



A national pilot project integrating CLIL in the Transition Year between lower and upper secondary education, Ireland

Curriculum scenario for CLIL in the language classroom and in other subjects

Why is this scenario interesting?

In the Irish curriculum, a Transition Year is offered between lower secondary (ISCED2) and upper secondary education (ISCED3). The [Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026](#) identifies CLIL as an area for focus, and specifically mentions exploring the potential of CLIL in the Transition Year.

A national pilot project integrating CLIL in the Transition Year was introduced in 2019 by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), in collaboration with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Short description:

In Ireland, a Transition Year is offered between lower secondary (ISCED2) and upper secondary education (ISCED3), i.e. at age 15-16. The Transition Year follows the three-year Junior Cycle, in preparation for the two-year Senior Cycle programme. The Transition Year is optional in Ireland but almost all students do it and in many schools it is compulsory. There is no set curriculum during this year (in contrast to all other years in secondary education), so teachers have more freedom to explore new approaches.

Foreign languages in Transition Year: Transition Year provides an opportunity for schools to offer language courses which will build on what students have learned in junior cycle. Transition Year also provides an opportunity for students to take up a new language, which they can then keep on for Leaving Certificate. This is how Japanese (in 31 schools) and Russian (in 17 schools) are currently offered as ab initio subjects, supported by the PPLI. Mandarin Chinese was offered as a Transition Year module in 86 schools in 2016, supported by the Confucius Institutes. A total of 341 schools offered two or more languages in the same year, a pattern this strategy aims to extend to all schools.

On a national level, a strategy for Foreign Languages in Education was launched by the Department of Education in 2017.

[*Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*](#) is described as follows: “While providing high-quality language learning opportunities and promoting competence in both of the official languages, Irish and English, is a very important objective of government, the learning of a range of foreign languages in Ireland must also be targeted. There is a significant opportunity for Ireland to excel on the global stage. Education providers and employers must work together to increase awareness of the importance of gaining proficiency in foreign languages.”

The ‘Languages Connect’ strategy identifies CLIL as an area for focus, and specifically mentions exploring the potential of CLIL in the Transition Year stating that the potential of CLIL should be explored “with a view to extending its use” ([*Languages Connect Strategy*](#), p.23). This is part of Goal 1 “Improve Language Proficiency by Creating a more Engaging Learning Environment”.

A national pilot project was introduced in 2019 by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), in collaboration with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. The CLIL pilot project has been in operation for the past few years in Transition Year. As CLIL is not widely used in Irish schools, this pilot project has focused on training in-service teachers. Each year language teachers, who have a Transition Year language class, are invited to participate in this training. The languages currently offered are French, German, Spanish and Italian, i.e., the main curricular Modern Foreign Language subjects in Ireland. Teaching materials have been designed to suit the context of the Irish TY classroom. A set of materials on the topic of Fair Trade are provided as a starting point. Follow-up training has then been offered to these teachers in subsequent years, with supports to start designing and using their own materials.

In my own teaching, the CLIL programme for French students was introduced for the first time in 2018. Students choosing to participate in this have additional hours of subject content taught through French, in addition to the regular French classes. For the 2022-2023 school year, the students have approximately 3-4 hours of CLIL per week (in addition to 2 hours of French language class).

I work with subject specialists to identify areas that would be worth focusing on with the students – topics and themes that could support students in preparation for Senior Cycle in their subjects (without specifically covering topics in advance, as this could lead to other issues later). The programme covers European Studies, History, Geography, Fair Trade and Sustainable Fashion.

How does the scenario support transitions?

Transition Year, as evidenced by its very name, has educational transitions at its core. This year-long part of secondary education is based on the ideas of supporting students as they make the move from lower secondary (ISCED2) to upper secondary education (ISCED3). There is no centralised curriculum for Transition Year in Ireland, so the ways in which this transition is supported vary from school to school. The CLIL LOTE pilot project, as established by the Languages Connect Strategy, has been working to take transitions in a range of (non-language) subject areas into account, so that students can be better prepared in these areas, as well as in their chosen language, for Senior Cycle (ISCED3). The curriculum hereby establishes *vertical coherence* designing CLIL LOTE transitions from lower (ISCED2) to upper secondary education (ISCED3).

	Aims of language learning	Aims of content learning	Approaches/methods
Transition Year between lower secondary (ISCED2) and upper secondary education (ISCED3)	In Transition Year, the aims of language learning are largely to consolidate the learning from ISCED2, so that most students would be at A2 level by the end of this year (and weaker students would consolidate their A1 level).	Transition Year in Ireland is an opportunity to try subjects out before making choices for Senior Cycle. Content teachers aim to bridge gaps between the Junior and Senior Cycle curricula in their classes. The programme covers e.g., European Studies, History, Geography, Fair Trade and Sustainable Fashion. Aims of content are related to the subjects.	<p>A range of approaches and methods are used in the TY CLIL LOTE classroom, reflecting what is typically used in the MFL class, in the subject classes and Transition Year in general, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions, • Games, • Puzzles, • Project-based learning (producing written projects, posters and presenting orally in front of an audience of classmates) • Online research • Research using books, maps and other classroom materials • Creating a portfolio of work (as part of overall TY portfolio) <p>Visits, where possible, to environments supporting the everyday use of this language (e.g. Alliance Française library) and also to other areas of the school, e.g. Home Economics kitchens, for different types of lessons.</p>

Short description how the curriculum scenario establishes links between CLIL and plurilingual education,

The project in Transition Year for CLIL LOTE is currently still in the pilot phase and work so far has largely focused on the target languages. The pilot project does not specifically identify the support of other languages, including home languages, as a goal. However, there is also a major focus in the 'Languages Connect' strategy on languages other than the traditional target languages of the Irish MFL classroom, as Goal 2 looks at ways to "Diversify and Increase the Uptake of Languages Learned and Cultivate the Languages of the New Irish". Although there is currently no specific focus on plurilingual education in my experiences with CLIL in Ireland, we do have natural references to Irish throughout MFL classes, as the vast majority of students have Irish as either L1 or L2.

Suggestions for further development:

There are difficulties across the Irish school system at the moment with teacher supply and particularly with language teacher supply. Even in a school like my own, which has been very supportive of the CLIL initiative we have in place, it is uncertain from year to year whether or not the teaching hours will be available to facilitate it.

In Ireland we don't tend to have subject specialists who are able to teach through another language, so the focus is on training language teachers in subject areas. More support in this would always be welcome.

In the long term, CLIL would have a lot more possibilities to enhance overall language learning in Ireland, if it were available from an earlier stage, e.g in the first year of secondary school as part of the transition from primary.

Furthermore, CLIL classes could increase their focus on plurilingual education, when CLIL LOTE has become more established, and teachers were more confident and experienced with it, in order to integrate other languages than the target language, e.g., by supporting home languages. PPLI have done great work in the past few years to support the development of teaching materials, and to support the building of skills among teachers to create and develop their own materials.

References:

Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026

<https://eurireland.ie/assets/uploads/2018/02/Foreign-languages-strategy-2017.pdf>

Author:

Gemma Kelly, French/CLIL teacher Manor House School and Associate with Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), gemma.kelly@ppli.ie