

CURRENT PROVISION IN IRISH-MEDIUM UNITS:
ENDURING QUESTIONS REGARDING ESTABLISHMENT, MANAGEMENT
AND SUSTAINABILITY

RESEARCH REPORT

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Research context.....	6
Definitions.....	6
Historical background.....	7
Research rationale.....	7
Research questions.....	8
Research report structure.....	8
Conclusion.....	8
Chapter 2: Review of literature.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Immersion education.....	9
Irish-medium immersion education.....	10
The Irish-medium unit.....	11
Conclusion.....	13
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	14
The Research Question.....	14
Research Sample.....	14
Research methodology.....	15
Research limitations.....	19
Conclusion.....	19
Chapter 4: Main findings from the data analysis.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Establishment and sustainability.....	20
Management.....	25

<i>Provision</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Chapter 5: Findings and recommendations for the current Irish-medium units</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Findings and recommendations relating to the current units.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Chapter 6: A reconceptualised future model</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Recommendations relating to the reconceptualised model</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Success indicators for a reconceptualised model.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>References.....</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Appendix 1</i>	<i>99</i>

Executive Summary

Immersion education is a bilingual education model in which students are taught content through the medium of a second language, foreign language, heritage language or native language (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). At the present time, many countries worldwide implement immersion education programmes. Numerous types of programmes exist, with many variations between them. The sociolinguistic and cultural context influences each programme. Programmes have different languages, different targets and different learners.

The immersion model used in Irish-medium schools in Ireland is a bilingual enrichment model i.e. summative bilingualism and biliteracy are its aim, as well as the expansion and revival of the minority language and minority culture among the community and nationally. This form of education has seen significant growth since the 1970s and currently 66,979 pupils (i.e. 7%) are pursuing it in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland: 60,643 pupils in the Republic of Ireland and 6,436 pupils in Northern Ireland (www.gaeloideachas.ie). Research on immersion education consistently asserts that it is a reliable method to teach languages and subjects successfully without adversely affecting the learners' first language (Genesee et al., 2006; Hunt, 2011; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Our knowledge base relating to immersion education grows continually and there continues to be a bedrock of support for immersion education among parents/guardians, educationalists, and policy makers at every level. Although the immersion education system in Ireland has achieved significant success, as evidenced by the increase in the number of providers, this growth has also brought about a rise in challenges related to the diversity that has emerged from the sector's expansion.

The Irish-medium unit is an education unit at post-primary level, providing a curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education, and implementing the immersion model. An Irish-medium unit functions under the management and roll number of an English-medium host school. Despite the extensive corpus of research on immersion education, neither curricular studies nor guidelines have included any explicit identification of specific provision needs of Irish-medium units.

The purpose of the present research is to examine the current immersion education provision provided in Irish-medium units located in English-medium post-primary schools. This involved the use of an extensive online questionnaire, individual interviews and online discussion fora to generate data from relevant stakeholders, i.e. host school principals, unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeigil), founders of units, Irish language bodies and patrons. A quantitative and qualitative analysis were undertaken of the data that was gathered resulting in three broad themes emerging – establishing and sustaining a unit, managing a unit and curricular provision in a unit.

Findings of the present research show that Irish-medium units have a positive influence on the sustainability of the Irish language as a living language and on Gaelic culture in host schools. Nonetheless, the present research strongly affirms that significant difficulties and challenges

remain in Irish-medium units operating under the management of English-medium post-primary schools. These include inadequate emphasis on the formation of a clear vision for immersion education within the host school, as well as insufficient efforts to engage with identified challenges. Some common catalysts were identified that are deficient, yet, essential in order to assure the quality of immersion education in Irish-medium units. Additionally, it is noted that numerous management challenges continue to persist, hindering the effective administration of the unit. A lack of consistency in relation to the role of the unit coordinator (*múinteoir i bhfeighil*) is highlighted, in addition to the range of ambitious responsibilities to be fulfilled. The report states that insufficient time is provided to focus on the promotion of the Irish language and consequently, it is perceived that the provision of immersion education is not of a satisfactorily high standard. Factors that impact on the capacity of the unit to provide subjects through the medium of Irish include the number of students, the availability of teachers and student language proficiency. Of particular concern is the deficiency in professional development both in the pedagogies of immersion education as well as proficiency in the language. A comprehensive strategy has yet to be developed designed to improve students' language proficiency, to place an emphasis on Irish in assessments, to promote extracurricular activities in Irish and to promote Irish as the main language of communication. Based on the current research, findings are attributed to the Department of Education's inadequate leadership, specifically their failure to recognise the immersion education system as a credible model for acquiring both content and language.

With a focus on current Irish-medium units, and in light of the findings of the present research, relevant conclusions and recommendations are presented, and key success indicators are outlined relating to a reconceptualised immersion education model, i.e. a stand-alone Irish-medium unit, located off-site, functioning under the management of an Irish-medium host school.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In this chapter, the background to the research is described as well as the associated rationale. An overview is provided of the research questions, and of the methodology used to carry out the present research. Finally, the structure of the report is outlined.

Research context

The setting up of units in English-medium schools has been an important element of Irish-medium provision since the mid-1980s as another option to stand-alone Irish-medium schools. In spite of the increased demand for immersion programmes and their reasonable success, implementation has been difficult. At present, the Department of Education is developing a new policy for Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht. It is crucial, therefore, that the policy is attentive to the specific needs of Irish-medium units. The purpose of the present research is to examine the explicit needs relating to the current educational provision of Irish-medium units. It is intended that the findings of this research are shared with the Department of Education to inform policy development for Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht.

Definitions

To date the Department of Education has no official policy to guide Irish-medium units/streams. Consequently, it is hard to arrive at an agreed definition of what constitutes an Irish-medium unit or stream. Even so, account must be taken of the specific needs of units and streams.

The definition used in this present research is that an Irish-medium unit is a post-primary educational unit which follows a curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education and where the immersion education model is implemented. The Irish-medium unit operates under the management and roll number of the school that provides English-medium education i.e. the host school. It is understood that some subjects are taught through the medium of Irish in the unit. As a rule, the unit offers more subjects through the medium of Irish at Junior Cycle than it offers through the medium of Irish at Senior Cycle. Usually, teachers from the host school teach the classes in the unit and more often than not, the Irish-medium unit is based in separate rooms on the site of the school or adjacent to it.

An Irish-medium stream functions within the host school that provides English-medium education and where a small number of subjects are delivered through the medium of Irish. It is also understood that students in a stream are not fully immersed in the Irish language. As most of the streams do not receive extra financial support from the Department of Education, they are not required to seek official recognition. In this report, the term “unit” is used to refer to the two educational models – unit and stream.

Historical background

The first Irish-medium unit was established in Tralee, Co. Kerry in 1986 as a result of an application from parents/guardians for Irish-medium second level education for students who attended the local Irish-medium primary school (Gaelscoil). The Department of Education considered the number of students involved was insufficient to establish a stand-alone school. The parents¹ were dissatisfied with the concept of a stream, leading to the establishment of an Irish-medium unit as a compromise.

The Irish-medium unit (aonad lán-Ghaeilge) is the proposed model where it is considered that the demand from the local Gaelscoil is insufficient. Significant efforts have been made in developing Irish-medium units to cater for students who wish to be immersed in the language and to study subjects through the medium of Irish. These efforts have not always been successful, unfortunately. A number of Irish-medium units have failed for a variety of reasons. Despite the lack of success, Irish-medium units (aonaid) and streams (sruthanna) are operating in English-medium schools across the country.

It is noted that the Department of Education does not hold accurate information as reported here “it is possible that the number of schools with units may be lower than the listed number” (Department of Education, 2022, p.23). In addition to that, “reliable data are not available centrally on the precise number of students in English-medium post-primary schools who attend the units themselves” (Department of Education, 2022, p.23). It is accepted also that more streams may exist that are not included in the Department’s records. In the most recent document, no reference is made to the number of streams providing Irish-medium education (Department of Education, 2022).

Research rationale

Under the Education Act, 1998, the Department of Education is responsible for promoting and facilitating the development of Irish-medium education. The Department of Education aims to develop a clear policy on the establishment and sustainability of Irish-medium units in English-medium post-primary schools in order to strengthen the provision of Irish-medium education. To that end, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) has commissioned this research to examine the specific needs that relate to current provision in the Irish-medium units. To date, the research on Irish-medium units is limited. The present research, therefore, focused on the current educational provision available in Irish-medium units that operate under the management of English-medium post-primary schools.

¹ While the term ‘parent(s)’ is used in the present report, it is interchangeable with ‘parent(s)/guardian(s)’

Research questions

The aim of the present research is to examine current educational provision available in Irish-medium units that are located in English-medium post-primary host schools. The main research question is:

- What Irish-medium educational provision is currently available in units located within English-medium host schools?

To gain a deeper insight, the following embedded research questions are examined:

- What are the challenges associated with establishing and sustaining Irish-medium units?
- What is the role, responsibility and impact of management on current provision in the units?
- What is the current state of educational provision in Irish-medium units, specifically regarding teaching and learning through the medium of Irish?

A variety of methods was used to examine specific research questions. Quantitative data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire among school personnel who participated in the research. Qualitative methods were used, that included interviews and discussion fora, in order to gain a comprehensive insight into participants' understandings, specific meanings and experiences in relation to the educational provision in Irish-medium units.

Research report structure

Chapter one provides an overview of the present research project, including the background to the study, research questions and the structure of the report. In chapter two, national and international literature is examined as related to the educational provision available in Irish-medium units. Chapter three casts light on the research question and a rationale is provided for the various approaches adopted. The same chapter outlines the sample, questions, and research methods, discusses the analytical approach, addresses specific ethical considerations, and identifies the research limitations. Chapter four discusses the findings in line with themes and sub-themes that emerged from research analysis. Findings are recorded relating to the educational provision in Irish-medium units that are located in English-medium post-primary schools. Chapter five provides a synthesis of the research findings in the form of conclusions and recommendations. Chapter six identifies a new immersion educational model based on the analysis of the research data and relevant recommendations are presented. In addition, success indicators are outlined as a guide for the new model of Irish immersion education.

Conclusion

The present chapter provides a context for the research as it applies to Irish-medium provision in units that operate under the management of English-medium host schools. The next chapter examines national and international literature with reference to the identified research question.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

Introduction

The present review attempts to examine and analyse the effectiveness of Irish-medium units with a particular focus on challenges and associated outcomes. A key characteristic of this immersion education model is the continuous exposure to the Irish language within an English-medium post-primary setting. Immersion education is defined and the merits and challenges of immersion education in Ireland are critically examined. The concept of the Irish-medium unit is then considered and relevant research undertaken in Ireland to date is explored. Following on from this, the model similar to a unit in Scotland, Canada and Hawaii is examined. Finally, the research gap concerning the current state of Irish medium units is outlined.

Immersion education

Immersion education is a bilingual educational model in which content is taught to students through the medium of the second language, foreign language, heritage language or native language (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Academics contend that immersion teaching involves a great deal more than merely teaching a language or teaching content: a knowledge base and a particular set of specific pedagogical skills are required through which content, language and literacy are integrated in teaching. (Cammarata & Hayley, 2018; Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Lyster, 2007; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). The history of immersion education programmes extends back as far as Canada in the 1960s at least, where they were devised to empower students, whose mother tongue was English, to become proficient in French (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Immersion education contexts, in which a foreign language is the medium of instruction, with the aim of achieving a higher level of proficiency in the target language, have now become a worldwide phenomenon. From Asia to Europe to North America and beyond, there is a boom in immersion education programmes with the aim of developing bilingual or multilingual citizens and to revive indigenous or native languages. Nonetheless, there is great variation in the educational approaches adopted in different contexts in relation to the promotion of multiculturalism, the development of bilingual identity, bilingualism, biliteracy and academic success for bilingual students (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020). It is the micro-contexts that determine the unique nature and success of every immersion education classroom. The programme type decided for the immersion language is determined by the specific purpose of the immersion education model, the unique aspects of particular language communities, and the different factors in any one school programme. It is for that reason that no one programme is identical to any other programme. Undoubtedly, among the main reasons for the success of immersion programmes described above is the strong research base which consistently demonstrates the benefits of immersion education (Cammarata & Hayley, 2018; Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Genesee & LindholmLeary 2013; Ó Duibhir, 2018; Swain & Johnson, 1997; Tedick & Lyster, 2020).

Irish-medium immersion education

The immersion education model used in Irish-medium schools in Ireland is a bilingual enrichment model. The aim of Irish-medium immersion education is summative bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as the expansion and revival of the minority language and culture among the community and nationally. Research consistently indicates that learners in Irish-medium immersion education settings in Ireland generally achieve high standards and strong academic performance (Harris et al., 2009; Ó hAiniféin, 2007; Ní Longaigh, 2016; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016). Students of immersion education succeed in achieving much higher levels in the second language (the target language e.g. Irish in the educational system in Ireland) than that achieved by students who are not in the immersion education system who study the second language as a school subject (Harris et al., 2009; Ó hAiniféin, 2007). Furthermore, immersion education learners attain the same standard academically or higher than learners of the same age in mainstream education (Ó hAiniféin, 2007; Gilleece et al., Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020).

Regardless of developments in Irish-medium education provision, implementing immersion education programmes remains challenging, posing unique difficulties for teachers, learners, and parents/guardians alike (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017, 2021; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Research over several years consistently shows that language production skills of students in immersion education do not align with language norms in areas such as grammatical accuracy and complexity, lexical distinctness and sociolinguistic suitability (Maguire, 1990; Ó Duibhir, 2018; Walsh, 2007). As a result, there is increasing interest in identifying the essential knowledge base and associated teaching practices for immersion education. This focus aims to help students to achieve a high level of proficiency in the target language. The multiple immersion education challenges are comprehensively outlined by Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha (2017) which include learners' language deficits, overuse of the mother tongue (L1), deficient preparation of teachers for immersion education, difficulties in content and language integration, a dearth of relevant resources, and assessment of the development of biliteracy. For Irish-medium programmes to be effective, they must be implemented with skill. This requires recognising the crucial role of teachers and providing professional development to support them overcome challenges of teaching content in a language that students have not yet fully mastered. Specifically, teachers need to be upskilled in language and content integration approaches while at the same time ensuring the ongoing development of the target language (Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). In addition, researchers agree that teachers require expertise in the target language, including a wide range of advanced language skills, to effectively promote immersion language pedagogical competencies (Mhic Aoidh, et al., 2016; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2018; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Teacher preparation, therefore, and teacher professional learning, play a critically important role in the ongoing success of Irish-medium education programmes (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

The Irish-medium unit

An Irish-medium unit is a post-primary educational unit that follows a curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education and implements an immersion education model. The unit functions under the management and roll number of an English-medium host school. With regard to vision and ideology, summative bilingualism is the objective of the Irish-medium unit. Over the years, units were established to meet the demand from parents and other stakeholders for immersion education at post-primary level, particularly when opening a stand-alone Irish-medium school was not feasible for various reasons. The landscape of Irish-medium units functioning within English-medium post-primary schools is varied. It includes different models and approaches specifically designed to cater for the needs of different student communities and of different school contexts.

By comparison with research on immersion education generally, an area that has greatly expanded in recent years (Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2016; 2021; Ó Duibhir, 2018; Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023), few studies have been carried out on the growth of Irish-medium units. Irish-medium units have shown great promise in promoting bilingualism and cultural proficiency but, nonetheless, identified challenges still remain to be overcome in order to successfully implement the quality of provision. Drawing on research to date, Table 1 below provides a summary of challenges associated with the Irish-medium unit model:

Table 1: Summary of challenges relating to the Irish-medium unit model

Summary of challenges relating to the Irish-medium unit model	
Challenge	Reference
Internal management tension Internal tensions arise regarding the allocation of resources between the unit and the host school. Ensuring fairness between the two sides of the school also presents a challenge for whole school management.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
Inadequate immersion education policy Implementing a full immersion education policy in order to establish and maintain a distinct identity presents specific challenges for Irish-medium units. These including recruiting teachers and staff with a high standard of Irish, catering for parents who do not speak the language, the scarcity of appropriate textbooks in Irish and motivating students to use the language.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017

Limited Irish-medium provision The units' ability to offer subjects through the medium of Irish is limited, resulting in a restricted number of subjects available to students. Priority is given to meeting the needs of the host school when recruiting staff, which means that not all subjects can be taught through the medium of Irish in units.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
Role and status of the unit coordinator (múinteoir i bhfeighil) is poorly defined The unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil) often face a substantial administrative burden and feel that they have not received adequate preparation for the role.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
Location of provision and limited immersion language use Students often use their first language (L1) in situations where Irish (L2) should be used. Although the immersion language is utilised within the Irish-medium unit, the presence of an English-medium environment limits the use of Irish among students. Shared spaces during lunchtime and breaks with English-medium students, as well as extracurricular activities conducted in English, further reduce opportunities for students to use the Irish language.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
Student sociolinguistic deficits Students in units are less able to express themselves in the target language compared to their peers in stand-alone Irish-medium settings (Gaelcholáistí). Research indicates that when over 70% of teaching is conducted in the target language, it significantly impacts students' language acquisition.	Ó Freaghaile, 2021
Inadequate preparation of teachers for immersion education Initial teacher education and ongoing professional development programmes available to teachers in Irish-medium units are insufficient for addressing the specific demands of their setting.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
Lack of support for teacher proficiency in Irish Native speaker teachers and non-native speakers both attest that they need ongoing support in order to improve their proficiency in the immersion language.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017

Lack of response and support from the Department of Education There is a lack of support, including policies and guidelines, as well as insufficient state funding to support immersion education in Irish-medium units within English-medium post-primary schools.	School Accommodation Commission, 2004; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016; Ó Freaghaile, 2021; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017
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Furthermore, it could be argued that Irish-medium units are overlooked in school evaluations conducted by the Department of Education. Although the unit is mentioned occasionally in the school's evaluation report, it is evident that a comprehensive appraisal of the quality of teaching and learning is not typically conducted. Please refer to Appendix 1 for additional information.

Internationally, linguistic units are to be found in certain countries, that replicate a unit, in which students are immersed in the second language; but, unlike this country, they are more common at primary level. In Scotland, for example, immersion education is provided in a Scottish Gaelic (Gàidhlig) unit or stream within an English-medium primary school. In Hawaii, a replica of the unit exists to immerse primary pupils in Hawaiian, and in Canada also, dual-track immersion programmes are found i.e. a French-medium unit within an English-medium school. Research shows that teachers in such programmes encounter more complex pedagogical decisions related to language instruction. These programmes often suffer from a lack of support and resources, including difficulties in finding teachers who are fully fluent in the immersion language and familiar with immersion education methods (Alencastre & Kawaiaea, 2018; Brown & Bennett, 2017; Hill, 2022; Ó Hanlon et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Although some research has been carried out on immersion education in this country (Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2016; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2021; Department of Education & Skills, 2015), there has been limited research on Irish-medium units specifically located within English-medium host schools. While there are some benefits for the host school, significant challenges are evident (Commission for School Accommodation, 2004; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017; Ó Freaghaile, 2021). These challenges include difficulties in teacher recruitment, a heavy administrative burden for unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil), maintaining a distinct identity for the unit, promoting Irish in an English-speaking environment, and offering a limited range of subjects. Therefore, there is an urgent need for field research to assess the current situation of these units, to explore the challenges they face and the potential benefits of immersion education. This is the aim of the present study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology process employed in the course of the research. The main research question and embedded research questions are clarified. The research design, sample and methodology are described. Finally, the limitations of the research are specified, and a short summary of the chapter content is provided in the conclusion.

The Research Question

White (2017) asserts that a research question is often based on an information gap that needs to be filled. The main research question here focuses on such a gap.

The research question to be examined is:

- What Irish-medium educational provision is currently available in units within English-medium host schools?

Within that research question, the following embedded questions were examined in order to provide a comprehensive insight on current provision in Irish-medium units:

- What are the challenges relating to establishing Irish-medium units?
- What are the roles, responsibilities and impact of management on current provision in Irish-medium units?
- What is the current state of educational provision in Irish-medium units specifically regarding teaching and learning through the medium of Irish?

Research Sample

Table 2 below shows the various participants who took part in this research.

Table 2: Research participants

Research participants	Number
Principals/deputy principals/former principals of host schools	19
Principals/former principals of Irish-medium primary schools	3
Founders of Irish-medium units	1
Irish language committees and organisations	2
Patrons of host schools/Irish-medium units	2

Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Based on the Department of Education official list of units², invitations to participate in this research were sent to English-medium host schools with Irish-medium units. They were also asked to complete a questionnaire. Schools that completed the questionnaire were invited to interview. Various groups, central to educational provision in Irish-medium units, also participated in semi-structured interviews.

Research methodology

The present research employed a mix of methods that combine two main research methods, namely the quantitative method and the qualitative method. Integrating quantitative and qualitative methods effectively provides the best opportunity to examine the objective and subjective aspects of the research question at a local level (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A quantitative and qualitative analysis were carried out using the collected data. Data from multiple sources were used in order to gain a deeper understanding and a fuller perspective of the research question.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was utilized to gain a clearer understanding of the specific needs related to current educational provision in Irish-medium units located in English-medium host schools. In the spring of 2022, a letter was sent to 28 schools where an Irish-medium unit was located according to the Department of Education records. Nineteen (19) schools completed the questionnaire. However, only 12 schools answered all questions. Contact was later made with 9 schools. Four (4) schools indicated that an Irish-medium unit no longer existed in the school. Although a further 3 schools did not complete the questionnaire, they participated in interviews at a later stage. There were 2 schools that did not participate in any aspect of the research.

The questionnaire was in four sections with a total of forty-three questions to be answered. The questions were based on the areas identified in table 3:

Table 3: Scope of questionnaire

Scope of questionnaire	Number of questions to answer
Profile of Irish-medium unit/stream	15
Identity of Irish-medium unit/stream	9
Leadership of Irish-medium unit/stream	12
Educational provision in Irish-medium unit/stream	7
Total	43

² The Department of Education official list of units involves a self-declaration system

Generally, using a questionnaire as a research tool provides an advantage in gathering data from a wide sample. Participants were given multiple choices with some open questions so as to provide them with the opportunity to express additional opinions. Cohen et al., (2007) asserts that this approach gives the researcher a better insight into participants' understandings and views. The questionnaire quantitative data provided a knowledge baseline which could be developed further during semi-structured interviews.

In order to begin the second part of the research, a letter was sent to the host schools in spring of 2023 to make arrangements to interview the host school principal and the unit coordinator (múinteoir i bhfeighil). Qualitative data were gathered through interviewing the participants in two ways:

- Interview during visits to the host schools
- Online interview

Visits to host schools and Irish-medium units

14 host schools were visited during the course of the research project as shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: Overview of host schools and units

Province	Number of host schools/ units/streams visited	Additional detail
Munster	host school/unit * 7	• Three English-medium host schools located in different cities with units linked to them • Three English-medium host schools located in suburbs with units linked to them • One English-medium host school located in a rural town with a unit linked to it
Connacht	host school/unit * 4	• A Gaeltacht post-primary school that converted from a unit to an independent Irish-medium post primary school • Two English-medium host schools in a Gaeltacht district participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme • One English-medium host school located outside the Gaeltacht with a unit linked to it
Ulster	host school/unit * 2	• One English-medium host school located in a Gaeltacht district participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme with a stream linked to the host school • One English-medium host school located in a Gaeltacht district participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

Leinster	host school/unit * 1	One Gaelcholáiste located in an English-speaking district (i.e. Galltacht) that converted from a unit to an independent stand-alone Irish-medium college
Total	host school/unit * 14	

The purpose of the visits was to gain an understanding of the educational provision in Irish-medium units located in English-medium post-primary schools. During the visits, researchers had the opportunity to experience the daily life in the units. Extensive notes were taken to augment previously gathered data.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were organised with individuals on school sites or online in order to gain a deeper understanding of their opinions and views relating to the current educational provision in Irish-medium units. The participants engaged in a semi-structured interview of 45 – 55 minutes' duration that was recorded. The views of participants were gathered in relation to the factors that shape provision in Irish-medium units as well as identifying areas for development.

Online discussion forum

An online meeting was organised with the Advisory Committee of Irish-medium Units (Coiste Comhairleach na nAonad lán-Ghaeilge) so as to give them the opportunity to share their views and experiences with regard to educational provision in Irish-medium units. The main research question and the embedded questions were discussed, and extensive notes were recorded during the meeting.

Discussion forum with educationalists and different Irish language organisations

The researchers presented and engaged in discussion at the following conferences:

- All-Island Conference on Immersion Education in Mary Immaculate College on Friday, 10 June 2022, with approximately 50 attendees present
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Conference: Foghlaim, Forbairt agus Feabhas (i.e. Learning, Development and Excellence) in the Irish-medium Sector on 30 September 2022 in Belfast with approximately 60 attendees present
- Meeting with members of the Board of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) in Dingle, Co. Kerry on 9 December 2022.

The project timeline is set out in table 5 below.

Table 5: Project timeline

Time period	Actions
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Spring 2022	• Contact with the Department of Education to source a list of all-Irish medium units in the country. • Contact principals of host schools to confirm their participation in the research project. • The completion of the online questionnaire by some principals and unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil) of the participating schools.
Spring-Autumn 2023	• Letter sent to schools seeking to arrange a visit to the school or to participate in an online interview. • Contact participating schools and units to make arrangements to visit them and to interview principals and unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil). • Visits to a number of participating schools and units. Interviews completed with principals and unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil). • Online interviews with participating schools.
Spring-Summer 2023	• Continuing with the online interviews and school visits.
Summer-Autumn 2023	• Series of interviews with the Irish language organisations and Patrons.
February 2024	• Publication.

Ethics

Written information was provided to principals of the host schools and to the unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil). The researchers' contact details were provided to give the participants an opportunity to raise questions. It was stated that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason, and that no detrimental repercussions would arise as a result of the withdrawal. Details of the information sheet were again communicated to the participants orally before the interviews commenced.

Data analysis

A quantitative analysis of the questionnaire findings was carried out to accurately assess the findings of the various sections. The correlated sections were divided into subsets in order to identify patterns and themes (Dornyei & Csizer, 2012). All interviews were transcribed in full. Themes were identified and data were cross-checked in order to examine similarities and differences. Analysis proceeded until a saturation point was reached (Dornyei, 2007, p. 244). Finally, the agreed central themes in relation to the experiences and outcomes of the participants were refined and agreed. The reliability of the results was reinforced by triangulation across the sources in order to assure patterns within the data (Guba, 1981; Skenton, 2004). Arising from the full data of the research, four main themes were identified along with supplementary themes within the main themes as shown in table 6.

Table 6: Identified themes

Main themes	Supplementary themes
Unit establishment	Definition; Demand; Vision; Awareness and Communications; Patron. Department of Education
Management	Unit coordinator (múinteoir i bhfeighil); Host school principal; Board of Management; Patrons. Department of Education; Various Organisations
Provision	Subject provision; Unit teaching staff; Student learning
Sustainability	Demand; Awareness and communication; Vision and Identity; Policies and planning; Change management and sustainability

Research limitations

While a certain number of participants took part in the research, a wider participation would be preferable so that a broader range of participants' experiences in the sector could be included. Although emails were sent on a number of occasions and efforts made to speak with principals of host schools or with unit coordinators (múinteoirí i bhfeighil) contact was not always successful and the invitation was not accepted in all cases. Other factors that impacted on the research findings were the lack of input from students of Irish-medium units as well as a dearth of opportunities for parents/guardians with children in units to participate in the research project.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to examine educational provision in Irish-medium units that are located in English-medium host schools. This chapter presented a detailed overview of the methodological approach used to investigate the research question and the rationale behind it. Specific ethical issues were considered. The analytical approach to the qualitative and quantitative data was discussed, the limitations of the research identified, and the project timeline outlined.

Chapter 4: Main findings from the data analysis

Introduction

The present chapter provides an overview of the research findings related to the establishment, sustainability, management and educational provision of Irish-medium units. In each section, the reader is presented with the findings in the form of relevant questions in the interest of providing clarity, structure and consistency. Use was made of data resulting from a quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding and fuller perspective of the research question.

Establishment and sustainability

Introduction

According to the evidence from participants of this study, certain common catalysts are found when it comes to establishing an Irish-medium unit, for example: demand, awareness, publicity campaign, and the founders' far-sighted vision. It is also clear that the founders' vision for immersion education may gradually fade over time, along with the energy invested, which poses a risk to the sustainability of the Irish-medium unit.

Specific questions relating to demand

Why was an Irish-medium unit established in the first place?

In the experience of most participants, it was demand that led to establishing an Irish-medium unit. Strong evidence is found in the present research that parental choice is key to the establishment of a unit where Irish-medium primary schools are already in existence. In almost all cases³ a parents' committee is involved in the establishment of a Gaelscoil (i.e. Irish-medium primary school) and normally the same committee is involved in the establishment of an Irish-medium unit. Consequently, pressure comes from the parents of children attending a Gaelscoil for full Irish-medium provision at post-primary level.

It is noted that the Department of Education lacks policies and transparent criteria in relation to the establishment of an Irish-medium unit. As one patron stated:

There is no guidance in the guidelines on this matter about how a unit should be included in a school building... our view is that the Department must have a plan or

³ More than 90%

policy in regard to the establishment of Gaelcholáistí (i.e. Irish-medium post-primary schools) in the first instance... there is a need for criteria and rules from the Department in relation to establishing, funding, resourcing and management.

(Interview, Patron)

There is no broad agreement, either, about enrolment figures or the number of students required before an Irish-medium unit is approved. It is clear that the Department has not specified a particular number of students as a criterion for the establishment of an Irish-medium unit. One patron, for instance, observed – “We use that figure, 120, as it arises from informal discussions when we were setting up Gaelcholáiste (name of school)” (Interview, Patron).

Particular questions relating to the role of awareness and publicity campaigns

How do awareness and publicity campaigns contribute to establishing an Irish-medium unit?

There are various factors involved in the terms of reference and circumstances of a founding committee of an Irish-medium unit. The present research shows that founding committees encounter an information gap as well as a lack of guidance from the Department of Education in relation to the stages in the process of establishing an Irish-medium unit. In a few instances, the founding committee began with teachers and a principal who were prepared to undertake planning for the establishment of an Irish-medium unit:

We had what I called a coiste comhairleach (i.e. advisory committee) and I was cathaoirleach (i.e. chairperson) of it. We brought parents on board, and we started canvassing, promoting and we did all sorts of marketing with the kids to encourage them to come in, and our first year we had twenty-two.

(Interview, MibhF⁴).

For the establishment of an Irish-medium unit, considerable importance is attached to publicity and awareness campaigns to entice parents to enrol their children. It is clear, in the case of the majority of Irish-medium units that participated in this research, that intensive efforts were made to attract students by visits, not alone to Gaelscoileanna (i.e. Irish-medium primary schools) and English-medium primary schools but also by visits to individual families. Despite awareness campaigns and marketing strategies, it is reported that convincing the Department of Education to officially recognise an Irish-medium unit remains challenging. In a small number of cases, the awareness campaign was not successful as it was difficult “to wrestle (the unit) from the

⁴ MibhF = Unit coordinator (Múinteoir i bhfeighil)

Department” (Interview, Iar-PO⁵). The following account, from one participant, reveals a pioneering zeal in the efforts at founding a unit, - “...a parent and the unit coordinator visited four houses, and we got seven. They visited parents. We continued to get one or two from English-medium schools at the time...” (Interview, PO⁶).

There are frequent references to open nights, presentations, taster evenings, summer camps and ongoing publicity being undertaken, not alone to attract students in the first instance, but to ensure at the same time that student attendance did not abate. The research indicates that the person who visited the primary schools did not always have an understanding of the principles and benefits of immersion education.

It was reported, however, that the support of the patron greatly helped the efforts of the founding committee to ensure recognition for an Irish-medium unit from the Department of Education. The majority of the participants felt that the patron helped them to set up an Irish-medium unit because - “they appreciate the position we are in” (Interview, MibhF).

Particular questions relating to the vision and distinctive identity of an Irish-medium unit

Does vision and dedication of leadership impact the establishment of an Irish-medium unit?

The vision and commitment of the leadership is extremely important in the establishment of an Irish-medium unit. Usually, one or two people have an immersion education “vision” and they succeed in sharing that vision. Personal energy, far-sighted vision and commitment are the drivers of all efforts. In other words, one or two committed stalwarts are the driving force behind the establishment of an Irish-medium unit, and they bravely persevere despite challenges. Very often, the impetus, commitment, inspiration and dedication arise from an individual’s love of the Irish language – “We do it with a full heart due to the regard we have for the Irish language and our Gaelic culture” (Interview, former principal). Unflinching courage is required to bring the vision to reality.

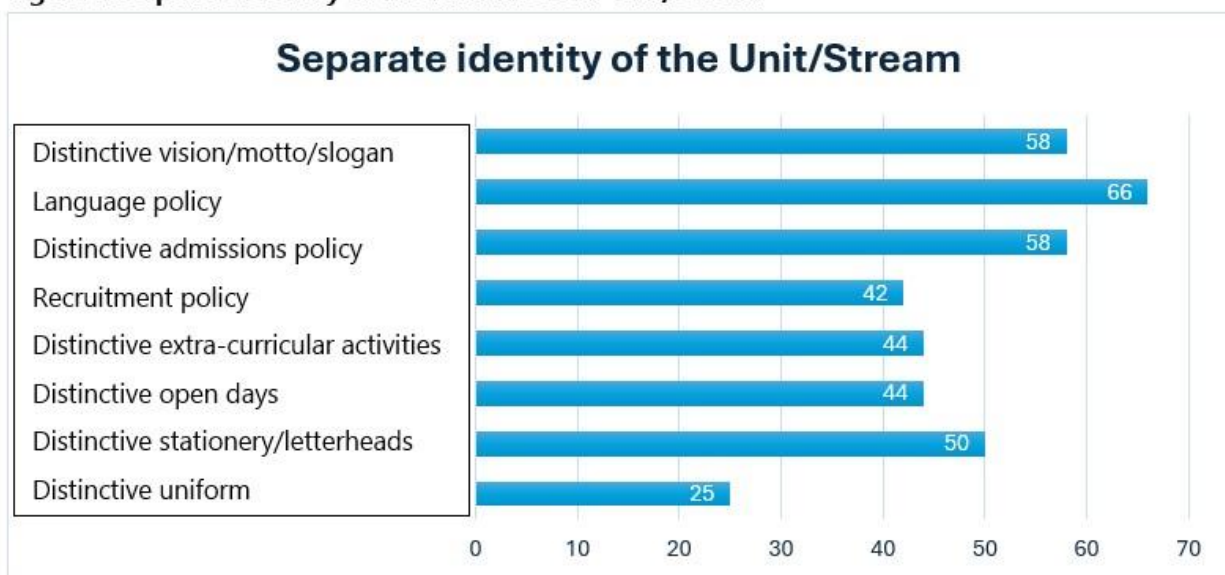
How is a distinctive identity maintained in an Irish-medium unit?

It is very important to sustain a distinctive identity ethos as would be found in an English-medium school. The questionnaire data show that certain factors are essential in order to promote the distinctive identity of an Irish-medium unit. Please refer to Figure I for an overview of the distinctive features of Irish-medium units that participated in this research.

⁵ Iar-PO = Former Principal (Iar-Phríomhoide)

⁶ PO = Principal (Príomhoide)

Figure 1: Separate identity of the Irish-medium Unit/Stream

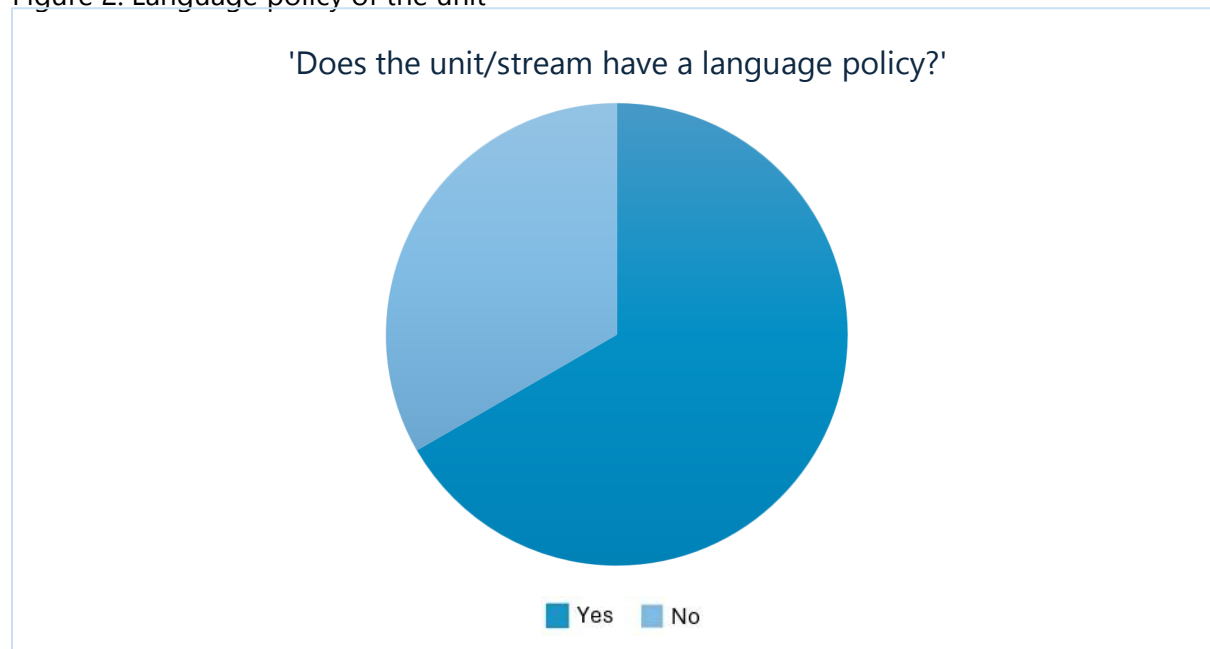


Particular questions relating to policies and planning

What is the aim of having a policy and language plan in the Irish-medium unit?

It emerged from the questionnaire data that the majority of Irish-medium units have a unit specific language policy (see figure 2). It is reported, however, that neither the unit coordinator nor the staff of the Irish-medium unit are generally involved in drafting policies. One teacher's observation on the lack of input into formulating policies is noteworthy – "I would love if there was a policy that describes what exactly we are, what exactly we do and what our expectations are" (Interview, MibhF). Another unit coordinator admitted, in reference to policy – "Even if we were to formulate policy, we would have to write it in English so that it was understood by all". Although policies do exist, they are not always implemented effectively as is shown here – "... we have a policy, is it implemented, that's the question" (Interview, MibhF). To that end, the present research highlights that immersion education policies and plans are essential to strengthen the distinctive identity of an Irish-medium unit.

Figure 2: Language policy of the unit



Particular questions relating to change-management and sustainability

How does change management impact the long-term sustainability of future an Irish-medium unit?

Initially, vision serves as a great energiser, but sometimes enthusiasm can wane over time as the circumstances and administration of the unit evolve. Reflecting on events, a former unit coordinator observed – “We had great energy about the unit for two years but then I’m not sure the same energy endured because other needs had emerged and people were going in different directions” (Interview, MibhF).

Personnel changes were frequently cited as an obstacle to the development of the unit. The departure of one teacher from the school, for example, could adversely affect continuity and in certain cases - “... (they) died a death” (Interview, Former PO). It is clear, therefore, that matters relating to personnel and unexpected changes can have serious consequences for the success of the unit.

Conclusion

In this section, some common catalysts were discussed related to the establishment and sustainability of a unit, for example: demand, awareness and publicity campaigns, far-sighted vision of founders of units, maintaining a distinctive identity, and change management. It was noted that these elements are crucial for ensuring the quality of immersion education in an Irish-medium unit located within an English-medium post-primary school.

Management

Introduction

This section looks at the management of the Irish-medium unit in relation to the unit coordinator, the principal of the host school and the board of management. In addition, the role of patrons, of the Department of Education, and of Irish language organisations in guiding and promoting the Irish language within Irish-medium units is described.

Particular questions relating to the unit coordinator in the Irish-medium unit

What is title given to the unit coordinator?

Data from this research show that schools are not unanimous in agreement regarding the titles given to the teacher with responsibility for the unit. One school stated that they avoided the title unit coordinator as it lacks authority. According to another participant, the title creates tension and discord among the staff. Another participant raises a contentious issue, namely, to what extent is the unit coordinator actually in charge?

Another participant observed that various titles are used to describe her role, and the question often arises - "Who are you?" (Interview, former MibhF). Another participant answered the question with - "I am a spéirbhean but not a superwoman" (Interview, MibhF). In another case, the uncertainty surrounding the role was described by one participant - "... I was just a teacher and on certain days I was in the thick of action as the leader and on other days I was in the background as leader" (Interview, former MibhF). In other schools, the unit coordinator of the Irish-medium unit is called the director (i.e. stiúrthóir). One principal noted that this title held authority and status and that it made a significant difference – "from the point of view of respect... and from the point of view of the person's role and how the role went from strength to strength" (Interview, Former PO). Data analysis highlights that the title assigned to the unit coordinator lacks consistency, leading to misunderstandings and uncertainty in Irish-medium units.

What responsibilities are assigned to the unit coordinator?

Data from this research indicates that the unit coordinator must undertake a wide range of responsibilities beyond their teaching duties. Table 7 outlines two particular responsibilities:

Table 7: Areas of responsibility of the unit coordinator

Administrative responsibilities	Irish language responsibilities
• Year head teacher • Arranging subjects and classes for students in the unit • Arranging visits to the Gaeltacht • Drafting Irish-medium unit timetables • Dealing with student behaviour • Managing and allocating unit resources • Promoting teacher professional development relating to teaching through Irish • Maintaining links with primary schools in the locality • Organising open nights and preparing information packs • Organising Irish language classes for parents • Developing and maintaining relations with the local community • undertaking administrative work, for example, dealing with phone calls, emails • Maintaining communications with parents of students • Providing translation of letters etc. for host school management • Maintaining links with Irish language organisations	• Maintaining the distinctive Irish language ethos among the staff • Promoting the Irish language and culture in and outside the unit • Promoting Irish language use among students • Organising Irish-medium extracurricular activities

The research outcomes acknowledge that there are significant variations among Irish-medium units relating to the extent of duties to be undertaken by unit coordinators. For example, one of the participants observes – “... I am a teacher, I am a principal, and I am a unit coordinator. I am under pressure” (Interview, PO). As against that, in another unit, the host school principal is cognisant of the workload associated with the post; and by way of support, a deputy unit coordinator was appointed to share the duties. In other schools, support is available from teachers of Irish in the Irish department. It is frequently stated that the duties are informal and arise from the day-to-day management of the Irish-medium unit with - “nothing on paper” (Interview Former MibhF). The principal of another host school mentions that she frequently acts as a substitute for the unit coordinator to enable her to undertake her administrative duties. Although this cooperation facilitates effective teaching, there is an appreciation that this practice generally impacts on the school’s administration, stating that there is - “a huge amount of work involved,

so it is absurd to think that a person could do it in 4 hours. That is not possible" (Interview, Former PO).

What is the status of the unit coordinator?

The data frequently addresses the status of the unit coordinator. It is understood that the unit coordinator is the day-to-day manager of the Irish-medium unit who works under the direction of, and in partnership with, the host school principal. In almost all cases, it comes to light that the unit coordinator feels that the role lacks status. In reference to board meetings, for example, one participant reports that she provides a monthly report but never receives any feedback, which reinforces the perception among participants that they lack managerial status in the unit's administration – "Although I was fully in charge of the unit, the principal and deputy principal attend meetings relating to the unit. . . without Irish" (Interview, former MibhF).

Participants believe that without a specific roll number for the unit, issues concerning the role of the unit coordinator will persist. Further clarification is required regarding the status of the unit coordinator within the Irish-medium unit.

Are specific administrative hours allocated to the unit coordinator?

Participants indicated that they do not have sufficient time to undertake their duties:

We do not have sufficient time to perform the duties of the post properly... you have a wide range of multiple responsibilities, but at the same time, you are teaching most of the time.

(Interview, Former MibhF).

In almost all cases, the participants refer to their full teaching timetable of 16 and 22 hours, with no specific time allocation for administrative duties. It is reported that four hours are insufficient to undertake the unit coordinator's role – "Four hours amounts to nothing no matter how many students are involved" (Interview, Former PO). Another participant supports this view, with the observation – "I spent most of my time running from a classroom to the office and back again" (Interview, Former PO). It is clear that unit coordinators are under pressure to undertake their duties within their working hours. Reference is also made to the hours spent after school time organising Irish language cultural activities. In conclusion, the role of the unit coordinator is deemed to be excessively demanding.

Does the unit coordinator have responsibilities for the promotion of the Irish language?

A common view expressed by unit coordinators is - "The job is to ensure that the best interests of Gaeilge are served, that the language is promoted, looked after, protected and supported"

(Interview, Former PO). Nonetheless, unit coordinators rarely report having the opportunity to promote the distinctive immersion education perspective of the Irish-medium unit – “It is difficult to find time to promote Irish. You are dealing with other matters, they do not relate to the Irish language” (Interview, MibhF). In almost all cases, unit coordinators agreed that they lack time to maintain the Irish language environment, to promote the language, and to enhance the immersion education model.

Does the unit coordinator have a leadership role at AP1 or AP2 level?

Data from the research indicate that there are significant differences in the recognition of the unit coordinator as either AP1 or AP2. A small number⁷ of participants reported holding a AP1 position, which includes a leadership role. To fulfil their duties as a unit coordinator, these participants reported a reduction in their teaching timetable ranging from 40 minutes to 4 hours. In one exceptional case, 6 hours were allocated to the unit coordinator. In other schools, the unit coordinator holds an AP2 post without administrative hours. As one host school principal observed, - “She has an AP2 position, but there wouldn’t be time allocated for it. We don’t give time to AP2 positions” (Interview, PO). In other schools, AP2 duties are performed in the host school and the business of the Irish-medium unit is administered outside school hours. There is also uncertainty surrounding the role of unit coordinator when the Irish-medium unit does not have official permanent recognition from the Department of Education.

More often than not, the research reports a lack of understanding of the solitary nature of the position of the unit coordinator. Although other teachers occasionally come to the unit to teach certain subjects - “you are alone in charge... and reliant on yourself all the time to ensure everything is right.” (Interview, MibhF). It appears that participants do not feel that adequate support structures are in place to help them develop the unit.

What incentives prompt teachers to take leadership posts as unit coordinators?

The findings demonstrate that teachers have different reasons for assuming the role of unit coordinator of an Irish-medium unit. Two categories of incentives are identified in table 8:

⁷ 16% – 24%

Table 8: Incentives to assume a leadership post in a unit

Irish language Incentives	Personal Incentives
• Love of the language • Opportunity to promote the Irish language among young people • Opportunity to foster among young students an understanding of preserving the language • Seeing students thrive and taking responsibilities related to the promotion of the Irish language • Teaching through the medium of Irish	• The value the person places on the school • Personal matters – personal development, readiness to take on challenges, leadership skills developed through experience from having worked in other schools • Gaining a master's degree

The research affirms that a love and regard for the Irish language is what prompts teachers to take up a post as unit coordinators. As one principal observed when referring to a recent appointment in the Irish-medium unit, - “he has a huge passion for the language and that’s what is really needed in the unit. You really need a person that has that fire” (Interview, PO). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that unit coordinators are dealing with duties that are not directly related to promoting the Irish language, especially considering that the greatest challenge in an Irish-medium unit is to maintain and strengthen the use of the language. There appears to be a disconnect between the work the unit coordinator is expected to do and the work that is actually undertaken.

A personal investment is certainly involved if the Irish-medium unit is to be developed. One participant remarked - “...it is no lie when I say that I put my heart and soul into developing the school” (Interview, PO). A note of despondency, however, can be discerned among the participants from the observation - “it is tiring, and we are running out of energy” (Interview, MibhF). It is no surprise, therefore, that unit coordinators are raising pertinent questions about their working conditions. Another issue raised by participants relates to pay allowances, which were previously provided to acknowledge the additional duties associated with teaching through the medium of Irish. They maintain that the lack of allowances for teachers, as compensation for their heavy workload, is unhelpful. Currently, there appears to be no incentives to attract teachers to join a unit.

What recruitment process is used for the appointment of a unit coordinator?

It is reported that most host schools advertise a teaching post in Irish on the understanding that the teacher will be able to teach the relevant subjects through English. As observed, – “In an aonad you need your teachers to be able to move between the two... to be able to function in both”

(Interview, PO). One host school principal indicated that he finds himself to and fro with the advertising process - "We know it (aonad) is poorly defined. So, what am I applying for? If I advertise a position in this school, do I advertise it just for the unit?" (Interview, PO). If the advertisement is in Irish, it is possible that some candidates would not apply for the post, and if the advertisement is in English there is the possibility that the person applying for the post might not realise that they would be expected to teach subjects through the medium of Irish. Schools are keen to seize every opportunity to recruit teachers. In considering staffing requirements, it appears that principals are "recruiting" (Interview, MibhF) teachers who are proficient in Irish although they are not immediately required, a further sign that there is an urgent need for an appropriate recruitment campaign to employ teachers in Irish-medium units. In two cases, it happened that permission to advertise a post was not sanctioned due to a moratorium on recruitment. As a result, units are being managed without a unit coordinator and as was observed, they resemble "a ship without a captain" (Interview, MibhF). There is an awareness also that difficulties arise when a teacher, one who is central to the promotion of the Irish-medium unit, retires or takes a career break. It is noted that this problem is escalating and that finding teachers to work in units is almost impossible.

In certain schools, an open competition for a unit coordinator was held and a teacher was appointed as AP1. In some cases, teachers were encouraged to take the position as they were recognised as having a love and empathy for the language. In another instance, the teacher indicated that he had a personal interest in the position. In a further case, the principal offered the post to the whole staff. The research affirms that a lack of confidence in their proficiency in the Irish language as well as an excessive workload are the main reasons that inhibit teachers from applying for a post as unit coordinator.

Does the vision held by the unit coordinator guide the direction of the Irish-medium unit?

It was stated in the research that unit coordinators have ambitious visions for the development of Irish-medium education within units. Three categories of visions are identified in table 9:

Table 9: Categories of visions held by unit coordinators

Provision	• Attracting further students to the Irish-medium unit • Providing a broader range of subjects • Ensuring subject provision at Leaving Certificate level • Recruiting teachers who will be based in the unit • Organising Irish language courses for the staff with a focus on teaching subjects through the medium of Irish
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	• Ensuring a stand-alone school that operates separately from the host school • Providing of excellent quality education • Securing a separate building and facilities for the Irish-medium unit
Irish language	• Promoting Irish language in the school and in the community
Personal	• Engaging in personal development – improving leadership and management skills

It was frequently noted that participants felt disheartened in relation to vision implementation. For example, one-unit coordinator indicates a wish to develop the Irish-medium unit - “but I don’t know is it possible to do so” (Interview, MibhF). Another participant says. – “It is difficult to see a path to growth when you are restricted” (Interview, MibhF). Some participants feel there is a lack of expectation in relation to an Irish-medium unit. It seems, in the absence of policies, that a unit coordinator rarely has the opportunity to formulate and agree long-term plans with school management.

The participants’ perspective on the unit being separate from the host school is noteworthy. The majority of participants advocate that implementing immersion education can solely be achieved if the unit is located within an Irish-medium environment, separate from the English-medium host school. On the contrary, in one instance, a desire was expressed for the unit to remain connected to the host school, based on the belief that separating students might limit their social skill development. Several contextual factors, therefore, need to be considered in order to fully address the needs of Irish-medium units.

How are communications managed with the host school?

The data analysis clearly shows that there are varying levels of practice relating to maintaining communications with the host school. Usually, communications are informal between the Irish-medium unit and the host school. As one principal observed:

There’s no official scheduled meeting but if anything is happening, she’ll just pop in. And all that stuff that comes in, I always liaise with her... and keep her in the loop” (Interview, PO). With such ad hoc meetings, it often happens “that (they) encroach upon the teachers’ personal time.

(Interview, MibhF).

Participants report that although plans are made to convene meetings, they often do not take place since the business of the host school is prioritised, resulting in the work of the Irish-medium unit being overlooked. The data indicates that unit coordinators seek meetings regularly, particularly when the Irish-medium unit in the early stages of its establishment. As one of the participants indicates – “I sought meetings on a weekly basis and on occasions I succeeded and at other times I did not succeed, but starting out, when the unit was being established, there was a great need for it” (Interview, Former MibhF).

In relation to the agenda of meetings, one school confirms that the business of the Irish-medium unit is always an agenda item. In other instances, however, the unit coordinator does not have input at meetings. Additionally, one coordinator notes that her input would not be welcomed given that her post is not officially recognised. It is also reported that reaching an agreement on the unit’s needs is challenging due to the presence of many individuals who are not directly involved with the unit. It is also acknowledged that it would be more effective to discuss the business of the Irish-medium unit solely with teachers who are based in the unit. The research findings highlight that school management has a central role in maintaining communications between the Irish-medium unit and the host school. It is noted, nevertheless, that the value placed on the unit by school management is particularly important for its development and success.

How is communication managed with schools in the catchment area?

It emerged from the research that a broad range of planned events is used to encourage and attract primary school pupils to the unit. See table 10:

Table 10: Communications with schools

- Visits to surrounding schools – Irish-medium primary schools and mainstream English-medium schools, speaking with pupils from 4th class to 6th class
- Students of the Irish-medium unit visiting the primary schools in the district
- Various workshops during the year to give pupils an opportunity to visit to the Irish-medium unit
- Irish-medium summer camps during holidays
- Taster days and open nights
- Providing an information pack and booklet to parents
- Individual visits by host school principals, or unit coordinators, or joint visits by both

The research demonstrates that practice differs among Irish-medium units in relation to the person who visits the primary schools in the area. Where the principal and unit coordinator visits schools together, it is reported that this practice has a significant impact on pupils and their

parents. In other cases, the host school principal visits the English-medium schools, and the unit coordinator visits the Irish-medium schools. It also happens that the host school principal visits all schools in the catchment areas during which most of the communication is conducted in English. As one participant noted, – “If you are going out to them speaking in English in order to get them to come to the unit, where we speak Irish, that does not accurately represent the provision they will receive” (Interview, MibhF). The majority of unit coordinators said they give a realistic picture of the provision that will be available so that pupils will be happy with their decision. In other instances, however, details of the provision are not communicated precisely. Despite these challenges, the majority of Irish-medium units succeed, by and large, in increasing student enrolment. As one unit coordinator reported – “we were lucky in a way, the numbers have increased, the numbers doubled” (Interview, PO). In the case of other schools, however, they were not as fortunate as they failed to increase enrolment. This research highlights that marketing is crucial for attracting students to the unit, and that a significant portion of this responsibility rests with the unit coordinator.

Particular questions relating to the host school principal

What vision do principals have for Irish-medium units?

Planning by the principal is essential to realise the vision of the Irish-medium unit. Many principals expressed a desire to expand and develop the unit, noting – “We are always seeking growth but in reality, it is very difficult” (Interview, PO). One participant mentioned a preference for maintaining the unit as is – “The aim is not a stand-alone... it’s that they are inextricably linked” (Interview, PO).

Other schools had the specific aim of developing the unit towards independence – “We decided it would be ten times better and more sensible to establish a stand-alone school, an independent school” (Interview, lar-PO). Another participant envisioned the stream growing into an Irish-medium unit, stating, – “It would be wonderful if we had a unit and a unit coordinator, a person who can take care of Irish language matters in the school” (Interview, PO). Overall, most principals focused on the development of the unit, even in the absence of proactive growth plans to guide them.

The majority of principals acknowledge that there are substantial benefits in creating a stand-alone Irish-medium unit. Participants reported that they encounter serious challenges as they strive for growth. One participant was confident that the school would not be entirely at fault if growth did not continue, stating, – “if it does not flourish and I think it’s not, I don’t think we are totally at fault. It just means that there’s something of a disconnect... that needs to be strengthened” (Interview, PO). It appears that schools have not received sufficient information or guidance to effectively pursue expansion.

If schools choose to move towards a stand-alone school, participants unanimously agreed that a unit must be structured at the outset with specific criteria in place that would ensure independence. These criteria need to be clearly defined so that schools can plan effectively for the transition to a stand-alone school. Without such criteria, schools are “in limbo” (Interview, PO). The research outcomes confirm that the most common and strongest vision among unit coordinators is to have an Irish-medium unit in which students are immersed in the language. Data suggest that the current provision in these units does not fully align with the fundamental principles of immersion education. While it is acknowledged that Irish is not the primary language of communication in these units, it appears that some principals are unsure how to implement a true immersion programme, with one principal observing, “I would love more guidance in terms of how to develop that” (Interview, PO). This implies therefore, that a development plan should be created and agreed to advance Irish-medium education within units.

How do principals of host schools perceive Irish-medium unit?

Data from the present research demonstrate the importance of host school principals’ positive attitude towards Irish-medium units. The majority⁸ of principals stated they have a high regard for the language and for the educational opportunities provided in the Irish-medium unit. Moreover, they demonstrated pride in their accomplishments, as one principal noted, - “... you are always going against the tide because the tide is English. In saying that we have done a great job where we are, but we are always just holding our ground” (Interview, PO). Undoubtedly, principals’ positive attitude plays a significant role in the development of an Irish-medium unit.

On the other hand, in a few cases⁹, principals expressed doubts about immersion education provision as an educational concept. One principal thought it was not advantageous to study all subjects through the medium of Irish up to the Leaving Certificate examination. Another principal admitted that she often questions herself – “can I actually justify timetabling that or not?” (Interview, PO) where only a small number of students wish to study certain subjects through the medium of Irish. But another principal held a contrasting view stating that Irish-medium provision was a distinctive aspect of their school, which attracts more students each year. The research data suggests that the success of the Irish-medium unit largely depends on the ongoing commitment of the principal.

What are principals’ perceptions of how staff understand immersion education pedagogies?

Principals generally agree that staff have some awareness of effective methods of teaching subjects through a second language. Research findings indicate that principals believe that teachers require a deeper understanding of - “immersion education, including, L1 teaching and the link to L2 and about subject vocabulary and that you are teaching a language as well as teaching a subject” (Interview, Former PO). While a qualification in Irish is important, that does

not necessarily mean that a teacher is equipped to teach a subject through a second language, a view strongly held by host school principals. As a result, there is a recognition of the importance of ongoing professional development to address the specific needs of teachers in Irish-medium units. Nonetheless, it is reported that the professional development priorities of host schools often take precedence over the needs of Irish-medium units, which can contribute to the failure of some units. To ensure success, further professional development focused on immersion education implementation is critical. As one participant noted – “it has to be down to the roots. I don’t think it is at the roots at present” (Interview, Former PO).

What impact do principals believe the Irish-medium unit has on the host school?

The majority of principals believe that the Irish-medium units have a positive and lasting impact on promoting Irish as a living language, particularly by fostering a greater appreciation of the Irish language and culture among students. One principal noted – “The culture in the unit hugely influences the culture in the main school *mórscoil* (host school). It infuses everything you do... in the main school *mórscoil*” (Interview, PO).

Frequently, principals highlight the positive influence of events that are organised both within and outside the school which give students of the host school an opportunity to hear and speak Irish. It is often remarked – “that the Irish culture has really enriched the whole school” (Interview, PO). While the benefits for the host school are evident, the advantages for the students of the Irish-medium unit are less certain.

How does the Irish language proficiency of the host school principal impact the management of the Irish-medium unit?

The research suggests that host school principals recognise the challenge of managing Irish-medium units when they themselves are not fully fluent in the Irish language. One principal admitted – “I am not a *Gaeilgeoir*” (Interview, PO), while another acknowledged that – “when you don’t have the Irish... I think that could be a huge issue... I think it could be a slight barrier” (Interview, PO). That is not to say that host school principals are not making efforts to improve their Irish: some have taken Irish language courses to boost their confidence in the language. However, they also report – “that the everyday use of the language remains a challenge” (Interview, PO).

Additional challenges emerge when the principal is not proficient in the Irish language. Evidence suggests the principal is reliant on the good will of Irish language teachers to translate and draft letters. It is acknowledged that a principal’s limited Irish language skills played a significant role in the failure of some units during the establishment stage. Furthermore, it has been reported that student numbers in the Irish-medium unit declined when a principal, fluent in Irish, was replaced by one with less proficiency.

While not all host school principals are fluent in Irish, their attitude towards the language is seen as equally important as their linguistic ability. It is understood from various participants that they try to promote the Irish language in the school environment. One principal remarked that some sentences can be practised throughout the day, especially when interacting with students in the corridor. The view was – “my Irish is far from good, but everyone can learn, and we can give other people that opportunity, that place to develop it a little bit as well” (Interview, PO). Although these efforts to cultivate an Irish language environment are appreciated, participants still believe that host school principals should have a high standard of proficiency in Irish.

What recruitment procedures are used by principals?

Principals report that staff members should be capable of promoting the unique Irish-medium ethos in addition to fulfilling their teaching duties. Host school principals acknowledge the value of collaborating with universities to identify teachers who are willing to teach through the medium of Irish or who are qualified to do so. They believe that simply placing an advertisement in the media is insufficient for recruiting suitable teachers. In many cases, the post needs to be advertised multiple times to secure a pool of candidates for interview. Principals understand the need to be proactive and take advantage of networking opportunities at Irish language events. As one principal stated – “I kept a steady eye on recruitment, I became a little more ruthless about it” (Interview, PO). It is apparent that principals must rely on various strategies in order to recruit teachers who are proficient in the Irish language with the appropriate qualifications.

Data suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to appoint teachers who are proficient in the language. According to principals the range of subjects offered in the Irish-medium unit is limited due to teacher shortage. This puts immense pressure on principals during the recruitment process. As one principal stated – “You know, it really goes against the grain, to even think of having to put a teacher in the class who doesn’t have Gaeilge” (Interview, PO). Finding a teacher willing to take a position in a unit, and particularly on an island, is described as nearly impossible. In the view of one participant, it is an injustice that neither a Gaeltacht allowance nor an island allowance is no longer available.

There has been ongoing criticism for some time regarding the difficulties in recruiting teachers proficient in Irish. However, there is little evidence to suggest that significant action or research has been undertaken to address the issue. The research outcomes indicate that particular qualifications are required before teachers are interviewed, qualifications such as Ceardteastas or Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG). The research also notes that schools did not retain teachers – “who didn’t reflect the ethos and culture of the school” (Interview, PO). But, on the other hand, another principal reported:

I know that some of these classes are taught through the medium of Irish but maybe quite a few are being taught through English. The teachers were doing their best ... Irish in the degree... but they did not have the subject terminology.

(Interview, PO).

The issue of teachers being unable to teach subjects through the medium of Irish remains a concern. Student learning is clearly impacted where no teacher is available, and principals are struggling to find substitute teachers. The research highlights that principals must step in and teach classes themselves when teachers are absent. In addition, when a teacher goes on career break or maternity leave, schools frequently face difficulties in ensuring that certain subjects can continue to be offered. It is reported that teachers are reluctant to take up a temporary position in an Irish-medium unit due to limited teaching hours on offer and job uncertainty. In spite of the recruitment challenges, some principals have noted that teachers expressed a desire to improve their own language skills with a view to teaching full time in an Irish-medium unit. This interest is driven by factors such as smaller classes, good behaviour among the students and the opportunity to use the language daily.

What expectations do host school principals have for Irish-medium units?

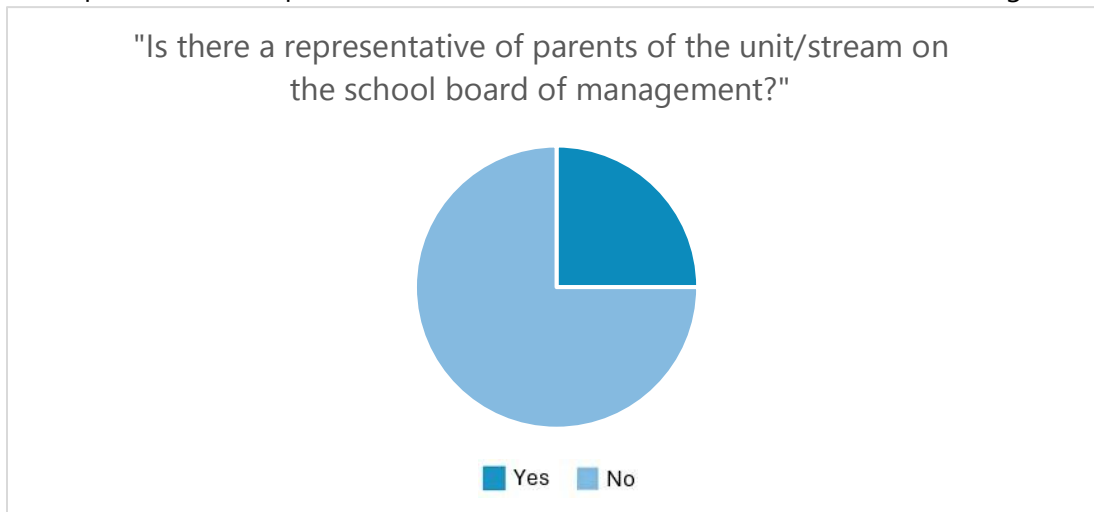
The primary expectation identified by host principals is that teachers would teach through the medium of Irish. However, it is acknowledged that this expectation diminishes where teachers do not have the capacity to teach the various subjects through the medium of Irish. As one participant noted – “we’ll put someone in there teaching RE, they’ll be fine” (Interview, PO), an indication of the pressure that principals face in recruiting teachers with Irish. The findings indicate that units do not always meet the expectation of providing Irish-medium education. As a result, this impacts on the quality of teaching putting the future of Irish-medium education at risk.

Particular questions relating to the board of management

Is there a staff representative or a parent of an Irish-medium unit on the board of management?

Quantitative results from the current research reveal that 25% of Irish-medium units have a staff representative on the host school board of management. A similar finding was noted in relation to the presence of a parent representative from the Irish-medium unit on the host school board of management. Questionnaire responses align with participant feedback, indicating that there is variability in the procedures for including teachers or parents from Irish-medium units on host schools’ boards of management.

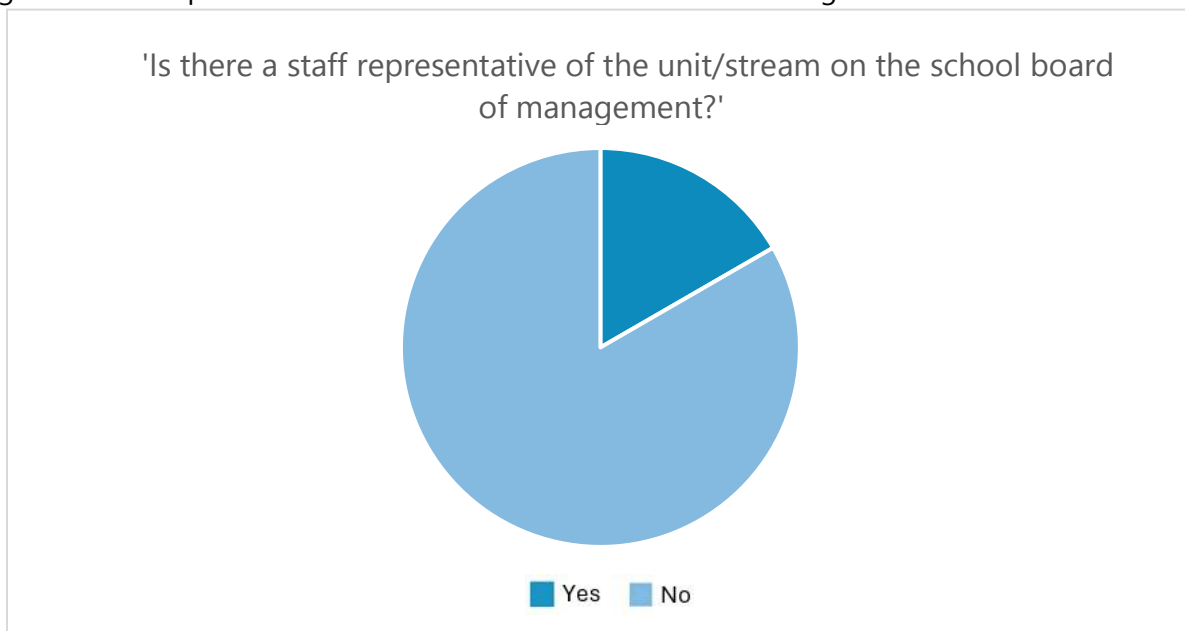
Figure 3: Representative of parents of the unit/stream on the school board of management



In most cases, Irish-medium units lack representation on the host schools' boards of management. - "There is nobody there officially representing the unit" (Interview, MibhF). However, there are exceptions: one board of management includes two representatives, and, in another case, a part-time teacher serves as the chairperson of the board. Some schools confirm that there is someone on the board with a proficiency in Irish. Conversely, there is at least one Irish-medium unit with its own board of management, which, while not officially recognised by the Department of Education, is seen as advantageous for gaining insight into unit management as it strives for independence. In another example, it was stated that the board of management appointed two representatives to form a subcommittee tasked with discussing unit management and making recommendations to the full board.

Overall, participants believe that without representation on the board they lack a voice in unit management and in the promotion of Irish-medium education. Participants acknowledge that having board representation contributes to more successful development of the unit. See questionnaire data in figure 4.

Figure 4: Staff representative of the unit on school board of management



Quantitative data support participant feedback, revealing that only 25% of Irish-medium units have a parents' committee. Contrary to popular opinion, an inspection report recommended dissolution of these committees, suggesting that the school board of management should have oversight for only one parent committee. The Inspectorate recommendation raises concerns relating to sense of identity, partnership, and the status of the unit. The ambiguity surrounding the structure of boards and unit representation contributes to uncertainty and, at times, a lack of cohesion among the educational communities sharing the same site.

What vision do host schools' boards of management have for the Irish-medium units?

Participants in this research emphasis that a clear management vision is crucial for unit development and must be shared with the broader school community. One participant recognises the difficulty with that practice, in noting – "it cannot be developed or shared if it resembles an Achilles heel in a host school that operates as a wholly English-medium school" (Interview, Former PO). Another participant admits that little attention is paid to the affairs of the unit – "they don't think too hard about it to be honest" (Interview, PO). Participants strongly believe that the needs of the unit and the host school are often incompatible, making it difficult for the board of management to articulate a vision for the unit while also addressing the host school's concerns. As one participant points out - "that there is more involved with a unit than a building and teachers" (Interview, PO). Ultimately it is the management's vision that steers the unit - "If there is no vision, it is merely a service" (Interview, PO).

What is management's perspective of the Irish-medium unit?

Research outcomes reveal that while the staff of the unit respects management, most believe that these boards do not fully grasp the concept of immersion education, the role of the unit coordinator, or the range of responsibilities involved. One participant indicated the view – “that they did not understand what was involved from the point of view of spirit or identity or language issues” (Interview, Former MibhF) which diminished their ability to advocate for the unit. Regarding the duties of the unit coordinator, one participant acknowledged – “I don’t think they understand, but I suppose they are constrained from the point of view of the number of classes they can relieve me of, so they are between a rock and a hard place in that case” (Interview, MibhF).

Criticism is directed at boards of management for their inadequate understanding and lack of knowledge of the most effective ways to lead and manage an Irish-medium immersion unit. Financially, priority is often given to the host school, leading participants to believe that their own needs are secondary. As one participant explained - “the host school got anything that was going, I only got what was left, if anything was left at all.” (Interview, PO). It is understandable why participants may feel disheartened given that the host school’s needs are consistently prioritised.

Does the Irish-medium unit receive special support from the board of management?

Participants report that boards of management support them as much as possible – “The board of management is helpful and supportive” (Interview, PO). There is also an appreciation that they are under pressure with the affairs of the host school and as a result, Irish-medium units receive limited support. Most participants believe that their needs are not adequately considered in decision making processes that directly affect the units. Participants contend that a dedicated support structure is necessary to address the specific needs of Irish-medium units.

What is the level of communication between Irish-medium units and boards of management?

The majority of participants expressed concern about inadequate communication between themselves and school management, often identifying the principal as the main intermediary. They also noted that while unit coordinators are required to submit a report for board meetings, they are frustrated by the lack of feedback and recognition for their work, leading some to question the value of these reports.

According to their understanding, it appears that Irish is rarely used at board level. One participant felt - “Perhaps a lack of confidence in the language deters senior management from engaging

with the unit” (Interview, Former MibhF). Participants noted the importance of board members having a proficiency in Irish and a solid understanding of managing an immersion education unit.

Particular questions relating to the patrons

How does the patron support the Irish-medium unit?

Research outcomes show that the patron has an important role in the establishment and development of a unit, offering valuable guidance and support. Patrons who exhibit strong management skills, support and a vision for Irish-medium education are particularly commended. Participants appreciate that patrons dealing with the Irish-medium sector understand the daily challenges of the unit. As one participant noted – “Maybe they do not understand everything relating to second level schools, but they do understand the general challenges that present and that is wonderful for us” (Interview, PO). However, opinions vary regarding the support provided by the patron of English-medium host schools. The data reveal a general lack of understanding and awareness of Irish-medium education among these patrons, noting teacher recruitment and funding as major issues.

The data also highlights the critical need for support from Department of Education for patrons. One participant remarked – “I think there is a great need for support for the patron from the Department” (Interview, PO). Participants believe that the lack of a comprehensive definition of what constitutes an Irish-medium immersion unit coupled with the absence of clear criteria from the Department of Education specifically aimed at promoting immersion education, further complicates the situation.

Particular questions relating to the Department of Education

What is the Department of Education’s understanding of the needs of Irish-medium units?

While it is acknowledged that the Department of Education plays a key role in establishing and sustaining Irish-medium units, data reveal that participants lack confidence in the Department’s commitment to promote the Irish language, particularly in the context of Irish-medium post-primary education. One participant noted – “It was very difficult to convince them (Dept. of Ed.) that Irish-medium education is a good thing” (Interview, Founder of a Unit). The Department of Education is criticised for its limited understanding of the immersion education system. There is also a concern that the Department of Education does not acknowledge the importance of separating the Irish-medium unit from the English-medium host school. As one participant identified – “If it is an Irish-medium school it must function as an Irish-medium centre or as an Irish-medium unit” (Interview, PO). From the perspective of Irish-medium units, an immersion system is unlikely to be effective if it is situated within an environment where English is

predominant. Participants argue it is merely a “pretence” (Interview, PO) and believe that students do not receive an adequate education in such circumstances.

Participants believe it is essential for a unit to operate as an Irish-medium unit from the day of its establishment. Data suggest that founders of Irish-medium units are frustrated by the Department of Education’s expectation that they must function in an English environment for several years before demonstrating their effectiveness as an Irish-medium unit with a sufficient student enrolment. One principal confirms – “if you are half-in and half-out, you are nowhere. You are preparing for a failure from the start” (Interview, PO).

The issue of enrolment numbers is contentious when it comes to establishing or sustaining an Irish-medium unit. Participants believe – “that your application is not being processed by the education it’s bringing; it’s being processed in a formulistic way” (Interview, PO). It is clearly discernible among the participants that Department of Education’s leadership does not fully appreciate that the value of Irish education goes beyond mere numbers. As one host school principal stated – “It is not a numbers game. When a person sits down and puts a value on Irish-medium education, numbers alone do not reflect that value” (Interview, PO). Nevertheless, the findings indicate that there is a lack of clarity from the Department of Education about the precise enrolment number required to establish a unit or to transition to a stand-alone school. As one of the participants stated – “it is a secret number” (Interview, PO).

What information and guidance does the Department of Education provide?

Outcomes of the present research suggest that there is a perception of insufficient support from the Department of Education, particularly during the initial stages of establishing a unit. The majority of participants expressed feeling isolated when the Department of Education have no clearly defined criteria for unit establishment. One participant argued that, logically:

If a Gaeltacht school has to reach criteria in order to be recognised as a Gaeltacht school, my personal view is that it would be fair and sensible from the Department’s perspective ... if any unit or Irish-medium second level school had to fulfill criteria.

(Interview, PO).

Participants believe that the situation could improve if the Department of Education provided clear guidance and ongoing support.

What support is available from the Department of Education?

Participants frequently question the level of support provided by the Department of Education, describing their situation as being in “limbo”. Due to this uncertainty, they often blame the Department for the perceived lack of support they experience. They believe, that, at a minimum, Irish-medium units could succeed if appropriate supports were available from the outset. One participant emphasised that support must be provided from the beginning – “you must provide support to grow it. It cannot grow if there is not a value put on it from the start” (Interview, PO). Participants also suggest that one of the most impactful ways the Department of Education could assist the immersion education system is by publicly showing its confidence through an awareness campaign that highlights the benefits of immersion education – “I would love to see centralised support from the Department, saying we have confidence in this model” (Interview, PO). However, they also acknowledge the risk involved, as one participant noted, – “it is a gamble that may not work” (Interview, Former PO).

While participants report that useful advice is available from Department of Education Inspectorate, they also point out that this advice is often inconsistent. It is reported that some schools had to rely on political support to establish their units.

How is communication conducted with the Department of Education?

Participants reported that their communication with the Department of Education often relies on the empathy of the person answering the phone to receive any meaningful assistance. More often than not, they are transferred from one section to another in search of answers. Participants' concerns are further validated by the Department's inaccurate records of the number of units no longer in operation that still appear on official lists. A former principal of an Irish-medium school highlighted this issue – “As things stand, the unit is there but it is not operating... the unit is officially open on paper” (Interview, Former principal Irish-medium school). This situation illustrates why participants might have doubts about the Department of Education's communication system.

What planning efforts is the Department of Education undertaking to develop Irish-medium units?

Participants agree that effective planning by the Department of Education is essential for the success of immersion education. However, participants have shared evidence of insufficient planning in some areas. For example, although one host school had the capacity to establish an Irish-medium unit, it was prevented from doing so to avoid affecting enrolment of an existing Irish-medium school in the area. The participant clarifies the matter in saying – “I understand the reason but at the same time it would be great to develop what we have ourselves” (Interview, LPO⁷).

⁷ LPO = deputy principal

In the absence of proactive development plans, some schools have taken the initiative to extend the education provision on their own. Participants believe that a proactive development plan is needed for these units, a plan that has identified targets relating to student numbers, curricular provision and teacher recruitment. Research findings indicate the critical importance for units to carry out forward planning to ensure recognition for an Irish-medium independent school. However, it is recommended that such planning takes place at the initial establishment stage.

One participant notes a shift in planning efforts with the introduction of a pilot scheme to establish a satellite school which aims to assess demand. This is seen as a significant indicator of the Department of Education's changing perspective, as it appears to recognise the value of trialing this model - "they (the Department) see the value of giving this model a trial" (Interview, PO). This development is viewed as an encouraging sign for the Irish language community and for the future of immersion education provision.

Particular questions relating to the Irish language organisations

How do Irish language organisations support units?

Research outcomes indicate that unit staff are generally satisfied with the support provided by Irish language organisations. One participant noted that – "They help us greatly in giving us guidance" (Interview, MibhF). Conferences and networking opportunities were particularly appreciated, as participants found these events valuable for connecting with colleagues. One participant responded highlighting the importance of such occasions, stating – "I think the workshops and conferences are exceptionally important and should receive a greater emphasis" (Interview, PO Irish-medium post-primary school). Participants also recommended additional teacher learning opportunities that focus specifically on the unique challenges of teaching through the medium of a second language.

Notwithstanding the opportunities provided by organisations, a concern was highlighted by one participant who remarked – "that the eye is taken off the ball" (Interview, PO) regarding the consistent use of Irish in Irish-medium settings. Concerns about the future of the Irish language described as "distilled down" remain (Interview, Former PO Irish-medium school). There is a consensus that Irish language organisations should take a more active role in promoting immersion education, ensuring that high quality Irish-medium provision flourishes. One participant acknowledges – "that there is a difference between teaching through Irish and Irish-medium schooling" (Interview, Former PO Irish-medium school). The need for advanced and ongoing professional development opportunities to strengthen Irish-medium education is critical.

While organisations have made efforts to address the quality of Irish used in textbooks, they remain a major point of contention among unit teachers. Students reportedly "struggle" (Interview,

PO) with subject-specific terminology, leading teachers to spend significant time translating or modifying the language in textbooks. Participants also reference the workload involved when syllabus changes occur as noted here – “currently, all the courses are new, so old notes are of no use. You are starting again” (Interview, MibhF). Another participant observed the way questions are phrased in textbooks is problematic. - “Straight answers are not even available in the book” (Interview, MibhF). The language of subject textbooks needs to be adapted to match students’ comprehension levels.

Despite these challenges, teachers are committed to translation work - “to allay the fears” (Interview, PO) of parents, particularly parents of first year students. One participant emphasised the importance of addressing textbook language issues, - “parents will jump ship if they don’t get it” (Interview, PO). Teachers’ efforts to overcome these problems are recognised but as one participant admits – “I don’t know what’s the best way forward” (Interview, PO). Regrettably, the solution many schools have adopted is to use English language textbooks – “we are using the English book” (Interview, PO). This practice, reportedly common among units, raises questions about initial teacher education and professional development for effective content and language integration, a keystone of immersion education.

Conclusion

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the role of the unit coordinator, the role of the host school principal and board of management. It also details the roles of patrons, the Department of Education and Irish language organisations in assisting Irish-medium units. Participants recognise the numerous challenges they face which hinder the effective management of Irish-medium units. Significant issues highlighted include the lack of consistency in the appointment of the unit coordinator, as well as a broad range of responsibilities they must undertake. It is also noted that they do not have sufficient time to focus on the promotion of the Irish language, leading to concerns that the quality of immersion education is not meeting the desired standard. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of the host school principal having a positive attitude to ensure unit success. The challenges the boards of management encounter in the recruitment of teachers are also discussed. Furthermore, the findings critique the Department of Education’s leadership, highlighting a perceived lack of appreciation for immersion as an effective means of education. Efforts of Irish language organisations to address specific issues are also acknowledged.

Introduction

This section begins by examining the unit's capacity to offer subjects through the medium of Irish at both Junior and Senior Cycle. It explores various and interconnect complex factors to provide a broader perspective on specific issues, highlighting the intricate nature of Irish medium provision within the unit. Subsequently, findings related specifically to the teaching staff and students of the unit are presented. The section concludes with a summary of these outcomes.

Particular questions relating to provision in the unit

What Irish-medium provision is currently available in units?

The current research indicates that full Irish-medium subject provision at Junior Cycle level is not consistently offered in the unit due to several factors. Most units provide between five and seven subjects through Irish, with the remaining subjects being taught in English. Typically, subjects delivered in English include Woodwork, Metalwork, Technical Graphics and Home Economics. It is also noted that units do not always provide a full range of Irish-medium subjects at Senior Cycle, with no expansion or diversification beyond what is offered at Junior Cycle level. Priority is often given to non-examination subjects as explained by one unit coordinator – “They do physical education and Christian doctrine and others that do not involve an examination” (Interview, MibhF).

This perspective highlights a significant gap in the provision of Irish-medium subjects within units, particularly at Senior Cycle level. Additionally, it is evident that the number of Irish-medium subjects provided at Junior Cycle is not extended to Senior Cycle. It is suggested that greater attention should be given to resource allocation and expansion efforts to address these gaps, ensuring a more comprehensive and balanced range of subject offerings.

Please refer to questionnaire data below in figure 5 and figure 6.

Figure 5: Subjects taught through the medium of Irish in units

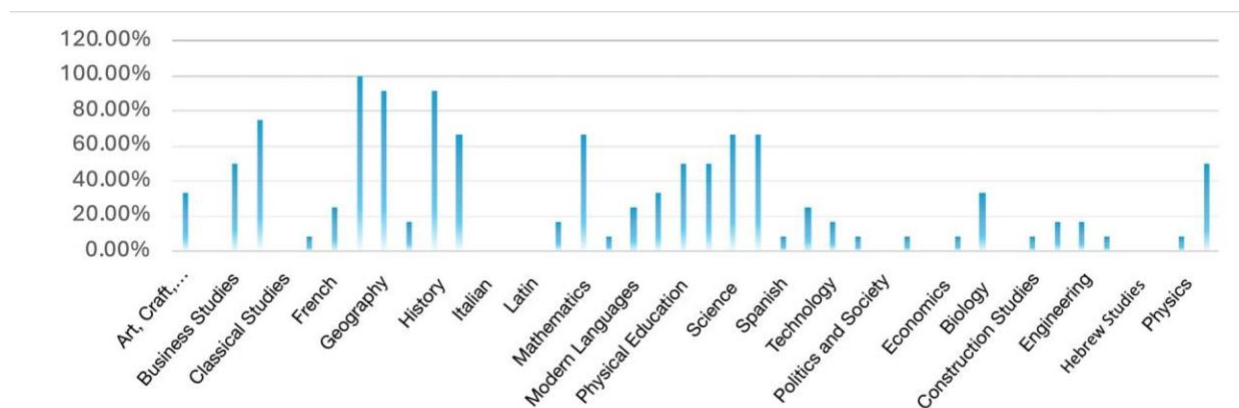
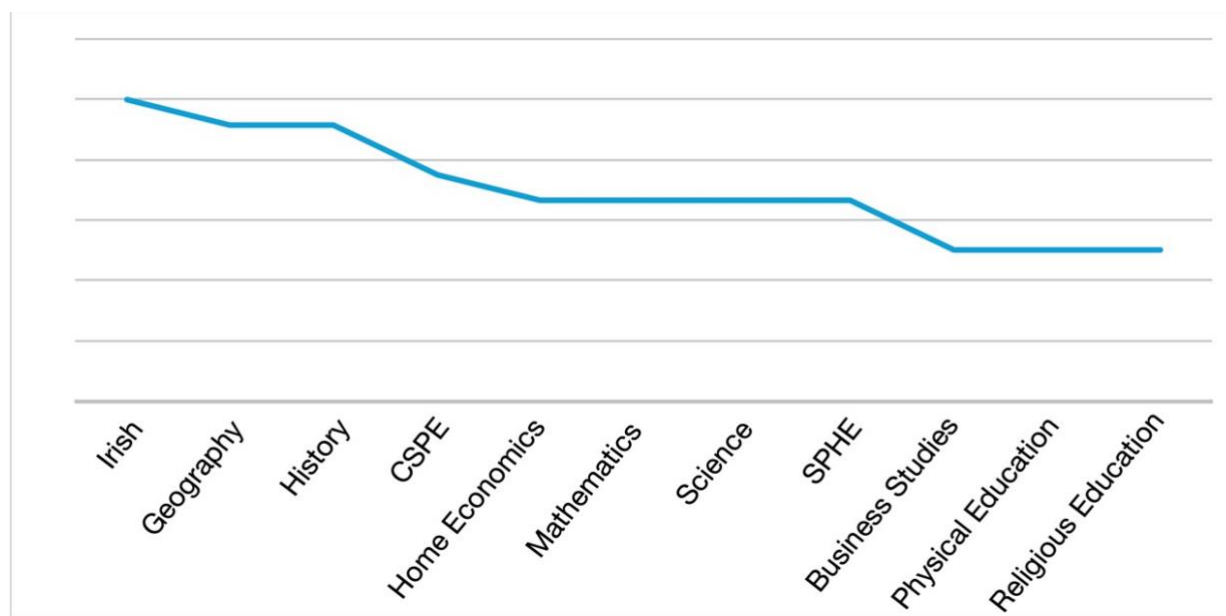


Figure 6 below gives details of the subjects provided through the medium of Irish in order of frequency in the unit.

Figure 6: Current provision in units in order of priority/frequency



Questionnaire data report that the following subjects are not available through the medium of Irish in the units: Ancient Greek, Classical Studies, Italian, Jewish Studies, Latin, Politics and Society, Agricultural Economics, Chemistry, Hebrew Studies, Japanese. It is critically important, therefore, to promote a more balanced and inclusive educational offering in units.

What are the factors that impact on Irish-medium provision in units?

In almost all cases, it was noted that the provision of subjects in Irish is largely influenced by the number of students in the unit, specifically, when the student population is small, a broad range of Irish-medium subjects is perceived as not feasible. The difficulty of offering various subject

options at Junior Cycle level is similarly present at Senior Cycle level, where both students and parents expect the widest possible selection of subjects. Nonetheless, practical constraints emerge when attempting to provide subjects for classes with only two or three students. As one participant explained – “All students and parents seek the widest option, that they would have a choice of every subject, but a subject cannot be provided where there are only two or three in the class for the junior cycle” (Interview, PO).

Participants noted a correlation between providing subjects through the medium of Irish and the number of students in the group. They mentioned that it is more manageable when student numbers are higher, particularly at Junior Cycle level. Nevertheless, they emphasize that significant challenges arise at Senior Cycle level, as illustrated in the following extract.

So, for example, you've got a group of nine 5th years in the unit... it is a massive challenge to offer them subjects through Irish as you don't have the nine together for everything. You know, we have Chemistry (in the unit), for example, four students in it and we've got a chemistry class with 12, 13 students (in the host school). Well, you can't..., that's a huge cost in terms of resources.

(Interview, PO).

Principals face a dilemma when allocating classes based on students' subject choices within units, often having to make difficult decisions depending on student numbers.

The associated costs further complicate the decision-making process, as one principal expressed – “So do you now double up on your allocation of geography teachers at 5th year and have a geography teacher teaching it through English and a different teacher teaching geography through Irish” (Interview, PO). There is a significant expense associated with allocating resources and managing related issues to accommodate students' various preferences for studying subjects in Irish.

Additionally, it was clearly demonstrated that a major obstacle to offering Irish-medium subjects in Irish-medium units is the limited availability of qualified teachers who can teach subjects through Irish. Furthermore, it was reported that subject provision in units is dependent on the teacher allocation by the host school, teachers who are proficient in Irish and qualified to teach a broad range of subjects through the medium of Irish. As one principal explains:

The other matter is to find teachers to teach the subject through Irish. At present, in reality, it is very hard to get teachers for subjects like woodwork, metalwork, or technical drawing, home economics, or geography. They are not in the school, let alone in the unit.

(Interview, PO).

The research indicates that Irish-medium provision is based on student demand for subjects. If there is low demand for an Irish-medium subject compared to demand for the same subject taught through English in the host school, the Irish-medium option is not offered. As a result, students in the unit must either study the subject in English, due to insufficient demand, or study a select range of subjects through Irish, based on the host school's policy. This dilemma is highlighted below:

They (i.e. the students) all study a language; we don't give them a language choice in the [unit] here. They must all study German. In the [host school], German, French or Spanish are available. Students in the [unit] don't have that choice. If you provide that choice, there would be a war, if you give them the choice of studying German, French or Spanish through the medium of Irish because if there are six in one class we will have no German class in sixth year.

(Interview, PO).

This illustrates the delicate balance between offering students subject choices and managing the contextual constraints related to class size. The need for sensible decision-making is emphasised in order to ensure an educational experience that is both inclusive and fair for every student in the unit. The research also highlights that the unit's capacity to provide subjects through the medium of Irish is affected by competing demands within the timetable, i.e. providing Irish-medium subjects at the same time in the subject band/block.

This creates a problem when students wish to choose subjects taught through Irish, but scheduling conflicts prevent them from taking up these subjects. The findings suggest the need for a more flexible and responsive scheduling system, one that accommodates the specific language and subject preferences of students, ultimately enhancing both their learning experience and the range of academic options available to them.

In addition, teachers noted the unit's ability to offer subjects through the medium of Irish is affected by several factors. These include limited language proficiency of students to access learning in Irish-medium subjects, teachers' lack of familiarity with late immersion education, and their low expectations of student achievement in these subjects. Teachers often expressed that - "certain subjects are too difficult for certain students from an English-medium background", leading the unit to reassess its Irish-medium provision. A unit coordinator elaborates on this challenge:

We wanted to provide all subjects through Irish at the outset but we may not have succeeded. The majority of them were always Irish-medium and thinking about it again, and of the students' Irish, they had come from English-medium primary schools so they were struggling with the subjects, business studies in particular, those were the complaints they had, science, and after that maybe history or geography. So sometimes we had to arrive at a solution for them, so maybe we will have to provide this in English.

(Interview, MibhF).

It is evident that students' limited language proficiency affects their achievement in Irish-medium subjects. This is compounded by teachers' lack of understanding of the needs of late immersion education (i.e. students who have not attended Irish-medium primary schools) and their low expectations for student success. Teachers repeatedly express concerns about the difficulty level of subjects for these students, prompting a review of the units' provision. This underscores the need to address student language proficiency, improve teacher awareness, and foster higher expectations to enhance the effectiveness of late immersion education across different educational settings.

What concerns do parents have regarding unit provision?

The research indicates that parents are concerned about the lack of full Irish-medium subject provision in the unit, something they were promised upon enrolling their children. A host school principal explains this delicate situation:

We weren't being upfront about what [the unit] was... it created an expectation that you couldn't deliver on sometimes. And then you find yourself trying to backtrack and explain. Well actually, no, we're not really what we said we are.

(Interview, PO).

Particular questions relating to the teaching staff of the Irish-medium unit

Do teachers share a common vision and hold high expectations for immersion education?

The research indicates that, in almost all cases, unit teachers have diverse approaches to teaching through the medium of Irish, influenced by their individual visions and expectations.

A shared vision and high expectations are essential principles guiding the implementation of immersion education. The extract below demonstrates this predicament:

I mean a dream school for me is everything through the medium of Irish from top to bottom but there are problems with the subjects, with the technical terms, and although people are trying to teach through the medium of Irish and they love Irish, it is very easy to swing into English while teaching.

(Interview, PO).

The teachers' enthusiasm for the Irish language and their commitment to providing a full immersion experience are evident. However, they face significant challenges related to mastering and using discipline specific terminology, teaching subject content through the immersion language and the tendency to revert to English while teaching. Although efforts to enhance and support Irish-medium teaching are recognised, there remains uncertainty about the overall success of these initiatives. This underscores the need for continuous evaluation and strategic action to ensure the effective implementation of immersion education in Irish-medium units. Such implementation must be guided by a shared vision and high expectations.

How are teaching staff assigned to an Irish-medium unit?

In almost all cases, teachers assigned to Irish-medium units are also required to teach in host schools, which significantly limits the time and focus they can dedicate specifically to Irish-medium immersion education. The research highlights the impact of this arrangement on the effectiveness of immersion education in the unit as reported below – “if some teachers were teaching fully in the unit, all the time, that would be wonderful for the promotion of immersion education. They are split between schools” (Interview, MibhF). Findings indicate a need to reconsider teacher workload allocation to better support the growth and success of immersion education in a unit.

How is staffing continuity promoted in Irish-medium units?

The research reveals that the lack of continuity in staffing limits Irish-medium provision and its effectiveness. As the unit evolved, new challenges emerged, leading to a decline in teachers' motivation and commitment, ultimately reducing the number of dedicated staff:

We were full of enthusiasm and energy for the unit, for maybe two years but then I don't know that the same energy was there due to other needs that had emerged, and people were going in different directions.

(Interview, MibhF).

In a few cases where senior management changed, the unit's continuity became vulnerable. Unless incoming management had a particular interest in the unit, Irish-medium provision diminished gradually. The research emphasises that the success of the unit's vision heavily relies on senior management, in particular, the host school principal.

Are teachers compensated for the additional workload in Irish-medium units?

The research indicates that, in almost all cases, subject teachers experience an increased workload due to curricular developments and the associated linguistic demands of teaching through the medium of Irish. Additional tasks related to teaching through Irish in the unit include translating materials from English to Irish, creating resources tailored to immersion education and assisting school management with Irish language matters.

In a few cases, teachers noted the support system for new staff, which includes resource sharing and acknowledges the extra challenges associated with immersion education:

We have a mentoring system because we all understand the extra challenges that go with teaching through the medium of Irish. Therefore, all resources are shared with the new teachers coming in and that gives them the time and space, rather than doing the advance preparations from the ground up.

(Interview, MibhF).

Nonetheless, ongoing challenges persist in encouraging host school staff to work in units. The increased workload and associated complexities deter some teachers from transferring. A unit coordinator explains the dilemma here:

People said – ok would I like to continue in the place I’ve been for years, and teach through the medium of English or will I move to the unit now and try to learn everything again and teach through the medium of Irish for the first time at year XX of my career and to say, ok this is a lot harder, it is harder for the students in front of me.

(Interview, MibhF).

In relation to the additional time allocated for planning and curricular developments, it is widely noted that this time is largely inadequate. It is further pointed out that this amount of time does not meet the planning needs of the Irish-medium unit, particularly where teachers have to juggle multiply tasks while enhancing their skills in immersion teaching. As one participant observed – “For translation, putting resources together, planning – those teachers had not been involved with immersion education, so everything was new to them as well as for the students” (Interview, MibhF). In summary, Irish medium units present a significant workload, making it challenging to attract staff. While some units offer support to teachers in immersion education, the limited planning time allocated remains a consistent concern.

What professional development plan do teachers have in Irish-medium units?

The research reveals that teachers in Irish-medium units seek innovative professional development opportunities as well as ongoing support to develop the core competencies of immersion education. Key areas of focus include promoting language use both inside and outside the classroom, integrating language and content, and mastering the specific language needed to teach their subjects effectively. The findings suggest that host school principals' understanding of the unique pedagogical and linguistic demands is instrumental in supporting these professional development needs. In a few cases, substantial professional development initiatives were implemented to address complex issues – "I took the decision that there was a pressing need for in-service. So, even the teachers I found who had fluent Irish, they did not have a great understanding of immersion education" (Interview, Former PO).

Nonetheless, the need for further progress was identified. In some instances, teachers acknowledge the complexity of language demands in teaching cognitively challenging content across a range of disciplines.

There's a difference between managing to go out to the Gaeltacht for a weekend and be able to converse with everybody and going in to deliver a subject biology in senior cycle – yes? Teaching the subject is not the same as teaching it through Irish.

(Interview, Former PO).

Additionally, the importance of a specialised qualifications for teaching through Irish was highlighted as essential for successful immersion education practices, underscoring the need for both subject expertise and proficiency in Irish – "A special qualification is needed for teaching through Irish. A qualification in Irish alone is not enough" (Interview, MibhF). It is reported, however, that the self-evaluation process is rarely used in Irish-medium units to engage with aspects of teacher professional learning that needs to be developed, to celebrate strengths and to generate a culture of inquiry.

How does the language proficiency of teachers in an Irish-medium unit contribute to its success?

The research highlights that the success of the unit heavily relies on teacher language proficiency. In almost all cases, maintaining strong language skills was emphasised as critical to the unit's effectiveness. Professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing teachers' language proficiency in their specific subject areas were seen as vital – "An Irish course for the teachers, that would be important, the subject language, yes. There is quite a bit we can do to develop the teachers' language"(Interview, MibhF).

In a few cases, teachers initially eager to teach in Irish-medium units, realised that their Irish proficiency was insufficient to teach cognitively demanding content effectively. Consequently, they returned to teaching in the host school, thereby impacting on the unit's continuity:

Then they said, – ok I'm dealing with the same type of student, except through Irish, and I don't have enough Irish, so, gradually, the people who said at the outset, oh I love being in the unit, were now saying, – you know what, I would prefer to have the same amount of hours in the host school, but then we were in a fix again.

(Interview, MibhF).

Particular questions relating to student learning in Irish-medium units

Is the L1 Specification for Irish implemented in every unit?

The research states that the L1 Specification for Irish is not always implemented in Irish-medium units at Junior Cycle level as teachers often feel that students lack the necessary language competence to engage with it fully.

What is the language of assessment in Irish-medium units?

The research reveals that students in late immersion education typically take state examinations in English. Teachers believe that most students lack the Irish language proficiency required to perform well in these examinations – “There is more work involved to achieve a sufficiently high standard so that they would be able to do their exams in Irish. Only a few of them are able to do them in Irish (Interview, MibhF). Furthermore, most subjects are assessed in English for both internal and state examinations, as teachers commonly believe that students do not yet possess the necessary language skills to complete assessments in Irish.

How is Irish promoted as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation in Irish-medium units?

Promoting Irish as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation presents ongoing challenges, due to the limited opportunities for language learning, acquisition, and use both inside and outside the classroom. In some cases, host school principals recognised the importance of a dedicated space to support Irish language promotion within the school community:

If the school is not wholly Irish-medium, I don't think you get the standard that is needed in truth... you are going against the tide all the time mar it is the English tide. In the end of the day the school is an English tide, and you are always pushing against it.

(Interview, PO).

In almost all cases, promoting Irish outside the unit is reported to suffer where the unit lacks a distinct, designated space within the host school. This need is underscored by one participant:

One of the other most important things is to promote a separate identity in terms of language socialisation. The students need to be able to speak Irish among themselves, which is hard enough without being mixed with host school students.

(Interview, MibhF).

Another unit coordinator explains the particular complications – “Encouraging the spoken language here, with the students we have, mixed with the host school – that’s one of the biggest problems we will have (Interview, MibhF). The research suggests that a commitment to fostering Irish as a unique element within the host school environment is not always well established among students in the unit.

How are extra-curriculum activities used to promote the acquisition and usage of Irish in Irish-medium units?

In a few instances, extracurricular activities are employed to support Irish acquisition and use within the unit. One example illustrates this effort:

We now have a link; we plan to visit the Gaeltacht more often. We went there this year with a transition year group... and they really enjoyed it. They spoke Irish to us while we were there. When they returned maybe it was different, the motivation is there.

(Interview, MibhF).

However, most units report that extracurricular activities conducted in Irish, are not typically offered.

Conclusion

Key factors such student enrolment numbers, teacher availability, and student language proficiency impact the unit’s capacity to offer subjects through Irish. The findings reveal a lack of focus on establishing a clear vision for immersion education within the host school, along with limited efforts to address ongoing challenges, including capacity, staff retention and workload. Professional development remains notably insufficient, particularly in immersion pedagogy and language proficiency in Irish. A comprehensive approach to enhancing student language skills, emphasising Irish in assessments, promoting extracurricular activities through Irish and fostering Irish as the primary language of communication is still underdeveloped.

Summary

This chapter presents findings across key themes: establishment and sustainability, management, and provision. The research demonstrates that units positively impact host schools, promoting Irish language and culture. However, significant challenges persist for Irish-medium units within English medium host schools. The following chapter will summarise the research conclusions and provide recommendations to address identified challenges.

Chapter 5: Findings and recommendations for the current Irish-medium units

Introduction

This chapter presents findings and recommendations based on the outcomes of the research. The recommendations are made according to the findings in the following areas: establishment and sustainability, management, and educational provision. Given that the research findings suggest that units are not effectively managed by post primary English-medium host schools no recommendation for establishing an Irish-medium unit is provided in Table 11.

Findings and recommendations relating to the current units

Table 11: Establishment of an Irish-medium unit: Findings⁸

ESTABLISHMENT	
Area	Finding
Definition	The present study provides evidence that the Irish-medium units are not fully consistent regarding the description of what they provide. In some cases, the term 'Gaelcholáiste' is erroneously used to refer to the Irish-medium unit itself.
Demand	More often than not, pressure and demand from parents for post-primary immersion education are the driving forces in the establishment of a unit. There is no transparent policy relating to the establishment of Irish-medium units.
	There is no common agreement regarding the enrolment figure necessary before the establishment of an Irish-medium unit is approved.

⁸ As the outcomes of the present research show that it is not beneficial for units to be under the management of English-medium host schools, no recommendation is made for the establishment of a unit.

Vision	Vision and commitment of leadership are crucial for the establishment and long-term sustainability of an Irish-medium unit. Typically, one or two individuals have a "vision" for immersion education, and they effectively communicate that vision to a particular committee or group with whom they work. Their personal energy, strategic foresight and commitment are key factors that mobilise support on the ground and drive efforts overall.
Awareness and communications	The research indicates that publicity and awareness campaigns with primary feeder schools are crucial when establishing an Irish-medium unit. The research also highlights that the presence of an Irish-medium primary school (Gaelscoil) as a feeder school in the locality is beneficial.
	Data from the research provide evidence that an awareness and publicity campaign were conducted with Irish-medium primary schools (Gaelscoileanna) exclusively in English due to the unavailability of staff members proficient in Irish.
The Department of Education	The outcomes of the present research indicate that the participants lack confidence in the Department of Education regarding the provision of post-primary immersion education. This is particularly due to the lack of understanding about the challenges of operating an Irish-medium unit in a building where English is the dominant language.
	Some participants in the present research attribute blame to leadership in the Department of Education, arguing that they do not value immersion education as a means towards language acquisition and maintenance. It is reported that decisions regarding educational provision through the medium of Irish, are made solely based on enrolment figures.

Patrons

Data from the research frequently highlight that participants are of the opinion that they are operating in a vacuum due to the absence of proactive development plans and clear precise criteria from the Department of Education for establishing and sustaining Irish-medium units.

The research reveals that the Department of Education lacks a clear policy with regard to the perquisite enrolment figures for the establishment of an Irish-medium unit.

The research demonstrates that there is a lack of consistent and well-informed guidance or support provided by the Department of Education to those intent on establishing Irish-medium units. Instead, these founders depend on the empathy of the individual they contact for assistance. The advice they receive is often inconsistent.

It is also noted that civil servants dealing with Irish-medium units are not always able to perform their duty through the medium of Irish. In nearly all cases, when an evaluation takes place in the host school, the Irish-medium units are not included. Additionally, participants report that the advice and practices of inspectors are inconsistent when dealing with Irish-medium units.

Research outcomes indicate that the patron has an important role in the establishment and development of Irish-medium units. It is reported that the patron provides important guidance and support.

Irish language organisations	The results of the study provide no evidence that the Department of Education offers guidance to patrons of Irish-medium units to assist in their establishment. The study also identifies that some patrons of host schools demonstrate a lack of awareness of immersion education. Additionally, participants acknowledge the challenges faced by patrons in developing an immersion education model due to the absence of clear guidance and definite criteria from the Department of Education.
	The ongoing support and advice provided by Irish language organisations are acknowledged in this study, especially with reference to conferences and professional development workshops which they organise.

Table 12: Sustainability: Findings and recommendations

SUSTAINABILITY		
Area	Finding	Recommendations
Distinctive identity	Data from the present research indicate that the Irish-medium unit faces numerous challenges in maintaining its distinctive identity as an immersion education model thus ensuring its future sustainability. The unit's high level of dependence on the host school is identified as a significant obstacle to securing its distinctive identity and long-term viability.	It is recommended that the Irish-medium unit establish a distinctive identity ⁹ independent of the host school. The host school should recognise the importance of this independent identity for an Irish-medium unit and provide the necessary support for it.

⁹ The following features are those recommended to convey a separate identity: separate name for the Irish-medium unit, vision, school uniform, website, stationery/letterhead, information leaflets, separate email address.

Policies and planning	In almost all cases, it is shown that as an immersion education setting, the Irish-medium unit does not have a language policy or plan of its own.	It is recommended that a language policy and plan be developed and implemented from the outset in the Irish-medium unit to ensure its effectiveness as an immersion education setting.
	In almost all cases, it is shown that the Irish-medium unit does not have policies or an action plan of its own, independent of the host school.	It is recommended that Irish-medium units have their own policies and action plans, independent of the host school, to ensure effective immersion education. The staff of the unit must play a central role in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of its various policies.
	In nearly all cases, there are no policies specifically relating to the Irish-medium unit as an immersion education setting apart from the policies of the host school which are written in English.	Each Irish-medium unit requires policies that are written in Irish and that incorporate all principles of immersion education. These should include a language policy that promotes the use of Irish, an Irish-medium subjects provision policy, an Irish-medium teaching policy, an admissions policy, a recruitment policy, a marketing policy, and a policy governing interactions between the Irish-medium unit and the host school.
	There is no evidence that the school self-evaluation process is a central component of the work of the Irish-medium unit, as recommended by the Department of Education (School Self-Evaluation: The Next Steps 2022-2026, including Circular	It is important to use the school self-evaluation process as recommended by the Department of Education (School Self-Evaluation: The Next Steps 2022-2026, including Circular 0056/2022). It is recommended that

Enrolment	0056/2022). This process is intended to evaluate teaching and learning with the aim of improving the quality of provision.	the Department of Education design and provide transparent indicators specifically related to immersion education in Irish-medium units. These indicators would facilitate the evaluation of teaching and learning and improve the quality of provision.
	The research indicates that the Department of Education has neither a policy nor a common agreement about enrolment figures to ensure the sustainability of Irish-medium units.	The Department of Education must develop and implement an enrolment policy that would specify the number of students required to ensure the sustainability of an Irish-medium unit, tailored to various local factors and contexts.
	The research states that any discernable decrease in enrolment figures poses a significant threat to the sustainability of Irish-medium units.	The Department of Education must develop and implement a strategic plan tailored to various local factors and context affecting Irish-medium units. This plan should identify perquisite enrolment figures to ensure the sustainability of the unit.
Change management	This research highlights that unexpected staffing changes pose obstacles to the success and sustainability of Irish-medium units, for example, the departure of an individual teacher from the unit could hinder its progress and development.	It is recommended that the host school is cognisant of the substitution requirements specific to the Irish-medium unit. This will ensure that the Irish-medium unit has access, as required, to the highest number of substitute teachers who are proficient in Irish and who are trained to teach various subjects in an immersion education setting. The host school must be proactive in empowering teachers to teach

Sustainability		through the medium of Irish as part of the school's professional development plan.
	Research outcomes indicate that the patron has an important role to play in the development and sustainability of Irish-medium units. Ongoing guidance and support are required by the management of host schools to enable them implement and strengthen the quality of immersion education within the unit.	Patrons must provide ongoing guidance and support to host school management to ensure that members of the board understand how immersion education principles are implemented. This will serve to contribute to the effectiveness of the Irish-medium unit.
	The outcomes of the present research suggest that the guidance provided by the Department of Education is insufficient to ensure the sustainability of Irish-medium units.	The Department of Education, in collaboration with patrons, must provide clear guidance and ongoing support in order to ensure the sustainability of Irish-medium units. It is recommended that specific advice be given to units, addressing key sustainability issues, such as Irish-medium provision, professional development, allocation of resources, assessment, community participation, marketing, capital funding, and appropriate accommodation.
	The present research provides evidence that there is no coordinated planning or established procedures for the development and long-term sustainability of Irish-medium units.	The Department of Education must devise and implement coordinated planning to consolidate procedures and put structures in place to strengthen the development of Irish-medium educational provision.
	The research indicates that in the majority of Irish-medium units, there is a general lack of responsibility	To ensure sustainability, it is recommended that the Irish-medium units assume greater

taken and inadequate development of policies, approaches and practices to ensure sustainability.	autonomy and responsibility for developing their own policies, approaches, and practices thus enabling them to operate effectively as immersion education settings.
The research provides evidence that there is no external evaluation of Irish-medium educational provision within Irish-medium units.	To ensure sustainability, it is essential that the Department of Education conduct regular evaluations of Irish-medium educational provision in Irish-medium units. This will help to identify areas that require development and provide support to facilitate improvement.
Research indicates that while people are energized by the vision of the unit's founding members, this enthusiasm tends to wane over time due to ongoing challenges.	Despite the ongoing challenges, it is crucial for an Irish-medium unit to remain committed to its founding vision, thus adhering to the aims of immersion education and the provision of an Irish-medium curriculum.
The research findings provide evidence that the Department of Education has neither a proactive development plan for Irish-medium units nor for the promotion of immersion education.	The Department of Education must formulate a proactive development plan for Irish-medium units that includes specific targets to promote immersion education.
The present research states that accommodation (i.e., building and spaces designated for the unit) in an English -medium environment poses challenges and hinders the implementation and reinforcement of immersion education in the Irish-medium unit.	Considering local factors and contexts, it is recommended that the Department of Education review the current accommodation of Irish-medium units, on a case-by-case basis, including capital expenditure. For Irish-medium units without dedicated accommodation, it is

		recommended that permanent spaces within the host school be assigned to provide teaching classrooms and centres for students to socialise. This would ensure the Irish-medium unit is preserved as a “language sanctuary” fostering an authentic Irish language environment.
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Table 13: Management of a unit: Findings and recommendations

MANAGEMENT		
Area	Finding	Recommendations
The unit coordinator	The present research reveals that a passion for, and commitment to the Irish language are key motivators for teachers to assume leadership roles in Irish-medium units.	A recruitment campaign for teachers should be launched to highlight the advantages of teaching through the medium of Irish. Additionally, professional development opportunities should be created to enhance language proficiency and management skills.
	The research acknowledges that the status of the unit coordinator’s position is unclear and that a range of titles are used to identify this post.	It is recommended that a uniform title be used consistently for the unit coordinator, i.e. ‘stiúrthóir’ (director) rather than ‘múinteoir i bhfeighil’ (unit coordinator). This appointment is at AP1 level, an ex-quota position with the appropriate allowance.
	The present research acknowledges that the role of the unit coordinator lacks clarity and that the range and scope of the duties to be performed are inconsistent.	The responsibilities of the unit coordinator should be defined collaboratively with the host school principal. These responsibilities should include areas such as: enrolment, curriculum, staffing needs, teacher recruitment, teacher professional development,

	timetabling, accommodation, maintenance, care for students with additional educational needs, communication with parents, and the promotion of the distinct identity of the Irish-medium unit. These responsibilities should be contractually agreed.										
The research findings indicate that unit coordinators found it challenging to undertake their duties within standard working hours, duties that they perceive as being overly onerous.	It is recommended that the unit coordinator's weekly teaching hours be reduced. Moreover, as the unit expands, it is recommended that the coordinator's teaching hours be further decreased. as recommended below: (The figures in the left-hand column relate to circular 0003/2018). <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Number of students in the unit</th><th>Reduction in hours in the week</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1-59</td><td>11 (50%)</td></tr> <tr> <td>60-99</td><td>15 (70%)</td></tr> <tr> <td>100-139</td><td>19 (85%)</td></tr> <tr> <td>>140</td><td>22 (100%)</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Number of students in the unit	Reduction in hours in the week	1-59	11 (50%)	60-99	15 (70%)	100-139	19 (85%)	>140	22 (100%)
Number of students in the unit	Reduction in hours in the week										
1-59	11 (50%)										
60-99	15 (70%)										
100-139	19 (85%)										
>140	22 (100%)										
The present research highlights that unit coordinators are required to fulfil duties relating to both the host school and the Irish-medium unit.	The role and duties of the unit coordinator should relate specifically to the Irish-medium unit.										

The research outcomes confirm that the allowance previously associated with teaching through the medium of Irish remains a contentious issue as such an allowance is no longer applicable.	It is recommended that the allowance for teaching through the medium of Irish be reinstated for teachers in Irish-medium units. This would serve towards addressing recruitment challenges currently faced by the Irish-medium education sector.		
The research shows that host schools have difficulties in overseeing the recruitment process for selecting a unit coordinator.	It is recommended that an open competition be introduced for the appointment of the unit coordinator. The selection criteria should include the candidates' qualifications in Irish as well as their experience in teaching through the medium of Irish.		
The research highlights that unit coordinators are not represented on boards of management to ensure the effective functioning of the Irish-medium unit.	The unit coordinator should be a member of the board of management of the host school. It is recommended that a standing item relating to the Irish-medium unit be included on the agenda of all board meetings.		
The research indicates that unit coordinators require ongoing support in the daily administration of Irish-medium units.	It is recommended that a deputy unit coordinator be appointed at AP2 level where enrolment in the Irish-medium unit exceeds 59 students. The reduction in teaching hours for this appointment is recommended on the following basis: <table border="1" data-bbox="977 1719 1421 1856"> <tr> <th data-bbox="977 1719 1200 1856">Number of students in the unit</th><th data-bbox="1200 1719 1421 1856">Reduction in the weekly teaching hours</th></tr> </table>	Number of students in the unit	Reduction in the weekly teaching hours
Number of students in the unit	Reduction in the weekly teaching hours		

		<table><tr><td>1-59</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>60-99</td><td>4.4 (20%)</td></tr><tr><td>100-139</td><td>7.7 (35%)</td></tr><tr><td>> 140</td><td>11 (50%)</td></tr></table> The figures in the left-hand column relate to circular 0003/2018.	1-59	0	60-99	4.4 (20%)	100-139	7.7 (35%)	> 140	11 (50%)
1-59	0									
60-99	4.4 (20%)									
100-139	7.7 (35%)									
> 140	11 (50%)									
Host school principals	Data reveal that there is a lack of formal opportunities for unit coordinators to consult with host school principals as the priorities of the host school typically take precedence.	It is recommended that regular meetings between the host school principal and the unit coordinator be scheduled to provide formal opportunities to address the specific needs of the Irish-medium unit.								
	The research demonstrates that Irish-medium units impact positively on the use of Irish as a living language and on Irish culture within host schools. Principals report a sense of pride in how the units have impacted positively on host schools.	It is recommended that regular activities and events be organised to facilitate interaction between students of the unit with students of the host school, thus promoting the use of the Irish language and Irish culture.								
	The research indicates that the success of the unit is significantly influenced by host school principals' positive attitudes to the Irish language and to the principles of immersion education.	Host school principals should provide full support for the development and sustainability of Irish-medium units and should be well-informed about principles and practices of immersion education.								
	The research findings confirm that the majority of host school principals wish to develop Irish-medium units as stand-alone schools. However, there are no development plans in place to facilitate this expansion.	Host school principals, in consultation with their boards of management, should formulate development plans for the establishment of stand-alone schools with the ongoing support and guidance of the Department of Education.								

The data reveal that this lack of planning is primarily due to insufficient guidance from the Department of Education.	
The present research infers that most¹³ host school principals lack confidence in their proficiency in the Irish language.	It is recommended that host school principals be proficient in the Irish language and demonstrate a commitment to the promotion of the language and culture among the whole school community (i.e. the unit and the host school).
The present research reveals that more than half¹⁴ of host school principals lack confidence in their ability to effectively implement an immersion education system in Irish-medium units.	Host school principals should be required to regularly attend professional development training courses on the management and operation of Irish-medium units. Additionally, they should participate in various professional networks, specifically related to immersion education, to support them in their leadership role.
The data reveals that professional development training, organised by the host school, often fails to address the specific needs of teachers who teach in the Irish-medium unit as the needs of the host school take precedence.	It is recommended that continuing professional development be organised that focus specifically on the needs of teachers who teach in the Irish-medium unit.
The current research indicates that expectations regarding provision in Irish-medium units are not always met, thus affecting the standard of teaching and learning.	In order that teachers adhere to the principles of immersion education, host school principals should ensure that staff, teaching in Irish-medium units, have high expectations of

Board of Management		their own teaching practices through the medium of Irish.
	The research frequently recounts the challenges facing boards of management in recruiting teachers who are proficient in Irish and who are competent to teach through the medium of Irish.	It is recommended that boards of management formulate a specific recruitment policy for Irish-medium units. This policy should clearly outline the explicit requirement for candidates' to be proficient in the Irish language and to be competent to teach through the medium of Irish.
	The research reveals the challenges faced by boards of management in recruiting both ancillary and non-teaching staff who are proficient in the Irish language.	It is recommended that boards of management formulate a specific recruitment policy for Irish-medium units outlining the explicit requirement for both ancillary and non-teaching staff to be proficient in the Irish language.
	The findings of this research indicate that unit coordinators are not always represented on host schools' boards of management, since appropriate structures are not in place for this representation.	It is recommended that host schools' boards of management review their terms of reference specifically in relation to the managerial structure that secures unit coordinators' representation on boards.
	The data highlights, in almost all cases, that parents of students in Irish-medium units do not have representation on host schools' boards of management.	It is recommended that host schools' boards of management review their terms of reference specifically in relation to the managerial structure that secures parents' representation on boards.

	It emerged from the findings of this research, in almost all cases, that appropriate support structures have not been put in place by management of host schools to cater for the specific needs of Irish-medium units.	It is recommended that host schools' boards of management establish a subcommittee ¹⁰ that can operate through the medium of Irish and who have an understand of the principles of immersion education in order to advise boards on relevant policies, curriculum, staffing, resources, accommodation and general maintenance of Irish-medium units.
	Research findings indicate that, in general, members of host schools' boards of management exhibit a lack of knowledge regarding the principles and practices of immersion education.	It is recommended that members of host schools' boards of management be well-informed about the principles and practices of immersion education.

Table 14: Provision for Irish-medium units: Conclusions and recommendations

PROVISION		
Area	Finding	Recommendations
Subject provision (The capacity of the unit to offer subjects through the medium of Irish at both Junior and Senior Cycle levels is reliant on a range of interlinked and complex factors as outlined here.	The research indicates that the provision of subjects in the Irish-medium units is subject to a range of interlinked and complex factors. Specifically, such provision is contingent on the supply of teachers qualified to teach subjects through the medium of Irish.	It is recommended that initial teacher education as well as continuing professional development for teachers in Irish-medium units be prioritized for investment to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers, proficient in Irish and qualified to teach through the medium of Irish.

¹⁰ Recommended as members of the subcommittee: director of the unit, principal of the host school, two parents, staff representative of the Irish-medium unit, representative of the local community

	It is noted in the research that the provision of subjects in Irish-medium units is impacted significantly by a range of interconnected and complex factors. Specifically, this provision is contingent on the supply of teachers who are proficient in Irish and qualified to teach a broad range of subjects through the medium of Irish.	It is recommended that a policy be devised and implemented to ensure a continuous supply of teachers proficient in Irish and qualified to teach a broad range of subjects through the medium of Irish in the Irish-medium unit. In addition, it is recommended that the capacity of teachers in host schools to teach various subjects through the medium of Irish be audited on a continuous basis.
	The research shows that the provision in Irish-medium units is contingent on student demand for various subjects which are interlinked with a range of other complex factors. For example, if there is a limited student demand for a subject through the medium of Irish in comparison to the demand for the same subject in the host school, the subject is then generally taught through English and as a result, students of the Irish-medium unit have no alternative but to study that particular subject through English.	It is recommended that host schools, in consultation with Irish-medium units, carry out a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the limited demand for subjects to be taught through the medium of Irish. Additionally, it is recommended that a thorough examination of the challenges associated with this low demand be conducted, as well as specifying the unique benefits of immersion education, all the while cooperating with other schools that are experiencing similar challenges.

	The research indicates that capacity of Irish-medium units to provide subjects through the medium of Irish is significantly curtailed by the fact that Irish medium subjects are timetabled concurrently and in the same subject-band/block with the equivalent subjects through the medium of English.	It is recommended that host schools, in consultation with Irish-medium units, provide a timetable that incorporates flexibility of subject choice, thereby providing students of the Irish-medium unit with the opportunity to learn through medium of Irish.
	The participants in this research highlighted the fact that provision in Irish-medium units is restricted by a number of complex factors including students' limited Irish language capacity to undertake certain subjects, teachers' own lack of awareness of late immersion education, and teachers' low expectations of student attainment in subjects.	It is recommended that Irish-medium units implement a full immersion programme for late immersion learners, through the consistent use of the Irish language thereby ensuring student achievement in these subjects. In order to raise the awareness of teachers in Irish-medium units of the potential of late immersion education, and to heighten their expectation of student achievement therein, it is recommended that ongoing professional development be provided, focusing specifically on the learning needs of late immersion learners.
	This research highlights the fact that the full range of subjects at Junior Cycle level is not always provided for through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium units.	It is recommended that the full range of subjects at Junior Cycle level be taught through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium units.

	This research notes that the full range of subjects at Senior Cycle level is not always provided for through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium units.	It is recommended that all subjects be taught through the medium of Irish at Senior Cycle level in Irish-medium units, i.e., building on and extending Irish-medium provision that is provided for at Junior Cycle level.
Teachers of Irish-medium units	The current research reveals that there is a diversity of practices among teachers of Irish-medium units when it comes to teaching through the medium of Irish. This variation is dependent on the staffs' vision and expectation of how a full immersion education programme is effectively implemented.	It is recommended that staff meetings in Irish-medium units include opportunities to discuss, implement and regularly evaluate staffs' shared vision and their high expectations for the effective implementation of an immersion education programme.
	The current research reports that teachers in Irish-medium units are also required to teach in the host school. This dual teaching requirement results in a lack of time and restricted capacity in fulfilling their duties related specifically to the effective implementation of Irish-medium immersion education.	It is recommended that dedicated staff members be assigned to Irish-medium units to provide consistent Irish language input, to align the curriculum with immersion education principles, to share best practice and to strategically manage the specific needs of the Irish-medium unit.

	The current research demonstrates that retention of qualified teachers in Irish-medium units is constrained by the high rate of turnover in staff personnel, thus impacting significantly on Irish-medium provision and the implementation of immersion education. Participants in the study indicate that teaching through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium units involves an additional workload, including tasks such as: translating from English to Irish, developing resources that align with the specific requirements of immersion education, and assisting school management with Irish language related matters.	It is recommended that each Irish-medium unit formulate and implement a staff retention and professional development plan to include: an induction programme and continuing mentoring for new staff members, as well as ongoing training opportunities for the whole staff. Furthermore, it is recommended that the additional workload of teachers in Irish-medium units be acknowledged through appropriate compensation measures such as: providing dedicated time for collaborative planning, timetabled opportunities for enhancing language and teaching skills, as well as opportunities for staff reflection and for translating and creating suitable resources.
	The current research asserts that teachers in Irish-medium units require innovative professional development and continuous support to further develop the core competencies essential for the implementation of effective immersion education. These competencies include promoting the use of the Irish language both within	It is recommended that a comprehensive plan be formulated and implemented to address the professional learning needs of teachers in Irish-medium units. In addition, it is recommended that the school self-evaluation process be employed to identify strengths and areas for development, as well as fostering a culture of continuous enquiry.

	and beyond the classroom, upskilling in the area of content and language integration (CLIL) and acquiring the specific language required to teach the subject content.	
	The current research acknowledges that the success of Irish-medium units is contingent on teachers' proficiency in the Irish language.	It is recommended that teachers of Irish-medium units demonstrate advanced levels of proficiency in the Irish language, that is, C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This level of proficiency is essential for delivering the curriculum, providing feedback to develop students' core competencies in the Irish language and creating an enriched language environment.
Learning	The present research suggests that the L1 Specification is not consistently applied at Junior Cycle level in Irish-medium units as teachers are concerned that students may not have the requisite language proficiency to engage with learning through the medium of Irish.	It is recommended that teachers in the Irish-medium units set higher expectations from the outset regarding students' capacity to undertake L1 Specification in Irish at Junior Cycle Level. It is recommended that teachers evaluate their own teaching practice to ensure that students are adequately prepared to undertake the L1 Specification in Irish at Junior Cycle Level.

	The current research data indicates that subjects are typically assessed in English, both in internal and in state examinations, as teachers are of the view that students are not sufficiently proficient in the language to sit these examinations through Irish.	It is recommended that teachers in Irish-medium units set higher expectations regarding students' capacity to sit examinations through the medium of Irish. To support students sitting examinations through Irish, it is recommended that teachers review and evaluate their teaching practices, emphasising the integration of content and language, thus ensuring that students are fully confident to sit examinations through the medium of Irish. In addition, the State Examinations Commission should address the specific issue of Irish language terminology used in state examination papers in the various subjects.
	The current research states that late immersion education students (i.e. students who did not attend Irish-medium primary schools) tend to sit state examinations in English. This practice arises from the perception among teachers in Irish-medium units that these students lack proficiency in the language to enable them to sit the examinations in Irish.	It is recommended that the Department of Education allocate additional hours to Irish-medium units specifically for language support so as to develop language

		support target-programmes¹¹ for late immersion education students. The number of additional hours is recommended on the following basis: <table><tr><th>Number of students in the unit</th><th>Additional weekly hours for language support</th></tr><tr><td>1-59</td><td>11</td></tr><tr><td>60-99</td><td>15</td></tr><tr><td>100-139</td><td>19</td></tr><tr><td>>140</td><td>22</td></tr></table> Circular 0053/2007 was referenced here.	Number of students in the unit	Additional weekly hours for language support	1-59	11	60-99	15	100-139	19	>140	22
Number of students in the unit	Additional weekly hours for language support											
1-59	11											
60-99	15											
100-139	19											
>140	22											
	Promoting Irish as the language of communication, as the language of teaching, and as the language of socialisation presents a persistent challenge for Irish-medium units due to limited opportunities for students to learn, acquire and use the Irish language both within and beyond the classroom setting.	It is recommended that comprehensive language-exposure initiatives be established in Irish-medium units that include the following: organising immersion education events, developing peer-support through language-buddy or peer-mentoring programmes, using digital platforms in order to extend language exposure outside the classroom, establishing a language ambassador¹² programme, implementing regular language assessments in order to monitor students' proficiency levels in the language, identify areas for improvement, recognise and										

¹¹ The following areas are recommended for language support target-programmes: formative/summative assessment; individual teaching and support; extended learning opportunities; immersion education experiences in the Gaeltacht; regular monitoring of progress; teacher professional development; participation of parents/guardians

¹² Students who actively promote the use of Irish in the unit

		celebrate language attainment in Irish-medium units.
	The current research indicates that students have significant difficulty with the appropriateness of the language used in Irish-medium textbooks and as a result, English language textbooks are often used as an alternative.	It is recommended that the Department of Education draft a dedicated policy for publishers aimed at addressing the linguistic needs of Irish-medium units. This policy should focus on identifying clear criteria for the use of appropriate language in subject-based textbooks, including style, language register, specific vocabulary, and language forms. These elements would feature in every section of the various subject books.
	The research data acknowledges that there are limitations to the organising extracurricular activities which foster acquisition and promote the use of the Irish language in Irish-medium units.	It is recommended that proactive measures be taken to diversify and expand extracurricular activities. These include, organising regular events that foster the use of Irish, maintaining partnerships with local Irish-medium communities or organisations, organising immersion education language camps or weekend camps in the Gaeltacht where students can engage with a fully immersed Irish language environment, inviting guest speakers, poets, authors or artists who are proficient in Irish to direct workshops, organising Irish language competitions, such as debates, story-telling competitions, or drama productions, promoting Irish in sports events and pastimes,

		using technology to create language-based projects, such as online fora, blogs or podcasts, cooperating with parent associations to support and organise extracurricular language activities, regularly assessing the demand and effectiveness of the extracurricular events, and providing activities based on student choice and student feedback.
	The current research indicates that students in Irish-medium units do not consistently appreciate the distinctive ethos of the unit, due to its location within the English-medium host school environment.	It is recommended that teachers assist and enable students in Irish-medium units to develop language awareness transfer skills (i.e. from English to Irish and vice-versa). This will help students to adhere to the language protocol of the Irish-medium unit, enabling them to naturally switch to Irish even when in the host school environment.
Parents	The research indicates that parents of children in Irish-medium units are concerned that the full range of subjects are not provided through Irish for them.	It is recommended that clear and accurate information regarding the provision of subjects through the medium of Irish be provided to parents when enrolling their children in the unit. To achieve this, it is recommended that the Irish-medium unit utilise resources including open nights, brochures, handbooks, websites, etc. all provided through the medium of Irish.

	The research indicates that parents expressed concern about the lack of information available to them on how to effectively support their children while in the Irish-medium unit	It is recommended that a comprehensive support programme be devised and implemented for parents, to include workshops and information sessions, provision of language support networks, online language learning platforms, opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities, and the establishment of parents' room.
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Conclusion

This chapter presents relevant findings and recommendations relating to current Irish-medium units. The next chapter will introduce a reconceptualised post-primary immersion education model and outline success indicators designed to guide, enrich and strengthen the vision and strategy for Irish-medium immersion education in this country.

Chapter 6: A reconceptualised future model

Introduction

The present chapter identifies a reconceptualised immersion education model, a stand-alone Irish-medium unit, located off-site, functioning under the management of an Irish-medium host school. In addition, the reader is presented with recommendations that relate specifically to the establishment of this reconceptualised model. Key success indicators are then outlined to support the implementation of the reconceptualised model. The label Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with an Irish-medium host school is used to illustrate the reconceptualised model, for example, 'Gaelcholáiste Fhionnbarra, a school affiliated with Coláiste na Laoi'.

Recommendations relating to the reconceptualised model

Table 15: Recommendations relating to the reconceptualised immersion education model

ESTABLISHMENT	
Area	Recommendations
Definition	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, should prioritise defining itself with a distinct identity and specific ethos as an immersion education setting.
	It is recommended that precise and clear terminology be established regarding the definitions and roles of the staff at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school. This terminology should be consistently applied not only in daily practice but also in all related correspondence and documentation, ensuring that all stakeholders have a uniform understanding and interpretation.
	It is recommended that clear and specific criteria, along with a transparent policy, be implemented for the future establishment of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	It is important that enrolment is clarified to include the number of students deemed necessary before approval is given for the establishment of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

Awareness and communications	It is recommended that the Department of Education, in co-operation with Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, design and implement a marketing, enrolment and communications strategy that places an emphasis on the specific values, principles and benefits of immersion education so that feeder primary schools will be aware of them.
Patrons	Patrons should take an active role in establishing Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, while also ensuring its permanence. This role should include supporting and advancing immersion education policies.
	It is recommended that the relationships among all stakeholders be clearly defined from the outset of establishment, including entities such as the Department of Education (including the Inspectorate), the local community, and relevant Irish language organizations. This will help ensure that all parties collectively agree on their expectations for immersion education provision.
	Patrons must provide direction and ongoing support to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, as it moves towards becoming a stand-alone independent second level school.
Department of Education	The Department of Education should implement a proactive development plan with clear guidance on key sustainability factors. These factors include Irish-medium provision, teacher recruitment, professional development, resource allocation, assessment, community involvement, marketing, capital funding, and suitable accommodation.
	The Department of Education must, in consultation with patrons, establish and implement coordinated planning, agree structures and procedures to enhance the development and sustainability of Irish-medium education at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

	It is recommended that the Department of Education assign a specific roll number to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school from the stage of its establishment onwards. The Department of Education must provide permanent accommodation for Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school from the stage of its establishment.										
	It is recommended that the Department of Education develop an enrolment policy that specifies the number of students required to ensure the sustainability of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, while considering various local circumstances and factors.										
	The Department of Education must create and launch an awareness campaign to attract and recruit both teaching and non-teaching staff for Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.										
	It is recommended that the Department of Education allocate additional hours to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school for the purpose of developing language support targeted programmes¹³ so as to strengthen immersion education. The number of additional hours is recommended on the following basis.										
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="492 1213 933 1398">Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school Affiliated with the Irish-medium host school</th><th data-bbox="933 1213 1435 1398">Additional hours for language support in the week</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="492 1398 933 1455">1-59</td><td data-bbox="933 1398 1435 1455">11</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="492 1455 933 1512">60-99</td><td data-bbox="933 1455 1435 1512">15</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="492 1512 933 1568">100-139</td><td data-bbox="933 1512 1435 1568">19</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="492 1568 933 1623">> 140</td><td data-bbox="933 1568 1435 1623">22</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school Affiliated with the Irish-medium host school	Additional hours for language support in the week	1-59	11	60-99	15	100-139	19	> 140	22
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1-59	11										
60-99	15										
100-139	19										
> 140	22										
	Circular 0053/2007 was considered here.										

¹³ The following areas are recommended for language support target-programmes: formative/summative assessment; individual teaching and support; extended learning opportunities; immersion education experiences in the Gaeltacht; regular monitoring of progress; teacher professional development; parents'/guardians' participation. .

	The Department of Education must provide clear and definite criteria for patrons to help them to promote immersion education in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	It is recommended that the Department of Education design and provide systematic and transparent indicators, relating specifically to immersion education, for the purpose of assessing teaching and learning as well as strengthening the quality of provision in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	Ongoing external assessments and appropriate support from the Department of Education (i.e., the Inspectorate) are essential for Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, to remain informed about areas requiring further development and support for continued improvement.
	The Department of Education must ensure consistent practice among inspectors relating to undertaking external evaluation of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	The Department of Education must advocate immersion education among the public at large based on its current success.
	The Department of Education must identify a particular section, that operates through Irish, to cater for the specific needs of post-primary immersion education schools so as to provide advice, guidance and support that is consistent and informed by a solid knowledge base.
	It is recommended that the allowance for teaching through the medium of Irish is provided to teachers in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school to help overcome the recruitment challenges in the Irish-medium education sector.
	It is essential to make an urgent investment in initial teacher education and in continuing professional development so as to increase capacity for teaching various subjects through the medium of Irish.

Success indicators for a reconceptualised model

The findings of the current research indicate that a reimagining of immersion education is essential for its future. The indicators outlined below serve as a guide for implementing this reimagined approach, which will strengthen effective practices in immersion education. The indicators can help Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school to assess the quality of current provision. It is recommended that the success indicators are addressed, one by one, and are closely examined, by adopting the iterative school self-evaluation process.

The identified indicators may be used to do the following:

- help management develop and communicate the founding vision;
- inform immersion education leadership and practice with a knowledge base at the level of management, curriculum development, subject design, teaching, learning and assessment;
- encourage and enable teachers to examine their practice in a deep, systematic and reflective way as part of continuing professional development;
- design the plan of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school in order to implement immersion education principles and to assure quality provision.

Table 16: Success indicators: Management

MANAGEMENT	
Area	Indicators
Deputy Principal	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school has a policy to recruit teachers who are proficient in Irish and in teaching through the medium of Irish.
	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school has a strategic plan that shows the benefits and particular needs relating to Irish-medium teaching as well as professional development opportunities in the range of management, pedagogical and language skills.
	A deputy principal has been appointed, and Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is providing appropriate compensation. The deputy principal has particular responsibility and status in the daily management of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

The role of the deputy principal is outlined, jointly with the host school principal, and includes enrolment, curriculum, staffing needs, teacher recruitment, teacher professional development, timetable organisation, accommodation, maintenance, budgeting, Irish-medium marketing strategy, students with additional educational needs, communications with parents, and the promotion of the separate identity of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school. The role is formalised through a contractual agreement.

Areas of responsibility relating to the promotion of Irish are confirmed as a core element of the work of the deputy principal. Among the duties, the following are identified: strengthening Irish as the language of instruction, the language of communication and the language of socialisation, enriching the special character of Irish among the staff, promoting Gaelic culture outside and inside Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, organising Irish-medium extracurricular activities and events, strengthening relations with Irish language organisations and the local community.

The number of teaching hours assigned to the deputy principal are as follows:

Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.	Reduction in teaching hours for the deputy principal in the week
1-59	11 (50%)
60-99	15 (70%)
100-139	19 (85%)
> 140	22 (100%)

The figures in the left-hand column relate to circular 0003/2018.

The function and duties of the deputy principal relate solely to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school. It has been agreed that the deputy principal has no additional duties in the host school.

The deputy principal is appointed through an open competition. Proficiency in Irish, as well as experience in teaching through the medium Irish are identified as necessary criteria for appointment.

The deputy principal of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is a member of the host school board of management.

The ethos, specific needs, and management of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, are consistently included as a standing item on the host school board of management meetings' agenda.

An assistant principal has been appointed as part of the internal school management to assist the deputy principal manage Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school. Hours are allocated on the following basis:

Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.	Reduction in teaching hours for assistant principal I in the week
1-59	0
60-99	4.4 (20%)
100-139	7.7 (35%)
> 140	11 (50%)

The figures in the left-hand column relate to circular 0003/2018.

Regular meetings are organised between the principal of the host school and the deputy principal in order to provide formal opportunities to make decisions relating specifically, and solely, to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

In consultation with the host school principal, the deputy principal organises a continuing professional development programme that caters for the specific needs of teachers who are teaching in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

	The deputy principal of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is a member of the host school board of management.										
	The ethos, specific needs, and management of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, are consistently included as a standing item on the host school board of management meetings' agenda.										
	An assistant principal has been appointed as part of the internal school management to assist the deputy principal manage Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school. Hours are allocated on the following basis: <table border="1" data-bbox="521 858 1419 1260"> <tr> <th data-bbox="521 858 974 1035">Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.</th><th data-bbox="974 858 1419 1035">Reduction in teaching hours for assistant principal I in the week</th></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="521 1035 974 1094">1-59</td><td data-bbox="974 1035 1419 1094">0</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="521 1094 974 1152">60-99</td><td data-bbox="974 1094 1419 1152">4.4 (20%)</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="521 1152 974 1211">100-139</td><td data-bbox="974 1152 1419 1211">7.7 (35%)</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="521 1211 974 1260">>140</td><td data-bbox="974 1211 1419 1260">11 (50%)</td></tr> </table> The figures in the left-hand column relate to circular 0003/2018.	Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.	Reduction in teaching hours for assistant principal I in the week	1-59	0	60-99	4.4 (20%)	100-139	7.7 (35%)	>140	11 (50%)
Number of students in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.	Reduction in teaching hours for assistant principal I in the week										
1-59	0										
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>140	11 (50%)										
	Regular meetings are organised between the principal of the host school and the deputy principal in order to provide formal opportunities to make decisions relating specifically, and solely, to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.										
	In consultation with the host school principal, the deputy principal organises a continuing professional development programme that caters for the specific needs of teachers who are teaching in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.										

Host school principals	The principal of the host school fully supports the establishment and sustainability of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	In collaboration with the deputy principal, the host school principal has created and secured board approval for proactive growth and development plans to guide Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, towards achieving stand-alone status.
	Host school principals frequently attend professional development that relates specifically to the management and functioning of an immersion education unit that is not based on the school site, and they take part in various networks as a support to themselves.
	The host school principal confirms that the staff have high expectations, including the staff of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, relating to teaching through the medium of Irish.
Board of Management	The board of management at the host school has developed a distinct recruitment policy for Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, emphasising candidates' proficiency in Irish and their ability to teach through the medium of the language.
	The host school board of management has formulated a separate recruitment policy for Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, to ensure that the non-teaching staff are proficient in Irish.
	A parent from Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is a member of the board of management.

	A subcommittee of the host school ¹⁴ board of management, that has capacity to function through the medium of Irish, is responsible for advising the board regarding policies, curriculum, staffing needs, resource needs, accommodation and maintenance relating to Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	Board of management members are knowledgeable and well-versed in the principles and practices of immersion education.
	A formal communications structure has been agreed between the host school management and Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school to ensure that its particular needs are constantly taken into account in the school's programme of work.
	The deputy principal is a member of the selection board for vacancies in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.

Table 17: Success indicators: Provision

PROVISION	
Area	Indicators
Subject provision (The capacity of the unit to provide subjects through the medium of Irish at Junior Cycle level and at Senior Cycle level is dependent on certain factors that are interlinked and complicated, as	A teacher allocation policy has been designed and implemented that ensures there is a sufficient number of teachers proficient in Irish who are qualified to teach a broad range of subjects through the medium of Irish in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	The potential of the staff of the Irish-medium host school to identify and to fill gaps in provision in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

¹⁴ The following are recommended as members of the subcommittee: deputy principal, host school principal, two parents, staff representative of the unit, representative of the local community

presented here)	Learners at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, experience full immersion in Irish, along with regular practice of the language to ensure high standards in student achievement in the subject.
	All subjects are provided through the medium of Irish at Junior Cycle level and at Senior Cycle level in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
Teaching staff of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school	The staff at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, have collaboratively developed, agreed upon, and put into practice a shared vision and high standards for immersion education.
	Continuing professional development that is focused on the particular teaching and learning needs of immersion education, with a special emphasis on late immersion education, is provided to the teachers of Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school for the purpose of raising awareness and ensuring high expectations.
	Dedicated staff members are stationed at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, to facilitate the sharing of best practices and to strategically address its specific growth and development needs.
	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, has a staff retention policy and a professional development policy, including an induction programme, mentoring programmes and ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff members.
	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, has a substitution policy that ensures that the greatest number of substitute teachers competent in the Irish language, is available and who have capacity to teach various subjects in an immersion education setting.

	Time is provided to teachers in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, for collaborative planning, staff reflection and enhancement of language and teaching capacity to address the specific teaching and learning needs of immersion education.
	The school self-evaluation process is utilised in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, to celebrate strengths and generate a culture of enquiry, as well as addressing areas for improvement.
	Teachers at Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, possess a high level of proficiency in Irish, meeting recognised standards (e.g., C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). This proficiency supports the development of student skills in the immersion language and fosters a rich language learning environment.
Learning	Teachers in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, conduct an ongoing review of the quality of provision to ensure that the quality of immersion education learning is of a high standard.
	There is a strong emphasis on integrating language and content to ensure that students can take exams in all subjects through the medium of Irish.
	A broad range of Irish-medium textbooks is used to promote language exposure, language acquisition and language use in the various subjects.
	Comprehensive initiatives in language exposure are employed in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school that include the following elements: immersion education events, promoting peer support for Irish through language friend systems or creating peer assessment programmes, using digital platforms to extend language exposure outside the classroom, establishing a language ambassador programme i.e. students who actively promote the use of Irish, implementing regular language

	assessments to assess proficiency levels and identify areas for improvement, identifying and celebrating language achievements in Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
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Table 18: Success indicators: Sustainability

SUSTAINABILITY	
Area	Indicators
Separate identity	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school, is fostering its own distinct identity.
Policies and planning	Immersion education policies, including a language policy to promote the use of Irish, Irish-medium subject provision policy, Irish-medium teaching policy, admissions policy, recruitment policy, marketing policy, policy for interacting with the Irish-medium host school, these policies have been formulated and are being implemented in Gaelcholáiste X, a school Affiliated with the Irish-medium host school.
	Gaelcholáiste X, a school affiliated with the Irish-medium host school has its own policies and action plan independent of the Irish-medium host school with the staff having a central role in the formulation, implementation and assessment of the various policies.
	The school self-evaluation process is utilised, as recommended by the Department of Education (School Self-evaluation: The Next Steps 2022-26, including Circular 0056/2022) to strengthen the quality of Irish-medium provision.

Conclusion

This chapter presents recommendations for developing a reconceptualised immersion education model. It then outlines key success indicators to enhance this reconceptualisation and promote effective immersion education practices. Additionally, it offers guidance on utilising these indicators to reinforce the school self-evaluation process. This report serves as a foundation to advance and expand post-primary Irish-medium immersion education in the country.

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Appendix 1

Critical examination of evaluation reports on Irish-medium units

	Roll Number	Name of School	Name of Unit (U) Unit; (S) Stream	Date and Subjects	Statement
1	70830N	Ennis Community College	Gaelcholáiste an Chláir (U)	2023 Physical Education	Mainstream provision takes place in both an English-medium school and an Irish-language Aonad, known as Gaelcholáiste an Chláir.
				WSE 2017 15 references to Gaelcholáiste in report	The Board acknowledges the Inspectorate's affirmation of the following in particular: The high quality of learning and teaching in Ennis Community College/Gaelcholáiste an Chláir. Based on analysis of certificate examination results, which were analysed both collectively and separately to recognise the differences between the community college and Gaelcholáiste cohorts, achievable targets were set by the teachers to improve uptake and attainment. The overall quality assessment across the community college and the Gaelcholáiste was satisfactory. Many instances of effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a pedagogical tool were observed in both the community college and the Gaelcholáiste. A whole-school assessment policy needs to be developed, agreed and implemented across the community college and the Gaelcholáiste.

				2020 Mathematics	The school comprises an English-medium school and a Gaelcholáiste, with a total enrolment of 1353 students. Mathematics lessons through the medium of Irish were not evaluated during the course of this inspection.
2	71103K	Coláiste Choilm	Gaelcholáiste Choilm (U)	2014 Geography	Students can study Geography through the medium of Irish in the Gaelcholáiste. Geography teachers in the Gaelcholáiste work very closely with their colleagues in the mainstream English-medium school and share the same subject department, policies and planning structures.
				2014 WSE	In effect, each year's cohort, including those in Gaelcholáiste Choilm, is a sub-school, led by the year head and with designated responsibilities assumed by class tutors, members of the guidance department and other staff. In addition to formal and informal board meetings, a sub-committee of Cork ETB has been established also, as the board of management of Gaelcholáiste Choilm, to consider issues that support the Gaelcholáiste within the whole school framework.

3	76068N	Coláiste na Sceilge	Coláiste na Sceilge (U)	2017 WSE	The school's All-Irish Unit (An tAonad LánGhaeilge) provides for students who wish to pursue their junior cycle education through Irish. Planning is also underway to provide a separate student and classroom spaces for students attending the all-Irish unit (Aonad lán-Ghaeilge). Teachers in the All-Irish Unit (An tAonad lánGhaeilge) work very hard at preparing resources. These teachers should now maximise opportunities to access and share resources with supporting organisations and agencies, and to create links with other schools.
4	91513S	Pobalscoil na Tríonóide	Pobalscoil na Tríonóide (U)	2015 Geography	The school also has an Ionad where Tíreolas is taught as a curricular subject.
				2023 Science	There is no reference to the unit/stream in the report.

5	71020G	Davis College	Gaelcholáiste Dáibhís	2018 Mathematics	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
				2013 WSE	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
6	71123Q	Terence McSwiney Community College	Gaelcholáiste Mhic Shuibhne (U)	2022 Gaeilge	An Irish-medium unit which is called Gaelcholáiste Mhic Shuibhne was established in the school in 2019. 29 students were enrolled in the unit and the first year and second year class groups were studying the L1 specification for Irish. It would be good also to develop a sustainable link between the host school and the Irish-medium unit.

7	76090G	Coláiste Pobail Bheanntraí	Coláiste Pobail Bheanntraí (S)	2016 WSE	A sruth lán-Ghaeilge (Irish-medium stream) is provided in junior cycle to facilitate students to progress from primary school through the medium of Irish.
8	91400F	Mayfield Community School (S)		2023 CSPE	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
				2016 WSE	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
9	62970K	Coláiste lognáid S.J.	Coláiste lognáid S.J. (S)	2018 Science and Chemistry	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
				2012 WSE	A Sraith Ghaeilge, which operates up to Junior Certificate level, provides an enriching dimension to the school's activities. Students sit an assessment test after having accepted a place in the school, and with the exception of students applying for the Sraith Ghaeilge, the results of these tests are used to assign all students to mixed-ability class groups.
					In September 2017, an Irish language stream, An Sruth, was introduced to the school with the support of KWETB, as a means of providing additional choice to students from local primary

10	70691C	Confey College	Confey College (S)	2018 WSE	Gaelscoileanna. Teachers providing instruction through the medium of Irish in An Sruth are either degree-level qualified in Irish or have undertaken initial CPD in Irish language training in order to further their linguistic skills. The ongoing provision of such CPD is recommended in order to ensure that students in the programme receive a consistently high quality teaching and learning experience. Numbers opting for admission to An Sruth in this initial year were low. To ensure the ongoing viability of the programme, as well as to observe the school's admission policy, SMT should closely monitor the numbers applying for participation in the programme and adopt a more structured approach to the long-term planning for the programme.
11	76193Q	Maynooth Community College	Maynooth Community College (U)	2023 Mathematics	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
12	76474B	Dunmase College	Coláiste Dhún Másc	2023 Mathematics	The school operates an Aonad for one class grouping from first year through to sixth year, where the educational provision is offered through the medium of Irish.
13	71790J	Desmond College	Gaelcholáiste Uí Chonbá (U)	2014 WSE	The school has a Gaelcholáiste, a post-leaving certificate (PLC) section as well as specialist groups catering for students with mild learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

14	76195U	Pobalcholáiste Chú Chulainn	Coláiste Lú (U)	2019 Home Economics	The school includes a separate all-Irish provision which operates as Coláiste Lú.
					Coláiste Rís is a co-educational secondary school with an optional sruth Gaeilge (Irish-language stream) in the junior cycle. The optional sruth Gaeilge at junior cycle enjoys a long and proud tradition and is intrinsic to the school's identity.

15	63880O	Coláiste Rís	Coláiste Rís (S)	2017 WSE	The vast majority of students in the sruth come from English-medium primary schools and some of them struggle initially with subject-specific terminology in Irish. While the school provides them with a special induction day, it is evident that students would benefit from a more comprehensive induction programme and enhanced resources to build up their linguistic competence. During the evaluation, it was noted that while students of the sruth in first year and third year were studying three subjects through Irish, second year students were only studying one. School management reported that this was due to the complexity of providing additional subject options. It is recommended that the school make appropriate arrangements to ensure that students are offered an optimal number of subject options through Irish at junior cycle. It is also recommended that these students be provided with a more comprehensive induction course from the outset, to include subject-specific terminology in the target language. The school should also plan for enhanced resources and supports for the sruth from the school's general allocation, if they wish to secure its future.
16	65181V	Mercy College	Aonad Loch Gile	2014 WSE	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.

17	72420E	Central Technical Institute	Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn		There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.
18	76233C	Clare Galway	Coláiste Bhaile an Chláir	2019 WSE	There is no reference to a unit/stream in the report.

