Foras na Gaeilge Strategic Direction 2025-2030: Draft

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Summary of measures

Major Strategic Objective 1: Language ability

a) We will support the implementation of the new government policy on Irish-medium education in the south.
b) We will seek increased investment to address the lack of growth in Irish-medium education.
c) We will use the language planning process to support the establishment of a crèche in every Gaeltacht Service Town and Irish Language Network.
d) We will continue to seek to minimise the implications of the system of exemptions from Irish in the south.
e) We will seek to further support the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools through schemes such as Gaelbhratach.
f) At third level, we will support the development of the micro-credits system to provide more Irish language options.
g) At third level, we will aim to increase the provision of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) courses through the medium of Irish.
h) We will research the adult learning sector with a view to developing standardised course provision and learning opportunities.
i) We will support the learning of Irish among immigrants.
j) We will work towards establishing a permanent lexicography and terminology unit as an integral part of the organisation with ongoing core funding.
k) We will support the development of an Irish language advertising sector that meets the requirements of the revised language legislation in the south.
l) We will focus on the *Digital Plan for the Irish Language* and prioritise investment in written and spoken corpora of Irish.
m) We will explore the possibilities of establishing a technology unit in the organisation.

Major Strategic Objective 2: Language use

a) We aim to provide a permanent basis for the Irish Language Networks Development Scheme as an integral part of the organisation's work and to establish a language planning unit.
b) We will seek to participate in a joint national language planning committee to better co-ordinate this work.
c) We want to see development plans for Irish language centres in every Gaeltacht Service Town and Irish Language Network. We will support the creation and expansion of other safe spaces where people can speak and/or enrich their Irish.
d) We will further support Irish language groups to better serve immigrants and other minority communities. As part of this, we will develop an interpretative centre in Belfast aimed at the Protestant/Unionist/loyalist and other minority communities.
e) We will conduct detailed analysis of census statistics and new research findings to inform our policy on promoting opportunities to use Irish.
f) We will support the review of the *Teanga Tí* family support scheme with a view to strengthening it in the future.
g) We will work with stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the strategy for the Irish language-based arts published by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in the south.

h) We will explore possible legislative reform to place a stronger obligation on local authorities to include Irish in planning matters.

i) We will further develop Irish-medium economic activities in the language planning areas under our responsibility.

j) We will work towards further investment in Irish language media and highlight the need for major development of digital media content in Irish.

k) We will work to support the development of Irish-medium health services in the language planning areas under our responsibility.

l) We will work with the authorities to provide a stronger funding base for the Colmcille programme and to further publicise it.

m) We will commission research into the Irish language book sector to guide its strategic development.

n) We will develop a marketing programme to promote the best of Irish language books among the community.

o) We will seek to increase the resources of our book distribution service Áis, particularly in the area of technology.

p) We will implement the review of the prestigious primary school Irish language series, *Séideán Sí*.

q) We will develop a major project with the Department of Education in the south to address the lack of textbook provision for post-primary schools.

Major Strategic Objective 3: Language attitudes

a) We will work on awareness campaigns aimed at diverse communities, including immigrants and other minorities.

b) We will work with the Irish Government to further publicise the benefits of the official status of the Irish language in the European Union.

c) We will strategically support the development of the translation and interpretation sector as a way of highlighting attractive employment opportunities.

d) We will develop a new model to more effectively influence both governments on major strategic themes that require further support.

e) We will strengthen our co-operation with local authorities and cultural institutions north and south.

f) We will publish an updated major research report on public attitudes to the Irish language.

g) We will carry out new research on public use of languages, based on similar work in the Basque Country.

h) We will continue to support the use of Irish among businesses as a measure to enhance attitudes.

i) We will strengthen our relationship with the Central Statistics Office and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to publish information reports on the Irish language.

Major Strategic Objective 4: Organisational governance

a) We will review the structure of the organisation in the context of Foras na Gaeilge's 25th anniversary.

b) We will continue high-level discussions with both governments to enable these major objectives to be achieved.

c) We will agree a staff development programme covering areas such as induction, language enrichment, in-service training and additional supports in areas such as equality and diversity.

d) Based on major amendments to improve the Annual Report, we will review the structure and content of other corporate documents.

e) We will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our schemes and implement the results of this evaluation.

f) In line with our statutory functions, we will develop a deeper review of the use of Irish in society, in both speech and writing.

Introduction

The public have a very positive attitude towards the Irish language. According to a major survey carried out by Foras na Gaeilge on public opinion of the Irish language (2015), 67% of the public in the South and 45% of the public in the North have a positive attitude towards Irish and of those who expressed an opinion there was a majority in both jurisdictions in favour of teaching the language to children.

- Irish-medium education is in demand. One out of every four would send a child to an Irish-medium primary school if there was one nearby.
- The language planning process is now 10 years in existence and major work has been done in many of the districts to date, although there remain challenges to overcome.
- New legislation was passed in both jurisdictions recently and in 2022 Irish was awarded official status for the first time ever in the North.
- Foras na Gaeilge provides central support for the language on an all-island basis in partnership with 6 Lead Organisations.
- Major challenges for language planning arise from significant social, economic and technological changes taking place and these must be tackled in the future as an integral part of language planning.

About Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge is a North/South implementation body established on 2nd December 1999, responsible for the promotion of Irish throughout Ireland. The staff of Bord na Gaeilge (the Irish Language Board), An Gúm (publishers), and An Coiste Téarmaíochta (Terminology Committee) and all their activities were all transferred to Foras na Gaeilge on the day it was established. We are responsible for the following functions, as set out in the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999:

- Promoting the Irish language.
- Facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life in the South and, in the context of Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in the North where there is appropriate demand.
- Advising the two administrations, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sector.
- Undertaking support projects and providing grant aid to bodies and groups as will be considered necessary.
- Undertaking research, promotional campaigns, and public and media relations.
- Developing terminology and dictionaries.
- Supporting Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish.

These functions are carried out through work we do directly, through grants we provide to Irish language Lead Organisations and other Irish language organisations, and through financial support we provide to community groups.

As a cross-border we work under the guidance of the policies of the North/South Ministerial Council and both governments and we are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to Government Buildings. At the administration level, we report to our sponsoring departments, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Government of Ireland) and the Department for Communities (Northern Ireland Executive).

Planning Context

The context of this Strategic Direction are the various all-island planning duties of Foras na Gaeilge to the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) – that is to prepare a 3-year Corporate Plan and an annual Business Plan for approval by the NSMC – and the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* in the Government of Ireland's jurisdiction and its equivalent strategy in the Executive's jurisdiction. Furthermore, the *Digital Plan for the Irish Language*, published by the Government of Ireland in 2022, the *Policy for Gaeltacht Education*, published by the Government of Ireland in 2016, the Policy for Irish-Medium Education which was being drafted by the Department of Education in the South in 2024, and the Comprehensive Plan for Early Years which was being drafted in 2024 by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in the South are of immense importance.

Partnership Approach

As a result of a decision of the North/South Ministerial Council on the 10 July 2013, Foras na Gaeilge selected the following organisations to take responsibility for 6 major areas of work:

Lead Organisation	Major area of work
Gaeloideachas	Irish medium education/immersion education and Irish-medium preschool education
Gael Linn	Education in the English language sector and adult education, and opportunities for use for school pupils
Glór na nGael	Community and economic development
Oireachtas na Gaeilge	Opportunities which support the use of Irish and establishing networks for adults
Conradh na Gaeilge	Raising awareness, language protection and representation (on behalf of the language with state authorities)
Cumann na bhFiann	The development of opportunities for the use of Irish and networks for young people

As part of the same decision, two forums were established – the Partnership Forum and the Language Development Forum. The heads of the above Lead Organisations are members of the Partnership Forum along with the Chairperson of the Language Development Forum and representatives from Foras na Gaeilge. The Language Development Forum is representative of specific local language groups at community level. The Language Development Forum is an integral part of the partnership approach, the formal structure between the Lead Organisations and Foras na Gaeilge.

Language planning principles and concepts

Many terms and concepts are used to describe efforts made to influence language use. Among the most common referred to in the Irish language context are language planning and language revitalisation, and *language policy* is often used as an umbrella term for this work internationally. The use speakers make of languages, and their behaviour in respect of the languages they speak, are influenced by many related circumstances. In the sociolinguistic models recommended by scholars such as Joshua Fishman, Elana Shohamy, and Bernard Spolsky, the dynamic nature of language use can be traced and considered.

The term language planning is commonly used to describe this work in countries where English dominates. The roots of language planning stretch back to the period after the Second World War

when it was widely thought that planning would remedy the world's social problems. In the 1980s, it was recommended that language planning be subdivided according to various themes: status planning (for example awarding the language official status); corpus planning (developing the language itself, for example by means of lexicography) and acquisition planning (teaching and learning the language).

Language ideology

One of the most important aspects of language policy for Foras na Gaeilge's work is language ideology. Language ideology in the community entails the things one believes about languages. Language ideology is of practical importance in this *Strategic Direction* since this directs people's views of languages in general. The scholar Bernard Spolsky recommended a tripartite model covering the elements of use, ideology and management:

1. Language practices (how people use the language, which version of the language they speak, who they speak it with etc.);
2. Language beliefs (the things people believe about languages, the values they associate with different versions of the language);
3. Language management (the overt efforts the authorities make to influence practices and beliefs in respect of the language).

Each one of the subthemes above are connected to the work of Foras na Gaeilge: language practices refer to the use of Irish, language beliefs are people's views of it and as an organisation, we are responsible for the language management aimed at influencing use and attitudes. In other publications, Spolsky divided language management in accordance with domains of society or various themes. He began at the level of the individual and family and then analysed education, neighbourhood/workplace, public institutions, military policy, colonialism, economic pressure, language decay, language management institutions, nation state and international treaties. That diversity illustrates the large number of forces that influence the individual speaker. Therefore, we recognise the necessity of comprehensive planning at various levels of society to promote Irish.

New speakers

Another concept of language policy closely associated with the work of Foras na Gaeilge is the new speaker. This concept arose out of research on minority languages spoken in Spain, which had many new speakers as a result of language policy in the last forty years. New speakers are defined as people who learn the target language in an educational context outside of the home, who acquire the language to a high level of proficiency and use it regularly outside of the classroom. Often, new speakers have had little access to the target language in the home context, but they acquired it through immersion programmes, revitalisation projects or as adult learners. As an organisation that operates primarily outside of the Gaeltacht, the concept of the new speaker is an important one which is of central relevance to the work of Foras na Gaeilge.

Social transformation

Attention should be paid to social transformation in relation to language revitalisation, and in that context, it is fitting to draw attention to the book *Language Revitalisation and Social Transformation* (2021). The authors of this book compel us to reimagine language policy in light of social, economic, technological and political changes which have significant influence on minoritised languages such as Irish, and they draw attention to four major questions that guide their analysis of social transformation and language revitalisation:

1. Language transmission and family transformation: the nature of the family has changed dramatically, and a combination of family members and professional services now care for children. This has significant implications for the linguistic input young children receive.
2. Mobility, community and language use: mobility is an integral part of modern life and populations throughout the world are now diverse due to immigration, emigration and remigration for both positive and negative reasons.
3. Globalisation and language revitalisation: economic changes influence the economy of cities, which could attract speakers of minority languages away from original language communities seeking work.
4. Governance and the policy making process: there have been significant changes to the governance structures at a regional level, for example in Wales and the Basque Country, and at the transnational level, for example in the European Union, which have major implications for language affairs.

All these questions have major relevance for the case of Irish and for this *Strategic Direction*.

The status of Irish in the South

The Irish language was given special recognition in the 1922 constitution and a language policy was implemented primarily through Irish having a central role in the education system. It was intended that a particular role be given to the civil service in the promotion of the language; until 1974 an understanding of Irish was needed for a job in the civil service and until 2013 extra marks were given to candidates who did their civil service entrance exams through the medium of Irish. Corpus planning was carried out for the language also when the Official Standard was published in 1959, a standard that adapted the language for modern life by tackling spelling variations and challenges related to font and modern terminology, and with the publishing of the de Bhaldraithe English-Irish dictionary in 1958 and the Ó Dónaill Irish-English Dictionary in 1977. In 2003 the Official Languages Act was enacted, which resulted in the establishment of the Office of the Language Commissioner, and which put in place the first comprehensive legislation for Irish language services. Amended legislation was enacted, the Official Languages Act (Amendment), in 2021, which aims to put Irish language services on a firmer footing. The amended act sets out 1) that 20% of recruits for the public service will be proficient in Irish by 31st December 2030, 2) that all public services in the Gaeltacht and for the Gaeltacht will be provided in Irish, 3) that all public offices based in the Gaeltacht will function through Irish, 4) that a National Plan for Irish Language Public Services will be developed, 5) that the language standards system will replace the language schemes, and 6) that a legislative Advisory Committee will be established, which will support achieving the main goals of the act. The act came into effect in 2022.

As regards the Gaeltacht, it was given legislative recognition as a special area when the Gaeltacht Commission set out the boundary in 1926. Since the Department of the Gaeltacht was established in 1956, responsibility for the Gaeltacht, as well as responsibility for the Irish language in general, is associated with a ministry or part of a ministry at government level. Údarás na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht authority) was established in 1979, which had economic, cultural and linguistic responsibilities for the Gaeltacht as a geographic area. In the last 25 years, the establishment of the Gaeltacht Commission in 2000 was the most significant demonstration of a particular commitment to the Gaeltacht. The Commission published a report 2 years later that influenced future developments, especially the *Government Statement on the Irish Language* (2006) and the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-30*. The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study on the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (2007) gave an insight into the crisis facing Irish as a community language in the Gaeltacht and in 2015, an update to that

study illustrated that language matters in the Gaeltacht had worsened further. In 2018 and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published an *Action Plan 2018–22* based on the *20-Year Strategy* in which specific actions were detailed that would benefit both the Gaeltacht and the Irish language.

Following the enactment of the Gaeltacht Acht in 2012, language planning in the Gaeltacht was consolidated when the territory was divided into 26 Language Planning Areas. The Act also recognised the influence of towns which the people of the Gaeltacht depend on for certain services, Gaeltacht Service Towns, and it created an opportunity for areas outside of the Gaeltacht to achieve official linguistic status as Irish language Networks. At the start of the period of this *Strategic Direction*, three areas were recognised as Irish language Networks in the South and two in the North. Foras na Gaeilge was given extra specific duties under the act to manage the language planning process in the Gaeltacht Service Towns outside of the Gaeltacht, and Irish Language Networks.

The status of Irish in the North

When Northern Ireland was established in 1921 there were still Irish speaking communities and native Irish speakers in scattered Gaeltacht areas persisted until the end of the 1960s. There was a significant shift in the fate of the Irish language in the North at the end of the 1960s when the Shaw's Road community was established in west Belfast. A significant increase in the growth of Irish-medium education occurred from that point on until the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. Today the Irish language community is based on learners, many of them who have transmitted the Irish language to the next generation. Also included in the Irish-speaking community in the North are pupils who are receiving their education through the medium of Irish at primary and secondary level. As in the South, the language is dependent on the education system in the most part to create a community of speakers. In 1989 an organisation was established with state funding, the ULTACH Trust, to promote the language across the entire community, with responsibilities for catering also for people who are not nationalists.

Arising out of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Irish-medium education was place on a firm state-sponsored footing when Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (Irish-medium education council) and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (Irish-medium education trust) were established. Again, this was a demonstration of how central Irish-medium education is to the development of Irish in Northern Ireland. In 2001 the British government accepted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which placed certain duties on it in respect of Irish and Ulster-Scots. The legal status of the language developed further in the North when the British government enacted the Identity and Language Act (Northern Ireland) in 2022. The legislation was significant and set out the following main provisions: 1) that the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737, which prohibits the use of Irish in court shall be withdrawn; 2) that official status shall be given in law to the Irish language and to Ulster-Scots; 3) that two commissioners shall be appointed, one for the Irish Language and another for Ulster-Scots and for the British-Ulster tradition; 4) that the Irish Language Commissioner shall set out standards of good practice for the use of Irish in the state system; 5) that all public bodies shall have due regard to the good practice standards and shall prepare a plan which will demonstrate how they will be fulfil them; and 6) that an Office for Identity and Cultural Expression shall be established.

The support given by Foras na Gaeilge from 1999 onwards has been very important for the development of the Irish language in the North. For example, we have given continuous support to the two Irish language centres in Belfast and Derry, and historically we have significantly facilitated language planning in the community through the Irish Language Communities Scheme and the

Community Radio Scheme. The latest development is that Foras na Gaeilge has extended the Irish Language Network model, as set out in the Gaeltacht Act 2012, to the North and two areas had that status at the beginning of the period of this *Strategic Direction*.

Current trends in both jurisdictions

The public have a positive view of the Irish language in both jurisdictions, and this is a vitally important support base for language policy. In the major research work that we commissioned in 2015, 67% of the public in the South and 45% of the public in the North have a positive attitude to Irish and among those who expressed an opinion, there was a majority in both jurisdictions in favour of teaching the language to children. Furthermore, the results of the censuses carried out by the Central Statistics Office in 2022 and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 2021 demonstrate that 40% of the public in the South and 12% in the North have some knowledge of Irish. As regards frequency of use in the South, 115,065 respondents to the 2022 census (2.3%) said that they speak Irish weekly outside the education system and 71,968 (1.4%) said that they speak it daily within and outside of the education system. In the North, 228,600 respondents to the 2021 census (12.4%) specified that they had some knowledge of the Irish language and 6,000 of the population (0.3%) reported that Irish was their main language.

One of the things which most shows the public's commitment to the language throughout the island is the development of Irish-medium education in the last 40 years. In 1972 there were only 11 Irish-medium primary schools and 5 Irish-medium secondary schools; in 2021 there were 188 Irish-medium primary schools and 52 Irish-medium post-primary schools and the demand for Irish medium education is always well ahead of supply. For example, in the major survey on public opinion of the Irish language, nearly a quarter of the respondents (23%) in the South said they would think of sending a child to an Irish-medium primary school or would do so if there was an Irish-medium school nearby.

The challenge in the years ahead during the period of this *Strategic Direction* is to build on these developments and bring forward even more initiatives to keep up with the continuous demand for the Irish language and the major interest the public has in it.

MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

This *Strategic Direction* is a high-level document that sets out the main objectives of Foras na Gaeilge as an organisation and covers the areas of life we have recognised as priorities to promote the Irish language throughout the island. The next Corporate Plan and annual Business Plans will be based on the *Strategic Direction* from now until 2030 and therefore it is a foundation stone of the organisation's corporate and strategic planning.

There are 4 main strategic objectives in the *Strategic Direction* which encompass all of Foras na Gaeilge's work. The first three main objectives relate to the organisation's external work in the community: language ability, language use and language attitudes. These objectives are in accordance with the principles of language planning that recognise the need for various intervention measures to support a minority language such as Irish. The fourth is concerned with internal organisation affairs, governance This recognises the need for ensuring good governance so that other work can be done effectively.

MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: LANGUAGE ABILITY

Ability is the foundation stone of language planning, because without enough people competent in the Irish language, opportunities for use in the community cannot be increased. This main objective includes the education system, other learning opportunities and the language resources which support the learning and acquisition of Irish so that it can be used at every level of society. Digital technology is of the utmost importance to empower the community in the Irish language and therefore, a particular emphasis is put on this element in this major objective and indeed in this entire *Strategic Direction*.

1.1 Education

To empower the community in Irish, it is necessary to ensure that there is proper and accessible provision available at all levels of the education system, from preschool to university. This includes schools that function through the medium of English, the backbone of the education system in both jurisdictions since they cater to the majority of the community, as well as Irish-medium schools, Irish-medium colleges and Gaeltacht schools. Foras na Gaeilge has a legislative function to support the teaching of Irish and education through the medium of Irish and, therefore, we make a series of recommendations in this *Strategic Direction* to strengthen these two elements. As well as formal education in an institutional context, the learning of Irish is of particular importance among adults and, therefore, this main objective includes that element as well.

1.1.1 Preschool education, nurseries and daycare

The nature of society has changed beyond measure in the last generation and includes a transformation in family life also. With more parents or guardians than ever participating in the workforce, there is an urgent need for more professional facilities to care for children of preschool age – playgroups, nurseries and daycare in general. A radical change is needed here because early years education depends completely on the private sector at present, and no-one is looking after the needs of children who speak Irish as a family language or whose parents/guardians wish to increase their ability in the language. This is a foundation stone for Irish-medium education, and childcare through Irish is a necessary service for parents rearing their family with Irish. Without investment at the preschool and early years care level, growth targets for the Irish-medium schools cannot be

achieved. At present, the range of responsibilities of the Lead Organisation Gaeloideachas include preschools but their resources are not sufficient to grow the sector strategically.

The Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Participation and Youth in the South have begun to compile a comprehensive plan for early years and Foras na Gaeilge hopes to support the implementation of that plan. During this strategic period, Foras na Gaeilge will seek much more investment in this area to provide a stronger basis for immersion education, whether through the Lead Organisation Gaeloideachas or another appropriate structure.

As a first step towards better provision, we will use the language planning process to support the establishment of a nursery in every Gaeltacht Service Town and Irish Language Network during the period of this *Strategic Direction*. Capital investment will be needed to that end in the Language Planning Areas, and further support for community groups implementing the language plans. Extra resources will be needed, especially in training and staff empowerment. We also recommend that more sustainable structures are required in this sector and that good practice in other countries should be followed, for example Scotland where Gaelic-medium preschool education is on a stronger footing since it is under the aegis of the local authorities.

1.1.2 English-medium schools

The English-medium schools have a very important role in the South to ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to learn Irish and that they will be provided with information about the standing of the language in society. That linguistic and sociolinguistic information should support a more positive view of Irish among pupils themselves and their parents/guardians, which is essential as wider support for the Government of Ireland's Irish language policy. Although only a very small minority of pupils in the North take Irish as a school subject at secondary level, wider access to the language is necessary to empower more people in it and to foster a stronger awareness of it.

Foras na Gaeilge believes that the exemptions system has caused significant damage to the status of Irish as a core subject in the Government of Ireland's system. With the growth in the number of pupils awarded exemptions, there is the danger that this approach will promote optional Irish, and that one of the most important state supports for the language will be undermined. Foras na Gaeilge will continue to support the Department of Education in the South to minimise the damage caused by this system and we will advise that extra support in respect of Irish is given to pupils in English-medium schools. This will be done, for example, through further investment in projects such as Gaelbhratach (school flag) and Scoil Spreagtha (inspired/encouraged school).

Foras na Gaeilge recognises that it is necessary to improve some teachers' standard of Irish, as recognised in the Department of Education's Chief Examiner's reports in the South for the last 10 years and in various research reports. A systematic approach is required here, encompassing teacher training at third level and continuing professional development. We support the *Languages Connect* recommendation that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standards be applied in universities so that it can be confirmed that newly qualified teachers have adequate Irish to register with the Teaching Council. To that end, we will continue to support Gael Linn as a Lead Organisation supporting the Network for Irish Teachers and we will work in partnership with the third level sector to seize opportunities for development that will improve the standard of Irish (see 1.1.4 below).

1.1.3 Irish-medium education

It is clear that Irish-medium education is succeeding regarding language acquisition and therefore the sector should be regarded as a key basis to support the development of Irish language communities throughout the island. The growth of the sector has been at a standstill for years in both jurisdictions, however, and there are great challenges associated with pupil transfer from primary to post-primary level. The current weak provision of Irish-medium education in the South is of major concern, especially when sociolinguistic contexts reasonably similar to Ireland are observed, such as Wales and the Basque Country, where a much higher proportion of children are in the immersion education system. Between 2012 and 2022 only 10 new Irish-medium schools were established and between 2008 and 2024 only 12 new schools came into existence. Ad hoc growth is occurring in places, but the primary school and post-primary school population is falling, and the Government of Ireland's target (2020), that the number of immersion education pupils would be doubled during that government's lifetime, has failed. Considering that various surveys demonstrate that parents/guardians would be happy to send their children to Irish-medium education provision if that were to be available, it is timely to tackle the structural challenges, set out ambitious goals and provide appropriate resources so that the Irish-medium provision in both jurisdictions will be closer to other similar contexts. As part of that, a new model is needed to support schools in the South that seek to transition from English-medium to Irish-medium. Foras na Gaeilge recognises that a Policy for Irish-Medium Education, a new initiative of the Government of Ireland for immersion education outside of the Gaeltacht, is imminent as this *Strategic Direction* is being written. In this coming strategic period, we will strengthen our advisory role to ensure that policy will be implemented and that the lack of growth in Irish-medium education will be addressed.

Within the Irish-medium education sector, Foras na Gaeilge recognises the urgent need for more resources to support the acquisition of Irish in the classroom. To that end, we will advocate for extra investment in a wider range of resources, including books and interactive resources, taking advantage of digital technology. We will seek to support the Department of Education in the South to make further investment in the OIDE scheme which encompasses Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach which can be used in both the Irish-medium system and in English-medium schools to boost pupils' ability in Irish.

We also recognise the need for supporting children in the Irish-medium system who have special educational needs. We will support the Lead Organisation Gaeloideachas in their work in this area, and ensure that it is included in the implementation of the *Digital Plan for Irish* (2022). Regarding out of school activities, we will continue with our investment in summer camps, in youth clubs and in other informal events and activities which aim to increase schoolchildren's ability in Irish outside of the classroom.

1.1.4 University education

The universities are particularly important in light of the Government of Ireland's legislative goal that 20% of those recruited by the public service would have Irish, and in the context of new Irish language legislation in place in the North. In both cases, there will be a need for graduates with advanced Irish language skills to cater to the demand for the provision of Irish language services including administrative posts, management roles and specialist translation and technical services. Other than primary BA degrees in Irish itself and other limited choices (in the University of Galway for the most part), there is little university education through the medium of Irish available. There is an urgent need to tackle this as part of a wider strategy to develop the Irish language at all levels of the education system.

Foras na Gaeilge welcomes the microcredits system developed by the Irish Universities Association to provide short, accredited courses to cater to the needs of learners and businesses. Microcredits provide learner opportunities which are flexible, accessible and user-friendly as a route to acquire new skills or to retrain. Some university modules in Irish are available for which students and/or professionals could register but more choices must be provided and more effective marketing systematically carried out. As part of this, in light of the new legislation a microcredit module on language awareness could be provided nationally aimed at the public sector. It would also be beneficial if university students were given a universal choice throughout the South to select one Irish language module (5 ECTS) per year, independently of the degree they are doing. As well as that, a Gaeltacht semester and work placements through the medium of Irish would be of enormous benefit to all third level Irish students to increase both their Irish language ability and professional experience.

As part of this development, we recognise as well that there is a need to greatly increase the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) choices available through Irish, especially in light of the difficulties experienced by Irish-medium schools in finding Irish-speaking science teachers. As a start, Foras na Gaeilge will seek to influence providers to make limited provision available on an incremental basis at undergraduate level in one institution and/or give more scholarships to students already qualified in STEM subjects who wish to do postgraduate courses in education through the medium of Irish.

Foras na Gaeilge recognises that it has a role in influencing the Irish Universities Association and the universities themselves in respect of provision of courses and other supports through the medium of Irish as part of a national strategy to reach the goal of 20% of recruits in the public service. We will seize this opportunity during this strategic period.

1.1.5 Adult learners

As well as formal education, Foras na Gaeilge recognises the major importance of other learning opportunities for adults, including various options such as conversation circles and accredited tailored courses. In Wales adult learners have long been recognised as part of the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy which aims to reach a million speakers by 2050. It is recognised in various minority language contexts that there is a major gap between school leaving age and the next contact with the language, often up to 10 years, and census statistics in both jurisdictions in Ireland show that ability in Irish falls during the 20s after people leave school. To tackle this gap in Wales a national system of accredited courses, *Dysgu Cymraeg*, was created, with significant government support and a central website and standardised teaching and support resources. In Ireland, various providers including universities and private businesses are in competition with each other, it is difficult for the learner to find information centrally about the choices available and there is also variety in the teaching material from course to course.

Foras na Gaeilge recognises the importance of common course provision and offering learning opportunities to adult learners as a central part of a strategy to increase the public's ability in Irish. We also believe that any such syllabus should draw on the richness of the Gaeltacht dialects and present a wide choice of styles and language registers to the learner. During this strategic period, it will be helpful to research current provision, encompassing a detailed examination of various course options, costs, syllabi and associated teaching materials and opinions of both providers and adult learners. Such research would be a preliminary stage for better coordination of what is on offer, so that a national standard learning accreditation system for adult learners can be established in the future.

As part of the provision for adults, people from a background outside Ireland must also be included. Around 13% of the population in both jurisdictions was not born on the island, and there is a danger that they will not have access to Irish in light of extra obstacles such as the exemption from Irish in the South, or due to the erroneous belief that Irish is not related to them culturally. In the South, much of the current provision for complete beginners is based on the understanding that the learners have some Irish already, but there is an urgent need for awareness courses about Irish aimed at immigrants, as well as more tailored courses in Irish itself. During this strategic period, Foras na Gaeilge will support research about the motivations of immigrants to take on Irish and we seek further resources to carry out a systematic development of this area of work as part of a national strategy for adult learners.

1.2 Language resources

Development of terminology and dictionaries are specifically stated in Foras na Gaeilge's functions as set out in the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999. Since we were established, we have recognised the importance of corpus planning, developing dictionary and terminology resources, which will enable the public to discuss all aspects of contemporary life, including technical fields, through the medium of Irish. To that end, we have invested significantly in lexicography and terminology over the last 25 years, and we fully participate in discussions about language resources in European Union institutions since Irish was given full status as an official working language in them. That decision radically changed the standing of the Irish language and although challenges remain with training of translators and especially interpreters, excellent employment opportunities are available in Ireland and abroad for capable graduates who have a high standard of Irish. In line with that change, we have done ongoing work to support the translation profession in order to ensure high standards in the sector.

1.2.1 Development of lexicography and terminology

Although we have done significant work in lexicography and terminology particularly over the last 10 years, Foras na Gaeilge recognises that continuous development is needed after 2027. Two new major dictionaries (Irish-English and Irish-Irish) will be available by the end of that year, but they will not be of equal size with what is already available due to lack of resources. 2027 is not the end of the lexicography work, but rather another milestone on a longer journey that will require further investment to reach its final destination. More resources are needed, such as an Irish-French dictionary for example, to cater for the large number of students who are studying those two languages in the education system. In partnership with both governments and academics, Foras na Gaeilge will work in the period of this *Strategic Direction* towards establishing a permanent lexicography and terminology unit as an integral part of the organisation's work supported by long-term core funding. We will also continue to add to our existing lexicography and terminology products and carry out further marketing of the language resources already available, primarily Foclóir.ie and Teanglann.ie, to ensure that they strengthen the public's ability in written and spoken Irish.

1.2.2 Development of the translation sector

There is strong demand for the Seal of Accreditation for Translators since Foras na Gaeilge established it in 2006. We will continue to provide that seal as well as the new Seal of Accreditation for Editors. We recognise that there are other gaps in the sector, for example in literary editing and advertising as a result of the Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021, and we will seize every opportunity to put more resources towards these goals. During this strategic period, we will work in partnership with the Office of the Language Commissioner to support the development of an advertising sector through the medium of Irish, which will be able to cater to the provisions of the new act.

1.2.2 Digital technology

Foras na Gaeilge recognises the major opportunities for the language that arise from development in digital technology in recent years, especially in respect of artificial intelligence, as set out in the *Digital Plan for Irish*. These opportunities cover learning and enrichment of Irish and the provision of services and interactive media in the state and the private and voluntary sectors. The development of technology has huge implications for the both the translation and interpreting sectors, areas for which Foras na Gaeilge has key responsibility through corpus planning. We also recognise that investment will have significant implications in the digital area for people with disabilities and we will seize the opportunity to develop that aspect as part of our commitment for diversity and equality. Coordination of this work and awareness of it will be principal priorities for Foras na Gaeilge during this strategic period.

Therefore, we will emphasise implementation of the *Digital Plan for Irish* and prioritise investment in written and spoken corpora of Irish so that services such as speech synthesis, speech recognition and machine translation can be further developed. As part of that, we will recommend that appropriate recognition be given to the richness of Irish, to Gaeltacht dialects and to different styles of speech and writing. During this strategic period, we will investigate the possibilities of establishing a technology unit in Foras na Gaeilge, which will take responsibility for the development of this area in the future, in partnership with academic parties who have appropriate expertise. We will place an emphasis on the development of Irish language corpora by offering scholarships to people who have expertise in computer science and/or the Irish language.

MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: LANGUAGE USE

Promotion of the Irish language and encouragement of the use of the language are the main functions of Foras na Gaeilge and therefore we shall spend considerable resources on achieving this major objective in partnership with Irish language groups, Lead Organisations and grantees. A significant proportion of the organisation's budget is already spent on language planning, which aims to increase the use of Irish in various communities in both jurisdictions. Included in that is the fostering of new speakers, people who were not raised with Irish but who wish to make the language their own and change from being learners to active speakers. We invest heavily in the media and publishing to increase the number of people who use material through the medium of Irish and to encourage reading. Again, technology has a very important role in the implementation of this main objective, both the provision of interactive Irish language services in the Language Planning Areas and the development of digital media and digital publishing.

2.1 Language planning in the community

As explained in the introduction, language planning is the intervention carried out by the state to support the Irish language in various areas of use, education and status. This is done in the South through the language planning process launched by the Government of Ireland in 2012 as a result of the Gaeltacht Act and Foras na Gaeilge has supported it since then. Recognising good practice in language planning, Foras na Gaeilge uses the same approach in the North. There are 3 geographical levels in the process in the South: Gaeltacht Language Planning Districts, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks. Údarás na Gaeltachta is responsible for Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas and three of the Gaeltacht Service Towns situated in the Gaeltacht, and Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for supporting the work of the Gaeltacht Service Towns outside of the Gaeltacht and the Irish Language Networks in both jurisdictions. As well as the language planning process itself, Our Irish Language Networks Development Scheme supports language planning in various communities in both jurisdictions.

2.1.1 The language planning process

Foras na Gaeilge recognises that major progress has been made in the language planning process since 2012 but that significant challenges remain. Although we recognise that the public has taken ownership of the process in many areas and that there is exemplary work taking place, there has been less process in other areas. We also recognise the difficulties language planning officers have as regards resources, status and employment stability. As the principal Irish language organisation with an advisory role, we will continue to pressure for more resources for the process so that there will be a greater dependence going forward on professional employees and less on voluntary workers. We will seek to direct further investment to the Gaeltacht Service Towns and to increase the number of Irish Language Networks, and we will continue, in partnership with stakeholders, to seek to develop work in areas that are behind up to now. As part of the development, we will seek to place the Irish Language Networks Development Scheme on a permanent basis as an integral part of the organisation's work and to develop a language planning unit. Community groups will thereby be supported to develop themselves to apply for status as an official Network as other rounds in that process are announced. We will seek to participate in a National Language Planning Joint Committee in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, language planning officers and a broad range of other actors to better coordinate the work, especially in the case of districts adjoining each other.

2.1.2 Irish language centres

We recognise the language planning importance of creating Irish language 'safe spaces' where learners and more fluent speakers can use Irish without fear, in the knowledge that their efforts to speak the language will be supported. Such facilities can be a pillar of support for the local community for language activities, specialist language groups, language services, childcare and public services. As part of the language planning process, we will provide targeted support to community groups to develop Irish language centres in their areas as 'safe spaces' in which Irish can be promoted, people whose usual language is Irish can be catered for, and new speakers can make the language their own. As part of integrated language planning required in the community, it is an aim of Foras na Gaeilge that plans will be developed for such centres in all Gaeltacht Service Towns and all Networks by the end of the *Strategic Direction*.

2.1.3 Training and awareness

Foras na Gaeilge recognises the continuous need for training and awareness to develop language planning in the public service and in the community in general. To that end, as stated at 1.1.4 above, we will investigate possibilities with the third level sector regarding a module and appropriate degree programmes so that the number of microcredits in respect of those themes are increased nationally. As much as possible based on resources, we will support such modules and courses by means of scholarships etc.

2.2 Equality and diversity

According to the 2022 Census, there were nearly 632,000 non-Irish citizens living in the South, or 12% of the population. Nearly half of them were from European Union member states. Nearly 257,000 people, or 13.5% of the population, were born outside of Northern Ireland according to the 2021 Census. As regards disability, the Central Statistics Agency census shows that 22% of the population have a disability and 24% was the relevant figure in the Northern Ireland census.

Therefore, it is clear that a large proportion of the population in question in both jurisdictions can say that they face additional barriers in accessing the Irish language. For example, anecdotal evidence shows that ethnicity or disability can be used as an excuse for awarding an exemption from Irish in the South. Prejudices against Irish can also come into play if when it is argued, for example, that people from abroad should not have to learn the language since they are immigrants or that they do not have an Irish identity. Foras na Gaeilge is strongly of the opinion that Irish is for all and that everyone should have access to it in both jurisdictions, no matter what their ethnic background or minority status.

During the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge will work diligently to ensure that the Irish language itself and information about the circumstances of the language are presented to minority communities in Ireland. Particular emphasis will be placed on external Foras na Gaeilge activities during that period, but new legislative equality schemes will also be put in place within the organisation to adhere to our legislative duties and increase staff awareness around these questions. Below are the main external measures that will be developed in this strategic period.

2.2.1 Targeted support

Foras na Gaeilge supports the Céad Míle Fáilte (hundred thousand welcomes) project that aims to help people who have arrived in Ireland from different countries to learn Irish. As part of the project classes are organised, scholarships are awarded to pupils to attend Gaeltacht courses, workshops are organised on appropriate vocabulary and handbooks are provided to learn Irish through various languages. During the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge will seek to increase

resources available to support Irish language groups to better cater for immigrants and other minority groups.

We will foster closer contact with organisations that promote different minority groups such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Equality NI, Vision Ireland, LGBT Ireland, Africa Centre Ireland, Pavee Point, Disability Action NI etc.

2.2.2 Awareness of diversity and the Irish language

Based on good practice in other countries such as Catalonia, Foras na Gaeilge will develop awareness campaigns in the media that will showcase immigrants who have learned Irish. We believe that large groups such as the Indian, Polish and Ukrainian communities are particularly important, since there are significant numbers of them living here. That campaign will be tied in with similar initiatives such as *Creidim Ionat* (I believe in you).

2.2.3 Showcasing diversity

We will continue with our policy of supporting diversity on the social media accounts under our care, by ensuring that racial diversity, other kinds of diversity and gender balance are shown in images we publish and that cultural events in connection with minority communities in Ireland are supported.

2.2.4 Fostering diversity in society

In our schemes we will ask applicants to show how they will support the promotion of equality and diversity in the work that Foras na Gaeilge funds and those answers will be considered as applications are considered.

We commend organisations such as Aerach Aiteach Gaelach (gay, queer, Irish) and Bród na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Pride) for creating space for LGBTQ+ people in the Irish language sector. We will carry out further publicity among appropriate groups on our schemes and other sponsorship opportunities to develop this area.

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, Foras na Gaeilge must be mindful of promoting good relations between people of different religions or different political opinions or different ethnic groups. As an example of the promotion of good relations, Foras na Gaeilge provides major funding to the East Belfast Mission and Naíscoil na Seolta, two Irish language initiatives in east Belfast, some of the groups we fund are very active in providing classes and activities aimed at the Protestant/unionist/loyalist (PUL) community and unionist broadcasters can be heard on Raidió Fáilte. We will continue to foster links with the PUL community during the period of this *Strategic Direction*.

Foras na Gaeilge intends to develop an Irish language interpretative centre for Belfast city during the period of this strategy. This is being developed in the context of the shared island because we recognise that large sections of the community in the North do not have access to the Irish language, to information about it or to opportunities to learn it. This is so in the case of the PUL community and among various ethnic minority groups, both new communities and long-established communities.

As stated under 1.1.5 above, we will ensure that learners without an Irish background will be catered to in the review of the teaching of Irish to adults, to ensure that more people have easier access to

the language. We will ensure that syllabus and learning resources will be adapted to diversity among learners and that this will be implemented in a standardised way.

2.2.5 Fostering diversity in the organisation

Internally, Foras na Gaeilge will develop new equality schemes that satisfy legislative responsibilities in both jurisdictions. As part of these, there will be ongoing awareness training for staff and particular measures to support employees to whom the protected characteristics are relevant, for example people with disabilities.

2.3 Opportunities for use

The major research project *Public Attitudes to the Irish Language* (2015), which we commissioned, and census results in both jurisdictions give us a detailed insight into the places people use Irish and the gaps that must be addressed. During the lifetime of the Strategic Direction, Foras na Gaeilge will carry out a detailed examination of census statistics and results of the new major research project which is proposed to be published in 2025 to shape the organisation's policy on fostering opportunities for use for the coming period.

2.3.1 New speakers

New speakers are multilingual people who cross social and linguistic borders when they acquire languages not historically associated with them. In the case of Ireland, much research has been carried out on new speakers of Irish and the challenges they meet as they try to become active, regular speakers. Indeed, this change from learner status to speaker status was the greatest obstacle research participants identified and, therefore, there is a need to focus on measures to support them to cross this barrier. Although language planning is concerned with everyone in Ireland, no matter what their linguistic background, since we function outside of the Gaeltacht for the most part, the work of Foras na Gaeilge is primarily concerned with people that can be called new speakers. The language planning process is focused on new speakers outside of the Gaeltacht and, therefore, the concept itself and the support that can be given to new speakers is very important in our work.

'Safe spaces' have been mentioned already under 2.1.1, places where Irish can be spoken without fear and in which efforts at all levels will be welcomed. Irish language centres which have already been referred to will support the creation of such spaces, but Foras na Gaeilge recognises that there is a need to widen the concept to include strengthening conversation circles, new social opportunities in both physical and virtual spaces and language enrichment for people who already speak good Irish. By supporting Irish language centres and through various schemes of the organisation, Foras na Gaeilge will focus on these broad goals in the coming strategic period.

Another challenge identified by new speakers of Irish is the lack of information on how they can integrate with existing Irish language networks in such a way as will support their decision to acquire Irish. This can be undertaken through amendments to the Irish language curriculum at post-primary and third level to demonstrate to pupils how to overcome challenges connected with the active use of a minority language. These amendments could be piloted locally in areas that are participating in the language planning process, for example on the transition year curriculum and/or as a separate university module. Opportunities in this regard arise from the microcredits system referred to already in 1.1.4 above.

Another of the challenges identified by new speakers is the social anxiety and demoralisation connected with speaking a language they are not entirely comfortable in. Some new speakers report

that they often have problems with people from the Gaeltacht due to differences in dialect or ability and, indeed, not all new speakers set out to acquire a traditional dialect, whether they are in Ireland or in other countries. European research shows that a new 'more central' version of a language often comes to the fore among new speakers and that the people who practice that version wish to be recognised as legitimate speakers. It would be beneficial to recognise the great variety within the Irish language community so that various models are presented to people who wish to convert to being new speakers. There are many opportunities to organise a media awareness campaign that would present different kinds of Irish speakers to the general public and aim to support existing speakers and encourage potential new speakers further. As part of our communication work, Foras na Gaeilge will strive in the coming years to develop such a campaign, in parallel with other awareness campaigns such as *Creidim Ionat*.

2.3.2 Families

The promotion of Irish is included as an integral part of language planning but it is recognised that it is complex, challenging work in which there are many aspects and stakeholders. For years, the Irish state supported the use of Irish in Gaeltacht families through Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge (scheme to encourage the speaking of Irish within the family), which came to an end in 2011. There has been no financial support of its kind since then, but through core funding of the Lead Organisation Glór na nGael, Foras na Gaeilge supports the *Teanga Tí* (home language) programme for parents raising a family through Irish. *Teanga Tí* advises parents/guardians on best practice, provides support and resources and gives information on activities for Irish language families.

As stated at 2.2 above, Foras na Gaeilge recognises that the family structure has completely changed in the context of a more diverse society, and we believe that there is a need to ensure that all kinds of family in which Irish is used will have the same kinds of support. The results of the work of *Teanga Tí* are to be reviewed during the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*. We expect to strengthen the scheme and that will include recognition for the diversity of the family.

As stated at 1.1.1 above, as part of the range of services required in families where children are being reared with Irish, we intend that crèche services will be established in all Language Planning Areas under our care by the end of this strategic period. We will also continue to provide funding for opportunities for social and out of school use for youth, including summer camps.

We will continue to organise awareness campaigns on the use of Irish in the family in partnership with various groups, including parents/guardians with little Irish.

2.3.3 Culture and arts

Irish is a gateway to discover a wide range of cultural activities which are often pillars of support for the acquisition and vitality of the language, especially in the Gaeltacht through music and the indigenous arts. Research has long been carried out on the links between creativity and culture and the United Nations Development Programme places major emphasis on culture as an integral part of human development. The success of Irish language arts and media demonstrate that significant economic, social and linguistic benefits arise out of investment aimed at these areas of work. Foras na Gaeilge recognises the importance of the arts and culture to increase the social, enjoyable use of Irish in the community and, therefore, we give ongoing support through our various schemes to cultural and literary festivals and events.

This support will continue in this strategic period and in light of the central role of the Arts Councils in both jurisdictions, Foras na Gaeilge will seek to work in partnership with them to attract more resources towards language-based arts and the Irish language in the arts in general.

The process has begun in the South to develop a national integrated strategy for the Irish language-based arts in 2018 when it was specifically stated as a measure in the *Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2023*. In measure 5.47 it is stated: 'An integrated arts strategy will be developed for the Gaeltacht and Irish language arts in conjunction with interested parties, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, Foras na Gaeilge, the Arts Council and TG4 which will be focused on

- ensuring better coordination and collaboration in the development of Gaeltacht and Irish language arts
- strengthening further the relationships between interested parties
- increasing and promoting the profile of Gaeltacht and Irish language arts nationally and internationally
- finding opportunities to provide further support for Gaeltacht and Irish language arts and to develop them further'.

Foras na Gaeilge will work in close cooperation with the Lead Organisation responsible for developments in this area, Oireachtas na Gaeilge, and with other interested parties to set about the activities set out in the *Strategy for the Language-Based Arts* and the related Action Plan.

2.3.4 Economy

Foras na Gaeilge recognises the importance of Irish as a normal language of communication in business and economic contexts. An aim of our Business Support Scheme is to support bilingual branding, and we provide a range of support materials and the Business with Irish Q-Mark recognises excellence of service through the medium of Irish. Through the Lead Organisation Glór na nGael, we support the Business Awards annually, a scheme that gives recognition to businesses which make a particular effort for the Irish language.

We are aware that economic advantage arises from the use of Irish in commerce and we recognise that the Irish language community is part of the local and national economy. Commercial use of Irish is one of the aspects that encourages people to conserve fluency after leaving school and therefore it is vital to develop this aspect of the promotion of Irish. Irish must be given a more central place in national development policy, especially in the development plans of local authorities in counties where there are Gaeltacht Service Towns and/or Irish Language Networks.

Therefore, based on international research on the advantage of culture as a motor for development, Foras na Gaeilge will consult with interested parties to widen the concept of development to encompass Irish. We will investigate the feasibility of a legislative amendment along the lines of the act in Wales which requires local authorities to include Welsh in complementary planning for the sake of wellbeing. In this way local authorities will be empowered to promote a more inclusive development vision, especially in respect of the Gaeltacht Service Towns and the Networks. Likewise, we will investigate the possibilities of a legislative amendment to strengthen the planning provisions in respect of the Irish language.

To support this, we will foster closer contact with appropriate organisations such as Údarás na Gaeltachta, Enterprise Ireland, Invest NI, the Western Development Commission and Pobal. In partnership with them, we will carry out further development of economic activities through the medium of Irish in the Language Planning Areas under our care. This will include the use of Irish itself

as a marketing or branding tool and support for enterprises that work directly with Irish or that function through Irish.

2.3.5 Media and technology

The role of the media has long been recognised in the revitalisation of minority languages and since the 1960s, the establishment of special radio and television channels has been a fundamental aim of many language organisations in the west. Experts recognise that media are very important for strengthening minority languages and to encourage people to use them. Among those advantages are the promotion of the minority language among the general public, the creation of opportunities for use and social networks for young people, minimisation of negative prejudices towards minority language, fostering speakers' confidence, increasing the minority's unity and identity, creating high quality employment opportunities, promotion of creativity in the minority language, increasing speakers' language skills, spreading new terminology and creating role models for young speakers. All these areas are capable of exerting a positive influence on the foundation stones of language planning: the status of the language, the use of the language and attitudes towards the language. International research demonstrates that the media often function as spaces – physical or virtual – which normalise the use of the language among practitioners, and that they foster a healthy relationship with the listening or viewing audience. For these reasons, Foras na Gaeilge is very committed to ongoing investment in Irish language communications media, whether printed, digital or broadcast, therefore we invest significantly in 2 community radio stations and 3 print/digital services.

Foras na Gaeilge is mindful of the transformation occurring in the media landscape at present and we are delighted to have fostered a close relationship with the new Government of Ireland regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, which is responsible for a comprehensive review of media services through the medium of Irish. During this strategic period, we will work so that more high-quality media material will be made available through Irish on channels and various platforms including legacy media as well as digital and social media.

We also recognise that the media are vitally important for the fostering of democracy and to oppose misinformation and false information and we want the Irish language community to achieve their right to high quality media services in their own language. Through digital technology, the influence of the media on society has increased dramatically and if attractive and plentiful material in Irish is not available in the virtual platforms used by the public, that will have extremely negative implications for the use of Irish in the digital area.

To that end, in this strategic period, we will work to make further investment in Irish language media and in the context of technology, we recognise the need for considerable extra development of digital media material in Irish, both short-form and long-form and including different genres and styles.

2.3.6 Public services

Additional opportunities for development arise out of the Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021 through language standards that will place direct duties on public bodies regarding services through Irish. This will include interactive government services for which demand is ever increasing. The Language Commissioner estimates that 80% of citizens will be using the MyGovId portal to find public services by 2030 but that there are serious omissions in Irish language interactive services at present. Further such interactive services will depend on extra investment in digital technology for Irish, training for experts in information technology and Irish and an awareness campaign to engage the Irish language community to use services.

During the period of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge will work closely with the Office of the Language Commissioner to develop supports in this area, especially in respect of advertising by public bodies. Through our relationship with the Welsh Language Commissioner, we will advise the Government of Ireland in respect of the development and implementation of the new language standards, which are the backbone of the new legislation.

In partnership with other interested parties, we will work on a programme to support the development of health services through the medium of Irish in the Gaeltacht Service Towns and the Irish Language Networks. Emphasis will be place on extra training medical professionals in third level institutions by providing scholarships and other supports, and the development of social networks between professionals in the health system, in conjunction with Oireachtas na Gaeilge in their role as Lead Organisation with responsibility for the development of Irish language networks.

2.3.7 Scottish Gaelic

The links between Ireland and Scotland go far back and Foras na Gaeilge are very committed to the relationship between the Irish language and Scottish Gaelic through the Colmcille programme. Through that programme, which is a partnership with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, common activities are organised which encompass both languages, events are run which promote one Gaelic language in the other country, grants are awarded to projects, awareness is increase about the natural environment in which the languages survive and the Irish language community in Ireland are given an opportunity to learn Scottish Gaelic. Co-operation is fostered with the Scottish Gaelic speakers in Canada, and with speakers of Manx Gaelic as well. Strategically, the work of Colmcille covers the following themes: arts, youth, heritage, learning of both Gaelic languages, community development and research.

Foras na Gaeilge recognises the unique value of Colmcille as a project that promotes international co-operation by encompassing more than one Celtic language. We will work closely with the Government of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Scottish Government, through the British-Irish Council and the East-West Council to place Colmcille on a stronger funding foundation and to carry out more effective marketing of it during the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*.

2.3.8 Other opportunities for use

Census results and other research show that Irish language ability among certain sectors of the population is weak. Among those groups are between people of school leaving age and around 30 years, men, socioeconomically disadvantaged people, immigrants, people from a Protestant/unionist/loyalist background, and other minority communities.

During the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge will further examine these subgroups in partnership with the statistical authorities in both jurisdictions to shape our policy on fostering the use of Irish. Research will be commissioned as necessary.

2.4   Books

Publishing is an important area of Foras na Gaeilge work because we recognise that the supply of print/digital resources is necessary to increase the use of Irish through the medium of reading. For a long time, we have been supporting campaigns and activities such as the Oireachtas na Gaeilge literary competitions, World Book Day, Love Leabhar Gaeilge, the Publishing Awards, Clubleabhar.com and An Post Irish Book Awards to promote Irish language publishing. High quality books over a wide range of genres add to the attraction of the language and their visibility online and in bookshops boosts the status of Irish among the public. To that end, we recognise that there is a need for an effective

marketing campaign to promote every aspect of Irish language publishing, but we are also aware of the major barriers to fostering reading habits in a minority language and we wish to develop a better understanding of them.

2.4.1 Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge (Irish Language Books Programme)

Through various schemes, the Irish Language Books Programme (Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge) supports independent publishers to supply Irish language books to the market. More research of that market is needed to ascertain the gaps that exist and to establish where is there most demand for Irish language material. That research should include reading habits among young people and adults so that the Irish language books sector can be strategically developed in partnership with the publishers. Foras na Gaeilge will commission comprehensive research about the Irish language books sector to guide that strategic development.

As part of the discussion with both governments regarding the organisation's resources, we will make the case that the Irish Language Books Programme funding should be brought under the core funded system, that is that it should have a permanent budget from both sponsoring departments, instead of the current settlement which is based on ringfenced funding from the Government of Ireland alone. Foras na Gaeilge's work in this important area includes the Irish language community throughout the island and abroad, and it is vitally important that Irish speakers have reading opportunities locally and in the wider community. It is a basic necessity to develop that part of the work of Foras na Gaeilge strategically.

Foras na Gaeilge will seek to build on the worthwhile publicity work already done to develop a comprehensive marketing programme in partnership with the publishers and the shops to promote excellent books among the public. That programme will include a strong digital aspect and media material broadcasters/providers will be influenced to give more publicity to critical reviewing. we will also seek to increase partnership work with Children's Books Ireland and Laureate na nÓg to draw attention to books and reading for young people.

The *Scríobh Leabhar* project has been a great success so far in inspiring primary school children to write Irish language books of their own. We will seek to add greatly to the resources spent on that scheme and it will be developed through the language planning process, especially in the Gaeltacht Service Towns and in Irish Language Networks.

Among the other proposals we will be seeking to build on during this strategic period which will help foster reading and writing are accelerated reading schemes, the mentoring scheme for writers, extra training for literary writers and editors, and accessibility in various formats such as audiobooks.

2.4.2 Áis

Áis is the Foras na Gaeilge book distribution system that ensures that books reach bookshops throughout the country. During the lifetime of the *Strategic Direction*, we will build on the resources available to Áis, especially in the field of technology, to develop this necessary aspect of our work. Foras na Gaeilge will seek to implement recommendations that came from the close examination of the Irish language writing, publishing and reading sector in the report published by the Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking Community in 2023.

2.4.3 An Gúm

An Gúm is the Foras na Gaeilge publishing house which publishes schoolbooks for the most part. An Gúm will continue their cooperation with other stakeholders such as Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta

(Gaeltacht parents), An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge (Irish-medium materials unit) and An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (Council for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium Education) to recognise the gaps in the provision of educational books. The review of the well-known series for primary schools, *Séideán Sí*, will be completed by the start of the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction* and we will work to ensure that amendments will be implemented, with a particular emphasis on the richness of the Gaeltacht dialects. We will further survey our stakeholders to identify other needs, for example, regarding a programme of reprints and other books for young people which are translations from other languages.

During the lifetime of the *Strategic Direction* we will seek to develop a major project in conjunction with the Department of Education in the South and other interested parties to deal with the challenges with supply of textbooks for second-level schools.

In recent years, An Gúm have published books with the theme of diversity, for example the hardship of immigrants or the change in the make-up of the contemporary family. During the lifetime of the *Strategic Direction*, An Gúm will ensure that this theme is further developed in its publications in order to give a more diverse representation in Irish of Irish and international society. We will also ensure that there is more cooperation between An Gúm and An tÁisaonad to coordinate provision of educational material.

MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

The research on people's attitudes towards languages is one of the fundamental aspects of language planning across the globe. Without a positive attitude, circumstances cannot be created in which a person can learn a target language or in which a person could use the language they already speak more often. But positive views on their own are not enough and there are major obstacles between attitude, ability, and use as the case of Irish clearly demonstrates: despite a majority of the public in the South and a significant portion of the public in the North having a positive view of the language, the level of usage in social situations outside of the education system is still very low outside of the Gaeltacht. In the Gaeltacht itself, Irish is only a community language in a small number of areas and continues to erode over time. Foras na Gaeilge believes that it is necessary to foster positive attitudes among all of the public to support the circumstances in which more Irish will be learned, acquired and used and we are making continuing efforts to that end since our foundation in 1999.

3.1   Awareness

There is a continuing need for an awareness campaign among the public on themes such as the advantages of bilingualism, immersion education, opportunities for the use of Irish and language rights. Despite historical efforts of Foras na Gaeilge and the Lead Organisations to reverse or mitigate erroneous opinions, misunderstandings and sometimes hostility remain in respect of Irish among a section of the public. In light of diversity in society in both jurisdictions we are very aware that there is a need for a new approach to influence people who were not born in Ireland and are of different ethnic backgrounds or who do not identify with an Irish identity. This is associated with immigrants throughout the country and with a large proportion of the PUL community in the north.

As stated at 2.2.2 and 2.3.1 above, Foras na Gaeilge will work in this strategic period on awareness campaigns aimed at these target groups and we will demonstrate that the Irish language is a positive resource for inclusion which belongs to all living in Ireland and that it has nothing to do with exclusivity. These campaigns will include different levels of ability and geography: for example, a national campaign could be run parallel with local initiatives in the Language Planning Areas and there are possibilities for developing campaigns aimed at encouraging competent speakers to use more Irish as well as others for learners who do not speak much Irish yet. We will also work on a campaign to inform the public about the employment and innovation opportunities in Irish to convince people to give the language a more important place in their lives.

3.2   The Irish language abroad

It is a cause of celebration for us that Irish is an international language that is spoken beyond the bounds of Ireland and that people all over the globe are interested in learning and using. We recognise the significant advantages which the Irish language gained when it was given full status as an official working language in the European Union. As regards language attitudes, that decision greatly enhanced the status of Irish, which is now on an equal level with other official languages of Europe, encouraging the view that there is an extra economic and cultural value associated with it. As a result, there are excellent employment opportunities available for people who have an advanced ability in Irish, an additional encouragement to foster a positive view of the language. Our terminology staff in conjunction with the voluntary members of the Terminology Committee are working regularly already with representatives from all the European institutions to coordinate the development of the Irish language technology and major progress has already been made in this area in recent years.

We will work in conjunction with the Government of Ireland during the period of this *Strategic Direction* to further publicise the advantages of official status for the Irish language in the EU. We will also work to tackle the challenges of recruiting translators and especially interpreters and, as per our resources available, we will strategically support the development of the sector, for example by awarding scholarships.

We also recognise the opportunities created by initiatives of the Government of Ireland to teach Irish at third level in North America, the Irish language programmes in partnership with the Fulbright Commission and the Ireland-Canada University Foundation. There is great value to these programmes in increasing awareness of the Irish language in the institutions themselves and in the surrounding communities and they create another attractive employment opportunity for young Irish language graduates from Ireland. We will support the publicising of these programmes in the networks in which we are active, and will encourage groups that work for the Irish language in North America and in other places to apply for our support schemes.

Through the Colmcille programme (see 2.3.7 above), we will continue to increase awareness of the Gaelic languages in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man.

3.3   Influence and advice

Foras na Gaeilge takes very seriously its legislative function to advise the administrations in both jurisdictions, public bodies and other private and voluntary organisations on the Irish language. That function is an integral part of the work that needs to be done to foster a more positive view of the Irish language among the public authorities and in other organisations. It is important that they are aware of legislative developments and government policies, and aware of the opportunities associated with that. As the principal national Irish language organisation, we will continue to lobby for the language at different levels during this strategic period.

We intend during the lifetime of the *Strategic Direction* to develop a new model to influence our sponsoring departments in a more co-ordinated way, especially in light of the work on new government strategies for Irish in both jurisdictions. That model will be used to develop strategic major themes to gain the support of the departments to implement them.

We will strengthen our cooperation with local authorities and cultural bodies in both jurisdictions, we will remind them of the legislative duties they have and we will advise them regarding their implementation. We will continue to take a leadership role in the Cultural Organisations Forum and in the Local Authorities Forum.

We will ensure that we have representation at all times on government advisory committees and that we come before the Oireachtas and the Assembly as necessary to explain our work. We will take a proactive role regarding the language legislation in both jurisdictions, we will work in close cooperation with the Office of the Language Commissioner and we will participate in the process to establish such an office in the North.

We are very aware of the value of exchanging information about good practice in other countries where a minority language is spoken and our active participation in the trans-European forums, such as the Network for the Promotion of Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) and the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) is a cause of pride for us. We will ensure that this participation continues and that we will seize the opportunity to foster closer contacts with representatives from other governments/authorities, especially in the sociolinguistic contexts which are similar to the case of Irish, such as Wales and the Basque Country.

3.4   Research

The development of research on the Irish language is one of the legislative functions of Foras na Gaeilge and we have projects under various themes planned during the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*.

The successor of the *Public Attitudes to the Irish Language* (2015), the major 10-year research project, is to be published at the start of the lifetime of the *Strategic Direction* and we will use the outcome of that work to shape our policies in the coming period.

In light of the importance of media in the context of the transformation of society as a whole, we will continue to cooperate with Coimisiún na Meán, we will support the implementation of the recommendations of the review on the landscape of the Irish language media and we will commission other research as needed.

We will develop new research on the use of languages on the street and in public places in the Gaeltacht Service Towns and in the Irish Language Networks, based on similar work in the Basque Country in the last 30 years. To that end, we will continue with our valuable cooperation with the Basque research body Soziolinguistika Klusterra.

We will continue to commission research on the development of Irish among businesses to promote the Irish language in economic affairs.

We will strengthen the cooperation with the Central Statistics Office and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and, in partnership with them, we will publish special research reports based on census results regarding Irish language ability and use. That research will be valuable to give additional strategic direction for the language planning process.

In the context of the discussion of constitutional changes on the island and possible implications for Irish, we will form a partnership with other research bodies, such as the *Analysing and Researching Ireland North and South* project of the Royal Irish Academy to collect evidence.

We will commission other appropriate research in the same period, especially on key new themes in this *Strategic Direction* such as technology and diversity.

MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: ORGANISATIONAL GOVERNANCE

There has been a large gap in the provision of resources to Foras na Gaeilge since the organisation was established in 1999, which has prevented us from achieving some of our strategic aims during the year and greatly limited our organisational development. Since 2014, the lack of resources has limited the Partnership Approach and the operation of effective policies in respect of the Irish language in both jurisdictions. The political, economic and social context in which we are working has changed beyond measure since 1999 and will change more in the period of this *Strategic Direction*, especially in the areas of technology and society. Foras na Gaeilge will be hoping that the challenges with Foras na Gaeilge core funding will be tackled and that a more sustainable and effective structure will be put in place in the years ahead. 25 years after the establishment of Foras na Gaeilge it is timely that the internal structure of the organisation be reviewed to see if it is fit for its purpose in the 2025-2030 period. As regards governance, the reporting duties are more diverse and challenging and there is a need to bring policies and procedures of the organisation up to date to cater to the needs of the era.

4.1 Resources

The appropriate provision of resources, both budget and staff, to cater to the organisation's strategic plans is the greatest priority of Foras na Gaeilge in the coming period. In light of political instability in the jurisdiction of the Executive, there has been continuing uncertainty about the organisation's core funding for years, which has significantly limited our ability not only to complete our work effectively but also to carry out midterm or long-term planning. Subject to an external advisors' report in 2022 that recommended that 20 extra posts be created in the organisation, we will continue with high-level discussions with both governments so that the main objectives of this *Strategic Direction* can be achieved in line with the organisation's vision and mission in the coming period.

4.2   Structure and systems

4.2.1 Organisational structure

In the coming period, we will carry out a review of the structure of Foras na Gaeilge, which has been in place since the foundation of the organisation in 1999. This review will aim to agree an amended structure that will clarify the functions and key responsibilities of the organisation and management team to ensure that we can achieve our vision and mission.

4.2.2 Human resources

Foras na Gaeilge has been severely challenged in relation to human resources in recent years, especially in the lowest employment grades. That challenge is more severe still due to full employment and the cost of living, especially in Dublin. It is yet more difficult to find qualified staff when there is an Irish language requirement, especially in specialist areas such as technology. Before the start of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge intensified the development of the human resources division in the organisation and during this strategic period, we will agree a staff development programme which will include areas such as induction, language enrichment, in-service training and extra support in areas such as equality and diversity. A review will be conducted in this period also of the Staff Development and Performance Improvement System (FFFF) which has been in place since 2014.

4.2.3 Internal systems

The annual report is the shop window of every organisation and it is necessary that it be clear, readable, and attractive to its audience and that it can be used to promote a positive image. In 2022, a review was undertaken of the structure and content of the annual report so that it would present the work of Foras na Gaeilge to the public in a clearer way and that it could be used as an aid to influence a wide range of stakeholders. That development will continue during this *Strategic Direction* and a review will be carried out of the structure and content of the Corporate Plan and the Business Plan also.

As a response to the transformation in the governance context, a review will be carried out of all Foras na Gaeilge policies and procedures to ensure that they are fit for their purpose and up to date. Priority will be given to policies on climate, equality and data protection.

During the period of the *Strategic Direction*, it will be ensured that the new online grants management system will be in place effectively and that it will work at a high level of performance which will be of benefit to both Foras na Gaeilge and grantees.

4.3 Evaluation

In 2022, Foras na Gaeilge commissioned external researchers to carry out an independent review of 6 of the organisation's schemes/projects. The aim of the review was to carry out an independent valuation of the schemes and suggest recommendations for improvement, to ensure that they influence language behaviour and that expenditure of public money and the performance of Foras na Gaeilge functions is effective.

The outcomes of that review will be put in place during the lifetime of this *Strategic Plan* and other research will be commissioned to carry out an evaluation of further schemes/projects. Emphasis will be placed in the next stage on getting a more detailed insight into how one of the main functions of Foras na Gaeilge is performing: promotion of the Irish language in speech and in writing in public life.

A review of the Partnership Approach was underway before the implementation of this *Strategic Direction* and those results will be available in 2025. Foras na Gaeilge will prioritise the implementation of the recommendations arising from that review which is highly important for the Irish language sector. Depending on the results of the review, we will ensure that the Language Development Forum and the Partnership Forum are functioning effectively and regularly in the coming strategic period.

Based on that valuation project and on other research, Foras na Gaeilge will develop a deeper review of the use of Irish in society, both spoken and written. This will be done in the in the following ways:

- Begin research on the use of languages on the street and in public places (see 3.4 above);
- Carry out a detailed examination of the two censuses in partnership with the appropriate agencies (see 3.4 above);
- Carry out a detailed examination of the efficacy of other schemes which aim to increase the use of Irish;
- Implement the recommendations of the major research project on public attitude which will be published in 2025 (see 3.4 above).

4.4 Technical infrastructure

The technical context is changing at a blistering pace over time in such a way that it is impossible to predict what it will look like by 2030. As well as supporting the implementation of the *Digital Plan for*

the Irish Language to support the promotion of Irish in society (see 1.2.2 above), Foras na Gaeilge will develop in the period ahead the Digital Transformation Strategy within the organisation to ensure that all divisions and all employees can take full advantage of the new opportunities created by digital technology, especially artificial intelligence. Our aim is that this strategy will greatly increase the organisation's efficacy and that it will increase our ability to put in place the Foras na Gaeilge vision and mission.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this *Strategic Direction* depends on effective co-operation with all Foras na Gaeilge stakeholders, especially the sponsoring departments and the Irish language Lead Organisations. It also depends on the appropriate provision of resources being available, both budget and staff, and especially on further awareness among the public regarding the vision and mission of the organisation. All Foras na Gaeilge staff must work in co-operation with each other to achieve the major strategic objectives. During the lifetime of this *Strategic Direction*, Foras na Gaeilge will need to grow and change according to the planning context, to cater to the needs of the people we serve and the development of both technology and society.

The senior management of Foras na Gaeilge will take responsibility for the implementation of the *Strategic Direction* under the direction of the Chief Executive. There will be a need for an implementation plan, which will align with other strategic planning cycles such as the Corporate Plan and especially the annual Business Plans in which more detailed goals will be specified. The Corporate Planning staff will report on the progress of the *Strategic Plan* and will establish a Strategy Implementation Group to monitor the implementation.