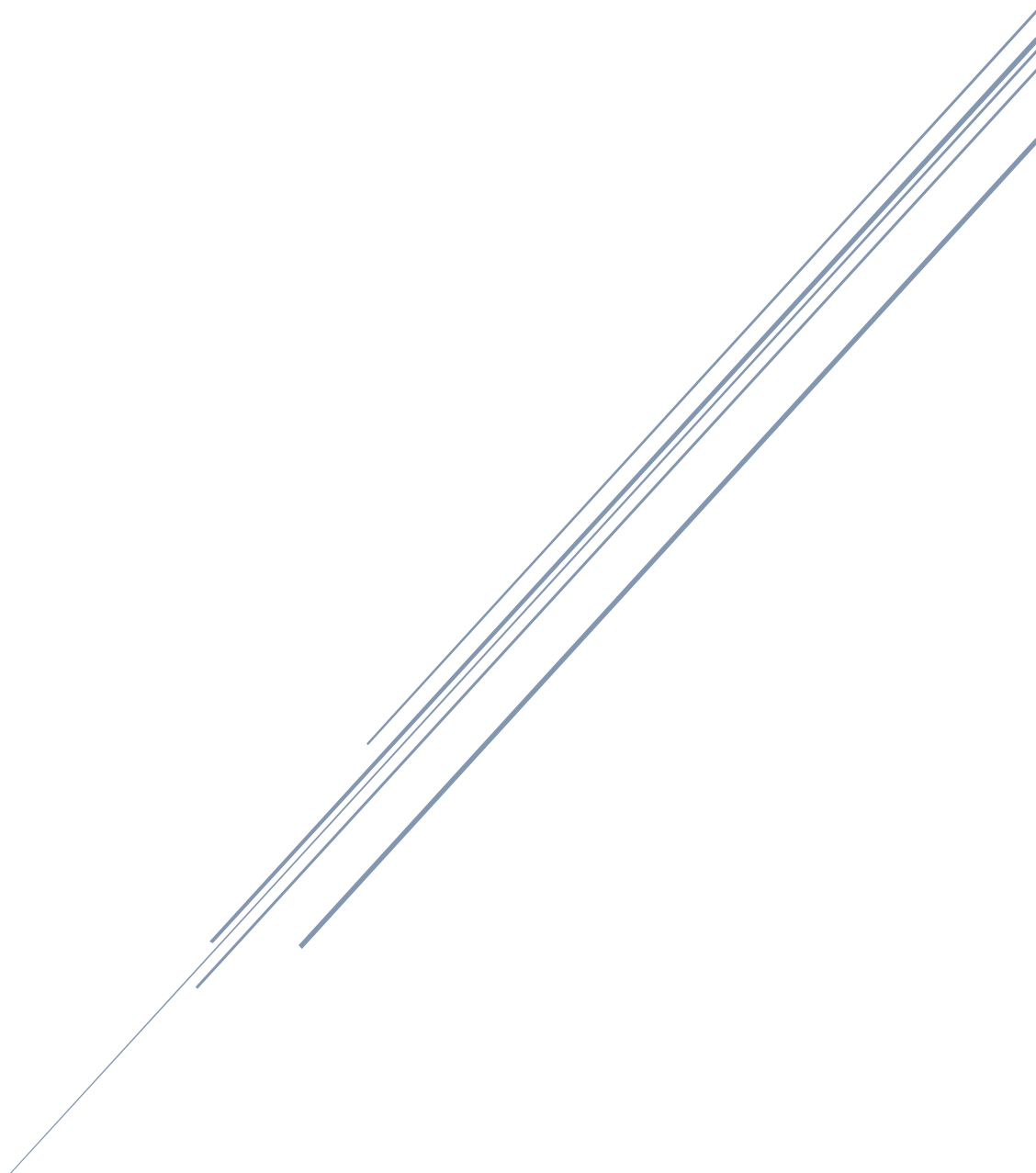


ENSURING EFFECTIVE TEACHER SUPPLY IN THE IRISH-MEDIUM SECTOR

*A proposed action plan to address the dearth of teaching staff at primary
and post-primary level in the Irish-medium sector*



Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
August 2023



Ensuring Effective Teacher Supply in the Irish-medium Sector

The paper below was written to initiate conversations around the interventions required to ensure effective teacher supply in the Irish-medium sector. The projections contained within are based on current data and previous trends in relation to the Irish-medium population, however, some elements are anecdotal.

In order to appropriately address this issue, a collaborative approach is needed with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Department of Education, Higher Education Institutes and other relevant stakeholders coming together to plan effectively for future needs.

As identified in the following paper, the needs are particularly pressing at post-primary level. Therefore, as part of the 2023/24 programme of work to address the recommendations in the *A Fair Start* report, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will be conducting research into the current and projected staffing needs of Irish-medium post-primary schools and to create a long-term plan for future teacher provision at post-primary level. This will be shared with all stakeholders in due course.

The Irish-medium Sector

The Irish-medium (IM) sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the education sector with a growth of 8.5% over the last five years and a moderate projected growth of 4% for the next five years.

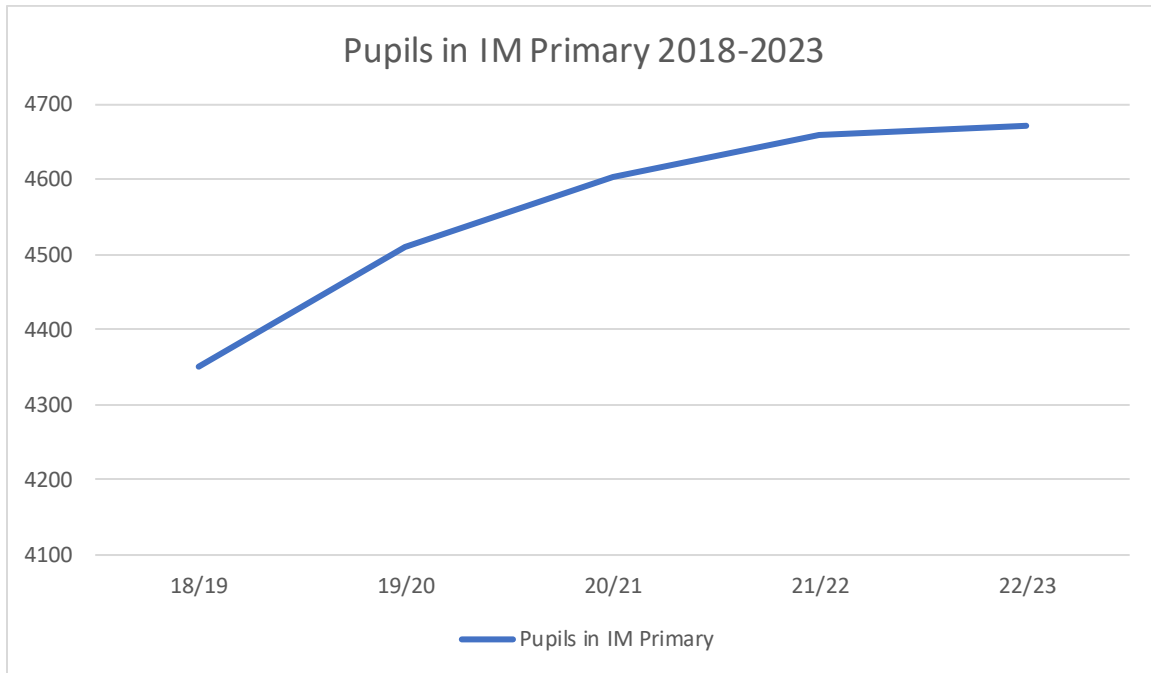
With the establishment of the first integrated IM provision in recent years, IM provision now exists under all school management types.

The availability of suitably qualified teaching staff is currently one of the greatest challenges facing the sector and the lack of teaching staff is, and will continue to be, a key constraint on the development of Irish-medium education.

IM Primary Provision

Context

At primary level, there are currently 28 freestanding IM schools and 7 IM units, housed within English-medium (EM) schools. The growth in pupil numbers over the last 5 years is shown in the graph below.



Challenges in Teacher Supply

Teacher supply issues are currently impacting all Irish-medium primary schools. Where this issue had previously had a greater impact on rural schools and certain areas, particularly those in counties/areas where provision was limited or isolated from other areas, it is now being seen across the sector. The lack of available substitute teachers is one of the most pressing issues at primary level.

This has become more critical in recent years with issues including:

- instances of schools having to combine multiple classes in order to stay open, greatly impacting on the provision of the curriculum and wellbeing of staff;
- a lack of Irish-medium supply teachers to cover short-term illnesses and absences;
- the decimation of principal release; one third of the sector's principals are employed as teaching principals and agreed principal-release time has been non-existent due to the lack of available cover;
- full-time principals having to cover classes on both an ad-hoc and long-term basis;
- initiatives such as Engage, SEN and Wellbeing funding not being implemented as needed due to lack of human resource;
- access to TPL constrained by lack of supply cover.

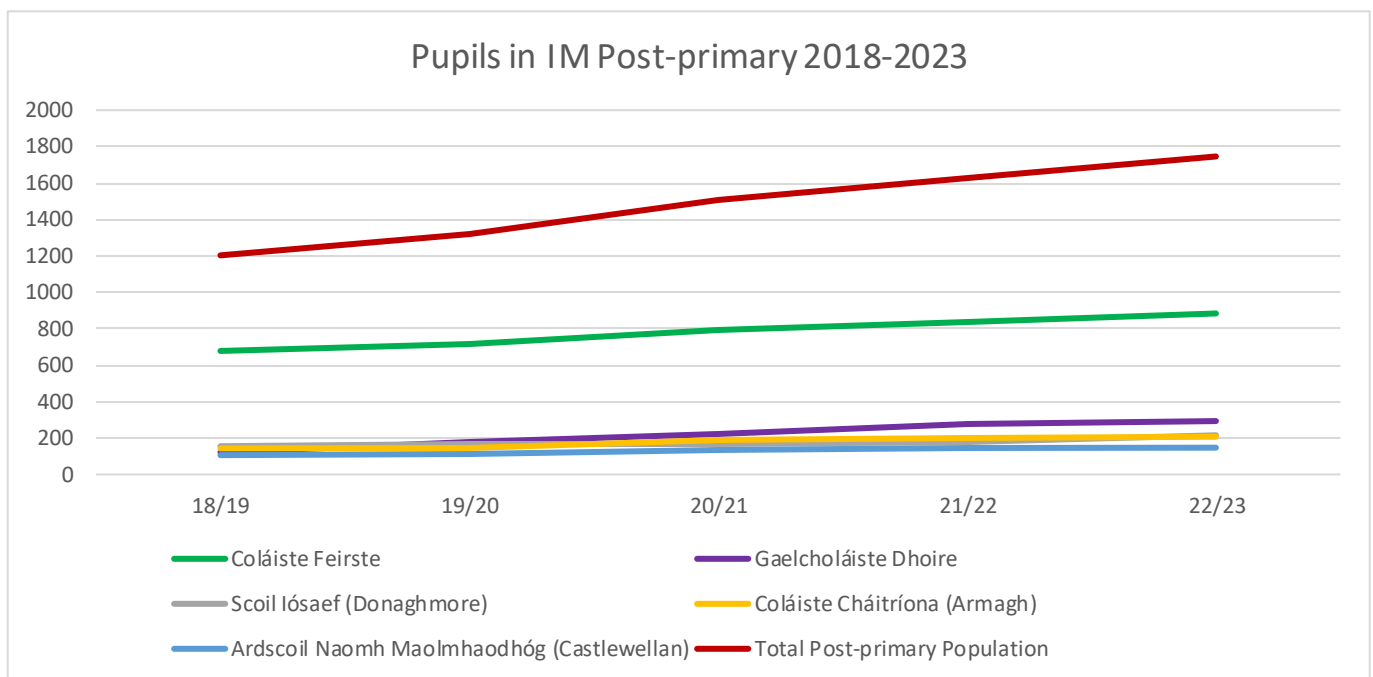
IM Post-primary Provision

Context

At post-primary level, there are 2 freestanding IM post-primary schools in NI; Coláiste Feirste in Belfast and Gaelcholáiste Dhoire in Dungiven.

There are also 3 post-primary IM streams in EM schools; St. Joseph's Donaghmore, a Voluntary Grammar, and two Catholic Maintained post-primaries – St. Catherine's, Armagh and St. Malachy's, Castlewellan.

The growth in each post-primary over the last five years can be seen in the graph below.



As the IM sector continues to grow, it is clear that the current Initial Teacher Education offering is not producing adequate numbers of post-primary teachers, particularly subject specialists in key areas such as English, Mathematics, Sciences, Technology & Design and Home Economics.

Projecting teacher supply in relation to subject specialisms is particularly complex, however, with the current small cohort of Irish-medium post-primary schools, this would be a worthwhile exercise. For the purposes of this paper, however, post-primary need has been reflected on a general basis.



IM Initial Teacher Education

Primary Qualifications

At primary level, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is provided by St. Mary's University College Belfast. There are currently two routes available:

- A 4-year BEd Hons (Bilingual) programme (18 places annually)
- A 1-year IM PGCE programme (20 places annually)

At primary level, the challenge of teacher supply is not currently due to insufficient numbers of teachers being trained each year, although this requires regular review and foresight in relation to future planning.

On paper, the supply of teachers for Irish-medium primary schools is currently relatively healthy. The rate of attrition, however, is extremely concerning. The system appears to be hemorrhaging newly-qualified teachers before they even enter into our classrooms.

Whilst there is a lack of actual data in relation to the destinations of newly-qualified IM teachers, anecdotal evidence shows an average retention rate of only 40% for cohorts coming through ITE routes in the last ten years. The pandemic has had a positive impact in relation to retention, however, previous patterns are now reemerging.

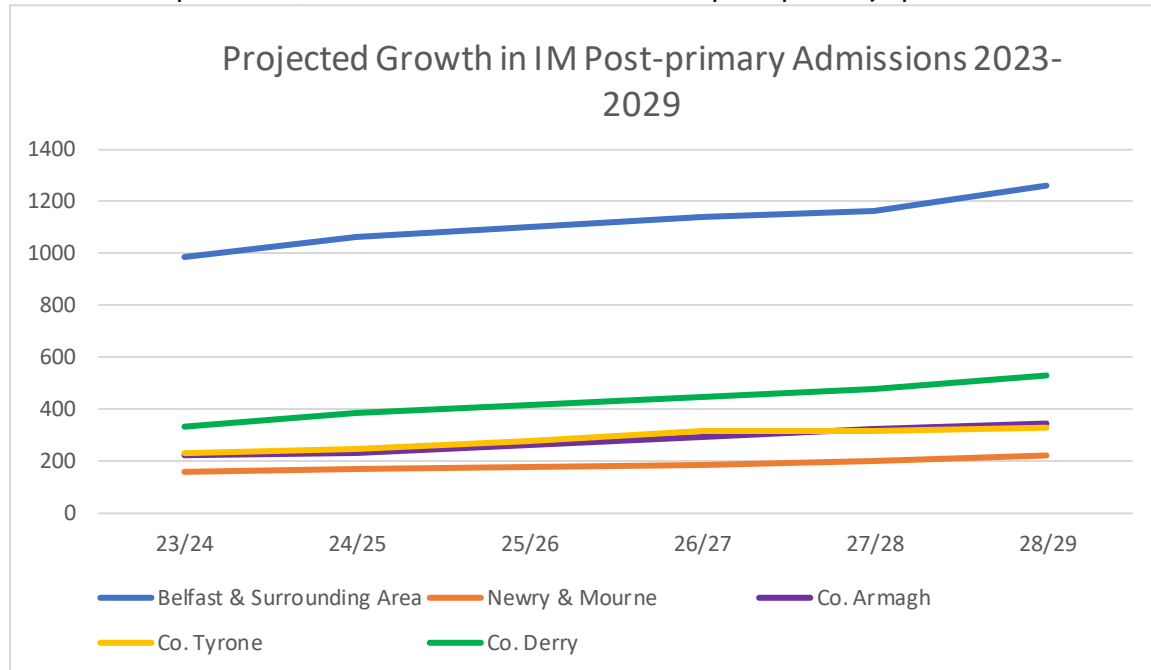
The factors causing such high attrition are as follows:

- There is a significant disconnect in the progression of graduates from IM ITE in NI to IM primary schools in NI due, in particular, to the loss of the IM BEd and PGCE graduates to work abroad, particularly in the Middle East. During the 22/23 school year, a number of careers fairs took place with international schools and organisations in attendance, promoting the opportunities abroad. There was a distinct lack of equivalent marketing for opportunities in our own jurisdiction with little incentive for practitioners to stay here.
- There are further losses in relation to those taking up teaching positions in the south, especially amongst those who live in the border counties. With better pay and conditions, it is deemed more advantageous to take up employment in that jurisdiction.
- Finally, an average of 15% of graduates take up employment in the English-medium sector, where workload is less and support is more. The recently commissioned QUB study into the additional workload of IM practitioners will give an important insight into this imbalance and these findings are due to be published in early Autumn 2023.

Post-primary Qualifications

The current model of initial teacher training for IM post-primary education is not meeting the needs of the sector in relation to the provision of a broad range, and a sufficient reserve, of specialist subject teachers.

Projections below show the continued growth of the IM post-primary sector, in already-established provision, and in areas where new post-primary provision is desired. ¹



At post-primary level, there is currently one ITE route:

- A Post-primary PGCE, facilitated by UU & QUB, with an IM Enhancement Certificate offered in conjunction with SMUCB (8 places annually)

This course poses particular challenges in relation to the recruitment of ITE students for identified subject specialisms. Rather than apply for a bespoke IM course, applicants have to apply online either to QUB and UU and indicate that they are interested in the Irish Language and Irish-medium Enhancement Course.

Additionally, the subject offerings at undergraduate level do not provide pathways for students to undertake study in Irish with a subject specialism. In QUB, students can study French with a multitude of subjects including Mathematics and Physics. The offering for equivalent joint degrees with Irish, however, is more limited.

The course, introduced over 10 years ago as an interim solution, is no longer sufficient to meet the growing needs of the sector and should be replaced with a fully mainstreamed course, allowing more autonomy in the recruitment of students.

The pathway into this course should also be underpinned by a broader offering at undergraduate level in those institutions where Irish Language programmes are offered. Students could therefore undertake a joint undergraduate degree in Irish and Maths for example, equipping them with the subject specialism in advance of post-graduate teaching qualification.

¹ These projections have been made in accordance with geographical areas as opposed to individual schools. It is important to note that at least two new post-primary provisions are being scoped; a second stand-alone post-primary provision in North Belfast and a new stand-alone post-primary provision in Tyrone.



Additionally, English-medium ITE students can undertake a four-year BEd programme with an identified subject specialism in SMUCB and Stranmillis. As the IM post-primary sector continues to grow, an equivalent BEd post-primary programme is needed for IMITE students. As an interim and immediate step this could be done as an extension to the existing English-medium BEd course at SMUCB by increasing/adjusting admissions to the EM provision for pupils with Irish and immersion-specific and language development modules included as part of course content.

Current Vacancies

Whilst the current vacancies within the Irish-medium sector is a fluid and everchanging situation, the volume of jobs being advertised within the sector has markedly increased in preparation for the 2023/24 school year. The increase can be attributed to a number of factors including growth of the sector, an increased number of teachers leaving the Irish-medium sector and the readvertisement of existing unfilled vacancies.

As of June 2023, there were 33 vacancies to be filled in the 35 primary settings. 2 of these were part-time positions and the rest full-time. A number of these positions were readVERTISEMENTS due to a failure to appoint initially.

At post-primary level, there are 16 positions to be filled across the 5 post-primary settings. Over half of these positions are for subject specialisms such as Maths, Science subjects, Drama and Technology. With only 8 post-primary ITE graduates graduating this summer, the undersupply is stark. If unable to appoint appropriately qualified teachers, post-primaries will be relying on non-subject specialist post-primary and primary-qualified graduates to take up these positions. The unfortunate reality is that a number of the positions will remain unfilled for the coming school year.

Future Need

The tables on the following pages show the projected number of teachers that will be needed to staff a growing sector. These projections are based on a realistic growth scenario over the next five years.

In the first instance, the figures consider the general growth of the sector in relation to the current pupil-teacher ratio to inform the number of new full-time teachers needed each year, including additional supply teachers.

The figures in the second part of the tables are based on anticipated future demand in relation to the establishment of new provision and anecdotal evidence collected from schools regarding those leaving employment within the sector.

Although not concrete data, the small nature of the sector allows for the collation of such information to give an informed prediction of future teacher supply within the sector.



Additional Teacher Needs at Primary for Next Five Years

		22/23 (Actual Enrolment)	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	
Predicted IM Primary School Population (Based on Realistic Scenario)		4664	4756	4890	5033	5237	5462	
Estimated Total Number of Primary Teachers Needed in the Sector (based on current PTR)	(Primary PTR: 22.3)	209	213	219	226	235	245	
Additional Teachers Required as a Result of:								
Growth Alone		-	4	6	7	9	10	
Supply Teachers Needed as a Result of Growth Alone (Based on 15%)		-	1	1	1	1	1	
Additional Statutory Pre-school need (Estimate)			3	1	1	1	1	
New Primary School Provision			0	1	3	5	8	
New Specialist Provision			1	2	2	2	3	
Retirement of Current Teaching Staff (Based on general average of 2.5%)			5	5	6	6	6	
Teachers leaving the sector (based on 21/22 data) ²			5	5	5	5	5	
Teachers Taking up Employment in Other Educational Roles ³			5	5	6	6	7	
Existing Substitute Shortage ⁴								15
Estimated Total Number of ITE Graduates Required Each Year at Primary Level			24	26	31	35	41	

² This figure is based on anecdotal evidence of teachers who have left Irish-medium primary schools for employment outside of the teaching profession.

³ Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is currently advocating for IM-specific roles within EA and other support bodies. If implemented by the system, this would have implications on current and future teacher supply/need.

⁴ This figure is based on feedback from schools unable to appoint teaching staff for Engage programme.



Additional Teacher Needs at Post-primary for Next Five Years

		22/23 (Actual Enrolment)	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	
Predicted IM Post-primary School Population (Based on Realistic Scenario)		1746	1937	2110	2237	2384	2494	
Estimated Total Number of Post-primary Teachers Needed in the Sector (based on current PTR)	(Post-primary PTR: 15.7)	111	123	134	142	152	159	
Additional Teachers Required as a Result of:								
Growth Alone		-	12	11	8	9	7	
Supply Teachers Needed as a Result of Growth Alone		-	2	2	1	1	1	
New Post-primary Provision			0	0	3	5	6	
New Specialist Provision			1	1	1	1	1	
Retirement of Current Teaching Staff (Based on general average of 2.5%)			3	3	4	4	4	
Teachers leaving the sector (based on 21/22 data) ⁵			5	5	5	5	5	
Teachers Taking up Employment in Other Educational Roles ⁶			2	2	3	3	3	
Existing Substitute Shortage								10
Estimated Total Number of ITE Graduates Required Each Year at Primary Level			25	24	25	28	27	

⁵ This figure is based on anecdotal evidence of teachers who have left Irish-medium primary schools for employment outside of the teaching profession

⁶ Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is currently advocating for IM-specific roles within EA and other support bodies. If implemented by the system, this would have implications on current and future teacher supply/need.



The Need to Oversupply

The 2019 Skills Barometer⁷, published by the Department for the Economy, estimated that 140 teachers too many will be trained in NI each year for the next 10 years. The 2021⁸ equivalent showed that this had reduced to 130, however, the general oversupply is still apparent.

It is clear from the current IM teacher shortage that the Irish-medium sector is going against the current trend. Figures and projections show that a distinct undersupply of Irish-medium teachers exists at post-primary. Whilst supply appears healthy at primary level, with an average of only 40% of graduates entering the sector each year, intervention is needed to ensure adequate numbers of teaching staff both now and in the future.

The Department for the Economy states the need to oversupply to ensure that a healthy workforce exists and to counter market realities such as graduates moving into other areas of study and not entering employment in their chosen area.

A unique advantage of undertaking an Irish-medium teacher training programme is that graduates are qualified to work in both English and Irish-medium. This should be considered in future planning in relation to ITE places.

Planning in Other Immersion Contexts

With the recognised advantages of immersion education, demand for places in immersion schools is increasing in many jurisdictions outside of our own context, creating a need for additional teaching staff as a result.

A number of initiatives have been implemented in the south and in Scotland and Wales to ensure sufficient numbers of teachers to meet the growing demand.

These can be seen in the tables on the pages following.

⁷ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Skills-Barometer-2019-Summary-Report.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-skills-barometer-2021-update>

Scotland	
Current Context	The context in Scotland is the most similar to ours in terms of growth rates and education provision. However, the provision of education is the responsibility of local authorities, who have a statutory duty to ensure that appropriate provision is effective in all areas. They have a number of plans and strategies to ensure this: <i>Gaelic Medium Teacher Education Strategy (2013-2016)</i> , <i>Statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education (2017)</i> , <i>National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023</i>
Initial Teacher Education	<p>1. <u>Undergraduate</u></p> <p>Primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Edinburgh - MA (Hons) Primary Education with Gaelic (Learners) 5 years • University of Edinburgh - MA (Hons) Primary Education with Gaelic (Fluent Speakers) 4 years • University of Strathclyde - BA (Hons) Primary Education 4years • Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI - BA (Hons) Gaelic and Education (Immersion programme) 4 years <p>Post-primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI - BA (Hons) Gaelic and Education (Immersion programme) 4 years <p>2. <u>Postgraduate</u></p> <p>Primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Strathclyde - PGDE Primary Education Gaelic Medium 1 year • University of the Highlands and Islands PGDE Primary: Gaelic Medium 1 year • Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI – PGDE Primary Education (Gaelic) 1 Year <p>Post-primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Strathclyde - PGDE Secondary Education Gaelic Medium 1 year • University of the Highlands and Islands PGDE Secondary: Gaelic Medium 1 year • Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI – PGDE Secondary Education (Gaelic) 1 Year
Actions/Policies to increase provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bòrd na Gàidhlig Gaelic Education Grants Scheme – a support scheme from Bòrd na Gàidhlig to fund some of the above courses.⁹ • ITE Bursary – a bursary of up to £20,000 for non-teachers who wish undertake a PGCE in STEM, Home Economics, Primary and Gaelic subjects.¹⁰ • GTC Scotland Probationer Scheme – a guaranteed position for newly qualified teachers for one year with a starting salary of £27,500. • Bòrd na Gàidhlig (funded by the Department) employs a recruitment officer to co-ordinate teacher recruitment and ensure appropriate provision.

⁹ www.gaidhlig.scot

¹⁰ www.stembursaryscotland.co.uk

Wales			
Current Context	The context is quite different in Wales. They have different approaches to Welsh-medium education provision; Welsh-medium schools, two-stream schools (Dual-Stream), bilingual schools, English-medium schools where Welsh is a curriculum subject. There is an emphasis on training teachers to deliver both the curriculum through Welsh and the teaching of Welsh as a subject in these schools.		
Initial Teacher Education		Primary	Secondary
	Cardiff Met	X	X
	Aberystwyth Uni	X	X
	Uni Wales Trinity St David's	X	X
	Bangor Uni	X	X
	Uni South Wales		X
	Swansea Uni	X	X
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Salaried PGCE - Open University PGCE while employed as a class assistant (2 years).¹¹ ➤ Part-time PGCE – self-funded but working around your current job (2 years).¹² 	
Actions/Policies to increase provision	<p>The Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme – language development courses at a certain level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry level – for classroom assistants in the English language sector • Primary – for teachers in the English language sector • Higher Level – for teachers in the Welsh language sector who wish to improve their Welsh • High level for assistants - for assistants in the Welsh language sector who wish to improve their Welsh • Welsh in a Year – to free teachers from the English language sector for a year to enable them to teach Welsh (most of these teachers remain in English-medium schools). 		

¹¹ <https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/qualifications/k36>

¹² <https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/qualifications/k36>

The south of Ireland	
Current Context	Immersion settings in the south of Ireland are facing a similar teacher supply shortage. In the past, the crisis was felt in Gaeltacht areas and in specific counties, but it is now felt in all areas. There have been difficulties with specific subjects at post-primary level but it is now a problem across all subject areas.
Initial Teacher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Primary Level</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Irish is taught as a part of all training courses (including training courses through the medium of English only). All teachers at primary level must achieve <i>the Qualification in Irish*</i>, even if they do not wish to teach in a Gaelscoil. ➤ In 2019, Marino was awarded the first and only B.Ed course (in 2023/24 the number of places increased from 30-60) ➤ From September 2023, there will be a new post-graduate course in Trinity College Dublin with 35 places for those who would like to work in a Gaelscoil (primary and post-primary) • <u>Post-Primary Level</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Usually, following a foundation degree in a particular subject, teachers undertake the Professional Master of Education. This is available in English only in Marino, DCU, Mary Immaculate College, Maynooth, Hibernia College and University College Cork. ➤ Previously, it was only possible to do so through the medium of Irish at NUIG. ➤ From September 2023, there will be a new post-graduate course in Trinity College Dublin with 35 places for those who would like to work in a Gaelscoil (primary and post-primary) <p>*For teachers who have registered outside of Ireland the <i>Qualification in Irish can</i> ¹³ be completed through a competency examination or an adaptation or assessment period. A period must also be spent in the Gaeltacht.</p>
Actions/Policies to increase provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ B.Ed. in Irish-Medium Education (Marino) bursary of €1000 per student, campus accommodation in the Irish Language Block, increased employment opportunities. ¹⁴ ➤ Professional Master of Education (NUIG) – bursaries for specific subjects by COGG (i.e. Sciences, Mathematics and Foreign Languages). ➤ The new PGCE course at Trinity College Dublin is subsidised and students only pay €650 in fees. ➤ Up until 2011, teachers received an allowance of €1,785 to teach through Irish. Those teachers employed before 2011 continue to receive this, however, those qualifying after 2011 do not. There are strong indications, however, that this will be reinstated soon due to advocacy in relation to teacher retention and the acknowledgement of the additional competences required by IM teachers.

¹³ [Qualification in Irish | The Irish Language Requirement \(ilrweb.ie\)](http://ilrweb.ie)

¹⁴ https://www.mie.ie/en/study_with_us/undergraduate_programmes/baitsileir_san_oideachas_tri_mhean_na_gaeilge/

Proposed Action Plan to Address Current Shortages and Future Need

The following proposed action plan has been formulated on the basis of those initiatives that are proving successful in other jurisdictions to increase teacher supply. Whilst investment will be needed to implement a number of recommendations, some are cost-neutral and could be progressed without further delay.

Whilst the recommendations have been aligned to relevant bodies, their realisation will require collaboration and support from all stakeholders.

<i>To be implemented by the Department of Education</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of a workforce planning strategy for the IM sector in partnership with DfE, CnaG and relevant stakeholders including universities, managing authorities, and IM schools. This should address both current shortfalls and future need. - This should be underpinned by the appointment of a designated team within DE to deliver and monitor this strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of an Irish-medium post-primary PGCE course and a post-primary B.Ed. course, enabling Irish-medium content to be taken along with other specialist subjects such as Maths, Science and Technology. Pathways into the PGCE course should be underpinned by additional joint-subject offerings at undergraduate level (i.e. Irish with Mathematics, Science Subjects etc...)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The initiation of retention initiatives, i.e. contract-fee scheme, whereby course fees are paid for students with the stipulation that they enter into employment within the sector upon graduation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The utilisation of recruitment initiatives as successfully utilised in Scotland, i.e. bursary awards for undertaking of BEd/PGCE and STEM initiatives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration of supply teacher employment model whereby 'floating' supply teacher is employed in specific areas to cover short-term absences in those schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address the resources gap between that available for EM and the disparity for IM. This would alleviate workload pressures, improve wellbeing and also enhance pupil outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investment in ECT support initiatives, via a three-way partnership between schools, EA as lead TPL partner, and ITE providers to aid retention.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate and appropriate Teacher Professional Learning for IM teachers to improve access to support for teachers as they continue through their careers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher Professional Learning initiatives such as conversion courses to allow non-specialist/general subject teachers to gain the skills and expertise needed to teach specialist subjects in Irish-medium. A similar approach could also be used to allow teachers in English-

<p>medium schools to gain requisite language skills to transfer into employment in Irish-medium.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration of more flexible routes into teaching i.e. Open University part-time or salaried courses. These initiatives have proven successful in Welsh-medium.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revision of the current position of modern languages, including Irish, in the English-medium post-primary curriculum to encourage a greater uptake of Irish at GCSE and A Level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Piloting of an e-Hub Project, as implemented in the south, for the teaching of identified subjects (i.e. Sciences) in Irish-medium post-primary schools.¹⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitation of a secondment scheme to allow English-medium practitioners with Irish-language skills to take up positions in Irish-medium schools on a trial-basis.

<p><i>To be implemented by school management (i.e. principals and Boards of Governors)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools should be enabled to move away from year to year appointments and commit to permanency.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of leadership roles, both middle and senior, within schools. Teachers carrying out these roles should be afforded appropriate teaching allowances.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration of the utilisation of the Teacher Recruitment/Retention allowance (TR268 Form). This should be included in school Salary Policy. Some schools are utilising this retention allowance in the 24/25 school year. These schools have a budget surplus and can therefore cover the financial burden within their delegated budgets. Schools who are currently operating in a deficit should be enabled to award retention allowances.

<p><i>To be implemented by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual marketing campaign aimed at post-primary and university-level Irish students to raise awareness of employment opportunities within the Irish-medium sector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research into workload of IM practitioners to inform advocacy around greater support for Irish-medium practitioners going forward.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research into future post-primary teacher and subject need to inform future planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased governor support in relation to recruitment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administration of a central space for advertisement of employment opportunities within Irish-medium sector.

¹⁵ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/independent-evaluation-gaeltacht-e-hub-pilot-project>