to the meaning of each type of qualification, allowing qualifications to be compared easily. The Framework comprises ten levels. For each level, standards of knowledge, skill and competence have been set out in a generic format. The standards associated with each level define the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain awards. The ten levels will accommodate awards gained in schools, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges and universities, from the most basic to the most advanced levels of learning. All learning can thus be recognised, including that achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings. The Framework recognises a diversity of attainment methods based on outcomes achieved. It defines a pathway to education and training awards from beginner to post graduate levels.

This development is very timely as it allows for interaction with the Common European Framework for Languages, its Reference Level structure and the associated European Language Portfolio. It represents an important step in developing a route-map to language learning with a flexible award system.

48 www.nqai.ie/overview.pdf (April 2005).

A fundamental principle in both frameworks is the capacity to lay layer upon layer of learning through formal and informal education. Language with its variety of learning systems and modalities as defined in the Common European Framework for Languages seems now to be an application which could be linked to the system architecture of the National Framework of Qualifications. The objectivity and structure of the Common Framework for Languages provides a system which links and grades learning components in a progressive process of formal or self-directed learning which can be extended into life-long learning and new languages.

4.1.7 Third-Level Institutions

There is a wide range of language provision in third-level courses, from the classical approach in traditional humanities courses, including in-country study, to elective components attached to business, law, IT and other courses⁴⁹. However, there is currently no database of third level language courses to centralise this information.

Table 7 illustrates trends in student demand for third level language courses. It shows the uptake, over a 5-year period, of CAO language courses, where the language component is specifically identified in the course name.

Table 7: CAO Acceptances for Language Courses

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Student Acceptances	1,125	1,076	1,078	926	1,027
% – Taking ‘99 as the base	100%	96%	96%	82%	91%

Source: Central Applications Office

The CAO figures only include students applying for courses in which language constitutes a major element of the curriculum; they do not take into account students taking languages as elective or optional subjects as a smaller part of their degree programme and perhaps not taken to degree level. Neither do they catch the humanities stream where the major language concentration takes place. They are nonetheless a good indicator of trends in language priorities among students entering third level education. While there was an upturn in 2003 relative to 2002, the longer-term trend is downward.

The new HEA student record system will provide data on all courses being undertaken in the universities, and, as management information systems are put in place, in the institute of technology sector too. This system will provide greater detail on the language skills being acquired by students as part of undenominated degrees, e.g. Arts, and will assist in greater accuracy on the numbers of students taking languages at third level. The system will also use an international classification structure, ISCED⁵⁰, to categorise such participation and to facilitate international comparison.

In addition, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in FÁS, established under the auspices of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, has developed a comprehensive database, the National Skills Database, which contains details of all third level courses currently available in the State. However, it does not distinguish those courses with a language component.

Neither of these systems were intended to support comparisons with the Common European Framework. Consequently, it will still not be possible to determine the language intensity in the array of courses on offer which incorporate a language component. Courses vary considerably and the manner in which language is integrated is not standardised. This shortcoming must be addressed in order to quantify the language capital being created at third level.

⁴⁹ Third Level in this context refers to the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the other Institutes of Technology.

⁵⁰ International Standard Classification of Education, UNESCO, 1997.

To this end, a mechanism should be devised to relate the language content of individual courses to the reference levels in the *Common European Framework*, so that attainment in these courses can be benchmarked objectively. This would be a substantial undertaking and should be overseen by educators familiar with the processes involved in assessing language competencies. It should be carried out as a two stage process: firstly, the NQAI should relate the CEF to the NFQ. Secondly, the various awarding bodies in the state should use this relationship to position their various courses in the CEF.

Chinese Studies

A positive recent development in relation to Asian language skills is the Irish Institute for Chinese Studies, established jointly by UCD and UCC in 2005. This will offer students from a range of disciplines the opportunity to study Chinese language and culture at the Institutes centres in Cork and Dublin and also in Chinese universities through exchange programmes.

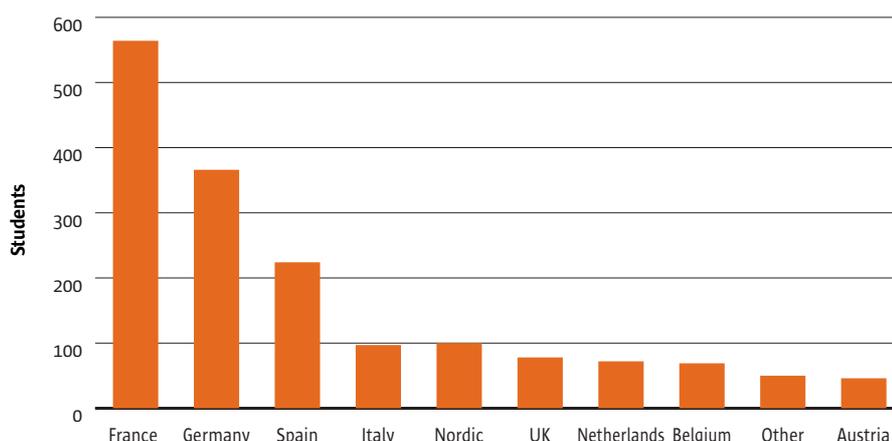
In addition, the Asian Institute, a training and consultancy company, located in UCD, provides evening courses in Mandarin and Cantonese for approximately 100 students per annum. It provides in-house corporate training for 10-20 business people per annum and also offers cultural awareness programmes for China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

4.1.8 EU sponsored Programmes

Erasmus Language Programme

The Erasmus programme facilitates undergraduate students to spend a year studying at a foreign third level institution to enhance their language abilities. Figure 13 illustrates the destinations of Irish students who participated in the scheme in 2000/2001.

Figure 13: Irish Erasmus Student Destinations (2000/01)



Although participation is relatively small at about 1,250 students per annum, this programme is an important mechanism for building language capability, alongside a professional/third-level qualification.

A range of educators were asked to place third level graduates who have undertaken the Erasmus Programme on the CEF language reference grid. There was a general view that the standard reached by these graduates approximates to level C1. However, these views were anecdotal rather than based upon research data. This group of students should also be included in the overall third-level benchmarking exercise referred to above to determine rigorously their level of attainment against the CEF.

These graduates are most likely to find outlets for their language skills among indigenous companies due to the fact that the FDI sector is, by and large, looking for native language skills. Indeed a significant number of these graduates have availed of IBEC's Export Orientation Programme (EOP) to join Irish companies for one year to work in an overseas market.

Leonardo da Vinci Programme

The Leonardo da Vinci programme aims to improve the quality of vocational training by financially supporting a range of trans-national partnership projects. A substantial proportion of this funding is dedicated to mobility. Mobility projects provide work experience placements and staff exchanges within 31 participating countries. Work experience placements enable those involved to develop vocational skills and competencies through periods of work-based training. They provide access to different working practices and new technologies, as well as opportunities to enhance linguistic capabilities, key skills and cultural awareness.

Placements are open to a range of target groups: people in initial vocational training; students in higher education; young workers and recent graduates. Funding is also available for specialist language trainer visits for those involved in the development of vocational-specific language skills.

4.1.9 Tailored Third-level Courses

Ireland was an early mover into the teleservices sectors, recognising that telecommunications would drive business processes more and more, and would facilitate centralisation of services across borders and continents. Tracking the evolution of the industry and adapting further, has brought Ireland into Shared Services and other tele-based business activities.

In 1997, it appeared that the availability of Irish people with foreign language skills would be inadequate to meet demand arising from the growing number of language-based call centres attracted to Ireland by IDA Ireland. Discussions were held between the Department of Education and Science, FÁS, and the newly formed Tele-Services Forum of Ireland (TSFI) to see how the issue might be addressed.

As a result, the Department of Education and Science initiated a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course in International Teleservices with certification by the NCVA. The course was designed to provide intensive language training in French, German, Spanish or Italian, in conjunction with training in IT, Customer Care & Support, and in Interpersonal Skills. Approval was given for 690 places in 20 Post Leaving Certificate schools across the country. The course was designed as a 2-year programme with up to 4 months work placement in the country of the language being studied.

Initially, the courses attracted student interest well in excess of the approved places. Interest in these courses declined as the economy expanded in the years 1997-2000. In addition, the services industry for whom these students were being trained found that their requirement was in fact for native language skills, not Irish people with language skills. The language needs of the rapidly expanding contact centres were then met by young people from France, Germany and elsewhere, using their native language skills.

4.2 Private Sector Supply – Further/Adult Education

There are a number of programmes aimed at providing further/adult education in foreign languages, such as:

- IBEC's EOP and EEP programmes;
- Adult Education courses in technical colleges; and
- Private language schools.

IBEC Programmes

IBEC supports Irish business in the provision of foreign language skills through two specific programmes:

- Export Orientation Programme (EOP); and
- European Experience Programme (EEP).

Export Orientation Programme (EOP)

This programme is targeted at recent third level graduates and provides them with a placement abroad with an Irish company. The EOP started in 1984 as the European Orientation Programme, with a particular emphasis on the acquisition of a modern European language as an integral part of the programme. The programme was subsequently widened to encompass English-speaking markets and relabelled the Export Orientation Programme; graduates are now placed world-wide.

Qualifying individual companies participating in the programme can avail of 50% co-funding from Enterprise Ireland or Shannon Development to cover the costs of the placement⁵¹. The programme is of 12 months duration, with a minimum of 6 months spent abroad in work experience with the company. The programme is very highly regarded by both the companies and graduates who participate.

IBEC short-lists about 200 applicants for the EOP per annum from graduates, but usually less than 100 are placed with sponsoring companies annually. IBEC marketed the programme more actively in 2004 with the aim of increasing placements to about 150 graduates. Traditionally, demand from companies, rather than supply of interested graduates has been the limiting factor on the programme.

This programme constitutes an example of “Best Practice” and, as such, it should be supported and expanded to its optimum size.

European Experience Programme (EEP)

This programme is targeted at those who have completed second level education (over 18 years old), often from a disadvantaged background. Its aim is to give participants an opportunity to live and work abroad, and thus increase their self-esteem and marketability to enterprise. There are a number of jobs – secretarial, logistics, and others – which require language skills, but are unable to attract and hold 3rd level graduates; this particular programme is intended to satisfy that demand. Since its inception 8 years ago, over 400 individuals have participated. There are approximately 100 applicants annually and 30-40 are selected to participate. So far, the programme has only been run in regions where funding is available, there is keen local interest, and hence demand.

The Department of family and Social Affairs, Area Development Partnerships and FÁS provide funding. However, there have been some recent difficulties with the programme due to cutbacks.

Private Language Schools

There are a number of cultural organisations, such as the Goethe Institut and Alliance Française, funded by their own national Governments, which promote their language and culture in Ireland. They offer language classes to Irish students or business people. Goethe Institut provides courses to 1,000 evening students per year, Alliance Française provides tuition to over 3,000 adult learners each year.

⁵¹ Approximately 2% of participating companies bear the entire cost without any grant aid.

4.3 Technology and Language

The use of technology can impact on language teaching, learning, and the assessment of proficiency levels. Automatic language translation is still a young but growing area of technology. There is extensive research going on in this area and no doubt, technology will speed up the ease with which language is learned and managed. However, no company consulted in the course of this study felt that the requirement to learn languages would be eliminated by a technology intervention. Instead, technology was seen as more likely to facilitate a higher quality of output and communication as well as faster learning and higher productivity.

ICT has great potential to contribute to language learning and to put high quality learning tools in the hands of learner at all levels. It has the capacity to put the learner in more central control of learning and learning strategies – ranging from the basic use of cassettes, videos and CDs to the online-learning environment. The latter can open up the potential for real-time interaction with other learners and with native speakers in other countries. However, the rate of absorption of these technologies into the formal education system has been relatively slow to date.

A 2003 report by the EU Commission⁵² surveyed current developments and looked at possible future developments. Teacher training was identified to be the key to the successful introduction and deployment of technology already available.

4.3.1 Assessment & Self-Assessment

An interesting initiative is DIALANG⁵³, an online diagnostic and self-assessment tool, designed to provide feedback and grading of a learner's progress. DIALANG currently supports 14 European languages. This is a valuable development as it pushes evaluation and objective grading out directly to the learner.

4.3.2 Machine Translation

Machine translation tools can now be used to support human translators dealing with routine translation of standard documentation into a variety of languages. Technology of this kind can also be deployed in standard interfaces at points of contact and reception desks. In public services, translation of large blocks of forms and documentation can be supported by these techniques. These tools can also play a role in internationalisation and localisation of web content.

There is no indication at this time, however, that technological approaches to inter-language communication will supplant human contact and dialogue to any significant extent in the foreseeable future.

4.4 The Role of Non-nationals

It is clear that there will always be an element of demand for language skills that cannot be satisfied by Irish nationals by virtue of the fact that the requirement is for native levels of fluency. Non-nationals from the EU and beyond will be required to meet this shortfall. This has already occurred: non-nationals fill the majority of foreign language positions in Ireland's Contact Centre sector, for instance. The expansion of the internal labour market following the accession of 10 new states to the EU will further facilitate employers in this regard.

Non-national workers are also working in the Food and Hospitality sectors. There are 3-4,000 immigrants working in the beef sector of the economy, boning and trimming beef carcasses for example. The main language issue arising here is ensuring that the workers have adequate English for basic communication regarding work practices, procedures and health & safety⁵⁴. The need to source workers for these positions abroad arises from the low skill and poor wages associated with these

⁵² *The Impact of Information and Communications Technologies on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and on the Role of Teachers of Foreign Languages*, European Commission, 2003.

⁵³ The project has been financially supported by the European Commission, Directorate for Education and Culture, under the SOCRATES Programme.

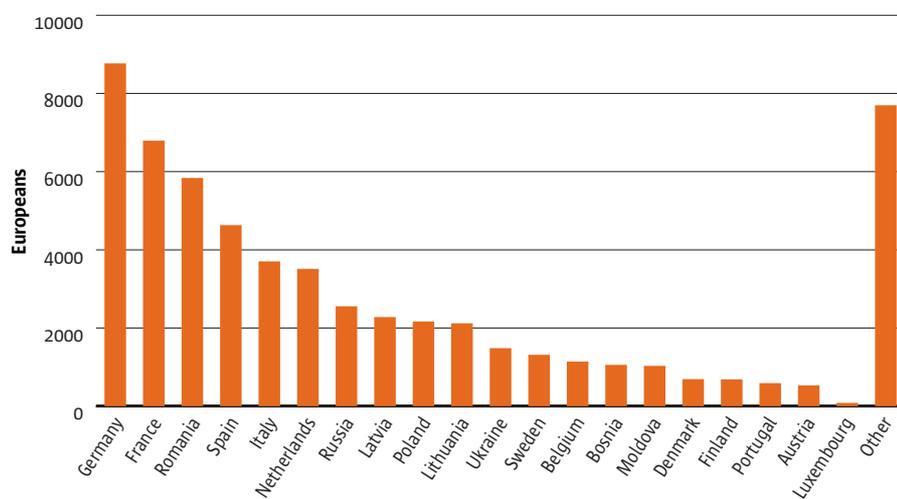
⁵⁴ The unique needs of immigrants in this regard are being addressed a number of agencies including FÁS and Integrate Ireland Language and Training Ltd. (www.iilt.ie).

positions, rather than any language requirements. However, the fact that these workers are here presents Ireland with an opportunity as they have contributed to the pool of foreign language skills now available within the country. This pool of language skills represent a largely untapped resource in the rapidly changing and globalising world economy. The challenge for Ireland is to learn to put this new national asset to best use.

The main constraint on this source of skills over the medium-term future will be the competitiveness of Ireland relative to other countries: Ireland's costs relative to the income norms in many of these occupations is putting increasing pressure on this model of operation⁵⁵.

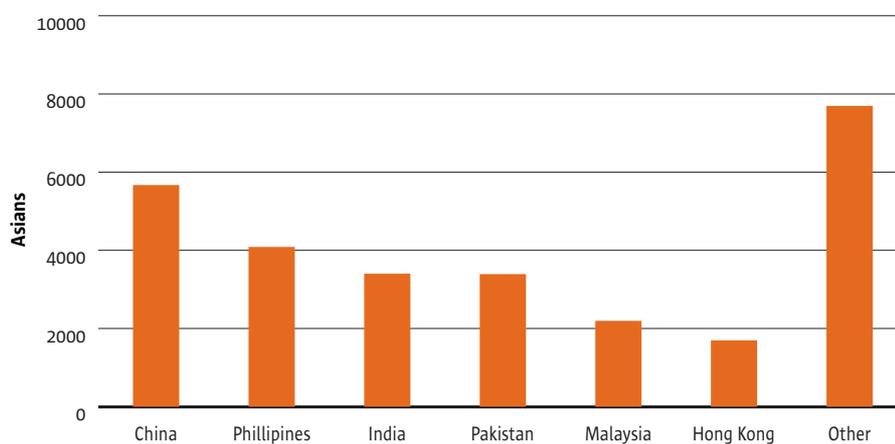
The 2002 Census illustrates the diversity of European non-nationals living in Ireland (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Census 2002 – Continental Europeans living in Ireland



A range of Asian nationalities are also represented in Ireland as indicated in Figure 15. While there is only a small Asian language dimension in teleservices activity currently, the accumulation of Asian language capacity will provide a valuable economic asset for a future in which China, and other Asian states, become increasingly significant players in the global economy.

Figure 15: Census 2002 – Asians Living in Ireland



55 NCC Statement on Prices and Costs, Forfás, 2004.

4.5 Experience in the UK

In order to put the Irish experience in relation to languages at second level in context, it is worth contrasting it with the situation prevailing in the UK. Notwithstanding the vast difference in population, the number of students studying foreign languages at the end of senior cycle second level education in Ireland are greater than in the UK, in absolute terms. Table 8⁵⁶ illustrates the take-up of languages at A Level in the UK.

Table 8: A-Level Candidates in Foreign Languages 1999-2002

	1999	2000	2001	2002
French	21,333	18,341	18,079	15,615
German	9,777	8,718	8,575	7,013
Italian	963	920	945	787
Spanish	5,876	5,702	5,743	5,573
Other	3,832	4,157	3,282	4,063
Total Language	41,781	37,838	36,624	33,051
Total A Level Candidates	787,732	774,364	770,995	701,380
Language Uptake %	5.30%	4.89%	4.75%	4.71%

Two key features of this data are the relatively small percentage uptake of foreign languages at A Level and the steady downward trend in the figures.

Interest in languages in the UK trails off steeply after the GCSE (age 16), when the compulsory requirement finishes. In 2002, 550,000 students took a language at GCSE. The UK Government is dropping the compulsory requirement to age 16 and proposes to make foreign languages optional from age 14. Most UK commentators are strongly opposed to this.

The matriculation requirement of the National University of Ireland for a foreign language at Leaving Certificate is undoubtedly a significant contributory factor to the higher take-up in Ireland. Any diminution of that requirement would almost certainly lead to a significant drop-off in students taking foreign languages in the Leaving Certificate.

4.5.1 The Nuffield Languages Inquiry

The Nuffield Foundation⁵⁷ established a national inquiry in 1998 with the aim of producing an independent assessment of the UK's needs for capability in languages. The inquiry found against English being a viable *lingua franca* for the future and warned that complacency will be costly in terms of lost opportunities in global trade. Many of its findings are relevant to Ireland:

- English is not enough;
- People are looking for leadership to improve capability in languages;
- Young people in the UK are at a growing disadvantage in the recruitment market;
- The UK needs competence in many languages – not just French – but the education system is not geared to provide it;
- The government has no coherent approach to languages;

⁵⁶ From the 2003 Nuffield Languages Programme study, *A New Landscape for Languages*.

⁵⁷ A UK charitable trust which aims to 'advance social well being', particularly through research. www.nuffieldfoundation.org (April 2005).

- University language departments are closing, leaving the sector in crisis; and
- The UK needs more language teachers.

Among the key proposals made in the report are:

- Designate language a key skill;
- Drive forward a national strategy;
- Appoint a *Supremo* for Languages;
- Raise the profile of languages;
- Develop the huge potential of language learning in adult life;
- Establish a national standards framework for describing and accrediting language competence; and
- Coordinate initiatives linking technology and languages.

These recommendations warrant consideration in the Irish context.

4.5.2 UK Government Strategy & Policy

The UK Department of Education and Skills established a National Languages Steering Group in 2001 to raise awareness of languages and provide input into a national strategy for the development of foreign languages as a key contemporary life skill. This work culminated in the publication of *Language Learning* (DfES: 2002a) and *Languages for All: Languages for Life* (DfES: 2002b) in 2002. The UK approach post-Nuffield and some elements of the policy debate are summarised in more detail in *Appendix 5: UK Government Strategy & Language Policy*.

4.6 Experience in the United States

The *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* published a report in 2002⁵⁸ which examined enrolments over the period 1994 to 2000. It found that at the high school level 44% of students were studying a foreign language: Spanish continues to dominate at around 70% of all language enrolments.

There does not appear to be any federal policy on languages in education. The US education system is quite fragmented and designed at local level rather than from the top down. This makes comparisons difficult, as language participation seems to vary significantly from state to state and even within states.

As with other countries, pupils at private schools are more likely to be studying a foreign language and that language is very likely to be Spanish.

It is difficult to say what can be learnt from the US system except that in the overall statistical comparison, Ireland's engagement with foreign languages is again significantly higher than in the US at secondary level. This is the most appropriate level at which to benchmark capability as it is the group with most potential to integrate language as a life-skill – the more the numbers decline at the end of second level the harder it becomes to build any momentum on languages at third level and later in adult education.

⁵⁸ *Foreign Language Enrolments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 2000*.

5 Broader Social and Economic Value of Foreign Language Skills

While the focus of this study is on the current and projected foreign language skills requirements of the enterprise sector, taking the development agency client companies as a sample, there is an underlying awareness of the broader value, economically as well as socially and culturally, to individuals and society of having some level of proficiency in languages; language ability bestows benefits in all life contexts.

As the Key to Cultural Awareness

Language and cultural awareness are inextricably linked; they reinforce one another. The study of a foreign language is a vehicle for gaining insight into the distinctive cultural make-up of its native speakers and the nuances and etiquette associated with their social interaction. Thus knowledge of a foreign language can build *cultural* capital and unmask the range of influences and values that contribute to national attitudes and perspectives.

Cultural capital is an asset that facilitates relationships with other groups or nationalities. The aphorism “travel broadens the mind” can be reformulated as “travel expands a person’s cultural capital”, especially if it is combined with knowledge of other languages.

Furthermore, in the context of an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, language skills are also an important contributor to social capital and can help to create social cohesion within local communities and at national level.

As a Contributor to International Competitive Advantage

A Knowledge Economy is one in which knowledge is generated, acquired, distributed and used effectively by businesses, organisations, individuals and communities. In a knowledge-led society, innovation is at the heart of economic progress. Innovation takes time but contributes immense strategic value. Innovation is effectively a strategy for competitive advantage, based on knowledge generated through collaboration among enterprise and universities and other institutes of learning. Trans-national collaborative alliances and networks will be an extremely important spur to innovation. In this process, knowledge management will be essential for maximising the economic benefit and spill-over between nations.

It seems unlikely that such an objective can be achieved solely through the English language: countries with higher levels of linguistic and cultural diversity have access to more varied knowledge and ideas than countries with few languages and cultures. Knowledge of foreign languages can therefore provide a competitive edge in this process. Ireland must view the build-up of foreign language capability as a strategic issue, just like innovation. Those with access to diverse information and ideas will prosper through enhanced creativity; creativity being a precursor to innovation.

The European Imperative

The free movement of people is a core principle of the EU. With the accession of ten new members to the EU in 2004 there are now 20 official national languages in the EU. Consequently, mono-lingualism or inadequate bilingualism will limit the options for further study, training, work experience and employment in other member states.

Recent EU policy on language has been strongly influenced by the challenges posed by the enlargement in 2004. The great challenge of bringing ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse peoples into a cohesive knowledge economy while preserving the richness embodied in their differences (“*unity in diversity*”) is centrally bound up with language. The EU Commission regards the ability to understand and communicate in other languages as a basic skill for all European citizens. Its goal that every European citizen should have mother tongue plus two languages is important for building a fabric of cohesion. In 2002, the European Commission observed:

*“One of the keys to the European Union’s success as a knowledge-based economy is how well it tackles the issue of language learning. How well it deals with wider issues of language, culture and diversity over the coming decade will shape its cohesion and its role in the world.”*⁵⁹

An action plan to further these objectives has been approved by the member states⁶⁰ and work is underway on implementing this plan as part of the “Education and Training 2010” programme⁶¹.

The Global Context

Rapid technological, economic and social change over the past twenty years has created a world that is complex, interconnected and highly interdependent. Given Ireland’s openness to this environment⁶² as the underlying approach to our economic strategy over several decades, there is a clear implication that the skills approach for the Irish labour force should be one which promotes knowledge and transferable skills which facilitate international mobility.

The belief that English alone is enough to function successfully in both employment and life terms remains a widely held belief in countries where English is the mother tongue, understandably perhaps given the proliferation of English resulting from cultural and economic globalisation. It is the first foreign language in most European countries and many continental business people can speak some English. English is manifest in everyday life in many countries in pop culture, satellite television and the Internet.

However, such a viewpoint overlooks the fact that 75% of the world’s population do not speak any English and 94% of the world’s population do not speak English as their mother tongue. The world now contains 6,909 living languages. Of these 250 languages are each spoken by more than one million people. Some 66% of the world’s children are raised as bilingual speakers. The ten most common first languages and numbers of speakers are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Language Diversity⁶³

Language	Speakers (millions)
Mandarin	885
Spanish	332
English	322
Arabic	220
Bengali	189
Hindi	182
Portuguese	170
Russian	170
Japanese	125
German	98

59 Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity – Consultation, Staff Working Paper, pg. 5, *European Commission*, 2002.

60 *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*, European Commission, July 2003.

61 Progress Report of the Working Group on “Improving Foreign Language Learning”, *European Commission*, Nov. 2003.

62 Ireland achieved the top ranking in the A T Kearney/Foreign Policy Magazine *Globalisation Index* for 2004, for the third consecutive year. The Index measures globalisation across four broad categories: political engagement, technology, personal contact and economic integration.

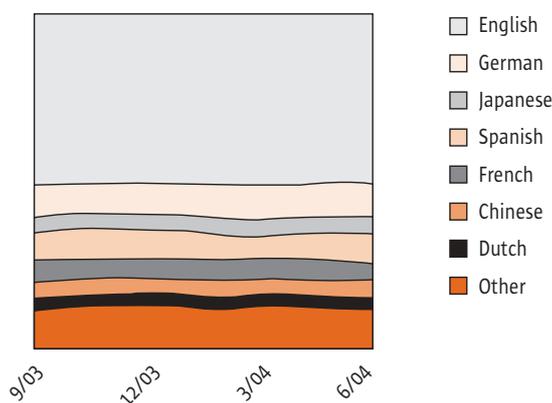
63 Sources: Worldwatch Institute, May-June 2001, SIL International, 2002 Annual Report; CILT, the National Centre for Languages, UK.

The reality is that most people prefer to buy in their own language. The fact that many continental or other business people can speak some English should not be construed as proof that they are happy to buy in English; they too prefer to buy in their native language.

Languages on the Web

A further indication of the diversity of languages in the contemporary global village is provided by the breakdown of languages used by individuals to access the Google web search utility, as illustrated in Figure 16⁶⁴.

Figure 16: Languages Used to Access Google



While English is by far the most popular language, it is interesting to observe that approximately 50% of users worldwide choose a language other than English. So even for this totem of the web generation, English is far from being the exclusive language that it is sometimes purported to be. If 50% of web users are most comfortable searching the web through their native tongue, then it is reasonable to assume that they would also be similarly inclined when faced with commercial transactions.

Furthermore, as web access approaches saturation in the English speaking world in the near future, it is primed for significant expansion, particularly in Spanish and Chinese speaking regions, over the medium-term; consequently the relative proportion of native English speakers accessing the Web is destined to diminish in the years ahead.

Pragmatic approaches to Fluency

It is only in a limited number of contexts that very high levels of proficiency in another language are required; for example, in the academic sphere or for those working as translators, where it is central to the role. Otherwise, the aim of all communication is to exchange messages – grammatical correctness or levels of fluency, important though they may be, may not be the decisive factor in communicating successfully.

The level of language fluency required in the majority of situations and for many individuals is a basic tool-kit for communication *i.e.* a sufficient grasp of the language to support basic communication in the relevant context *e.g.* the products and services provided by an exporting firm. Perfection is often not required in the second language, or the third. Native levels are attainable only by natives and may be an inappropriate and unrealistic benchmark for second and third languages. The Council of Europe makes a number of relevant observations:

64 Information sourced from Google Inc. www.google.com/press/zeitgeist.html (August 2004).

“Language learning does not necessarily mean the acquisition of one or two languages to a high degree of skill in all aspects of language learning. It may also commonly include the acquisition of different languages for different purposes and therefore with different emphases on what should be learnt at different stages in life.”

“Potential learners or their parents often have out-dated beliefs about how languages are learnt and about the methods used in language teaching, even though methods of language learning have changed radically in the last two or three decades, as have the purposes... the aims of language learning in the past were fulfilled only at the end of a long period of study when learners had acquired enough knowledge to study the texts of high culture, such as literature and philosophy, contemporary aims are to enable learners to use what they learn immediately for simple exchanges in everyday situations...”

It is now recognised that a more appropriate model is the person who can speak and/or write to differing degrees of competence a number of languages – a plurilingual competence – and peoples’ repertoire of languages will change in emphasis as they meet varying linguistic needs throughout life, and thus need to add to their repertoire through options of lifelong learning.”

Council of Europe, Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe, April 2003

6 Conclusions

This study did not uncover any evidence of an acute shortage of language skills in the sectors of the Irish economy within its scope (see Section 1.3) at the present time. However, it did identify some important considerations which, taken together, suggest that it would be short-sighted if either policy-makers, or businesses, wishing to promote international commerce from Ireland, were to adopt a complacent approach to this issue. These considerations flow from the future requirements of both the indigenous and foreign-owned enterprise sectors.

General

- Proficiency in foreign languages can be an important enabler in efforts to translate the aspiration to a knowledge economy into reality;
- Foreign language skills are life skills, not merely an employment qualification;
- The life-skill case should underpin the rationale for learning foreign languages;
- In planning for future skills needs, the *'English is enough'* viewpoint, while superficially appealing, is seriously flawed and needs to be strongly countered;
- The new EU Constitution⁶⁵ commits the Union to *"developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of Member States"*.⁶⁶ Improving integration and enhancing mobility are all essential elements of the Lisbon Agenda⁶⁷, to which Ireland is fully committed.

Foreign-owned Enterprise

- Services, and internationally-traded services in particular, will play an increasingly important role as a driver of future economic development in Ireland;
- Service transactions generally involve a high level of human interaction and therefore require sophisticated communication skills; for some markets, this will necessitate foreign language proficiency;
- Foreign language skills, sourced primarily from non-nationals, are already supporting a substantial component of foreign-owned enterprise, that contributes significantly to the Irish economy, both in terms of employment opportunities for Irish nationals, and revenue generated for the exchequer through personal and corporate taxation;
- The proven ability of multinationals to provide multi-lingual services from Ireland, in such a diverse range of languages, conveys a positive image of the country and augurs well for the growth of higher-added value activities, with a foreign language element;
- Access to migrants will be an on-going requirement in order to satisfy the demand in the Irish economy for foreign language skills. However, the availability of an internal supply of foreign language skills will also be increasingly important if Ireland is to be successful in attracting FDI in activities such as Internationally-Traded Services; Business Process Outsourcing; Sales and Marketing for the EMEA regions; and European Headquarters functions for US multi-nationals.

Indigenous Enterprise

- The foreign language requirement within indigenous enterprise stems primarily from direct sales and marketing activities, targeted at foreign markets. A less than native level of proficiency often suffices for these activities;

⁶⁵ Approved by the EU Council in June 2004, but still to be ratified by the member states.

⁶⁶ Article III-182 (2).

⁶⁷ In 2002 the Education Council adopted "Education and Training 2010", a programme to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems, in direct support of the Lisbon Agenda. The Council designated foreign language capability a key competency for a knowledge society and advocated the teaching of two foreign languages from an early age.

- However, indigenous firms, by and large, do not, currently, ascribe great value to foreign language skills. There is evidence, both national and international, to suggest that firms may be losing out on export opportunities as a result. Often, a chicken-and-egg scenario develops wherein 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;
- International business relationships will be crucial to indigenous enterprise in the future. Success in marketing and selling Irish goods and services will be contingent on the ability of the indigenous sector to establish and maintain close relationships with customers in global markets; in addition, partnerships and collaborations with foreign enterprises will be key drivers of innovation and growth;
- Cultural awareness is a prerequisite for forging successful cross-cultural relationships. Language capability and cultural awareness are inextricably linked: the former greatly facilitates the acquisition of the latter;
- Irish firms with in-house language expertise will be at a considerable advantage in forging such relationships. Firms without such expertise will find it more difficult to move “*closer to their customers*”, as advocated by the Enterprise Strategy Group⁶⁸;

S u p p l y

- There is a significant pool of foreign language capability present among those completing the Leaving Certificate currently; however, it is rapidly dissipated due to the failure of enterprise and the individuals themselves to capitalise on it. Furthermore, this resource is precarious; it is sustained by the matriculation requirements of the NUI and any further moves to relax this requirement⁶⁹ are likely to be highly detrimental to the take-up of languages at second level;
- Language skills are complementary to other skills such as Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) and are not in competition with them, nor are these skills mutually exclusive. A renewed focus on language skills in the education system will serve to enhance the value of these other skills to students;
- Significant public resources are already allocated to language tuition; furthermore students at all levels are already investing a significant amount of time and effort in the study of languages. What is required is a reevaluation of existing language provision in order to ensure that both the State and the individual students are deriving the maximum benefit from their respective investments;
- Future policy on languages should take account of the extent and likely continuance of migration into Ireland. The pool of foreign language capability created by immigration should be viewed and utilised as a resource.

Over recent decades, Ireland’s approach to economic development, characterised above all by an awareness of the need to adapt and adjust to changing requirements, has brought self-evident rewards. Ireland’s willingness to reach out has been a source of competitive advantage as well as national differentiation. Yet, recognition of the economic value of foreign language skills has been slow to materialise. Complacency in relation to the supply of language skills on the part of either the State or enterprise may result in indigenous firms failing to achieve their full potential in the global market over the medium-term on the one hand, and curtail the natural evolution of the foreign-owned sector on the other.

68 Ahead of the Curve: Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy, *Forfás*, 2004.

69 With effect from 2003/4, NUI Maynooth accepts any recognised subject in place of the third language for engineering courses.

7 Recommendations

The following recommendations are advanced to address the challenges identified in this study.

Recommendation 1: National Languages Policy

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, in all learning contexts. This policy should be driven by the cultural, social and economic needs of learners and the state. In particular, it should be cognisant of the future requirements of the enterprise sector, as identified by the development agencies and industry associations.

Recommendation 2: Language Education

- i. The work of the NCCA in reviewing the senior cycle is strongly endorsed, in particular as it relates to a new approach to language education at second level;
- ii. The Modern Languages in Primary Schools pilot programme should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum and made available to all primary schools;
- iii. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative should likewise 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;
- iv. The importance of foreign languages as a life-skill, as a promoter of cultural awareness and as a means of enhancing the value of other skills, be they intellectual or vocational, must be reflected in the teaching of languages at all levels of the education system.

Recommendation 3: Language Careers

IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and IBEC should collaborate to build up a portfolio of case-studies of the range of career opportunities open to those with foreign language skills. This portfolio should be made available to career guidance teachers, with appropriate backup, for dissemination to students.

Recommendation 4: Frameworks

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), in collaboration with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the NCCA, and the State Examinations Commission (SEC), should reference language competency as measured by the Common European Framework of Reference to the *National Framework of Qualifications*.

Recommendation 5: Awards

Subsequent to the implementation of Recommendation 4, FETAC, HETAC, the universities, DIT and the SEC, in consultation with the NQAI, should devise an appropriate award matrix for language learning by referencing each of their own awards, including grading/classification within these, as appropriate, within the National Framework of Qualifications against the Common European Framework of Reference. A key benefit of this exercise would be a better awareness and appreciation among employers and students alike of the language value inherent in particular courses.

Recommendation 6: IBEC European Orientation Programme

IBEC and Enterprise Ireland should capitalise on the success of the European Orientation Programme to date and consider how it might be expanded. For students, it provides clear evidence of the link between language skills and career options, and for enterprise it demonstrates how language skills can contribute to export success.

Appendix 1: Organisations Consulted

Demand Side

Foreign Companies:

America On-Line (AOL)
Apple Computers
Best Western
Bowne Global Solutions
Dell Computers
eBookers
Hertz
Hewlett Packard
IBM
ICT Eurotel
Ingersoll Rand
Intel
Lufthansa
Merchants Group
Microsoft
Oracle
Pfizer
PFPC
Pioneer Asset Management
RCI
SAP
Starwood

Indigenous Companies/Organisations:

Biotrin
An Bord Bia
Cooley Distillers
CRH
Dublin Industry Funds Association (DIFA)
Enterprise Ireland
Financial Services Ireland
Food & Safety Association of Ireland
Grafton Recruitment
IBEC
IDA Ireland
Intersource Group Ltd
Irish Distillers
Irish Exporters Association
Irish Management Institute (IMI)
Irish Translators & Interpreters Association
Kepak
Kerry Group
Marketing Institute of Ireland
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
PXIT limited
Shannon Development

Supply Side

Government:

Department of Education and Science
Conradh na Gaeilge
FÁS
Forfás
Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
Higher Education Authority
Institúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
National Office of Industry and International Links

Academia:

Athlone Institute of Technology
Blanchardstown Institute of Technology
Dublin City University
Dublin Institute of Technology
Goethe Institute
Institute of Technology, Tallaght
Institute of Technology, Tralee
National University of Ireland
Royal Irish Academy
Trinity College, Dublin
University College Dublin

Other Organisations:

British Chambers of Commerce
EU Representative Office, Dublin
Léargas
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Nuffield Foundation, UK
University of Southampton, Languages Dept

Appendix 2: The Common European Framework

Council of Europe Strategy

The Council of Europe has long been aware that the dominance of English as the most widely taught foreign language is problematic for the promotion of linguistic diversity:

“Linguistic diversification remains an objective of the language policies of European institutions.....For many reasons, a self-reinforcing upward spiral operates in favour of English as the first foreign language in almost all educational systems and in general international communication, not only in Europe, but on a global scale....However, one single vehicular language is not a panacea for international communication in a linguistically complex Europe.”⁷⁰

The Council and its 45 member states have decided to promote linguistic diversity at the level of society and Plurilingualism at the level of the individual. The objective is to promote the learning of several languages for all individuals in the course of their lives, so that Europeans become plurilingual and intercultural citizens, able to interact with others from different cultures in all aspects of their lives.

The Common European Framework was adopted by the Council of Europe to establish a common standard to measure language competency in languages (outside of native or mother-tongue) irrespective of how the language capability was achieved. This framework was developed and agreed by the Council’s 42 member states as a reference framework for competence, from the most basic to the most fluent. It is based on six levels within three broad bands as follows:

Proficient User

C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express himself or herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him or herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed texts on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

Independent User

B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his or her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce a simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations and explanations for opinions and plans.

⁷⁰ Language Learning for European Citizenship - Final Report, Council of Europe, 1997.

Basic User

A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce himself or herself and others and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Appendix 3: The REFLECT Study

REFLECT (Review of Foreign Language & Cultural Training Needs) was an international initiative over a two-year period (2000-02) to promote the economic and mobility value of acquiring linguistic competences. The project was co-funded by the European Commission, under the *Leonardo da Vinci Programme*, and designed to support European objectives of improving competitiveness in European companies by reviewing and measuring language and cultural needs, competencies and deficiencies. The project adopted the EU cut-off of 500 employees for an SME (in Ireland the cut-off is 250 employees). Nevertheless, nearly 90% of the companies surveyed had fewer than 250 employees.

Almost 50% of the companies exported from 30% to 100% of their products/services; a further 11% exported from 10% to 30% of their output.

- Language skills at some level were present in 67% of companies with 100 to 250 staff;
- In companies with less than 10 employees this dropped to 27%;
- Of companies exporting more than half their output 57% had language skills;
- Of companies exporting less than 10% of their output 23% had language skills.

Lost Business Arising from Language and Cultural Barriers

1 in 7 companies had encountered barriers in dealings with overseas companies – Japan, France and Germany caused the greatest difficulties. 9% of SMEs were aware that they had lost business because of language or cultural barriers. Reasons given for lost trading opportunities were cultural barriers, language mistranslation or misinterpretation. Some noted inability to negotiate – particularly in sales situations – resulting in lost business; also sales were lost because the “culture of selling” was not understood, particularly in non-European countries. The types of cultural barriers referenced included management styles (practice and etiquette) and methods of conducting business (meetings, social behaviour, religion or political background) as well as culture in a general sense.

Language Training

Only 1 in 6 companies had provided language training for employees in the previous three years. The most popular languages were French, German, Spanish, Italian and Japanese. Almost one third of the companies said they would require further training in the languages listed above with a small number (4%) also citing Chinese.

Language Strategies

Approximately 1 company in 6 had a language strategy – the most common being to deal with customers in their own mother tongue; some said it was sufficient to use the mother tongue at the introductory stage, and then use English. Over 40% of the companies used translators at some stage – mostly for literature and technical documents.

REFLECT Study Conclusions

“...With regard to foreign language use and cultural and language training Ireland’s position as an island nation and its proximity to the United Kingdom, reliance on English as a lingua franca for trade and commerce is strongly apparent in this study. Although a number of companies noted that a lack of linguistic ability and cultural knowledge deficiency had affected trade, this figure was not that high...the phase of the study that examined the success stories of organisations that developed some

form of a language or cultural strategy to overcome barriers to trade, reported enormous benefits and increases in sales and customer satisfaction [in comparison with earlier studies]...

“Many companies were not aware of the importance of foreign language use and training. Language training is not classified as a core business strategy in international trade in Irish businesses, and nor is cultural awareness training prioritised. In light of these facts and figures, the potential success of a large number of small businesses, that aspire to expand into a foreign market, is debatable. Most, might just escape from having to acquire a new language. However, in an increasingly expanding European market, within an already competitive global economy, others will be faced with a strong challenge ahead from their European and International counterparts, who are already leaps and bounds ahead in the linguistic league table”.

Appendix 4: British Chamber of Commerce Study – Key Findings

In 2003 the British Chambers of Commerce, in conjunction with the UK Learning and Skills Council, published the first of a two-part study entitled “*The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business*”. This part was a qualitative assessment of how language learning influences the attitude and behaviour of British exporters when confronted with foreign markets. The second, quantitative part of the study was published in 2004 and surveyed 1,000 exporters and focused on the extent to which export business is being lost or gained as a result of language competency.

The survey identified four categories into which British exporters can be grouped in terms of their behaviour and attitudes:

- **“Anglocentrics**, who focus their exports on the old British Empire countries;
- **Opportunists**, who respond to approaches from overseas customers rather than instigate business development initiative;
- **Adaptors**, who make an effort to adjust their approach and offering to their overseas market;
- **Enablers**, who are strategically focused on market penetration, facilitating a local presence in their overseas markets”.

The British study highlights the ambivalence toward foreign languages felt by many business people in the UK. At the same time, it pointed to a degree of self-consciousness about lack of ability in foreign languages, particularly from the cohort described as ‘Adaptors’:

“We went to this exhibition in France and on our stand there was a Spanish and an Italian guy and our French agent and a Spanish customer of ours and myself. And they were all talking quite fluently in one of the languages.....and I just stood there looking at the ceiling and the floor. And it does get embarrassing, you feel inferior, it knocks your confidence.”

Respondent to UK survey.

Although this is an anecdote from a UK study, it is likely to be representative of the experience of an Irish company, operating as it does, from an English-speaking environment.

Some of the common views held by exporters the survey identified were:

- *“Exporters express strong support of the Government’s drive to introduce foreign languages at primary school level;*
- *All respondents, even those that speak foreign languages, consider English to be **the** international business language;*
- *It is necessary for many overseas companies to employ English-speaking staff in order that they may trade effectively with other English speaking countries;*
- *Language is just one of the many key factors exporters consider when developing export markets;*
- *Because of the breadth of markets covered, most exporters question the practicality of learning languages to support their business dealings.”*

The most enlightened cohort from a language perspective was the ‘Enablers’. They were seen to adapt their products and services to target markets and had experience of recruiting multilingual staff to work in their UK operations and perceived clear benefits from doing so:

“The multi-linguist in the business makes it easier for the customer to do business with us. The communication is much better, they feel comfortable, they feel we are trying for them, they feel that we are very interested in them and if these days you can make the customer feel more cosy, that’s a real big thing.”

Respondent to UK survey

Appendix 5: UK Government Strategy & Language Policy

The approach taken in the UK acknowledges that the issue of languages reaches out well past the classroom – that languages are a lifelong skill and that the learning context will be varied, extending beyond the formal education system.

The strategy has three key objectives:

1. To improve teaching and learning of languages – including making the most of e-learning;
2. To introduce a recognition system – to give people accreditation for their language skills, and not just those coming through the formal educational system; and
3. To increase the number of people studying languages in further and higher education and in work-based training by stimulating demand for language learning, developing Virtual Language Communities and encouraging employers to play a more active part in language learning.

It recognised that in the knowledge society of this century language competence and inter-cultural understanding will be essential components of citizenship, and not just in a purely altruistic sense but will be crucial in order to be active and effective in international commerce. People who can move from country to country in pursuit of commercial opportunities, and can overcome language barriers, will be most likely to succeed on the international stage.

The UK strategy recognises the need for more teachers, language-learning opportunities for individual learners, and the greater deployment of ICT in the school system. It recognises that there is need for a motivational campaign to drive interest in language and at the same time to provide appropriate learning opportunities: a push and pull approach. The strategy is committed to the establishment of a new voluntary recognition system to complement existing national qualifications and the *Common European Framework* and form a *ladder of recognition* from beginner to the highest levels of competency.

It was recognised as a necessary intervention to provide a web of accreditation that could embrace all the distinct modes of learning from the adult beginner to the more formal schooling system. Apart from the natural inclusion-effect that this has on a diversity of routes to learning it should also motivate people to work their way up the grid. To this end the *Common European Framework* is widely recognised as a model approach to this issue; it enjoys transnational acceptance across the Council of Europe's member countries.

“In the knowledge society of the 21st century, where a premium is placed on communicative ability, countries, companies and individuals must communicate successfully in order to prosper and survive...At the heart of communication is language. The complexity of modern society creates complex language needs – access to a single language is not enough and languages are more than a useful skill or a subject in school. Competence in languages has become a core and defining characteristic of a citizen. The languages deficit in the UK has become an urgent economic, social and political question.”

Dr Lid King,
UK National Languages Director
“An Agenda for Languages”
Birmingham, October 2001

The National Languages Strategy proposes initiatives that are intended to achieve a step change in foreign language competence in the UK. It also outlines plans to broaden and enrich the opportunities for language learning at school and beyond and to create an appetite for learning. It states:

“The Government is determined to ensure that languages take their proper place at the heart of initiatives and activities to further the wider social, economic and political agenda. A key part of this is communicating the importance of languages, both at a national and local level. We will identify and expand opportunities for language use in printed, electronic and broadcast media and communications.”

The UK’s National Languages Strategy will be supported by dedicated investment, which will rise to £10 million (€14.3 million) per annum by 2005-2006. The plan states that the success of the UK strategy will be measured against the following targeted outcomes:

“All learners should have the opportunity to have their learning recognised.

- *Primary children should have an entitlement to high quality teaching and learning that instills enthusiasm in learning languages, is based on a flexible experience and makes the most of ICT and sets a foundation for future learning and success.*
- *Secondary pupils should have high quality teaching and learning ... and a flexible curriculum and range of routes to support success during the 14-19 phase.*
- *Schools should be able to draw on the people they need to deliver language learning, and be supported to deliver high quality teaching and learning.*
- *The demand for language learning from adults should increase.*
- *Businesses should be involved in supporting language learning and championing the importance of language skills.*
- *Businesses should be able to recruit employees with a wider range of language skills to better meet their business needs.”*

The UK National Centre for Languages is currently sponsoring a National Languages Standards Awards Programme as part of a National Languages for Export Campaign. The awards are designed to recognise outstanding achievement in overcoming language and cultural barriers in global trade. There are nine award categories including business, education, training and technology with the common theme of the interconnection between export performance and knowledge of language and cultures.

Appendix 6: Members of Steering Committee

Kevin McCarthy (<i>Chairperson</i>)	Dept. Education & Science
Claire Bolger	Dell
Paula Carroll	IDA Ireland
Roger Fox	FÁS
David Hedigan	Enterprise Ireland
Nicola Horgan	IBEC
Mary Molloy	IDA Ireland
Christopher O'Shea	Institute of International Trade of Ireland
Eamonn Cahill	Forfás

Appendix 7: Members of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Anne Heraty	CPL Resources PLC	<i>Chairperson</i>
Senan Cooke	Waterford Crystal Ltd.	<i>Member</i>
Jack Golden	Cement Roadstone Holdings PLC/IEI	<i>Member</i>
Una Halligan	Hewlett Packard	<i>Member</i>
Joe McCarthy	Arkaon Ltd.	<i>Member</i>
Dr. Sean McDonagh	<i>Former</i> Director of Dundalk IT	<i>Member</i>
Aileen O'Donoghue	IBEC	<i>Member</i>
Peter Rigney	ICTU	<i>Member</i>
Linda Tanham	Mandate	<i>Member</i>
David Barry	Dept. of Enterprise, Trade & Employment	<i>Advisor</i>
Ruth Carmody	Dept. of Education & Science	<i>Advisor</i>
Brian Cogan	Forfás	<i>Advisor</i>
Fergal Costello	Higher Education Authority	<i>Advisor</i>
Roger Fox	FÁS	<i>Advisor</i>
Anne Nolan	Dept. of Finance	<i>Advisor</i>
Martin Shanahan	Forfás	<i>Head of Secretariat</i>

Appendix 8: Publications by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

Report	Date of Publication
The First Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs – Responding to Ireland’s Growing Skills Needs	December 1998
Business Education and Training Partnership Report on the Inaugural Forum, Royal Hospital Kilmainham	March 1999
The Second Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs – Responding to Ireland’s Growing Skills Needs	March 2000
Business Education and Training Partnership 2nd Forum, Dublin	March 2000
Report on E-Business Skills	August 2000
Report on In-Company Training	August 2000
Benchmarking Mechanisms and Strategies to Attract Researchers to Ireland	July 2001
The Third Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs – Responding to Ireland’s Growing Skills Needs	August 2001
Labour Participation Rates of the over 55s in Ireland	December 2001
The Irish Labour Market: Prospects for 2002 and Beyond	January 2002
National Survey of Vacancies in the Private Non-Agricultural Sector 2001/2002	March 2003
National Survey of Vacancies in the Public Sector 2001/2002	March 2003
The Demand and Supply of Skills in the Food Processing Sector	April 2003
The Demand and Supply of Engineers and Engineering Technicians	June 2003
Skills Monitoring Report – Construction Industry 2003/10	July 2003
Benchmarking Education and Training for Economic Development in Ireland	July 2003
The Demand and Supply of Skills in the Biotechnology Sector	September 2003
Responding to Ireland’s Growing Skills Needs – The Fourth Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs	October 2003
Financial Skills Monitoring Report	November 2003
Literature Review on Aspects of Training of those at Work in Ireland	June 2004
The Supply and Demand for Researchers and Research Personnel	September 2004
Innovate Market Sell	November 2004
Skills Requirements of the Digital Content Industry in Ireland Phase I	February 2005

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