Gaeloideachas

Guth don Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta

Fáiltíonn Gaeloideachas roimh an deis aighneacht maidir leis an earnáil luathoideachais lán-Ghaeilge lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht a chur faoi bhráid An Comhchoiste um Leanaí agus Comhionannas

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18 Meitheamh 2025

Is eagraíocht náisiúnta dheonach í Gaeloideachas a thacaíonn le forbairt an oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge. Bunaíodh í mar Ghaelscoileanna sa bhliain 1973 chun tacú le scoileanna lán -Ghaeilge, bunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna, lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, agus áirítear anois i réimse chúram na heagraíochta seirbhísí tacaíochta a sholáthar do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht, agus do réamhscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht.

Aithnímid an obair shuntasach atá ar siúl ag an Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais agus Comhionannais agus ag an Roinn Oideachais araon i bhforbairt dhá phríomhpholasaí, atá le foilsiú in 2025: (1) Plean Náisiúnta do Sholáthar Gaeilge san Fhoghlaim agus Cúram na Luath Óige agus sa Chúram Leanaí d'Aois Scoile (RLMC) agus (2) Polasaí don Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht (RO). Tá an cumas ag an dá cheann feabhas suntasach a chur ar inbhuanaitheacht na seirbhísí, ar na coinníollacha dóibh siúd atá ag obair iontu agus, thar aon rud eile, ar cháilíocht agus ar inrochtaineacht oideachais agus cúram luathbhlianta trí mheán na Gaeilge do leanaí.

Tá an dá pholasaí i gcéimeanna ríthábhachtacha ina bhforbairt anois, agus tá Gaeloideachas ag iarraidh an toradh is fearr a chinntiú do leanaí agus dá dteaghlaigh. Tugann siad deis dúinn cearta leanaí chun oideachais agus cúram trí mheán na Gaeilge a chur i gcroílár a gcuid oibre, agus seirbhísí lán-Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil do chách mar rogha gan cur isteach ar inrochtaineacht, caighdeán, acmhainní, tacaíocht d'oideachas speisialta, ná aon rud eile.

Cloisim faoi na dúshláin a bhíonn roimh fhoireann na Naíonraí gach lá. Táimid imithe thar phointe na géarchéime san earnáil luathbhlianta maidir le hearcaíocht, coinneáil foirne, tuarastal múinteoirí/oideachasóirí agus inbhuanaitheacht na seirbhísí seo. Tá na dúshláin seo níos measa dóibh siúd atá ag obair i Naíonraí – toisc go bhfuil riachtanais bhreise acu agus iad ag feidhmiú trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Leagann an aighneacht seo amach forbhreathnú gairid ar na saincheisteanna a théann i bhfeidhm ar earnáil na luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge faoi láthair, agus moltaí Gaeloideachas maidir le conas a d'fhéadfaí aghaidh a thabhairt orthu tríd an dá pholasaí nua agus a bpleananna cur chun feidhme ina dhiaidh sin.

Naíonraí

Is iad na naíonraí bunchloch chóras an tumoideachais in Éirinn. Lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, is minic gurb iad an chéad teagmháil a bhíonn ag leanaí leis an nGaeilge, agus i gcás leanaí atá á dtógáil le Gaeilge, tá naíonraí riachtanach chun a chinntiú go bhfuil saibhriú agus cúram ar fáil ina dteanga dhúchais féin. Soláthraíonn naíonraí spás luachmhar freisin le haghaidh malartú agus comhtháthú cultúrtha, le fócas ar chumarsáid chuimsitheach agus tumtha, agus ba chóir

go mbeadh an deis ag gach leanbh, beag beann ar a dteanga dhúchais, a riachtanais oideachais nó a gcúlra cultúrtha, freastal ar naíonra áitiúil.

Forbhreathnú ar na dúshláin reatha atá roimh earnáil na luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge

Tá líon na naíonraí ag titim ar ráta suntasach lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. Níl rochtain ag gach pobal Gaelscoile ar naíonra. Is ar éigean go bhfuil aon sheirbhís nua ag oscailt, agus tá níos mó ag dúnadh. Tá na naíonraí atá ann cheana féin faoi bhagairt mar gheall ar easpa tacaíochta agus infheistíochta. Tá gá le struchtúr tacaíochta feabhsaithe chun cabhrú le naíonraí seirbhís iomlán a sholáthar trí Ghaeilge agus caighdeán a chinntiú do leanaí, agus tá scéim fóirdheontais riachtanach chun go mbeidh seirbhísí in ann foireann a bhfuil na scileanna cuí acu sa Gaeilge a earcú agus a choinneáil. Molaimid liúntas a íoc le hoideoirí atá ag obair i naíonra (suíomh tumoideachais Gaeilge) ar bhonn bliantúil, cosúil leis an liúntas atá i bhfeidhm do mhúinteoirí bunscoile atá ag múineadh i nGaelscoil.

Tá seirbhísí tacaíochta do naíonraí an-teoranta mar gheall ar easpa maoinithe. Idir 2013-2014, cailleadh beagnach €1.4 milliún de mhaoiniú Stáit a bhí ann chun tacú le naíonraí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht: €876,900 nuair a bhaineann scéim fóirdheontas a chur Foras na Gaeilge ar fáil agus €500,000 nuair a bhain Pobal maoiniú ón eagraíocht tacaíochta, Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (FNT), atá anois dúnta. Cé go bhfaigheann Gaeloideachas roinnt maoiniú do thacaíocht sonrach do na naíonraí, lena n-áirítear socrú maoinithe bliana trí Pobal do 2025, tá sé i bhfad níos lú ná a bhfuil ag teastáil chun tacaíocht chuí a thabhairt don earnáil agus chun seirbhísí inbhuanaithe ardchaighdeáin a chinntiú do leanaí. Tá difríochtaí móra idir na múnlaí maoinithe do naíonraí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht agus naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht.

Moltaí Gaeloideachas don dá pholasaí atá á fhorbairt

Tá aighneachtaí cuimsitheacha déanta ag Gaeloideachas trí na próisis chomhairliúcháin phoiblí don dá pholasaí, agus tá achoimre ar phríomhphointí gach ceann acu thíos. Creidimid go mbeadh na hidirghabhálacha straitéiseacha agus na hinfheistíochtaí seo ó thaobh an Stáit chun leasa leanaí agus a dteaghlaigh agus go gcuideoidh siad le todhchaí na Gaeilge a chinntiú mar theanga bheo.

Comhionannas rochtana

Chun go mbeadh rochtain ag gach leanbh ar naíonra, beag beann ar an áit ina gcónaíonn siad, beag beann ar a dteanga(cha) baile, a gcúlra cultúrtha nó socheacnamaíoch nó aon riachtanais bhreise a d'fhéadfadh a bheith acu, molann Gaeloideachas:

- feachtas feasachta náisiúnta ar bhuntáistí an tumoideachais agus an cúram luath-thumoideachais, agus d'fhéadfaí é seo a dhéanamh tríd an bhfeachtas feasachta náisiúnta atá á fhorbairt ag an Roinn Leanaí faoi láthair;
- scéim tacaíochta chun naíonraí nua a bhunú agus tascfhórsa a bhunú chun tacú le naíonraí atá i mbaol dúnta;
- athbhreithniú ar an reachtaíocht a bhaineann le beartais rollaithe scoile: ní mór meicníocht a chur i bhfeidhm a cheadaíonn agus a thacaíonn le leanúnachas do leanaí atá á dtógáil le Gaeilge nó atá ag freastal ar naíonra i mbunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge.

Aitheantas

Níl aon sainmhíniú caighdeánach ar naíonra i measc ranna Stáit ná a ngníomhaireachtaí. Molann Gaeloideachas:

- scéim aitheantais oifigiúil do naíonraí - cabhróidh sé seo le tuismitheoirí a dhearbhú gur suíomh tumoideachais iomlán atá roghnaithe acu, freisin, ar an gcaoi sin, is féidir linn a chinntiú go ndéantar cigireachtaí ar chaighdeán na Gaeilge i ngach suíomh tumoideachais;
- go dtabharfar cosaint speisialta do naíonraí aitheanta mar sheirbhísí riachtanacha don phobal;
- go mbeadh tacaíochtaí breise agus sonracha ó ghníomhaireachtaí Stáit agus ó eagraíochtaí tumoideachais atá maoinithe ag an Stát do naíonraí aitheanta, mar aitheantas ar riachtanais bhreise na suíomhanna luath-thumoideachais.

Caighdeán

Chun a chinntiú nach ndéantar aon chomhghéilleadh i dtéarmaí caighdeán ná leibhéil tacaíochta do theaghlaigh a roghnaíonn naíonra nó d'fhoireann a roghnaíonn oibriú i naíonra, molann Gaeloideachas:

- scéim tacaíochta agus dearbhaithe caighdeán sonrach do naíonraí, lena n-áirítear foireann speisialtóirí luath-thumoideachais atá ar fáil ar bhonn réigiúnach a sholáthraíonn comhairle agus seirbhísí meantóireachta do naíonraí;
- scéim fóirdheontais spriocdhírithe ar fáil do naíonraí chun cabhrú leo leis na costais bhreise a bhaineann le hearcú agus coinneáil foirne a bhfuil Gaeilge líofa acu, ranganna Gaeilge agus forbairt ghairmiúil ghairmiúil do bhaill foirne, costais aistriúcháin, acmhainní Gaeilge, srl.

Ionchuimsitheacht

Chun go mbeidh naíonraí in ann seirbhís chuimsitheach a sholáthar dá bpobail, molann Gaeloideachas:

- múinteoir i ngach naíonra a bhfuil cáilíocht LINC aige/aici;
- gach tacaíocht AIM ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge agus oiriúnaithe don suíomh luath-thumoideachais;
- acmhainní agus forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach a chur ar fáil ag an am céanna i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla, agus iad a oiriúnú do riachtanais teanga an phobail sprice.

Cáilíochtaí tosaigh agus Forbairt Ghairmiúil Leanúnach

Ní mór do mhúinteoirí saineolas a bheith acu i bpeidagógaí a thacaíonn le forbairt teanga i suíomhanna luath-thumoideachais sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh di. Ní mór dóibh saineolas a bheith acu freisin i riachtanais teanga éagsúla na bpáistí. Chun a chinntiú go bhfuil múinteoirí muiníneacha agus inniúla ar fáil don earnáil, molann Gaeloideachas:

- go mbeadh oiliúint tosaigh chun cáilíocht san luathoideachas a bhaint amach ar fáil trí Ghaeilge agus go ndéanfaí dreasacht chun glacadh leis an oiliúint sin

- go mbeadh modúl ar an oideachas tumoideachais ina chuid éigeantach den oiliúint tosaigh chun cáilíocht san oideachas luath a bhaint amach, dóibh siúd a bhfuil sé beartaithe acu a bheith ag obair i suíomhanna lán-Ghaeilge agus lán-Bhéarla araon;
- go mbeadh leagan Gaeilge de na cláir Teacher Talk agus Talk Boost atá á reáchtáil mar scéimeanna píolótacha in 2025, ar fáil go forleathan;
- go mbeadh gach forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach, lena n-áirítear iad siúd a luadh thuas, agus aon fhorbairt ghairmiúil nua ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Seirbhísí trí Gaeilge a leathnú do pháistí

Chun tacú níos fearr le teaghlaigh ar mian leo go bhfoghlaimeoidh a bpáistí an Ghaeilge agus go mbainfidh siad leas as an ilteangachas, molann Gaeloideachas go bhféachfaidh an dá pholasaí atá á fhorbairt faoi láthair níos faide ná an tumoideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus go n-áireofaí seirbhísí agus tacaíochtaí níos leithne don Ghaeilge sa phobal, amhail:

- scéim tacaíochta chun cabhrú le naíonraí agus scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta seirbhísí cúraim lae, clubanna bricfeasta, clubanna iarscoile agus campaí samhraidh a sholáthar do pháistí trí mheán na Gaeilge;
- scéim tacaíochta chun úsáid na teanga sa bhaile agus sa phobal a chur chun cinn;
- go mbeadh eolaire poiblí ann de sholáthraithe a sholáthraíonn seirbhísí pobail, oideachais agus cúraim trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Gaeloideachas

Guth don Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta

Gaeloideachas welcome the invitation to make a submission in relation to the Irish-medium early years sector outside of the Gaeltacht to The Joint Committee on Children and Equality

18 June 2025

Gaeloideachas is a national, voluntary organisation supporting the development of Irish-medium education. Founded as Gaelscoileanna in 1973 to support Irish-medium schools, primary and post-primary, outside of the Gaeltacht, the organisation's remit now includes the provision of support services for Irish-medium schools in Gaeltacht areas, and for Irish-medium preschools outside of the Gaeltacht.

We recognise the significant work in progress by both the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and the Department of Education in the development of two key polices, both due for publication in 2025: (1) the National Plan for the Provision of Irish Language in Early Learning and Care and in School-Age Childcare (DCDE) and (2) the Policy on Irish-medium Education outside of the Gaeltacht (DOE). Both have the potential to significantly improve the sustainability of the services, the conditions for those working in them and, most importantly, the quality and accessibility of Irish-medium early years education and care for children.

Both policies are at critical stages in their development now, and Gaeloideachas is anxious to ensure the best outcome for children and their families. They present us with an opportunity to put the rights of children to education and care through Irish at their heart, and to make Irish-medium services available to all as a choice without compromising on accessibility, quality, resources, support for special education, or anything else.

I hear of the challenges that Naíonra staff face day in, day out. We have gone beyond the point of crisis in the Early Years sector when it comes to recruitment, retention, teacher/educator salary and the sustainability of these services. These challenges are particularly worse for those working in Naíonraí – as they have additional needs as they operate through the medium of Irish.

This submission outlines a brief overview of the issues affecting the Irish-medium early years sector at the moment, and Gaeloideachas' recommendations for how they might be addressed through the two new policies and their subsequent implementation plans.

Naíonraí

Naíonraí are the cornerstone of the immersion education system in Ireland. Outside the Gaeltacht, they are often children's first contact with the Irish language, and for children who are being raised with Irish, naíonraí are essential to ensure the availability of early education and care in their own native language. Naíonraí also provide valuable space for cultural exchange and integration, with a focus on inclusive and immersive communication, and all children, regardless of their home language, their educational needs or their cultural background, should have the opportunity to attend a local naíonra.

An overview of the current challenges facing the Irish-medium early years sector

The number of naíonraí is falling at a significant rate outside Gaeltacht areas. Not every Irish-medium primary school community has access to a naíonra. Few new services are opening, more are closing, and the existing naíonraí are under threat due to a lack of support and investment. An improved support structure is needed to help naíonraí provide a full service through Irish and ensure quality for children, and a subsidy scheme is essential to allow services to recruit and retain staff with the appropriate skills in Irish. We recommend an allowance be paid to educators working in a naíonra (Irish-language immersion setting) on an annual basis, similar to the allowance in place for primary school teachers who are teaching in a Gaelscoil.

Support services for naíonraí are very limited due to a lack of funding. Between 2013-2014, almost €1.4 million was lost in State funding for support for naíonraí: €876,900 when a subsidy scheme funded by Foras na Gaeilge was withdrawn and €500,000 when Pobal funding for a dedicated support agency, Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (FNT), ended. While Gaeloideachas receives some funding towards dedicated support for naíonraí, including a one-year funding arrangement through Pobal for 2025, it falls far short of what's needed to adequately support the sector and ensure sustainable, quality services for children. The funding models for naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht and naíonraí inside the Gaeltacht differ vastly.

Gaeloideachas' recommendations for the two policies in development

Gaeloideachas has made comprehensive submissions through the public consultation processes for both policies, the main points of each are summarised below. We believe that these strategic interventions and investments on the part of the State would benefit children and their families and help to secure the future of Irish as a living language.

Equality of access

So that every child has access to a naíonra, regardless of where they live, irrespective of their home language(s), cultural or socio-economic background or any additional needs they may have, Gaeloideachas recommends:

- a national awareness campaign on the benefits of early immersion education and care, and this could be done through the national promotional campaign that the DCDE are currently developing;
- a support scheme to establish new naíonraí and a task force to support naíonraí at risk of closure;
- a review of the legislation relating to school enrolment policies: a mechanism must be put in place that allows and supports continuity for children who are being raised with Irish or who are attending a naíonra into Irish-medium primary schools.

Recognition

There is no standard definition of a naíonra among State departments or their agencies. Gaeloideachas recommends:

- an official recognition scheme for naíonraí- this will help assure parents that it is a total immersion setting that they have enrolled their child(ren) in, and so we can ensure inspections are carried out on the standard of Irish in each immersion setting;
- that recognised naíonraí be granted special protection as essential services for the community;
- that there would be additional and specific supports from State agencies and State-funded VCOs for recognised naíonraí, in recognition of the additional needs of early immersion settings.

Quality

To ensure that there is no compromise in terms of quality or levels of support either for families who choose a naíonra or staff who choose to work in a naíonra, Gaeloideachas recommends:

- a dedicated support and quality assurance scheme for naíonraí, to include a team of early immersion specialists available on a regional basis providing consultations and mentoring services for naíonraí;
- a targeted subsidy scheme available to naíonraí to help them with the extra costs associated with the recruitment and retention of staff with fluent Irish, Irish language classes and CPD for staff, translation costs, the purchase of Irish-language resources, etc.

Inclusivity

To enable naíonraí to provide an inclusive service to their communities, Gaeloideachas recommends:

- a teacher in each naíonra with LINC qualification;
- all AIM supports available through the medium of Irish and adapted to the early immersion setting;
- make resources and CPD available simultaneously in Irish and English, and have them adapted to the language needs of the target community.

Initial qualifications and Continuous Professional Development

Teachers need to have expertise in pedagogies that support language development in early immersion settings in the Gaeltacht and outside it. They also need to have expertise in the different language needs of the children. To ensure confident and capable teachers are available to the sector, Gaeloideachas recommends:

- that initial training to achieve a qualification in early education would be available through the medium of Irish and that its uptake be incentivised
- that a module on immersion education should be a mandatory part of initial training to achieve a qualification in early education, for those who intend to be working in both Irish-medium and English-medium settings;

- that an Irish-language version of the Teacher Talk and Talk Boost programmes which are running as pilot schemes in 2025, be made widely available;
- that all continuous professional development, including those mentioned above, and any new professional development is available through the medium of Irish.

Expand services through Irish for children

To better support families who want their children to acquire Irish and benefit from multilingualism, Gaeloideachas recommends the two policies currently in development look beyond Irish-medium immersion education and include broader services and supports for Irish in the community, such as:

- a support scheme to help naíonraí and Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools to provide day care services, breakfast clubs, after school clubs and summer camps for children through the medium of Irish;
- a support scheme to promote the use of language at home and in the community;
- that there be a public directory of providers who provide community, education and care services through the medium of Irish.