



## **Research Report:**

Review of Uptake of A-Level Irish in  
English-Medium Post-Primary Schools  
November 2015

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Rationale

A-Level Irish is regarded by the Irish-Medium (IM) community as an important barometer of ability to use Irish outside of education settings. A-Level Irish is also the gateway for many students wishing to study Irish at third level, and therefore one of the main sources of employees for the Irish-Medium schools sector and for Irish-language organisations based in N. Ireland, such as: Foras na Gaeilge, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and several other voluntary Irish-language organisations.

In spite of this, concerns have been raised with the number of students studying Irish at A-Level. Specifically, it has been stated that there has been a marked decrease in student uptake, post GCSE Level, over the last number of years in both the Irish, and, (in particular), the English-Medium schools sectors. Additionally, it is thought that there has been a gradual decline in the overall number of students who study GCSE Irish, which in turn, has had a knock on effect on the number of students studying Irish at A-Level. Again it is considered that this decrease is much more evident in the English-Medium school's sector.

CCEA's Research & Statistics (R&S) Unit were specifically commissioned by the Department of Education (DE) to undertake research into the issues raised.

## Key Findings (GCSE & A-Level Irish)

1. Despite the concerns raised, the overall number of A-Level Irish entries in English-Medium schools and across all schools types, has maintained a level of consistency since the 2007/8 academic year. The number of entries and their proportional share of the total candidature has fluctuated year-on-year; however, since there has been no logical direction over time regarding the number and proportion of students choosing to study Irish, a decline cannot be concluded or observed.
2. Additionally, when progression is taken into consideration it was found that continuation rates have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level. Again, fluctuations were noted year-on-year;

however, proportional decreases were not observed, suggesting there has been no real decline in the proportion of students studying Irish at this level.

3. Responses to the primary research suggest that Irish engenders extended skills in communication, reading and personal skills e.g. team work, problem solving and presentation skills. Respondents believe the subject supports bilingualism and improves and enhances students' cultural awareness. Students choose Irish as a subject as it is viewed as a native language and an important part of culture and family life. A love of Irish as a language, wanting to improve knowledge of the subject and a general ability in Irish were also given as reasons for choosing this subject.
4. The primary research recommends encouraging schools and youth groups to emphasise these skills and to promote the career opportunities that are available for those with an A-Level or higher qualification in Irish.

### **Other Notable Findings (GCSE & A-Level Irish)**

1. A larger proportion of students decide to continue to study Irish at A-Level compared to the other Modern Languages (MLs) (see Table 7); 23.6% compared to 17.9%.
2. A-Level Irish attracts a high-attaining cohort and that attainment has an influence on uptake and progression.
3. The number of centres which offer Irish at AS and A-Level are much lower than the number of centres which offer Irish at GCSE Level. Approximately half as many centres offer Irish as a subject at this level. This may also have an impact on progression levels.

### **Key Findings (Other Modern Languages & Regions)**

1. Continuation rates for all other MLs (French, Spanish and German) have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level, with Spanish being the most popular.
2. The number of continuing AS students in N. Ireland is proportionally higher for all MLs when compared to the Three Country (England, Wales and N. Ireland) average, indicating that ML progression and uptake at A-Level is much healthier in NI as a whole.

3. In terms of subject choice at AS or A-Level, for subjects such as, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Business Studies and ICT, usefulness for a future career typically features as the most important reason for selection. However, enjoyment and perceived interest were deemed to be of greater importance for students when deciding to study a Modern Language.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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### 2.1. Context of the Review

A-Level Irish is regarded by the Irish-Medium (IM) community as an important barometer of ability to use Irish outside of education settings. A-Level Irish is also the gateway for many students wishing to study Irish at third level, and therefore one of the main sources of employees for the Irish-Medium schools sector and for Irish-language organisations based in N. Ireland, such as: Foras na Gaeilge, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and several other voluntary Irish-language organisations.

In spite of this, concerns have been raised with the number of students studying Irish at A-Level. Specifically, it has been stated that there has been a marked decrease in student uptake, post GCSE Level, over the last number of years in both the Irish, and, (in particular), the English-Medium schools sectors. Additionally, it is thought that there has been a gradual decline in the overall number of students who study GCSE Irish, which in turn, has had a knock on effect on the number of students studying Irish at A-Level. Again it is considered that this decrease is much more evident in the English-Medium schools sector.

This is an important issue for the Department of Education (DE) who have a statutory duty to *'encourage and facilitate'* Irish and Irish-Medium education under the *'Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998'*. As a result, the Department have sought to examine whether the concerns raised in relation to the potential low uptake, and possible decline in the number of students studying A-Level Irish are founded.

### 2.2. Role of CCEA's R&S Unit / Terms of Reference

CCEA's Research & Statistics (R&S) Unit were specifically commissioned by DE to undertake research into the issues raised.

The R&S Unit are an independent team within CCEA who carry out a range of research and statistical projects to support the work of the Council and DE, and ensure that management decisions are enhanced by the provision of high quality research and statistical information.

The research objectives for this review were agreed by a Steering Group set up to

consider the research. The Steering Group consists of CCEA R&S, DE, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and Foras Na Gaeilge. The objectives stipulated that: by the end of the project, the following matters should be evaluated:

- The number of students studying Irish at A-Level within a cross-section of schools and whether they have declined;
- The factors which influence centres' decisions regarding their curricular offer (e.g. EF; breadth of provision; availability of teachers; careers advice; employment prospects etc.);
- The factors that influence students' decision to study / not to study A-Level Irish (as above);
- The number / percentage of schools which offer Irish on / off campus / in consortia;
- The reasons why GCSE Irish students continue / do not continue with A-Level Irish;
- The extent of knowledge of careers advisers in terms of CAO application process and employment opportunities in the Irish-Medium sector; and
- To contextualize this in line with other language provision.

## 2.3. Report Structure

In order to achieve what was set out in the research objectives, (Section 2.2), a substantial review was developed and facilitated by the R&S Unit.

The methodology and findings of which are detailed throughout this report; the remainder which is structured as follows:

<b>Table 1: Report Structure</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>Description</b>
3.0 Review Methodology	This section of the report includes a summary of the methodology used to collect information on the project.
4.0 Level of Need	This section of the report details the current trends in A-Level language uptake over the 2008-15 periods.
5.0 Literature Review	This section of the report includes a review of recent academic research into the reasons why students study languages at A-Level.
6.0 Primary Research Findings	This section of the report details the main findings gathered from stakeholders who took part in the evaluation. Information and data collected through primary research methods will be included from



Section	Description
	teachers, students, Principals and parents.
7.0 Conclusions	This section of the report concludes the findings from the review.

*Source: CCEA Research & Statistics Unit*

### 3. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

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The following section includes a summary of the methodology used to collect information on the project.

#### 3.1. Level of Need Analysis

The first stage of this review was to carry out a comprehensive Needs Analysis of the current situation in N. Ireland with regards to language uptake.

A Needs Analysis is simply a process of identifying and evaluating needs in a community or other defined population of people. A need has been described as:

- A gap between ‘*what is*’ and ‘*what should be*’. (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995); and
- A gap between real and ideal that is both acknowledged by community values and potentially amenable to change.” (Reviere, Berkowitz, Carter & Gergusan, 1996)

In this case, the target population was the Irish-Medium community, teachers, schools and students. Additionally, with regards to this review, a potential issue had already been identified, this being: a potential decline in Irish uptake at A-Level and a reduced proportion of students progressing into A-Level Irish from GCSE Level, particularly in English-Medium schools.

Based on this information, the needs analysis therefore detailed and assessed the following:

- The strategic and policy context relevant to protecting and promoting the Irish language in N. Ireland;
- The number of students studying Irish at A-Level within a cross-section of Northern Irish schools and whether they have declined;
- The proportion of students opting to continue studying Irish post-GCSE within a cross-section of Northern Irish schools and whether it has reduced;
- The number of students studying other Modern Language (MLs) at A-Level within N. Ireland and the Three Countries (England, Wales and N. Ireland); to compare with the trends identified within Irish;

- The proportion of students opting to continue studying other MLs post-GCSE within N. Ireland and the Three Countries; to compare with the trends identified within Irish; and
- Statistical trends which may explain uptake in A-Level Irish and the levels of progression from GCSE.

It is important for these types of analyses to have a defined time period in which data and trends are reviewed from. This particular review, as briefly mentioned in Section 2 of this report, assessed statistical trends over the 2008-15 academic periods.

### **3.2. Literature Review**

In addition to the Needs Analysis, a review of recent academic research into language learning was carried out. This was used to determine the reasons why students decide to study (or not to study), languages at A-Level. The literature review was informed by the findings of the initial Needs Analysis.

The overall findings from the literature review were subsequently used to inform the development of online questionnaires and discussion guides for the collection of primary research.

### **3.3. Primary Research**

#### ***3.3.1. Online Questionnaires***

The main method of collecting primary data from stakeholders was through an online questionnaire developed by CCEA's R&S Unit. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections, each with their own specific set of questions for each stakeholder group consulted; these groups being:

- Teachers, Principals and Heads of Department (post-primary schools only);
- Parents; and
- Students (GCSE, AS and A-Level only).

A mix of both quantitative and qualitative questions was posed to each individual group. IBM SPSS 22.0 was used to analyse quantitative data, whilst thematic content coding was used to analyse qualitative comments.

Letters containing the questionnaire link were dispatched to all N. Ireland post-primary Principals in June 2015. These letters encouraged Principals to share the questionnaire link to the survey with colleagues and students. In addition, 30 parent letters were provided to each Principal for them to distribute to parents who may have been interested in taking part in the questionnaire.

### **3.3.2. Research Workshops**

As well as the online questionnaire, two research workshops were hosted in Belfast during October 2015. These were held in the Europa Hotel and the Foras na Gaeilge office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October respectively.

These workshops focused on the skills developed through studying additional languages, progression routes from GCSE and GCE and ways of further encouraging and promoting language learning and acquisition, particularly Irish.

### **3.4. Timescales**

This review was bound by the following timescales:

<b>Table 2: Research Timescales</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timescales</b>
Project Plan	D1: Work Packages	May 2015
Research Report	D1: Data Analysis D1: Literature Review	May – July 2015
Online Questionnaire	D1: Draft D2: Approval D3: Programme D4: Test D5: Live	May 2015
Communication	D1: Letter Approved D1: Letter Sent	June 2015
Stakeholder Groups	D1: Confirm Youth Event D2: Deliver Youth Event	June – July 2015
Quantitative & Qualitative Analysis	D1: Quantitative Analysis D2: Qualitative Analysis	July – September 2015
Research Report	D1: Interim D2: Final	October – November 2015

Source: DE Project Plan: Review of Uptake of A-Level Irish in English-Medium Post-Primary Schools

## 4. LEVEL OF NEED

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As stated in Section 2.3 of this report, this section details the current trends in A-Level language uptake (particularly Irish) over the 2008-15 period.

### 4.1. Policy Context

Detailed in the following paragraphs is the strategic and policy context relevant to protecting and promoting the Irish language in N. Ireland. This is included as it is important to initially understand the wider issues affecting Irish language education, and their potential impact.

Current legal protection for the Irish language in N. Ireland comes from the '*Northern Ireland Education Orders*', the '*Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement*' of 1998 and its successor, the '*St Andrews Agreement*' of 2006. In relation to the 2006 agreement, there are two items relevant to the promotion and protection of the Irish language, which are:

**Table 3: Items – St Andrews Agreement**

Items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland; and</li><li>• To work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language.</li></ul>

Source: *Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006*

However, in spite of this, subsequent legal amendments following the 2006 Agreement to the '*Northern Ireland Act 1998*', (establishing devolved legislature), have made no mention of an Irish Language Act; or the development of one. The references made are exclusively to the adoption of promotional strategies by the Executive, (both for Irish and Ulster-Scots), and for such strategies to be kept under review, revised, or replaced by new ones.

Subsequently, the '*Hillsborough Castle Agreement*', published in 2010, which ensured devolution of policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly also recognised the need to progress on issues outstanding from the St Andrews Agreement; this included movement on the Irish language. As a result, commitments were put in place to ensure this occurs.

Relating to the adoption of strategies (mentioned previously), in 2012, DE published *'Languages for the Future: Northern Ireland Languages Strategy'*. This strategy recommends an extension of all MLs throughout the education system. On the Irish language, the following is stated as a recommendation:

*'That the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, ratified by the government of the United Kingdom, are fully applied and that, as a fully recognised indigenous language on an equal footing with Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, Irish should be afforded the full status and privileges that such standing entails.'*

Source: *Languages for the Future: Northern Ireland Languages Strategy*, (Department of Education, 2012)

Though there is a commitment to fully apply the provisions of the *'European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages'* within the NI Languages Strategy. It should be noted that recent monitoring reports, conducted by a Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe, have been critical of N. Ireland's compliance in relation to this.

A more specific protection and enhancement strategy was published in July 2012 for public consultation by the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The subsequently published, *'Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language'* lists in its first two objectives that it hopes to increase the numbers of those acquiring the Irish language through the Irish-Medium and English-Medium education systems. As part of this strategy there is a particular focus on post-primary education.

In a wider context, Key Stage 4 (GCSE Level) has been the focus of some considerable ML policy changes. Changes in the curriculum design were implemented to allow students to study a wider range of qualifications and subjects; with the aim of increasing motivation and encouraging young people to continue their education post 16 removed the requirement to study an ML at GCSE Level. This still has an impact on N. Ireland in 2015, as students, though they are required to take a ML course at Key Stage 4 as part of the *'Education (Northern Ireland) Order (2006)'*, do not have to study it as a GCSE.

Based on the information above, it can be seen that the strategic and policy context relating to the promotion and enhancement of Irish is complex. There are clear policies and strategies in place that emphasise the need to protect and encourage

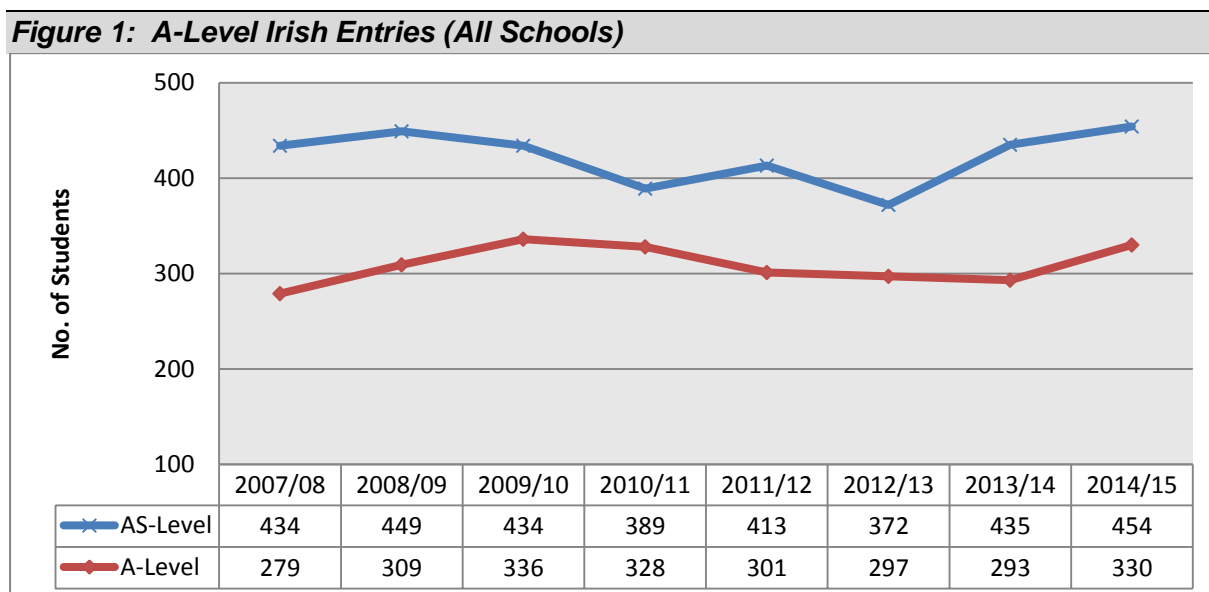
uptake in Irish. However, other evidence suggests that there are shortcomings in terms of putting these strategies and policies into action.

As such, there is a possibility that this may have an impact in the number of students choosing to study Irish at GCSE Level and therefore subsequently following through and studying the subject at A-Level. This notion is assessed further in the sections below.

## 4.2. A-Level Irish Uptake

### 4.2.1. N. Ireland

Figure 1 provides information on the total number of students studying Irish at AS and A-Level over the 2008-15 period.



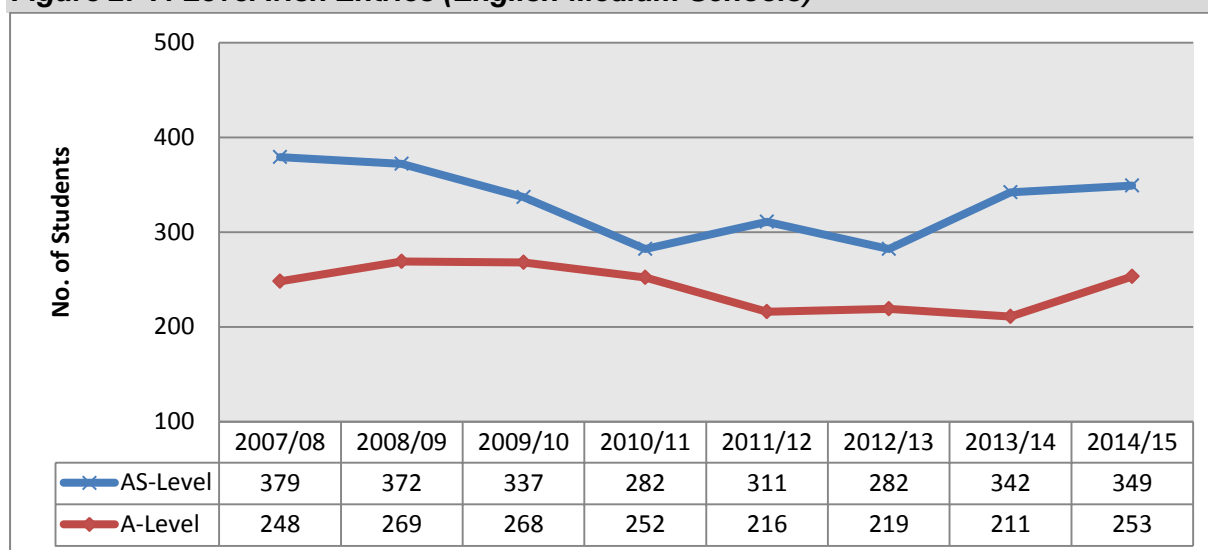
Source: CCEA Examinations Statistics, (2008-15)

Over the last eight years, the total number of A-Level Irish entries has fluctuated year on year, from 372 to 454 AS entries, and 279 to 336 A-Level entries. As there is no logical direction regarding the number of students choosing to study Irish at this level, it can be stated that uptake has been relatively stable over this period.

In total, there is one post-primary Irish-Medium school (Colaiste Feirste) and three post-primary Irish-Medium Units (St Brigid's College, St Catherine's College and St Joseph's Grammar School) in N. Ireland. As stated in Section 2.1 of this report, concerns have been raised that there has been a more evident decline in Irish uptake in English-Medium Schools. Figure 2 therefore shows A-Level Irish entries

but discounts the four centres listed above.

**Figure 2: A-Level Irish Entries (English-Medium Schools)**



Source: CCEA Examinations Statistics, (2008-15)

Much like Figure 1, over the last eight years, the total number of students studying A-Level Irish in English-Medium schools has fluctuated year on year from 282 to 379 entries at AS-Level, and 211 to 268 entries at A-Level. Again, it can be stated that uptake has been relatively stable over this period for these particular schools.

Though there is no decline in terms of overall number, it is important to consider whether there has been an decline in uptake in real terms; i.e. the A-Level Irish overall share of the total candidature. This is considered in Table 4. Please note that due to the availability of information relating to the total number of AS and A students, data only covers the previous six academic years:

**Table 4: A-Level Irish Overall Share**

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
AS Irish	434	389	413	372	435	454
AS Total	15,292	15,844	15,823	16,185	16,884	16,525
<b>% Share</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
A-Level	336	328	301	297	293	330
A-Level Total	12,975	13,290	13,660	13,776	13,832	14,467
<b>% Share</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>

Source: CCEA Examinations Statistics, (2010-15) and Department of Education Enrolment Statistics, (2010-15)

It can be seen from the table above that year on year, the overall candidature for AS/A has been increasing. As expected, due to the fluctuations in the numbers of



Irish students identified earlier, there has been no real decline in real terms for Irish uptake at AS and subsequent progression to A-Level. Though both AS and A-Level share reached a low point in the 2012/13 academic year, AS rose by 0.3% in the subsequent academic year and A-Level has also started to rise again, but has not yet reached the 2009/10 proportion.

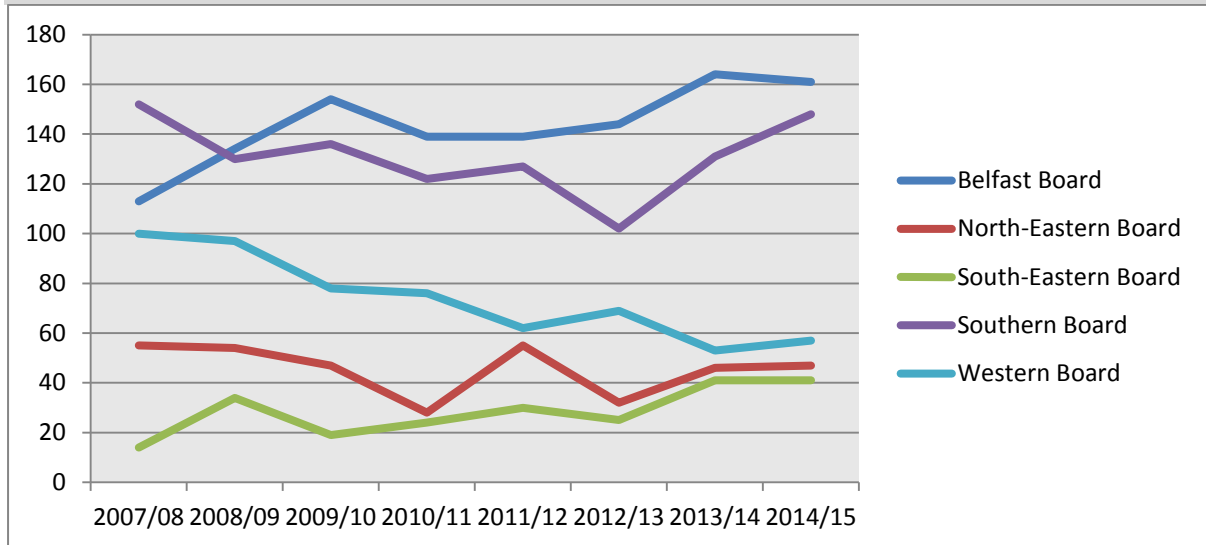
When broken down, it can be seen that the overall share of AS candidature has remained reasonably consistent between 2009/10 and 2014/15. This reached a low point in 2012/13 (2.3%, n=372), however, this rose again in 2013/14 by 0.3% (2.6%, n=434), and by a further 0.1% in 2014/15 (2.7%, n=454).

A-Level Irish on the other hand has seen a slight decline in its overall share of candidature. In 2013/14, 2.1% (n=293) of all candidates chose to study Irish at A-Level; a decrease from 2.6% (n=336) in 2009/10. However, it can be assumed that this is due to the low number of candidates who studied AS Irish during the previous academic year having a knock on affect regarding uptake at A-Level. This is implied as the proportional share of A-Level Irish rose by 0.2% in 2014/15 to 2.3% (n=784). As such, this trend is not considered to be a major concern.

#### ***4.2.2. Regional Variations***

To ensure that the review in question is comprehensive; regional variations in A-Level Irish have also been considered. Regions have been selected based on the former Education and Library Board (ELB) boundaries (now under the jurisdiction of the Education Authority; established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015).

**Figure 3: AS Irish Entries (Regional)**

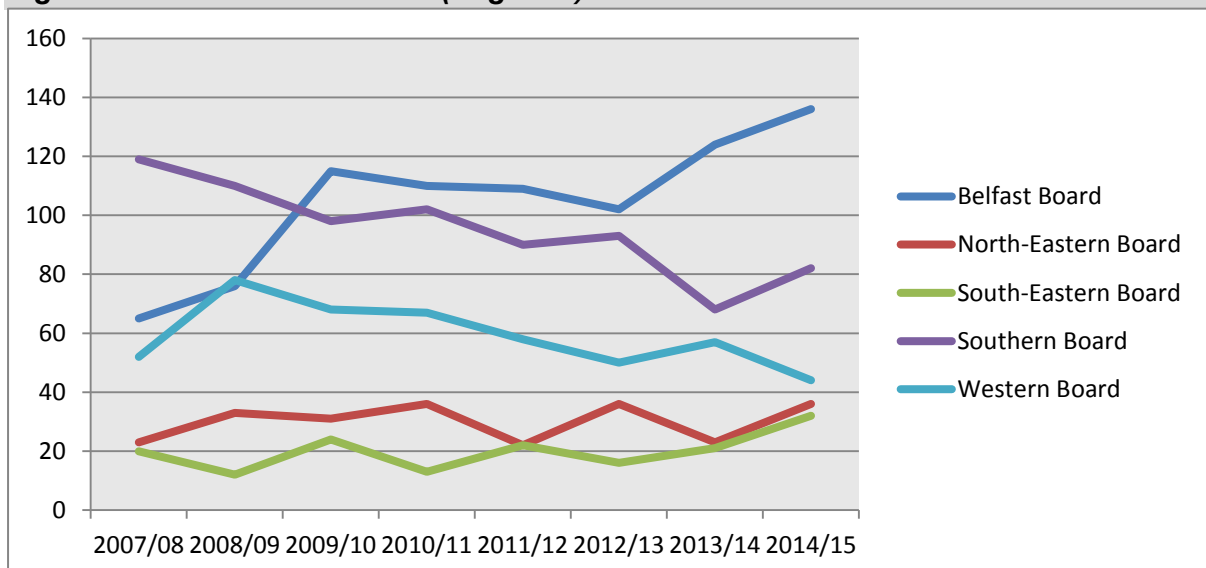


Source: CCEA Internal Examinations Statistics, (2008-15)

AS student uptake in four out of the five former ELBs, (Belfast, North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern), has been relatively consistent since the 2007/8 academic year. Furthermore, three out of these four boards (North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern) have experienced a slight increase in student numbers since the 2012/13 academic year.

However, it can be seen that in the Western Board, that there has been a slight decrease in the number of students studying Irish at AS-Level year on year between 2007/8 and 2013/14 (except for 2012/13). Nevertheless, it should be noted that there has been a slight increase in uptake during the last academic year in this particular board area.

**Figure 4: A-Level Irish Entries (Regional)**



*Source: CCEA Internal Examinations Statistics, (2008-15)*

Similar to the trends noted at AS-Level, student numbers in three out of the five former ELBs, (North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Western) have stayed at a constant level since 2007/8, whilst numbers in the Belfast Board have risen by approximately 53% since 2007/8.

In spite of this, from the graph above it can be seen that there has been a decline in the overall number of students studying Irish in the Southern Board area since 2007/8. Numbers have fluctuated with minor increases every other year. However, these have been smaller than the decline experienced in the previous year and thus have only partially offset any declines experienced. However, referring back to Figure 3, it can be seen that A-Level numbers in the Southern Board area have largely reflected the numbers preceding them at AS-Level. In regards to this, it can be seen that there has been an increase in the number of students studying AS Irish between 2012/13 and 2014/15. As a result, it can be assumed that these increases will affect A-Level uptake. This assumption is implied as there has been an increase in student numbers in the last academic year, again mirroring the trends experienced at AS-Level.

A-Level numbers in the Western Board have been declining since 2007/8; albeit at a slower rate than at AS-Level. This indicates that the proportion of students continuing the subject at A-Level seems to be slightly offsetting the decline experienced at AS-Level.

### **4.3. Progression from GCSE**

In Section 4.2.1, the number of A-Level entries was assessed in real terms, i.e. as a % of the overall candidature. It was found that the proportion of students deciding to study the subject at AS and A-Levels has been reasonably constant. Based on this it can be expected that progression and uptake should maintain consistency from GCSE Level as well. The following subsections assess this claim.

#### **4.3.1.N. Ireland**

Table 5 shows the rate at which students' progress from GCSE Irish to AS Irish. Please note, as per the terms of reference, the data being used in this report is from

the 2007/8 academic year. Progression into that year will not be taken into consideration as this will involve assessing data prior to 2008. Therefore, the graphs and tables relating to progression will cover the 2008/9 academic year onwards.

<b>Table 5: Progression from GCSE Irish</b>							
	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>
<b>All Schools</b>							
GCSE Irish (previous year)	1,946	1,849	1,816	1,663	1,596	1,741	1,830
AS Irish	434	449	434	389	413	372	435
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>25.9%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>
<b>English-Medium Schools</b>							
GCSE Irish (previous year)	1,747	1,630	1,637	1,577	1,426	1,542	1,597
AS Irish	372	337	282	311	282	342	349
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>21.3%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>21.9%</b>

Source: CCEA Examinations Statistics, (2009-15)

Continuation rates have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level. Approximately 23.5% of all GCSE candidates have decided to study Irish at AS from 2008/9 to 2014/15; this suggests that there has been no real decline in the proportion of students selecting to study Irish at this level. Furthermore, though the average continuation rate has been on average slightly lower, (20.4% compared to 23.5%), this trend remains the same when the four Irish-Medium Schools / Units are discounted from the analysis.

### **4.3.2. Regional Variations**

<b>Table 6: Progression from GCSE Irish</b>								
	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
Belfast	34.4%	37.2%	37.7%	59.1%	44.9%	49.7%	55.2%	45.5%
North-Eastern	21%	20.9%	13.4%	21.5%	15.8%	22.1%	16.8%	18.8%
South-Eastern	25.2%	24.7%	17%	25.6%	25.3%	33.6%	26.8%	25.5%
Southern	17.3%	18.4%	16.9%	17.9%	15.5%	16.5%	20.8%	17.6%
Western	23.6%	19.7%	20.3%	18%	21.8%	18.5%	15.2%	19.6%

Source: CCEA Examinations Statistics, (2009-15)

Table 6 above indicates that, across four of the five former ELBs (Belfast, North-Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern), continuation rates have remained relatively stable since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level. There has been no noticeable decline in any of these ELB regions.

However, it should be noted that there are variations in the levels of continuing students across these former ELB areas. In particular, levels of continuation seem to be considerably higher in the Belfast Board compared to the other three regions.

This regional trend could be explained due to the proportion of Irish-Medium schools located within the Belfast Board; approximately 32% of all Irish-Medium primary schools are located within the former ELB region<sup>1</sup>, alongside the only secondary-level Irish-Medium school in N. Ireland.

Although continuation rates have fluctuated year on year between 2008 and 2013, over the last two years there has been a decline in the proportion of students continuing to study AS Irish in the Western Board area. Currently continuation rates are at their lowest level in seven years.

However, it should also be noted that over the last seven years, average continuation rates in the Western Board have been higher than both the North-Eastern and Southern Board areas.

#### **4.4. Other Modern Languages (MLs)**

In order to adequately assess whether there are any issues in relation to A-Level Irish uptake and progression levels, it is useful to note whether the trends identified earlier are unique to Irish as a subject and N. Ireland as a region.

As such, this section of the report will look at trends in other ML entries in N. Ireland and the Three Countries over the same timescale.

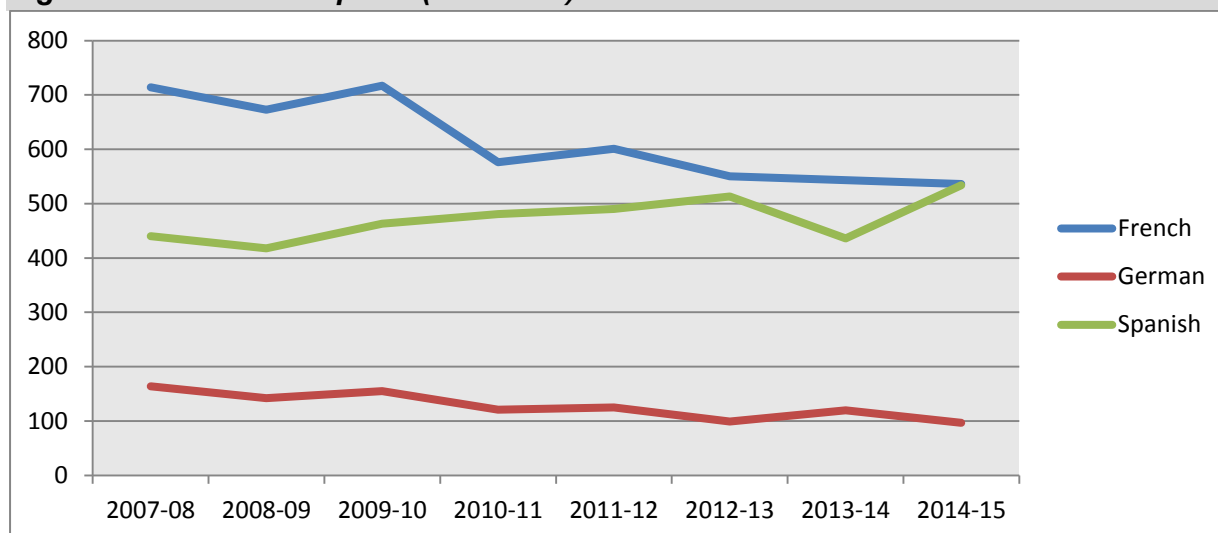
##### **4.4.1. N. Ireland**

The uptake for other MLs in N. Ireland is detailed in Figure 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education Irish-Medium School List ([http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/schools-management/10-types\\_of\\_school-nischools\\_pg/schools\\_-\\_types\\_of\\_school-irish-medium\\_schools\\_pg/schools\\_-\\_types\\_of\\_school\\_lists\\_of\\_irishmedium\\_schools\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/schools-management/10-types_of_school-nischools_pg/schools_-_types_of_school-irish-medium_schools_pg/schools_-_types_of_school_lists_of_irishmedium_schools_pg.htm))

**Figure 5: A-Level ML Uptake (N. Ireland)**



Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2008-15)

As can be seen, French remains the most popular language taught at A-Level in N. Ireland. However, between 2011 and 2014 there has been a decline in French entries, with uptake being at its lowest level since 2008. Spanish A-Level uptake on the other hand has been steadily rising since 2008, and has almost reached the same level of popularity as French, whilst German A-Level uptake has maintained a level of consistency since the 2007/8 academic year.

**Table 7: Progression from GCSE (Other MLs)<sup>2</sup>**

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
GCSE French	7,781	7,243	6,647	6,402	6,250	5,852	5,533
AS French	1,048	944	926	948	879	917	886
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>
GCSE Spanish	3,239	3,296	3,474	3,280	3,568	3,490	3,734
AS Spanish	643	728	696	766	692	816	820
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>
GCSE German	1,249	1,276	1,072	1,138	1,017	1,158	1,044
AS German	253	224	211	184	204	186	170
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>20.1%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>

Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2009-15)

Continuation rates for all other MLs (French, Spanish and German) have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level, with Spanish

<sup>2</sup> Please Note: As per the terms of reference, the data being used in this report is from the 2007/8 academic year. Progression into that year will not be taken into consideration as this will involve assessing data prior to 2008 (as noted in Section 4.3.1). Therefore Table 7, as it relates to progression, will cover the 2008/9 academic year onwards.

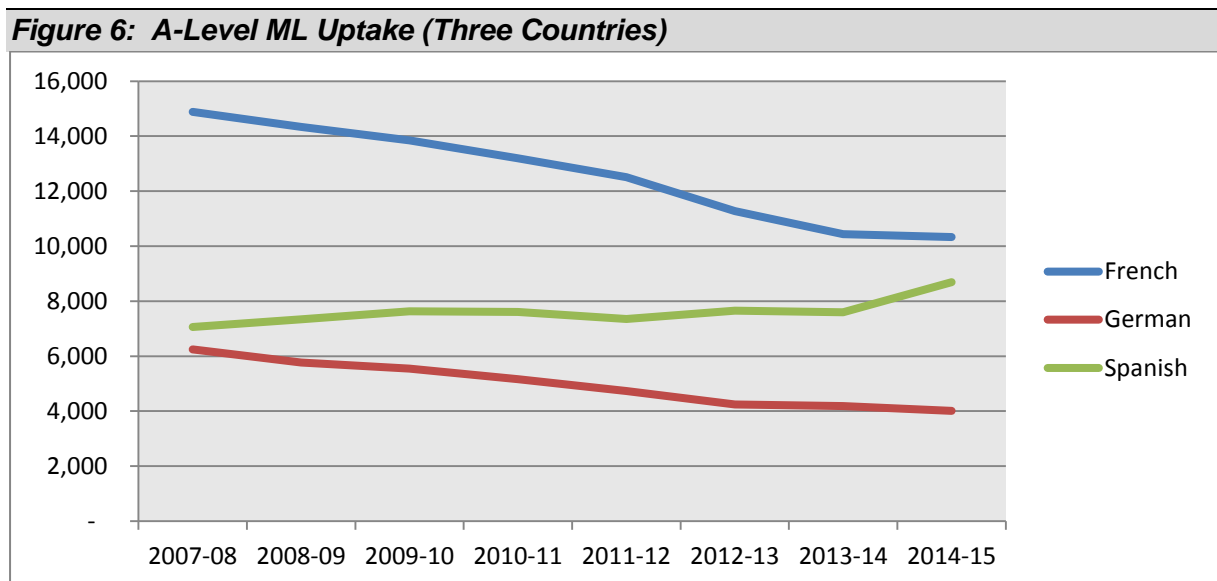
being the most popular in terms of the proportion of students continuing their studies to AS-Level (21.5%).

French, in spite of its slight decline, has managed to hold on to a consistent proportion of continuing GCSE students over the 2007-14 period. This suggests that there is no issue with the number and proportion of AS-Level students; however, there may be some cause for concern regarding the number of students progressing from AS to A-Level.

Overall, these trends in uptake and progression over time are largely similar to those presented for GCSE and A-Level Irish. Though it should be noted that a larger proportion of students decide to continue to study Irish at A-Level compared to the other MLs listed in the table above; 23.6% compared to 17.9%.

#### 4.4.2. Three Country (England, Wales & N. Ireland)

Information on ML uptake and progression in the Three Countries is detailed in Figure 6 and Table 8 below.



Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (Three Country), (2008-15)

In summary, Figure 6 indicates that A-Level ML entries are in decline for both French and German and rising for Spanish.

**Table 8<sup>3</sup>: Progression from GCSE (Other MLs)**

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
GCSE French	188,688	177,618	154,221	153,436	177,288	168,042	157,699
AS French	19,122	18,096	20,579	18,721	17,501	17,781	16,917
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
GCSE Spanish	67,070	67,707	66,021	72,606	91,315	93,028	90,782
AS Spanish	9,694	10,250	11,433	11,781	12,136	13,958	14,009
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>
GCSE German	73,469	70,169	60,887	57,547	62,932	59,891	54,037
AS German	7,415	7,001	7,859	7,119	7,006	7,193	6,645
<b>% Continuing Study</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>

Source: Jcq Internal Examinations Statistics (Three Country), (2009-15)

Much like N. Ireland, Spanish is the most popular in terms of the proportion of students continuing their studies to AS-Level (15.3%) in the Three Countries. Continuation rates for Spanish in the Three Countries have been relatively consistent since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level.

In addition to this, both French and German have maintained a stable proportion of GCSE students opting to continue their respective studies at AS-Level over the same time period. Similar to the findings regarding French in N. Ireland, this implies that there is no issue with the number and proportion of AS-Level French and German students. However, there may be some cause for concern regarding the decline in numbers at the highest level of school study.

Interestingly, the number of continuing AS students in N. Ireland is proportionally higher for all MLs when compared to the Three Country average, indicating that ML progression and uptake at A-Level is much healthier in NI as a whole. This is detailed in Table 9 below.

**Table 9: N. Ireland Three Country ML Comparisons**

<b>% Continuing Study from GCSE to AS-Level</b>			
	<b>NI</b>	<b>Three Country</b>	<b>Difference</b>
French	14.4%	11.0%	+3.4%
Spanish	21.5%	15.3%	+6.1%
German	18.0%	11.5%	+6.5%

Source: Jcq Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland & Three Country), (2009-15)

<sup>3</sup> Please Note: As per the terms of reference, the data being used in this report is from the 2007/8 academic year. Progression into that year will not be taken into consideration as this will involve assessing data prior to 2008 (as noted in Section 4.3.1). Therefore Table 8, as it relates to progression, will cover the 2008/9 academic year onwards.

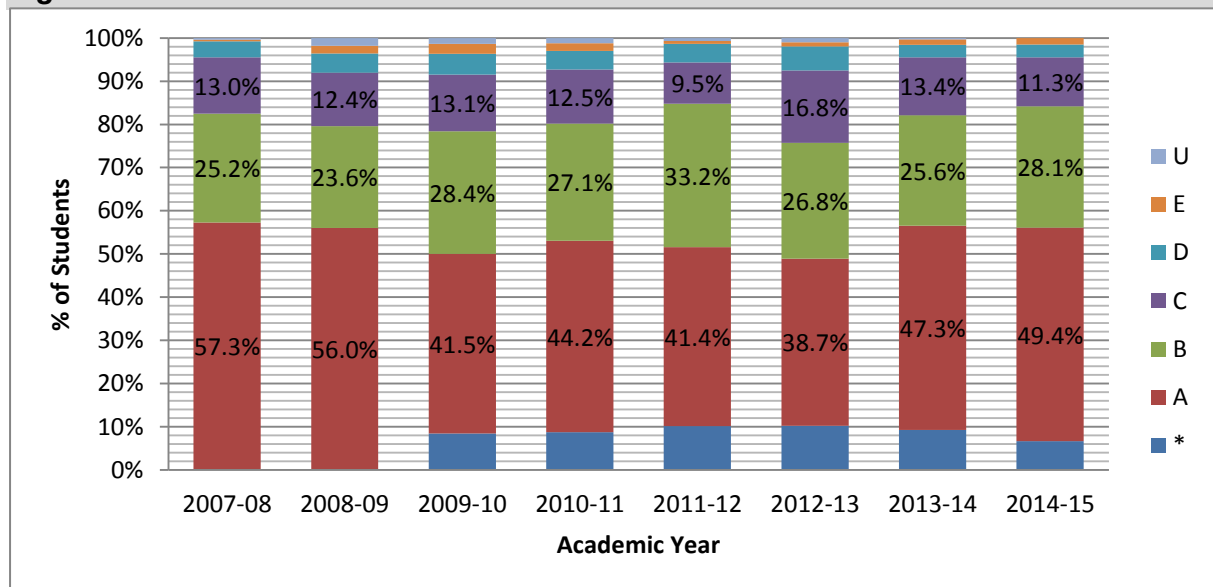


## 4.5. Attainment & Access

Dr Debra Malpass in her 2014 report: ‘A Review of Modern Foreign Languages at A-Level’, found that ML A-Levels generally have a higher proportion of candidates achieving grade A or A\* compared with other subjects.

This trend is also exhibited in students’ attainment levels in Irish at AS and A-Levels; as noted below.

**Figure 7: A Irish Attainment<sup>4</sup>**



Source: Jcq Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2008-15)

On average 95.9% of students achieved at least a C Grade at A-Level in Irish over the 2008-2015 academic period.

Table 10 indicates that a lower proportion of students (approximately 86.4%) received at least a C Grade at A-Level when all other subjects are considered over the same period.

**Table 10: Average Attainment (All Subjects)<sup>5</sup>**

Academic Year	A*	A	B	C
2007/8	n/a	38.5%	68.2%	87.3%
2008/9	n/a	37.8%	67.3%	87.5%
2009/10	10.5%	39.5%	68.6%	87.4%
2010/11	9.7%	37.6%	66.8%	86.8%
2011/12	8.8%	34.9%	65.6%	86.2%

<sup>4</sup> Please Note: For the 2007/08 and 2008/09 academic years A\* was not offered as a grade at A2 Level.

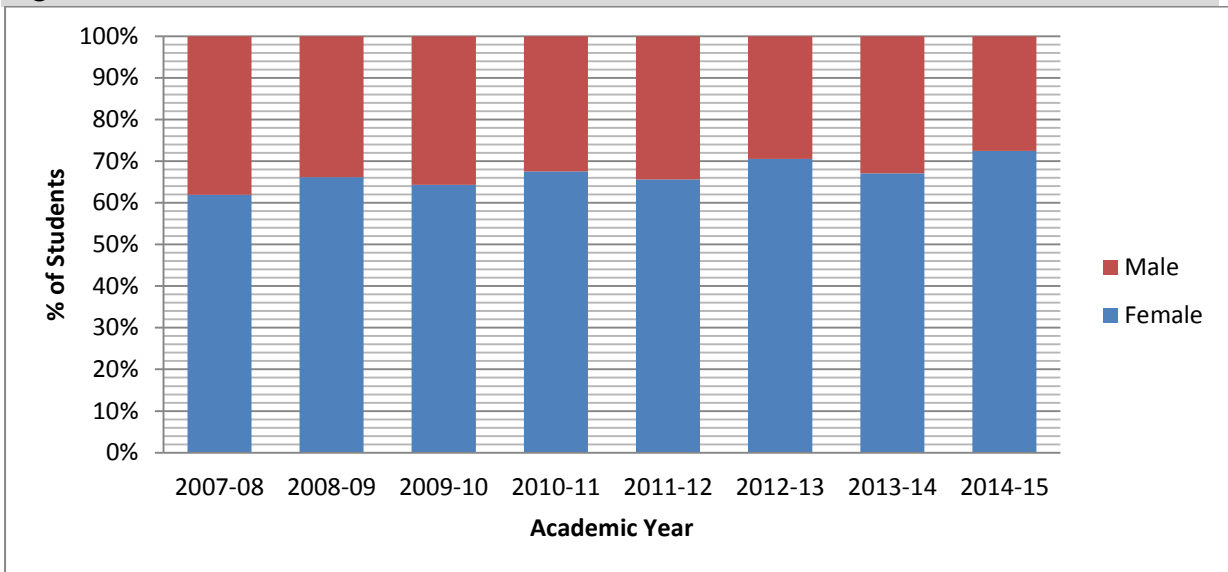
<sup>5</sup> Please Note: Percentage figures in this table are cumulative.

Academic Year	A*	A	B	C
2012/13	8.1%	33.5%	64.4%	86%
2013/14	8.2%	32.9%	64.2%	86.6%
2014/15	7.6%	29.3%	59.7%	83.0%

Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2008-15)

This implies that A-Level Irish attracts a high-attaining cohort and that attainment has an influence on uptake and progression. Analysis of gender uptake and prior attainment at GCSE provides further support for this claim.

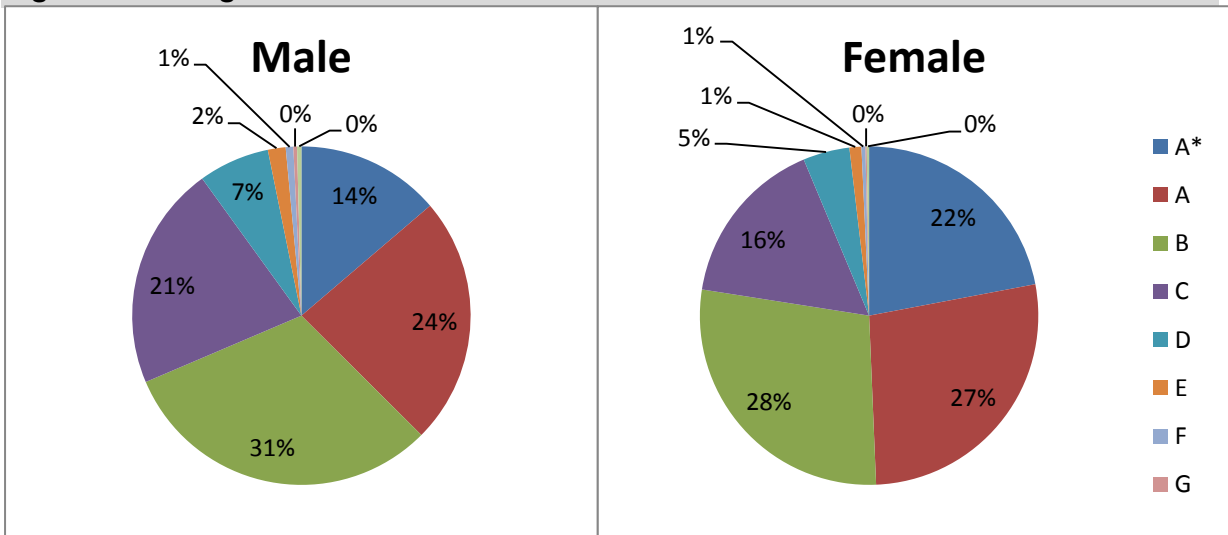
**Figure 8: Gender Breakdown of A-Level Irish Candidature**



Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2008-15)

It can be seen from Figure 8 that girls are more likely than boys to study Irish at A-Level. The gender split is consistent over time with boys making up around one third of the entry at A-Level.

**Figure 9: Average Irish GCSE Attainment**



Source: JCQ Internal Examinations Statistics (N. Ireland), (2008-15)

Figure 9 indicates that prior attainment at GCSE Level is much higher for girls than it is for boys. Based on average proportional grade achievements taken over the 2008-2015 academic period, it was noted that just under half of girls (47%) achieve an A\* or A Grade at GCSE Level compared with just over one-third of boys (38%). This suggests a reason behind the higher level of uptake in girls compared to boys.

However, it is also important to consider the potential impact that access to specific Irish courses might have.

**Table 11: Centres Offering Irish Courses**

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
GCSE	93	83	92	77	80	83	81	75
AS	46	45	51	47	50	47	48	51
A	44	52	51	51	44	53	42	44

Source: CCEA Internal Statistics, (2008-15)

As it can be seen, the number of centres which offer Irish at AS and A-Level are much lower than the number of centres which offer Irish at GCSE Level. Approximately half as many centres offer Irish as a subject at this level. This may also have an impact on progression levels<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.6. Summary

In summary, despite the concerns raised, the overall number of A-Level Irish entries across all schools types has maintained a level of consistency since the 2007/8 academic year. It was recognised that the number of entries and their proportional share of the total candidature has fluctuated year-on-year; however, as stated previously, since there has been no logical direction over time regarding the number and proportion of students choosing to study Irish, a decline cannot be concluded or observed.

Additionally, when progression is taken into consideration it was found that continuation rates have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level. Again, fluctuations were noted year-on-year; however, proportional decreases were not observed, suggesting there has been no real

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<sup>6</sup> Please note a full breakdown of these centres is located in the report's Appendices.

decline in the proportion of students studying Irish at this level.

Interestingly, this is similar to the trends identified for A-Level uptake and GCSE progression for French, Spanish and German in N. Ireland. Overall, data covering the same period has indicated that Irish, in terms of student entries, is slightly more popular than German, but less popular than French and Spanish as a subject option. However, a larger proportion of students decide to continue to study Irish at A-Level.

Moreover, JCQ data pertaining to England, Wales and N. Ireland (Three Country) found that the number of ML entries at A-Level is in decline for both French and German. This is similar to the corresponding N. Ireland statistics which found a similar decline for French but not German. In spite of this, progression statistics have suggested, (even when Irish is discounted from the analysis), that N. Ireland is in a better position regarding the proportion of students opting to study languages after GCSE when compared to England (18% compared to 12.6%).

However, it is interesting to note that, whilst for the most part, there has been no decline in terms of the number of A-Level Irish students, or the proportion of progressing GCSE Irish students since 2007/8, there has been no increase either; unlike Spanish. In addition to this, when regional variations are taken into account it is noted that whilst most areas have tended to fluctuate with regards to student numbers and proportion, the Western Board area has been experiencing a slight decline in this regard.

In Section 4.1, a review of the relevant policy context concluded that there are clear policies and strategies that exist in N. Ireland which aim to protect and encourage uptake in Irish. Nevertheless, other evidence has suggested that, in spite of initial intentions, actions in relation to promoting and achieving the aims and objectives of these strategies and policies may not have been successful. This, coupled with the contradictory actions of wider educational policies, could be influencing the number of students choosing to study Irish at GCSE Level and subsequently studying the subject at A-Level.

Other reasons including attainment prior to A-Level and access to courses were also considered as having a potential influence on uptake and progression. A review of examinations statistics indicated that A-Level Irish typically attracts a high-attaining

cohort. In addition to this, it is also interesting to note that the number of centres offering Irish at AS and A-Level are much lower than those offering Irish at GCSE Level. It can be assumed that this might have a curtailing effect on some high attaining students wishing to carry on the subject at AS-Level.

It may be presumptuous to interpret A-Level uptake and progression rates from GCSE to AS-Level as being completely dependent on levels of attainment, access to courses and governmental policy. Though these may be reasons for choosing to study Irish at A-Level, a more meaningful explanation would be to also consider students' original intentions and internal motivations. For example, some students may never have intended to continue studying Irish after GCSE due to subject specific entry requirements for certain university courses. These are potential reasons and issues which also need to be taken into consideration.

As such, the subsequent sections of this report will explore and assess students' attitudes and motivations towards Irish and their reasons for choosing to study or not study the subject at certain levels. These findings will be used to gauge whether the initial assumptions included in this section are correct. Additionally, in order to obtain a truly rounded and full conclusion, this report will also seek the views of teachers and parents.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

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This section of the report includes a review of recent academic research into students' attitudes and motivations towards ML learning in general<sup>7</sup>.

### 5.1. Students' Attitudes & Motivations

#### 5.1.1. Perceived Difficulty

Dörnyei (2005) argues that linguistic self-confidence plays the most important role in a person's motivation to learn a second language. Linguistic self-confidence refers to a person's perceptions of their own competence and ability to complete tasks successfully. This is typically established through the interaction between the language learner and teachers or members of the language community, and strengthened based on the quality and quantity of these interactions (Clement, 1980). Research has found that linguistic self-confidence amongst UK students tends to be low, and that the prevailing opinion on ML subjects is that they are difficult.

For instance, Suzanne Graham (2002) explored students' perceptions of studying GCSE French; in total, opinions from 123 students from four institutions in England were assessed as part of this study. Students were initially asked what grade they expected to obtain at GCSE. The questionnaire found that most students had high expectations, with 90% of students expecting Grade A\* to B. Overall, 52% of students believed that achieving their expected grade would be 'easy', whilst the remaining 48% believed this would be 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to achieve.

Research however found that only 18% of Year 11 students who completed the questionnaire wanted to continue studying French post-GCSE. The main reasons cited for wanting to pursue the subject further were enjoyment and the subjects' usefulness for a future career. Unsurprisingly, those wishing to give up French described it as difficult, uninteresting, of no use for future career plans and claimed not to enjoy it; some students giving more than one reason.

Similar trends have been noted in other studies; Linda Fisher (2001), for example,

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<sup>7</sup> Please Note: Due to the specific nature of this review, there is not a great deal of academic literature available that is specific to the Irish language. This section of the report will therefore focus on general opinion regarding ML education, and will attempt to reference Irish where possible.

noted that many high achieving students felt insecure in their ability in MLs and that this was consequently discouraging uptake post-16. In her study, she found that almost 60% of participant GCSE students found MLs to be one of the most challenging in the curriculum. Words such as '*hard*' or '*difficult*' were typically used to describe the ML they were studying in spite of the fact that many of these students were on course to achieve high GCSE grades.

These findings suggest a contradiction in students' perceptions – it was noted by Graham (2002) that, whilst many students anticipate a good GCSE, and that this would be easy to attain, the subject is still widely perceived as being difficult. Graham suggested that, in this case: '*A good grade at GCSE does not equate with being competent in the language*'.

Research conducted by Ipsos MORI (2014) lends support to this statement. In their study, surveyed teachers and students agreed GCSE MLs do not adequately prepare students for A-Level study. It was noted that there is a disproportionate increase in difficulty from GCSE to AS-Level, where students progress from knowing set phrases to conveying their own views and opinions; a transition which requires much greater confidence and proficiency. Generally grades at GCSE were felt to be very weakly correlated with language proficiency as it is possible to get the highest grades by relying largely on rote learning and memorisation.

Alongside this, it has been considered that students may also have unrealistic expectations of what is achievable after five years of ML study (i.e. since Key Stage 3); resulting in further discouragement. This is demonstrated in O'Reilly Cavani's (2000) study, where students stated that they expected to reach near-native fluency. This is further supported by Mitchell (2003) who found, (through a review of Ofsted reports) that, since most students start a language only at age 11, (when other subjects are already well established), higher expectations and lower achievement levels generally occur.

### **5.1.2. Perceived Usefulness**

Dörnyei and Csizer (2002) argue, based on data gathered from language learners in Hungary, that a '*language globalisation process*' is taking place, whereby the study of a '*world language*' (i.e. English) is gaining in importance at the expense of the study

of what is considered as '*non-world languages*' such as French and German. In their report, they state that: '*since only non-world language learning can take place in English-speaking countries*', this results in what they describe as, motivationally speaking, '*a losing battle*'.

This '*losing battle*' described here is well documented in research. Studies have found that many language learners believe that learning a ML would be helpful to their future career goals. However, many were also found to be unsure of the strategic benefits of language learning for the UK and EU (Gallagher-Brett, 2005). Other research has found that students tend to perceive languages as being less valuable than STEM or vocational subjects.

For instance, Ipsos MORI (2014), in their report: '*Why is the take-up of Modern Foreign Language A-Levels in decline?*' - found through focus group discussions with students that, whilst those who study a language at A-Level value the breadth of the qualification, many who do not lacked awareness of the economic benefits of studying a language beyond GCSE.

STEM or vocational subjects on the other hand were generally considered to be more prestigious and offer greater advantages in terms of career progression and provide better opportunities for specialisation (Ipsos MORI, 2014). This is an issue as students are typically receptive to economic arguments about the value of subjects and subsequently select A-Level and degree subjects with a view to the employment prospects they offer (Vidal Rodeiro, 2007).

This implies that MLs require more effective promotion to ensure that their economic value is communicated to students. This statement is supported by Ipsos MORI (2014) who explain that students consider the economic value of STEM subjects has been promoted much more effectively than MLs. Unfortunately, research has shown that attempts to emphasise the beneficial impact of ML study on future careers tend to be counterproductive and lower the status of the subject to that of a '*workplace*' skill (Lawes, 2000).

Unfortunately, these attitudes seem to have become embedded over time. A comparative study conducted by Stables and Wikeley (1999), asked students about their perceptions of the importance of modern foreign languages and about their



reasons for liking and disliking them. The results were compared with those of a similar project in the mid-1980s. It was found that students were at least as negative in their attitudes overall as in the earlier study, despite more recent changes in curricula and teaching approaches.

### ***5.1.3. Enjoyment / Interest***

In 2007, Carmen Vidal Rodeiro carried out an investigation into how students made their decisions about subject choices at AS/A-Level.

This took the form of a large scale survey which involved self-completion questionnaires. The first part of this questionnaire gathered factual information about students and their academic background. The second part aimed to discover factors affecting subject choice at AS/A-Level, the students' perceptions on their own subjects. Overall a total of 6,597 students from varying social backgrounds, abilities and interests took part in this survey.

Students were presented with a set of 16 reasons for choosing AS or A-Level subjects, they were then subsequently asked to rate how important these reasons were at the time they had to decide which subjects to take. For subjects such as, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Business Studies and ICT, usefulness for a future career featured as the most important reason. However, for subjects such as Psychology, Sociology, History and Art & Design reasons relating to interest and enjoyment outnumbered those relating to ability or usefulness for a career.

Enjoyment and perceived interest were also deemed to be of greater importance for language students. Vidal Rodeiro's research found that 91.8% and 89.6% of language students placed great importance on subject enjoyment and perceived interest respectively when it came to choosing their subjects at A-Level.

Though enjoyment is considered to be an important factor which dictates subject choice, it has been argued that enjoyment is dependent on the subjects' perceived usefulness. In other words, students tend to enjoy subjects more if they perceive them as having value. Bartram (2010) in a review of literature found, comparatively speaking, German and Dutch pupils' attitudes towards learning English is '*overwhelmingly positive*' and is enjoyed by these pupils more than learning French or German. This was considered to be due to English being more valued in terms of

its usefulness as a language. English pupils on the other hand were found in Barham's review of literature to be much more negative towards learning a second ML; it was argued that it was due to a lack of perceived usefulness in comparison to their European counterparts which underpinned their enjoyment of the subject.

## **5.2. Student Gender**

It is well known that girls are more likely than boys to study MLs at A-Level. The gender split has been noted to be remarkably consistent over time, with around one third of the total number of entries for MLs being male (Malpass, 2014).

This trend can be potentially explained by academic performance (as alluded to in Sections 4.3 of this report). The disparity between boys' and girls' performance at GCSE Level has been described as '*one of the most marked in the curriculum*' (Court, 2001). For instance, examination statistics show that in 2014, 68% of boys nationally obtained grades A\*-C in the three main MLs at GCSE Level (French, German and Spanish), compared to 74.8% of girls (JCQ, 2014a).

It should be noted that the picture changes at A-Level, where the fewer boys who do take foreign languages actually outperform girls slightly. Examination statistics show that in 2014, 86.9% of boys nationally obtained grades A\*-C in the three main MLs at A-Level (French, German and Spanish), compared to 86.5% of girls (JCQ, 2014b). This indicates that those boys who choose to take foreign languages at A-Level are the very able and motivated.

This link between students' attainment and subsequent motivation and uptake is much more evident in boys than in girls. Patrick, Ryan and Pintrich, (1999) found, (through survey data); in relation to general scholastic motivation, male students tend to be more extrinsically motivated (i.e. motivated by reward and outcomes), whilst females are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (i.e. motivated by enjoyment), and typically report greater use of cognitive strategies than males, which offsets the impact of poor academic performance.

A small scale quantitative study by Davies (2004) explored and compared the educational perceptions and attitudes of both boys and girls in Years 7 and 10, and compared this with their attainment in French. The data suggested that: '*boys*'

*underachievement and disaffection in ML, start for many as early as their first term of French in Year 7 and tend to grow with age.*' This indicates that disengagement amongst boys, though linked to underachievement, is also caused by a variety of other reasons.

Studies have suggested that boys feel disengaged from many ML tasks as there is a perceived female bias in topics studies such as healthy lifestyle and family and relationships (Callaghan, 1998). Other research implies that this gender bias varies somewhat between languages. Gender differences have been found in students' attitudes towards different languages. Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) found through their study on motivations that boys tend to have more interest in learning German than girls as the language is perceived to be more masculine and boys find guttural pronunciation more accessible than girls. German is also rated as being more useful by boys for careers in the stereotypically '*masculine*' engineering industry.

### **5.3. Student Age**

Alongside gender it is also important to consider whether age has an impact on ML uptake. The critical period hypothesis (CPH), first proposed by Wilder Penfield (1959), suggests that young children have a special instinctive capacity for language that allows them to acquire a second language in similar ways to their mother tongue. This has given birth to the '*younger the better*' claim and is used as a proponent by those promoting early language learning who argue that; '*age is an important factor contributing to success at school due to this special capacity*' (Hunt, Barnes, Powell, Lindsay and Muijs, 2005).

Results relating to this hypothesis have been varied; some studies indicate that pre-pubescent children acquire language easily (Scovel, 2000), whilst some have demonstrated that older learners are more efficient in this regard (Muñoz, 2006), whereas others have identified the existence of a critical period or periods for second language acquisition (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

However, in spite of this, research findings establishing the relationship between age and levels of motivation to learn MLs have been much more consistent.

Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) carried out an investigation into secondary school students' motivation to learn MLs. A questionnaire was constructed based on a model derived from the motivation literature to examine students' responses on 16 constructs related to motivation. This was administered to 228 students across different year groups. The analysis revealed a decrease in motivation with age, with students aged 11 reporting being more motivated to study MLs than those at 16.

Research conducted by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), (2001) suggests an explanation for this trend for certain students. The QCA carried out case study visits in order to evaluate ML provision in primary schools that have opted to teach the subject. Based on these visits, the following conclusions were drawn; primary students are generally very enthusiastic about their primary ML experiences and enjoy ML because it appears to them to be more fun than other subjects. However, students in their first year at secondary school with primary ML experience expressed some frustration about having to repeat work covered previously.

Other explanations provided are that changes in students' motivation over time with regards to learning may influence uptake and progression. Djigunovic's study (1995) of primary school children learning French in Croatia demonstrated that high motivation was initially '*associative*'; specifically that motivation is dependent on things such as pleasant activities and movement in class. However, it was noted that after three years of learning, motivation became '*intrinsic*', in other words more related to a student's self-perception as a successful ML learner.

A similar study of Hungarian children aged 6-14 found that the most important motivating factors for learning MLs included: positive attitudes towards the learning context and the teacher; intrinsically motivating activities, tasks, and materials; and they were more motivated by classroom practice than by integrative or instrumental reasons (Nikolov, 1999). However, it should be noted that although the importance of instrumental motivation increases with age, engagement and persistence in learning activities are not directly influenced by this: researchers have found that young people only persist in tasks if they are deemed worthwhile (Hunt et al., 2005).

## **5.4. Extrinsic Influences**

### ***5.4.1. Teaching Styles***

Research has shown that inappropriate teacher-student interaction such as: frequent use of criticism and negative feedback and constant supervision has a negative impact on attainment (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green and Dowson (2007) demonstrated a significant link between the quality of teacher-student relationships/interactions and students' mastery orientation and avoidance goals (the extent of goals associated with acquisition and refinement of skills to do a task).

As part of their study, 3,450 high school students were administered items assessing their interpersonal relationships, academic motivation and engagement, academic self-concept and general self-esteem. Preliminary correlations showed that both teacher-student and parent-child relationships are significantly associated with achievement motivation and general self-esteem. Interestingly, when gender, age and students' interpersonal relationships were controlled; it was found that the teacher-student relationship was a stronger predictor of academic success and motivation.

This claim is supported in comparable research studies. For example, Martin and Dowson, (2009) looked at the role of interpersonal relationships in students' academic motivation, engagement, and achievement. In their review, they found that students' perception of teacher social support in the form of feeling respected and valued typically predicted their expectations for success. Additionally, it was noted in their review that students who reported feeling accepted and cared for by teachers were more inclined to report higher levels of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement in class (Martin and Dowson, 2009).

Teacher-student relations are often described comparatively positively by teachers in countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Ireland which report high levels of achievement and engagement. On the other hand OECD comparisons have found that teachers in average to below average countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia report less positive teacher-student relations (OECD, 2009). The education systems of these high performing

countries are seen to be characterised by good levels of classroom discipline and above average time spent on tasks. Additionally, for teachers the following skills are encouraged: empathy and mutual respect. The Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Iceland and Norway) and Ireland are considered best able to prevent disruption and to encourage positive relationships at the same time (OECD, 2009).

#### **5.4.2. School Resourcing**

Filmer-Sankey and Marshall (2010) delivered a questionnaire to heads of languages departments in a nationally representative sample of 2,500 English schools (80% of all maintained schools in England). The questionnaire sought information on the factors that supported languages uptake at Key Stage 4, including training and resources available, the use of ICT, and support from external organisations.

Responses from the heads of languages' revealed that they believed, teaching approaches, activities, and resources were the main factors which supported uptake at Key Stage 4 and beyond. The questionnaire indicated the following practices can enhance interest and ML uptake and were exhibited by successful schools:

- Making use of ICT to support languages teaching and learning, including websites and interactive whiteboards;
- Having additional staffing support for languages (for example, a foreign language assistant, teaching assistant or languages advisor); and
- Making use of language supports from external sources, in particular from schools and organisations abroad, regional support networks, other secondary schools, and national support networks.

Furthermore, Newbould and Taylor (2012) in a piece of research entitled: '*Addressing the MFL GCSE Uptake Crisis*', also found through a curriculum review and case study research, that resourcing has a positive impact on motivation. Specifically the research found that increased motivation was created through the use of good resources and encouraging the use of ICT/e-learning. Additional research has suggested that the use of external speakers can also enhance interest and ML uptake (Filmer-Sankey and Marshall, 2010) and raise students' general educational aspirations (Passy & Morris, 2010).

The impact of finances and resourcing has been also noted to influence engagement

in ML learning amongst younger students. Studies have indicated that ML resources, or the lack of them, are very important to primary schools.

For instance, Driscoll, Jones and Macrory (2004) delivered a postal survey of a representative sample of schools with students in Key Stage 2 in order to assess their language provision. Overall, 5,358 primary schools in England were given the opportunity to provide a response, of which 2,825 submitted a response.

In total, 24% of primary schools offering ML had chosen to teach a particular language at least partly because resources for it were available. Amongst teachers who don't currently teach an ML, 82% said they would require teaching materials before they were prepared to do so and 77% would require schemes of work. One-hundred teachers noted that they need far more resources than are currently available both to support their own language competence and to help them teach ML and ensure that students succeed.

## **5.5. ML Assessment**

Though perceived difficulty can be easily assessed and distinguished (as noted in Section 5.1.1), it is much more difficult to discern whether a subject is intrinsically more demanding or whether its assessment arrangements hinder students.

Available research which examines the appropriateness and fitness for purpose of current language assessment is limited; however, there is evidence to suggest that assessment arrangements may have an impact on uptake and progression.

With regards to assessment at GCSE, research conducted by Ipsos MORI (2012) noted that teachers are of the opinion that controlled assessment at this level tests memory rather than language skills and thus leads to students' skills being biased towards speaking and writing, as these skills are tested by the controlled assessment at the expense of reading and listening.

However, in relation to A-Level, Smith, Alton and Mitchell (2012) noted that, at this level, external assessments examine speaking skills which differs to GCSE where only reading and writing skills are assessed. Furthermore, in contrast to the rote learning noted in GCSE, at A-Level students are rewarded for their spontaneity. This was identified as being very difficult for middle and lower achieving students as such

assessment tasks require students to *'think on their feet'*.

In addition to this, Smith et al. (2012) in their study found that there has been an increase in demand between AS and A-Level in languages. This was considered to be due to several factors such as the introduction of *'stretch and challenge'*. Also, the reduction of the number of units from six to four increased stretch and challenge, as many of the same skills are assessed in a reduced number of units. This has resulted in assessments becoming more complex as students must demonstrate multiple skills within some exam questions.

Due to this, it has been argued by researchers that the systematic approach to controlled assessment at GCSE, (as identified in the Ipsos MORI study, 2012), where students tend to learn the assessment by rote, may lead to a reduction in the number of students wishing to continue MLs at A-Level when the subject content and assessment arrangements becomes perceptively more difficult (Malpass, 2014).

Though this may in fact be the case, a definitive conclusion cannot be reached to the limited research that is currently available in this area.



## 6. PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section of the report details the main findings gathered from the questionnaire and research events delivered to those involved in the evaluation.

### 6.1. Respondent Capacity

As stated, this questionnaire consisted of three main sections, each with their own specific set of questions for each stakeholder group consulted; these groups being:

- Teachers, Principals and Heads of Department (post-primary schools only);
- Parents; and
- Students (GCSE, AS and A-Level only).

Table 12 below presents a breakdown of the questionnaire's respondents.

<b>Respondent Profile</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Principal	(n=11)	7.1%
Head of Department	(n=10)	6.5%
Teacher	(n=7)	4.5%
Parent	(n=22)	14.3%
GCSE Level Student	(n=84)	54.5%
GCE AS-Level Student	(n=10)	6.5%
GCE A-Level Student	(n=10)	6.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=154)</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The vast majority of respondents were unsurprisingly students (67.5%, n=104), most of whom are currently studying at GCSE Level (54.5%, n=84). The remaining respondents were Principals (7.1%, n=11), Heads of Department (6.5%, n=10), teachers (4.5%, n=7) and parents (14.3%, n=22).

### 6.2. Principal, Head of Department & Teacher Feedback

Collectively 18.1% of all respondents (n=28) were Principals, Heads of Department and teachers. Their collective response has been analysed in the Sections below.

With regards to the tables the value 'n' in the report is the number of actual

respondents to the items being presented, described, or illustrated. In some instances, where the respondents have been asked to provide multiple responses to an item, 'n' may be greater than the total respondent figure.

Please note that as respondent numbers are fewer than 100, figures will be shown rather than percentages.

### 6.2.1. Background Information

The table below presents information on the number of centres which offer specific languages at GCSE and A-Level.

	<b>GCSE</b>	<b>A-Level</b>
French	(n=27)	(n=23)
Spanish	(n=24)	(n=22)
German	(n=11)	(n=11)
Irish	(n=18)	(n=17)
Other	-	(n=1 <sup>8</sup> )
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=80)</b>	<b>(n=73)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The most common language taught at GCSE and A-Level was French, with 27 and 23 centres out of 28 offering French at these levels respectively. Spanish was the second most popular language offered in centres with 24 centres stating that they offer this language at GCSE, and 22 stating they offer it at A-Level. In total, 18 and 17 centres offered Irish at GCSE and A-Level respectively, whilst 11 centres offered German at both GCSE and A-Level.

Only one centre noted that they offered an 'Other' language as a study option; this was Mandarin at A-Level.

	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Reduced	(n=13)
Increased	(n=4)
Stayed the Same	(n=11)

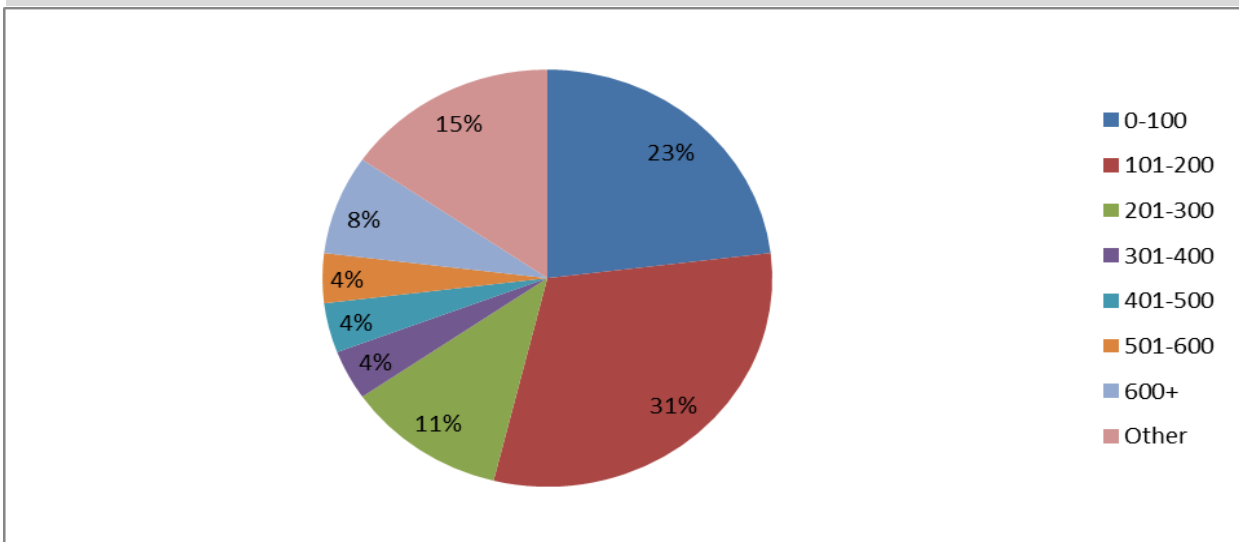
<sup>8</sup> Other responses included: Mandarin (n=1).

	Number of Respondents
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=28)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Response was split on whether ML provision at Key Stage 4 had changed in the past ten years. Approximately half of all respondents believed that it had reduced (n=13), whilst a slightly smaller proportion (n=11) believed that provision had not changed. Only a small proportion of respondents (n=4) felt that ML provision at Key Stage 4 had increased over the last decade.

**Figure 10: Number of Students Studying More Than One Language at Key Stage 3**



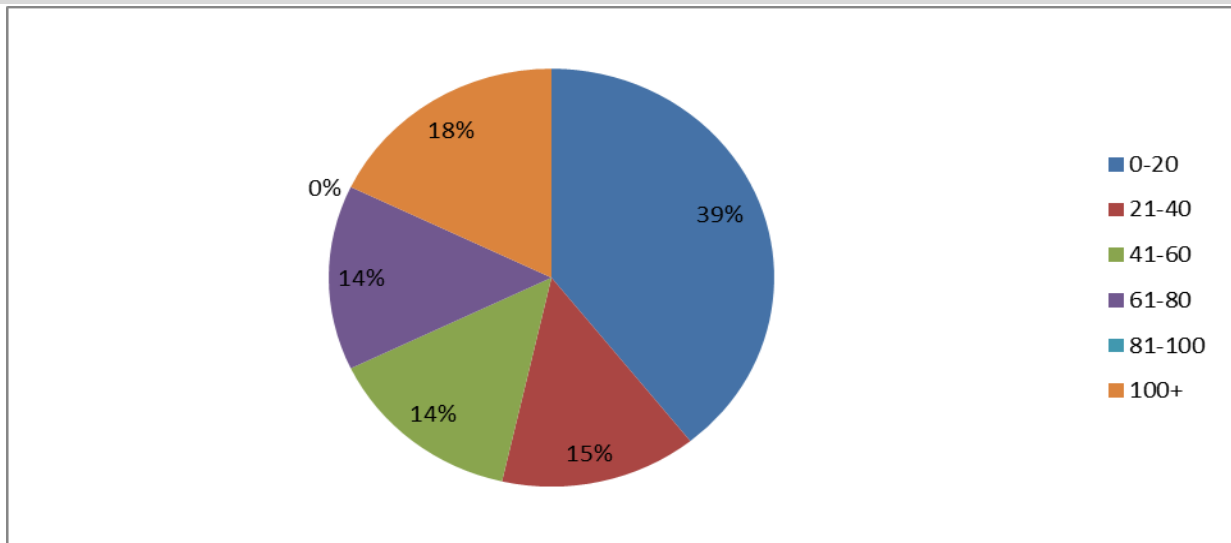
Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Around two-thirds of centres (n=18) noted that between 0 and 300 students study more than one language at Key Stage 3. One-fifth of respondent centres (n=6) mentioned that between 301 and 600+ students study more than one language at Key Stage 3.

The largest proportion of students studying more than one language at Key Stage 3 was between 101 and 200, were just under one-third of centres (n=9) noted this.

Centres who rated other (n=4) simply stated that all of their students studied more than one language at Key Stage 3, however, it was not clarified how many students this entails.

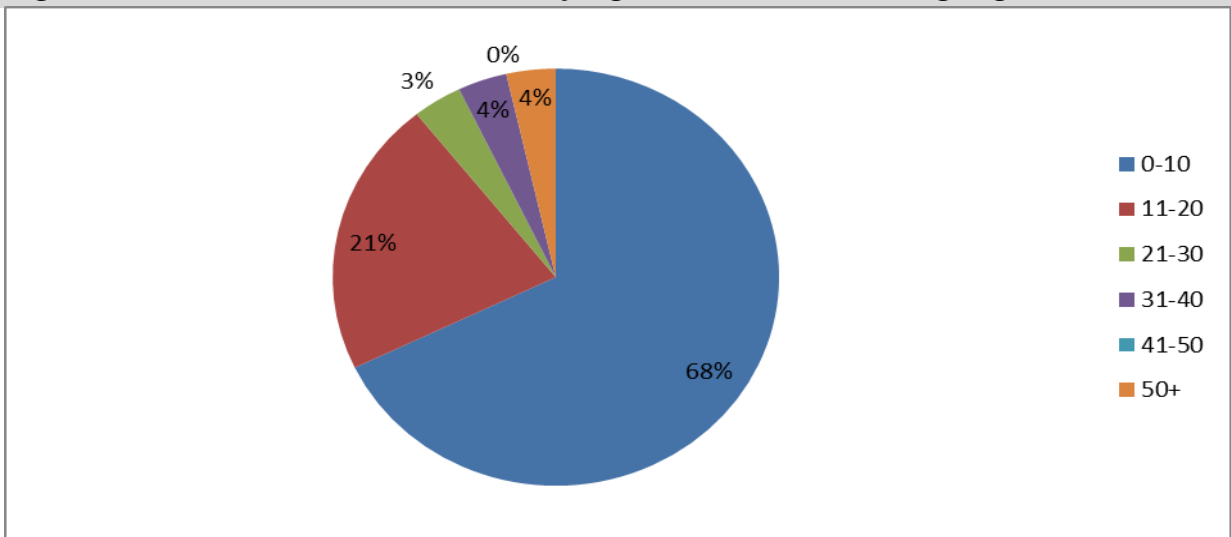
**Figure 11: Number of Students Studying More Than One Language at GCSE**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Over half of respondent centres (n=15) noted that between 0 and 40 students study more than one language at GCSE. In addition to this, under one-third (n=8) mentioned that between 41 and 60 students study more than one language at GCSE. The largest proportion of students studying more than one language at GCSE was between 0 and 20, were over one-third of centres (n=11) noted this. Furthermore, just below one-fifth of centres (n=5) indicated that over 100 students studied more than one language at GCSE Level.

**Figure 12: Number of Students Studying More Than One Language at A-Level**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Over two-thirds of respondent centres (n=19) noted that between 0 and 10 students study more than one language at A-Level, whilst just over one-fifth (n=6) mentioned

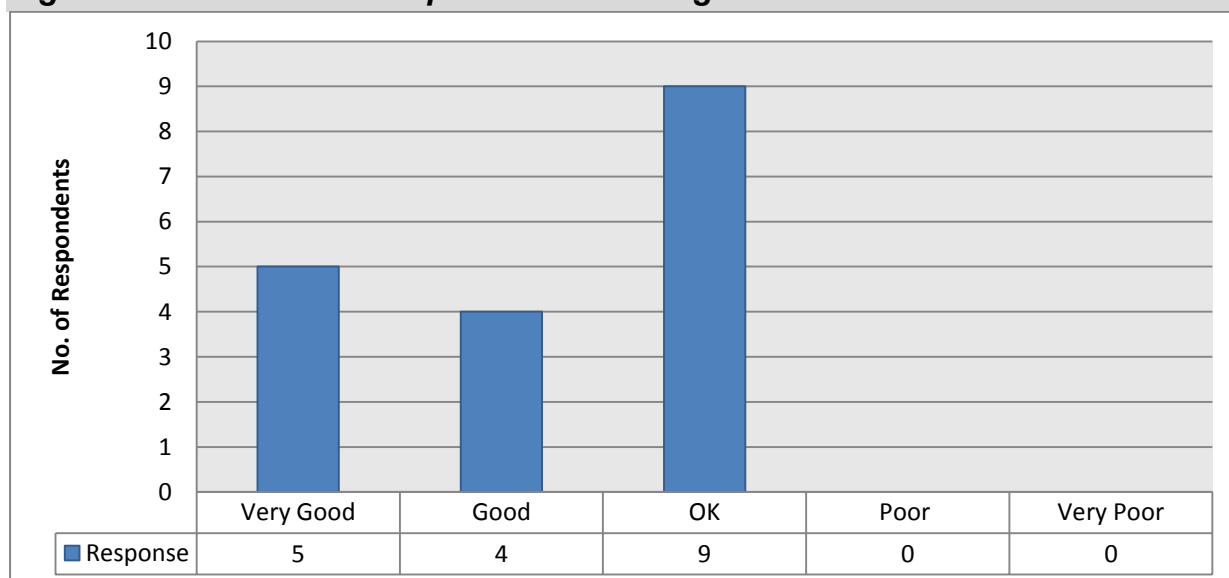
that between 11 and 20 students study more than one language at A-Level. The remaining centres either noted that between 21 and 30, 31 and 40 or 50+ students studied more than one language at this level (n=1, n=1 and n=1 respectively).

### 6.2.2. GCSE

In total, 18 centres offer GCSE Irish, all of which have a teacher qualified with either an undergraduate degree (n=14) or post-graduate degree (n=4) in Irish. When asked how many students are in a year group on average, responses ranged from 20 to 230 students, with the average number of students per GCSE year group being 76.

Respondents were subsequently asked to rate the current GCSE Irish specification on whether it is relevant and fit for purpose.

**Figure 13: Current GCSE Specification Rating**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Overall opinion is split on the current GCSE Irish specification. Half of all respondents (n=9) rate the specification as being either ‘Good’ (n=4), or ‘Very Good’ (n=4), whilst the other half of respondents (n=9) rate the specification as being ‘OK’. Encouragingly none of the respondents were negative in their rating of the current Irish specification.

Additional qualitative comments provided by respondents revealed both areas of support and concern, as well as recommendations in relation to the current GCSE specification. These are included in table 15:

**Table 15: Current GCSE Specification Rating [Comments]**

<b>Areas of Support</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current GCSE specification is appropriate (n=1).</li></ul>
<b>Areas of Concern</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment is not appropriate, controlled assessment does not develop writing (n=5);</li><li>• A generic languages specification does not suit Irish (n=1);</li><li>• Grade boundaries are too high in comparison to the other modern languages (n=1); and</li><li>• Gap is too wide between GCSE and AS/A (n=1).</li></ul>
<b>Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speaking tasks should be removed from the current GCSE specification (n=1).</li></ul>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Principals, Heads of Department and teachers were also asked what skills they think GCSE Irish offers students; responses included the following:

- Extended skills in communication, reading and personal skills e.g. team work, problem solving and presentation skills (n=16);
- A greater awareness and knowledge of their own culture (n=6); and
- The ability to work in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) (n=1).

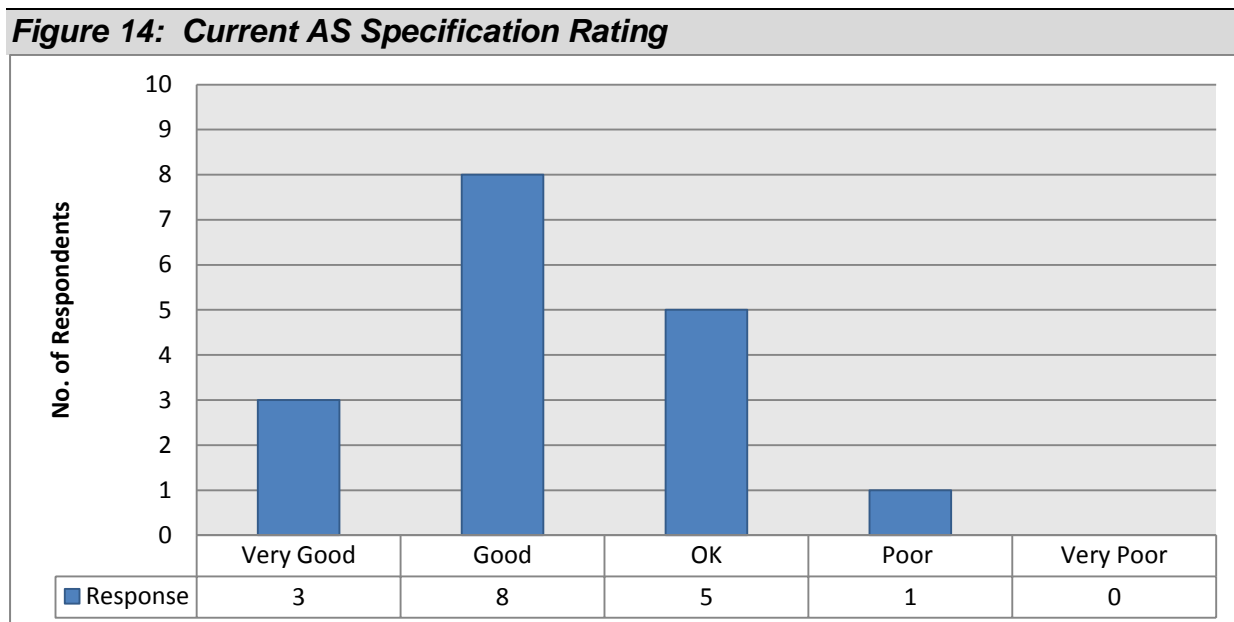
As mentioned previously, 18 of the 28 centres offer Irish at GCSE Level. For the remainder who do not (n=10), the following reasons were given as to why this is not the case:

- Lack of demand from students to offer GCSE Level Irish (n=5);
- No specialist staff available to teach Irish (n=4);
- Budget constraints make it difficult to maintain schools present provision of subjects (n=2);
- It is not mandatory to offer GCSE Level Irish (n=1);
- The political and cultural demographic in this area is not commensurate (n=1); and
- Schools language policy is to offer languages with a global currency (n=1).

### **6.2.3. AS-Level**

Seventeen out of the 18 centres who offer GCSE Level Irish also offer Irish at AS-

Level. With regards to the average number of students in a year group, the response, as expected, was lower than what was given at GCSE. Responses ranged from 2 to 15 students, with each AS-Level year group consisting of roughly seven students on average.



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Opinion on the current AS-Level Irish specification is generally positive. Around two-thirds of respondents (n=11) rate the specification as being either ‘Good’ (n=8), or ‘Very Good’ (n=3). Most of the remaining respondents (n=5) rate the specification as being ‘OK’. Only one respondent rated the current AS-Level Irish specification as being ‘Poor’.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional qualitative comments in relation to their rating of the current AS-Level specification. Similar to the response at GCSE, comments indicate that there were areas of support and concern, as well as recommendations.

**Table 16: Current AS-Level Specification Rating**

<b>Areas of Support</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current AS specification is appropriate (n=1).</li> </ul>
<b>Areas of Concern</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Topics are too broad (n=1);</li> <li>Difficult to cover topics in the given timescales (n=1); and</li> </ul>

- Controlled assessment in GCSE does not prepare pupils for AS-Level (n=1).

**Recommendations**

- Needs to be more structured with reference to contemporary issues (n=1);
- More emphasis on spoken Irish (n=1); and
- More emphasis on cultural identity (n=1).

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

In relation to the skills in which AS-Level Irish offers students, the response was similar to what was given at GCSE, though higher level conversational skills were mentioned in place of basic communication skills.

- Ability to converse in native language (n=12);
- Various skills including: personal skills, thinking skills, working with others and problem solving skills (n=9);
- Cultural enrichment (n=2);
- Increased chance of attending a university in ROI (n=2); and
- Ability to work independently (n=1).

The table below includes reasons teachers gave for and against students studying Irish at AS-Level.

**Table 17: Reasons for and Against Studying Irish at AS-Level**

Reasons For:	Reasons Against:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have a love of the language and enjoy learning it (n=10);</li> <li>• Students' background including: family ties or knowing someone who speaks the language (n=10);</li> <li>• Students have had a positive Gaeltacht experience in the past (n=5);</li> <li>• Students enjoyed learning the subject in class and were influenced by their teacher (n=4);</li> <li>• Good grades are achievable in this subject (n=3);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception that AS-Level Irish is a difficult subject (n=3);</li> <li>• Pupils fail to see the relevance of Irish as a subject (n=2); and</li> <li>• Not having the prerequisite GCSE qualification in the subject (n=1).</li> </ul>



Reasons For:	Reasons Against:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important for certain students' career development (n=3);</li> <li>• Students attended an Irish-Medium Primary School (n=2);</li> <li>• Beneficial for students looking to work in Southern Ireland (n=2); and</li> <li>• Schools' ethos and the Irish language resources available in that school (n=2).</li> </ul>	

*Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015*

As it can be seen, the main reasons given by Principals, Heads of Department and teachers for students studying Irish at this level include a love for the language and a desire to study it (n=10), and students background and familial influences (n=10). Respondents stated that the main reason they believe students do not study the subject is due to a perception that Irish is a difficult AS subject (n=3).

As stated previously, 17 of the 28 centres offer Irish at AS-Level. For the remaining centres who do not (n=11), the following reasons were given as to why this is the case:

- No demand for the subject from students (n=6);
- School did not offer the prerequisite GCSE (n=2)
- No specialist staff with the required qualifications to teach Irish (n=1); and
- Pupils can access AS Irish through the shared block (n=1).

All respondents were asked to provide suggestions as to what would make AS-Level Irish a more popular subject choice for students. This revealed the following recommendations:

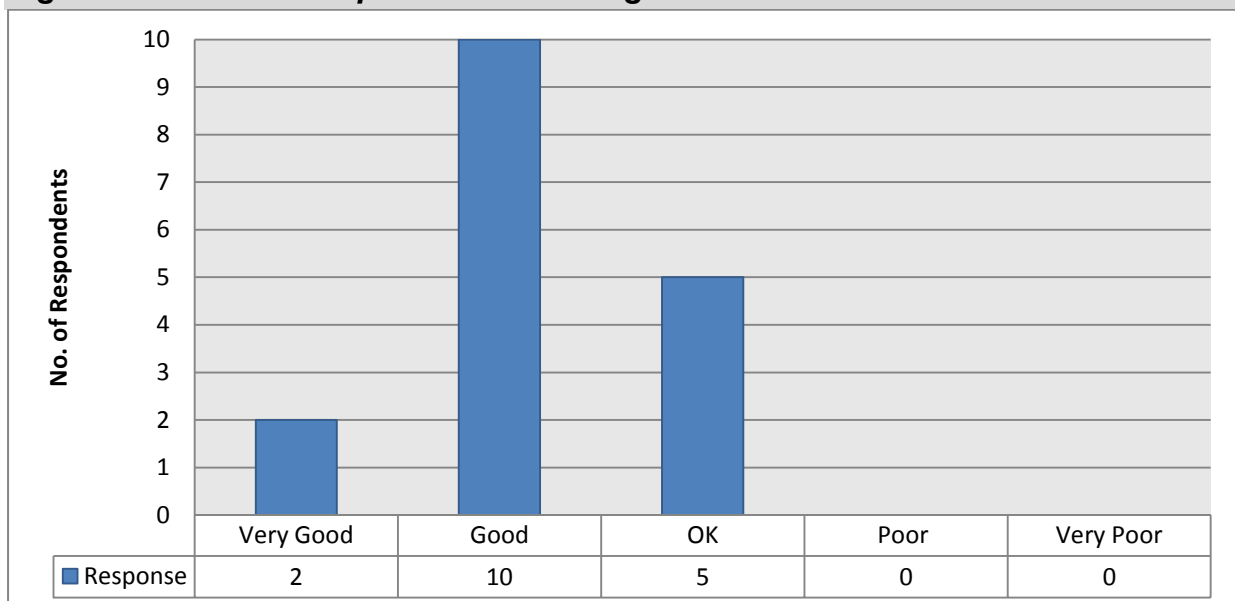
- Not sure how to make it more popular, the limited use of Irish makes it difficult to promote (n=6);
- Make the subject easier to achieve a good grade, especially for those who are not attending Irish speaking schools (n=5);
- Irish has a reputation that those who study it are of a certain political persuasion, this makes it off-putting for some (n=4);

- More emphasis needs to be placed on transferrable language skills (n=1);
- Extend controlled assessment to AS-Level (n=1);
- Remove controlled assessment from GCSE Irish (n=1);
- Completing this subject at another school puts pupils of (n=1);
- Schools should promote languages more in general (n=1);
- More work needs to be done to promote the relevance of Irish to future careers (n=1);
- Enhance the cultural aspect of Irish as a subject (n=1);
- Improve resources, online resources and language assistance (n=1);
- Improve uptake at Key Stage 3 (n=1);
- The gap between GCSE and A is very wide and needs to be addressed (n=1); and
- Unsure as ways and means would vary from school to school (n=1).

### 6.2.4.A-Level

Similar to AS-Level, 17 centres in total also offer Irish as a subject choice at A-Level. These respondents noted that, on average, between 2 and 15 students per year group study Irish at A-Level. Across all centres the average number of students in an A-Level Irish year group is stated to be approximately six.

**Figure 15: Current A Specification Rating**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Overall opinion is positive on the current A-Level Irish specification. Approximately three-quarters of respondents (n=12) rate the specification as being either 'Good' (n=10), or 'Very Good' (n=2), whilst the remaining respondents (n=5) rate the specification as being 'OK'.

Additional comments in relation to respondents' initial rating included the following:

<b>Table 18: Current A-Level Specification Rating [Comments]</b>	
<b>Areas of Support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current A specification is appropriate (n=1); and</li> <li>• Discussion at A-Level is easier to prepare for than AS presentation.</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas of Concern</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral examine can be inconsistent (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a literacy text as opposed to a general topic based question (n=1); and</li> <li>• Provide further resources for teachers (n=1).</li> </ul>	

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Respondents suggested that A-Level Irish provides students with the following skills:

- Improves personal skills, e.g. communication and thinking skills (n=11);
- Develops an ability to evaluate written work (n=5);
- Develops bilingualism (n=4);
- Improves and enhances students' cultural awareness (n=2);
- Improves career prospects (n=2); and
- Introduces new topics for discussion (n=1).

The skills identified were similar to those provided by respondents at GCSE and AS. However, additional skills were noted to be developed at this level such as, bilingualism and evaluation skills.

<b>Table 19: Reasons for and Against Studying Irish at A-Level</b>	
<b>Reasons For:</b>	<b>Reasons Against:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student achieved good grades at AS-Level (n=8);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult subject to get top grades in (n=2);</li> <li>• Time required to complete the subject</li> </ul>

Reasons For:	Reasons Against:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important for certain students' career or university prospects (n=7);</li> <li>• Initial cultural awareness of students makes them more willing to study Irish (n=4);</li> <li>• Students enjoy learning Irish and have a desire to become bilingual (n=3);</li> <li>• Students have had a positive Gaeltacht experience in the past (n=2);</li> <li>• Parental influences (n=2); and</li> <li>• Students enjoyed learning the subject in class and were influenced by their teacher (n=2).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n=1); and</li> <li>• The scaling of marks puts students' off. They don't see their hard work paying off. It is easier to get a top grade in other subjects (n=1).</li> </ul>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The main reasons given by Principals, Heads of Department and teachers for students studying Irish at this level include students achieving a good grade at AS-Level (n=8) and the subject being important for their university or career prospects (n=7). Respondents stated that the main reason they believe students do not study the subject is due to a perception that Irish is a difficult A-Level subject (n=2).

Eleven centres noted that they do not offer Irish as a subject choice at A-Level. This was due to the following reasons:

- No demand for the subject from students (n=2);
- No specialist staff with the required qualifications to teach Irish (n=2);
- School did not offer the prerequisite GCSE (n=1);
- Budget constraints (n=1); and
- No resources to teach Irish at this level (n=1).

Again respondents were asked to provide suggestions as to what would make A-Level Irish a more popular subject choice. These are detailed below:

- Not sure how to make it more popular (n=4);
- Promote Irish in a more inclusive sense, try and decrease the political

connection with studying Irish at school (n=3);

- Separate provision/statistics for non-native speakers as pupils of Irish are at a disadvantage as they are in the same statistic group as native speakers and adult learners. This is not the case of other subjects (n=3);
- More work needs to be done to promote the relevance of Irish to future careers (n=1);
- Enhance the cultural aspect of Irish as a subject (n=1);
- Make distinction with the Gaelige qualification and Irish - currently not defined well for general public. Too many Irish speaking taking an easy GCSE or A-Level and obscuring results for kids who start from scratch. This is unfair (n=1);
- Move the essay from AS-Level to A-Level, it would make more sense for it to be placed there (n=1);
- Nothing can be done to make the subject more popular (n=1);
- Improved resources (n=1)
- Promoting Gaeltacht courses more readily and increasing attendance from a young age (n=1)
- Review of weightings for different skills within the qualification (n=1); and
- Unsure as ways and means would vary from school to school (n=1).

### **6.3. Parent Feedback**

In total, 14.3% of all respondents (n=22) were parents. Their response has been analysed and detailed in the following sections (i.e. 6.3.1 – 6.3.4). Again please note, when viewing the tables, since respondent numbers are fewer than 100, figures will be shown rather than percentages.

#### **6.3.1. GCSE**

Fifteen out of the 22 parent respondents stated that their child studied Irish at this level. The remaining seven respondents stated that their child did not study GCSE Irish.

**Table 20: Did your Child Study Irish at GCSE?**

	Number
Yes	(n=15)
No	(n=7)
Don't Know	-
N/A	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=22)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

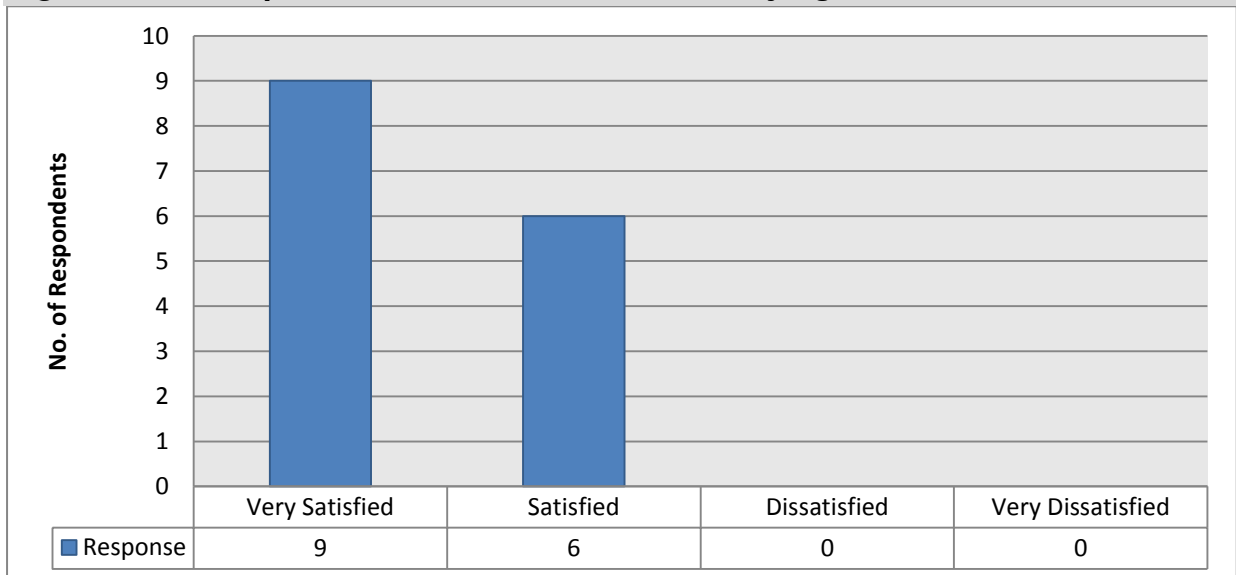
For the seven parents whose children did not study GCSE Irish, only two noted that their child was offered the choice to study the subject at this level. These parents explained their child's reasons for not selecting Irish as a subject option:

*'My son didn't study Irish at junior level instead he chose Spanish and French.'*

*'Not relevant for his studies.'*

Parents whose children studied Irish (n=15) were asked to rate their child's satisfaction with regards to studying the subject at this level.

**Figure 16: Perception of Child's Satisfaction Studying GCSE Irish**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Figure 16 above shows that all applicable parents (n=15) believed that their child was at least 'Satisfied' with studying Irish at GCSE. Most parents (n=9) stated that their child was 'Very Satisfied' in regards to this.

Parents were subsequently asked to give their opinions as to why their child chose to

study GCSE Level Irish; reasons included the following:

- Natural aptitude for learning languages (n=3);
- Strong Irish cultural identify which developed an interest in learning the subject (n=2);
- Attended Gaeltacht summer courses from a young age (n=3);
- Educated at an Irish-Medium Primary School (n=2);
- Familial influence, i.e. language is spoken at home so an interest was developed as a result (n=2);
- Enjoyed learning language at an earlier age (n=2); and
- Encouragement from parents (n=1).

### **6.3.2. AS-Level**

In total, nine out of the 22 respondents stated that their child studied Irish at AS-Level. The remaining parents either indicated that their child did not study AS-Level Irish (n=9), or that this was non-applicable to them (n=4); meaning that their child was too young at the time of responding to have studied AS Irish.

<b>Table 21: Did your Child Study Irish at AS-Level?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=9)
No	(n=9)
Don't Know	-
N/A	(n=4)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=22)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

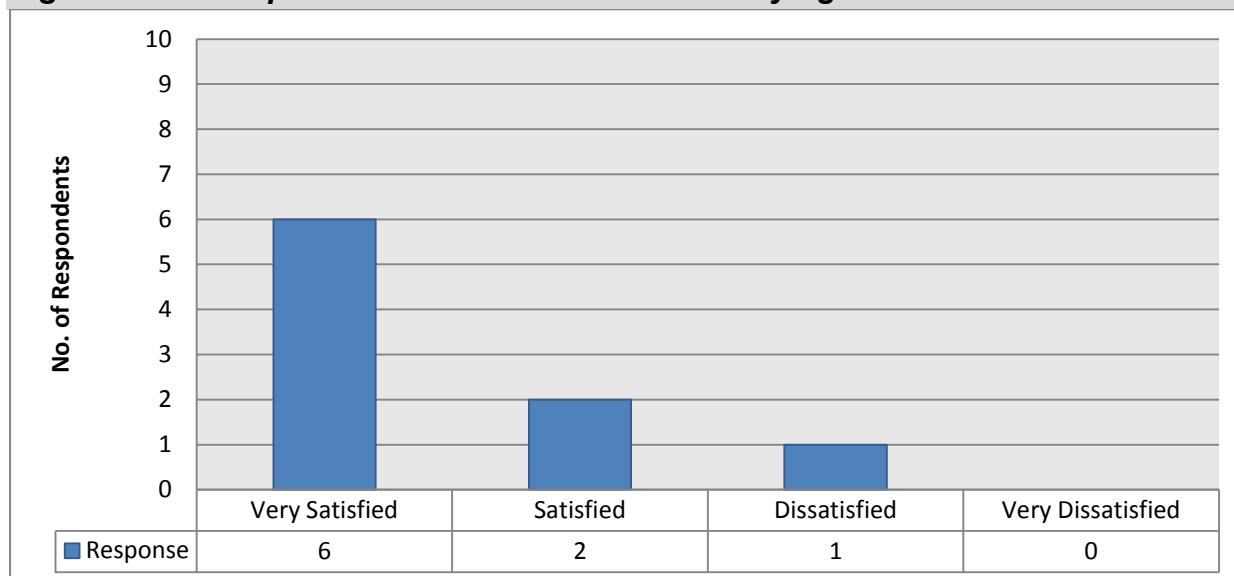
Only four out of the nine parents whose children did not study AS Irish stated that their child was offered a choice to study the subject. These parents gave opinions as to why their child did not choose Irish as a subject option at this level, these were:

- They did not study the subject at GCSE (n=2);
- There were other subject options that they were more competent in at this level (n=1); and
- They wanted to study science subjects (n=1).

Those whose children studied AS-Irish were asked to rate their child's satisfaction

with regards to studying the subject at this level.

**Figure 17: Perception of Child's Satisfaction Studying AS Irish**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Most of the applicable parents (n=8) believed that their child was at least ‘*Satisfied*’ with studying Irish at AS-Level. Most parents (n=6) stated that their child was ‘*Very Satisfied*’ in this regard. One parent stated that their child was ‘*Dissatisfied*’ with AS-Level Irish as they found the subject difficult.

Parents were subsequently asked to give their opinions as to why their child chose to study GCSE Level Irish, these included:

- Achieved a good grade at GCSE Level Irish (n=3);
- Attended Gaeltacht summer courses from a young age (n=2);
- Enjoyed learning Irish at this level (n=2);
- Relevant to the career they wish to pursue (i.e. translator) (n=1);
- Educated at an Irish-Medium Primary School (n=1);
- Great teacher at GCSE made them wish to pursue the language further (n=1);
- and
- Natural aptitude for learning Irish (n=1).

Respondents were also asked to give their opinions as to what would make AS-Level Irish a more attractive study option for students. The following themes emerged from their responses:



- Introduce Irish at an earlier age to engage children early (n=3);
- More effective promotion of the subject and its usefulness in a real world context (n=2);
- If more schools offered Irish as a subject option, e.g. child's school is in a loyalist area so it is not offered (n=2);
- Don't know / the subject does not interest me (n=2);
- Better teaching (n=1);
- Selection of subject depends on students' career choices, not sure how it can be made more popular (n=1);
- Irish is politicised in N. Ireland rather than treated the same as other languages. If Irish was seen as being able to provide the same skills as other languages then more would opt in to study it (n=1);
- Current policy is to force schools to offer more academically questionable subjects e.g. Health & Social Care, in which students find it much easier to get a good grade. This needs to change to make Irish more popular (n=1); and
- Make it more of a spoken course (n=1).

### **6.3.3.A-Level**

Six parents indicated that their child studied A-Level Irish. The remaining respondents stated either that their child did not study A-Level Irish (n=9), or that this was non-applicable to them (n=7); meaning that their child was too young at the time of responding to have studied A-Level Irish.

<b>Table 22: Did your Child Study Irish at A-Level?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=6)
No	(n=9)
Don't Know	-
N/A	(n=7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=22)</b>

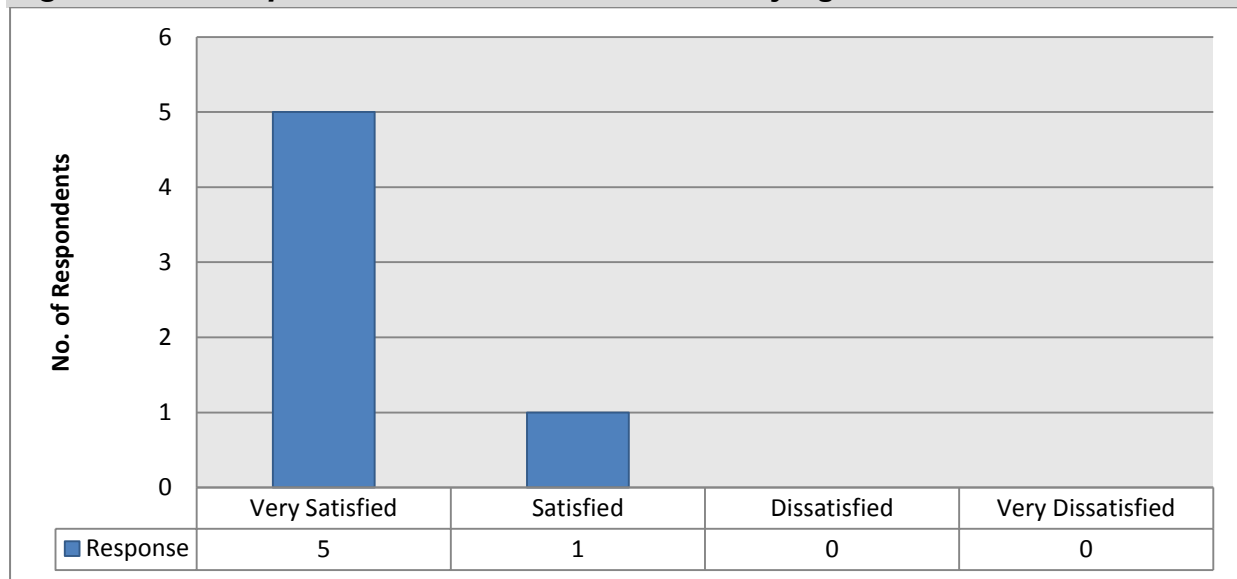
Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

A small number of parents whose children did not study A-Level Irish (n=4) stated that their child was offered a choice to study this. Reasons given by parents as to why their child did not study A-Level Irish included:

- They did not study the subject at GCSE / Never studied Irish (n=2);
- There were other subject options that they were a better fit for them (n=1); and
- They wanted to study science subjects (n=1).

Similar to GCSE and AS, parents whose children studied Irish at A-Level were asked to rate their child's satisfaction with regards to studying this subject.

**Figure 18: Perception of Child's Satisfaction Studying A-Level Irish**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

All parents (n=6) noted that their child was either 'Satisfied' (n=1) or 'Very Satisfied' with A-Level Irish. Reasons for choosing to study Irish at this level were given by parents, these included:

- Wanted to pursue the subject at University level (n=4);
- Received a good grade at AS-Level Irish (n=1);
- Educated at an Irish-Medium Primary School (n=1); and
- Enjoyed learning Irish at this level (n=1).

When this question was expanded to include all parental respondents and A-Level subjects, similar opinions were given by parents regarding what factors dictated their child's decisions to pick their A-Level subjects. These were:

- Chose subjects based on their enjoyment (n=7);
- Wanted to study pursue the subject at University level (n=6); and
- Wanted to pursue a career which required a particular set of subject

qualifications (n=5).

Parents also gave suggestions as to what would make A-Level Irish a more popular subject option. This included:

- If it could lose its negative politicised image and stigma (n=3);
- Don't know (n=2);
- Make it compulsory (n=1);
- Introduce it earlier (n=1);
- Make it more enjoyable i.e. learning through play and activities (n=1);
- End the pressure from soft subjects which are perceived as being easier (n=1);
- Make it easier (n=1); and
- Educate pupils in how Irish can be useful to them (n=1).

#### **6.3.4. Gaeltacht**

As part of this review focus has been placed on the impact of Gaeltacht courses on students' language skills and their motivations to study. Gaeltacht courses are Irish language summer courses which give students the opportunity to be totally immersed in the language, usually for periods of three weeks over the summer months.

The importance of assessing their impact was confirmed through the Principal, Head of Department and teacher questionnaire, where the importance of Gaeltacht courses were identified as a particular motivating factor for students choosing to study Irish at GCSE, AS and A-Levels.

	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=12)
No	(n=10)
Not Sure	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=22)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The response was split on this question. Slightly over half of all parents (n=12) noted that their child attended a Gaeltacht course when they were younger, whilst a slightly

smaller proportion of respondents (n=10) stated that their child has not attended a Gaeltacht course.

**Table 24: No. of Times Child Attended a Gaeltacht Course**

	Number
1-2 times	(n=2)
3-4 times	(n=8)
5 or more times	(n=2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=12)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Of the parents who indicated that their child had attended a Gaeltacht course, two thirds (n=8) mentioned that their child attended a course between three and four times. The remaining third stated that their child either attended a Gaeltacht course between one and two times (n=2), or five or more times (n=2).

**Table 25: Was Attending a Gaeltacht Course Beneficial to your Child's Irish?**

	Number
Yes	(n=11)
No	-
Don't Know	(n=1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=12)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

When asked whether they believed that attending a Gaeltacht course improved their child's Irish, most of the applicable respondents (n=10) felt that attendance was beneficial due to the following reasons:

- Became more confident in her Irish, especially spoken Irish after spending summers in the Gaeltacht (n=2);
- Brought language to life, made Irish cool (n=1); and
- Gave a better indication and love for the language (n=1).

Parents whose children have never attended a Gaeltacht course (n=10) were asked to give their opinion as to whether they think attending a Gaeltacht course would benefit their child's Irish.

The majority of these parents (n=7) believed that attendance would improve their

child’s Irish, whilst the remaining respondents either stated that they did not believe attendance would improve their child’s Irish (n=1) or that they were not sure (n=2).

Respondents who provided additional qualitative comments in relation to this question (n=2) expressed concerns about the accessibility of Gaeltacht courses and a perceived political nature of such courses.

*‘Culturally, I would find it unacceptable as unfortunately Irish is a politicised language.’*

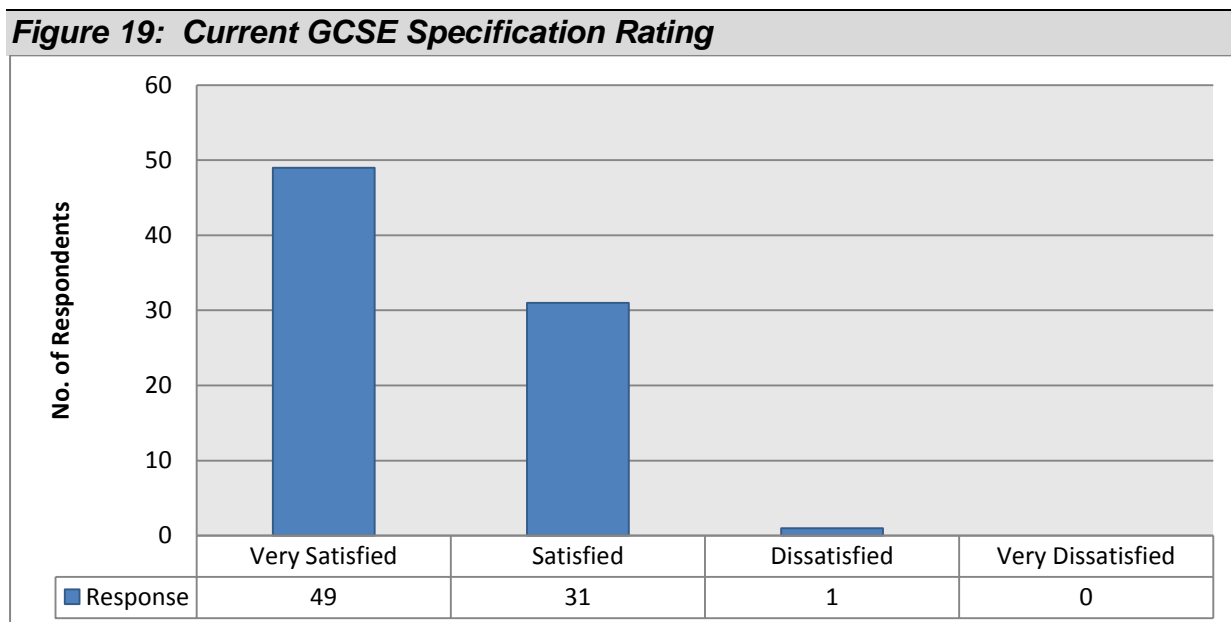
*‘Never really had the option - I would like her to go but don't know how to access it.’*

## 6.4. Student Feedback

The vast majority of students who responded to the questionnaire were students. Of the 154 respondents who completed the online questionnaire, 66.9% were students (n=104).

### 6.4.1. GCSE

In total, 81 (77.8%) of the 104 students studied Irish at GCSE Level. These students provided their opinion on the current GCSE specification; this is detailed in Figure 19 below:



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Almost all students who studied GCSE Irish stated that they were at least ‘Satisfied’

(n=80) with the current GCSE specification. Only one student reported being 'Dissatisfied' with the specification.

In spite of the positive ratings provided by students, additional comments given alongside their rating revealed both positive and negative attitudes towards GCSE Irish. Students mainly noted that they liked the GCSE course (n=9) and had a good teacher (n=5), though others noted that the subject can be boring (n=2) and that listening exams are difficult (n=2). This is detailed further in the table below:

<b>Table 26: Current GCSE Specification Rating [Comments]</b>	
<b>Areas of Support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liked the GCSE course and achieved a good grade (n=9);</li> <li>• Good teacher, made the language much more enjoyable to learn (n=5); and</li> <li>• Loved the language (n=2); and</li> <li>• Important part of heritage (n=2).</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas of Concern</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening exam was difficult (n=2);</li> <li>• Can be boring (n=2); and</li> <li>• Controlled assessments are rushed (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None provided.</li> </ul>	

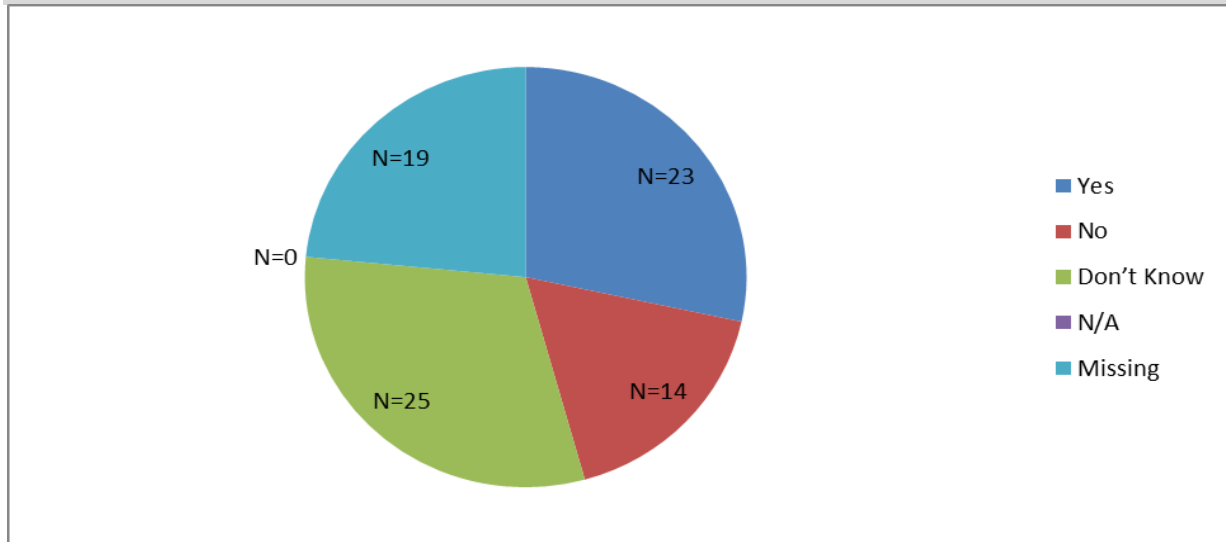
Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Students subsequently gave their reasons for studying GCSE Irish, responses revealed the following:

- Native language and is an important part of culture and family life (n=34);
- Love Irish as a language and wanted to improve knowledge of the subject (n=25);
- School had good Irish teachers (n=10);
- Attended Gaeltacht summer courses from a young age (n=10);
- Enjoyed learning the language at Key Stage 3 (n=7);
- Attended an Irish-Medium primary school (n=2);
- Preferred Irish over other subject options (n=2);
- Past pupils have found Irish enjoyable and influenced decision to study it

- (n=1);
- Already fluent in Irish (n=1);
- Capable of achieving a good grade (n=1);
- GCSE Irish is necessary for career being pursued (n=1); and
- Friendly atmosphere (n=1).

**Figure 20: Do you intend to continue studying Irish?**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Response was split on whether students intend on studying Irish at AS-Level. In total, 23 respondents stated that they do intend to continue their studies beyond GCSE; however, 14 stated that they do not wish to do so. The largest proportion of students (n=25) mentioned that they were not sure whether they will continue to study Irish at AS-Level. Comments given by students in relation to this provided reasons for their decisions to study or not study Irish at a higher level, these were:

- Decision depends on what other subjects are available (n=4);
- Not interested enough to continue studying Irish (n=2);
- Won't be studying Irish at AS-Level (n=2);
- Wish it could be used more (n=1);
- Irish listening turned me off the subject (n=1); and
- Irish should focus on grammar and sentence more (n=1).

Twenty-three students in total stated that they did not study Irish at GCSE. These students were subsequently asked whether they were given the option to study the subject or not.

<b>Table 27: If no, were you offered the choice to study Irish at GCSE?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=15)
No	(n=8)
Don't Know	-
N/A	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=23)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Over two-thirds of respondents (n=15) were offered the choice to study Irish at AS-Level, whilst the remainder (n=8) were not. Students who were offered the choice to study Irish at this level but did not, gave the following reasons:

- Preferred other languages and thought these would be more useful (n=6);
- Did not like Irish (n=3);
- Other subjects are easier (n=2);
- Did not think it would be useful in later life (n=2); and
- Went to an Irish speaking primary school (n=1).

As stated previously, findings from the Principal, Head of Department and teacher questionnaire confirmed the importance of assessing the impact of Gaeltacht courses on students' motivations and language skills. The following tables present this assessment.

<b>Table 28: Have you ever attended a Gaeltacht Course?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=34)
No	(n=50)
Not Sure	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=84)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

In total, 34 student respondents reported that they had attended a Gaeltacht course, however, the large majority of respondents (n=50) indicated that they had not.

The table below presents, for those respondents who have attended a Gaeltacht course (n=34), the number of times such a course was attended.



**Table 29: No. of Times Attending a Gaeltacht Course**

	Number
1-2 times	(n=30)
3-4 times	(n=4)
5 or more times	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=34)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

Almost all applicable student respondents (n=34) mentioned that they had attended a course between one and two times. The remaining respondents (n=4) stated that they had attended a course between three and four times. None of the respondents reported attending a Gaeltacht course five or more times.

**Table 30: Did Attending a Gaeltacht Course Benefit your Irish?**

	Number
Yes	(n=32)
No	(n=2)
Don't Know	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=34)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The vast majority of respondents (n=32) stated that attending a Gaeltacht course benefitted their Irish. Students provided specific examples of how attending such courses benefitted their language:

- Improved speaking and language (n=4);
- Mix and communicate socially with other young people (n=3);
- Enjoyed the location (n=1);
- Reinforced my love of the language (n=1); and
- Gaeltacht is beneficial for learning the language (n=1).

Only two respondents noted that attendance did not benefit their Irish. These respondents (n=2) stated that they had learnt nothing new from these courses.

For those respondents who mentioned that they had never attended a Gaeltacht course (n=50), just over half (n=28), believed that such courses would benefit their Irish if they had attended them. The remaining respondents either believed that attendance would not benefit their Irish (n=10) or were not sure (n=12). Comments

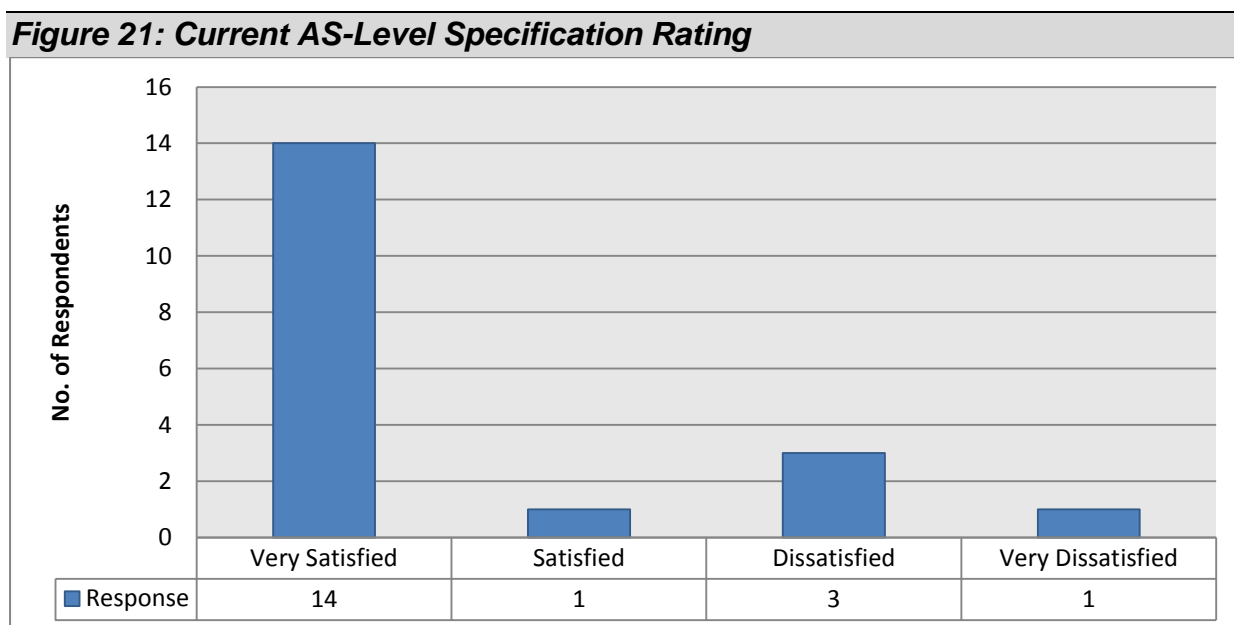
provided in addition to this question included the following opinions:

- Would like to attend a Gaeltacht course (n=3);
- No interest in Irish (n=2);
- Don't know (n=1);
- Other languages are more interesting (n=1); and
- Have not taken part in this before (n=1).

### 6.4.2. AS-Level

Most applicable students (n=19) who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they studied Irish at AS-Level. Only one respondent noted that they did not study Irish at this level.

These students provided their opinion on the current AS-Level specification, as identified in the graph below:



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The majority of students reported that they were either 'Very Satisfied' (n=14), or 'Satisfied' (n=1) with the current AS-Level specification. A small proportion of respondents (n=4), reported being either 'Dissatisfied' (n=3), or 'Very Dissatisfied' (n=1) with the current specification. Comments supporting the AS-Level specification included:

- The specification improved ability in the language (n=2); and

- Good teaching (n=1).

Comments which identified concerns with regards to the AS Irish specification included:

- The gap in difficulty between GCSE and A-Level is considerable (n=2);
- The course was difficult (n=2); and
- Would like more opportunity to speak the language (n=1).

Subsequently, students were asked what influenced their decision to study Irish at AS-Level. A range of factors and opinions were given as to why the decision to study Irish at this level was made, such as:

- Achieved good grades in GCSE Level Irish (n=11);
- Interested in the language and learning it further (n=6);
- Wanted to incorporate Irish into my life in further studies or perhaps as a career (n=3);
- Cultural influence and wanted to speak native language (n=2); and
- Encouraged by teachers to continue studies (n=2).

Nine respondents also provided a response about their plans after AS-Level. In total, seven respondents stated that they plan to continue their studies at A-Level and then university. Just over half of these respondents (n=4) stated that they intend to continue studying Irish at both A-Level and university levels. Two respondents mentioned that they have no intention of continuing their studies in Irish.

As mentioned previously one respondent stated that they did not study AS-Level Irish. Table 31 indicates that they were however offered the choice to study Irish at this level.

<b>Table 31: If no, were you offered the choice to study Irish at this level?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=1)
No	-
Don't Know	-
N/A	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=1)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The respondent elaborated on their response as to why they didn't choose to study Irish when offered, specifically it was noted that they felt GCSE Irish was 'a closed door in terms of careers'.

When asked to give reasons behind their AS-Level subject choices, students gave similar reasons to what they gave for Irish. These being:

- Enjoyed the subjects (n=14);
- Good teachers who encouraged continuation of studies (n=8);
- Achieved good grades at GCSE Level (n=7);
- Applicable to career being pursued (n=7);
- Found my choices easier than other subject options (n=6);
- Required the subjects for university (n=5);
- Other people's advice including friends and family (n=3); and
- Choose a range of subjects with course work and without (n=1).

When asked specifically what would make AS-Level Irish a more popular subject choice, students gave a wide range of opinions and recommendations such as:

- Raise awareness of the value of the transferable skills that can be developed through Irish and how beneficial these can be (n=5);
- Improve the oral content and subjects to be studied (n=3);
- Improve the teaching (particularly grammar at GCSE) therefore removing perception that it is a difficult subject (n=3);
- Raise awareness of the cultural aspect of the course (n=2); and
- Make the subject more interesting and engaging to learn 2
- Improve interaction with other schools and Gaeltacht's (n=2)
- Improve uptake at GCSE first (n=1);
- Increase number of lessons at KS3 including uptake in schools (n=1);
- Make the reading and writing separate (n=1);
- Try to remove the stigma around the subject (n=1);
- Reduce the gap between AS and GCSE (n=1); and
- Increase course work (n=1).

AS-Level students were also asked whether or not they have ever attended a Gaeltacht course. In total, seven students stated that they had attended a course in the past.

<b>Table 32: Have you ever attended a Gaeltacht Course?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=7)
No	(n=3)
Missing	(n=9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=19)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The table below presents, for those respondents who have attended a Gaeltacht course (n=7), the number of times such a course was attended.

<b>Table 33: No. of Times Attending a Gaeltacht Course</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
1-2 times	(n=2)
3-4 times	(n=2)
5 or more times	(n=3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=7)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

As it can be seen from table 33 above, the largest proportion of students (n=3) attended a Gaeltacht course five or more times. The remaining respondents indicated that they attended such courses between one and two times (n=2) or between three and four times (n=2).

<b>Table 34: Did Attending a Gaeltacht Course Benefit your Irish?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=7)
No	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=7)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

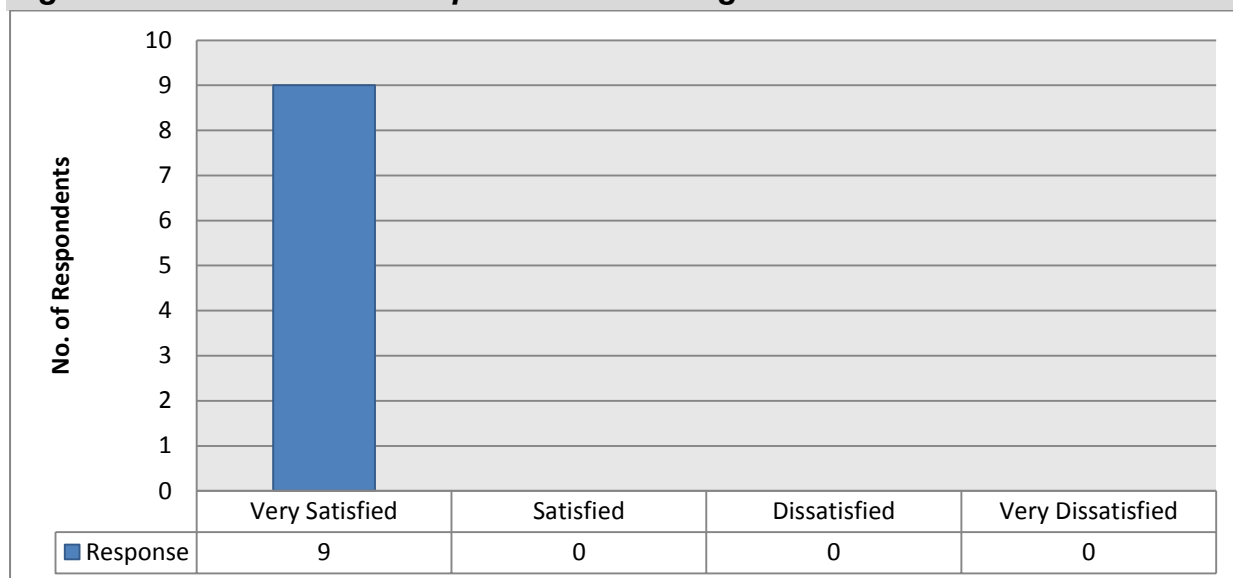
All applicable respondents (n=7) noted that attending a Gaeltacht course benefitted their Irish. Additional comments provided by a number of respondents (n=3) confirmed that attendance was beneficial in improving their overall linguistic ability.

Those who have never attended a Gaeltacht course (n=3) believed that attending such a course would enhance their Irish. One respondent went on to say that they would like to have attended a Gaeltacht course but couldn't due to the cost.

### 6.4.3.A-Level

Nine respondents in total stated that they studied A-Level Irish, whilst one respondent did not. These students went on to give their opinion on the current A-Level specification.

**Figure 22: Current A-Level Specification Rating**



Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

As it can be seen from the graph above, all applicable students (n=9) indicated that they were 'Very Satisfied' with the current Irish A-Level specification. These respondents provided reasons for their response; these included:

- Very good teachers (n=3);
- Enjoyed the A-Level Irish course (n=2); and
- Had pre-existing Irish language skills which made the subject easier (n=1).

These students were also asked what influenced their decision to study Irish at A-Level; a range of factors and opinions were given, such as:

- Liked the language and was interested in learning it further (n=5);
- Achieved good grades in AS-Level Irish (n=4);
- A-Level Irish is necessary for career being pursued, i.e. teacher (n=2);

- Wanted to study Irish at University (n=1); and
- Wanted to become more involved in the Irish language (n=1).

Seven respondents went on to provide a response about their plans after A-Level. In total, six respondents stated that they plan to continue their studies at university. Two respondents mentioned that they wish to pursue a career as an Irish language teacher.

As stated previously one respondent stated that they did not study A-Level Irish. As it can be seen from the table below they were however offered the choice to study Irish at this level.

	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=1)
No	-
Don't Know	-
N/A	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=1)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

When asked to give a response as to why they didn't choose to study A-Level Irish, the respondent mentioned that they did not study the pre-requisite AS-Level course.

Students were again asked broadly to list factors which influenced all of their A-Level subject choices, the following reasons and opinions were given:

- Achieved good grades in AS-Level (n=6);
- Outside influences: teachers, schools and parents encouraged continuation of particular subjects (n=5);
- Enjoyed the subjects (n=4);
- Required the subjects for university (n=3);
- Employment prospects from certain set of subjects (n=2); and
- Predicted grades (n=1).

In total, nine out of the ten A-Level students questioned noted that they had attended a Gaeltacht course in the past.

<b>Table 36: Attended a Gaeltacht Course</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=9)
No	(n=1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=10)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

The table below presents, for those respondents who have attended a Gaeltacht course (n=9), the number of times such a course was attended.

<b>Table 37: No. of Times Attending a Gaeltacht Course</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
1-2 times	(n=4)
3-4 times	(n=4)
5 or more times	(n=1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=9)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

As it can be seen from the table above, the response was split. Most respondents either noted that they have attended a Gaeltacht course between one and two times (n=4) or between three and four times (n=4). Only one respondent stated that they had attended a Gaeltacht course five or more times.

<b>Table 38: Did Attending a Gaeltacht Course Benefit your Irish?</b>	
	<b>Number</b>
Yes	(n=9)
No	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=9)</b>

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

All applicable respondents (n=9) were in agreement that attending a Gaeltacht course was beneficial to their Irish. Qualitative comments provided by a number of respondents (n=3) confirmed that attendance was beneficial in giving them an ability to speak Irish.

The remaining respondent (n=1) who stated that they had never attended a Gaeltacht course felt that attendance would benefit their Irish. However, they did also state that it is very costly for a family to send a child to these courses.



## 6.5. Additional Questionnaire Comments

All stakeholder groups at the end of the questionnaire were given the opportunity to provide additional comments. This option was given in order to allow these groups to provide additional relevant information that was not explicitly asked within the questionnaire or to reiterate important points made previously. These are analysed by group under the headings below.

### 6.5.1. Principal, Head of Department & Teacher

Additional comments provided by Principals, Heads of Department and teachers relate to the following:

<b>Table 39: Additional Comments [Principal, Head of Department &amp; Teacher]</b>	
<b>Areas of Support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None provided.</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas of Concern</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The gap in difficulty between GCSE and AS-Level is too large (n=3);</li> <li>• Career opportunities are limited for those who study Irish (n=1);</li> <li>• Pupils from Irish-Medium schools have an unfair advantage over those from English-Medium schools (n=2);</li> <li>• Top grades are difficult to achieve in Irish (n=1);</li> <li>• Irish can be perceived as not being beneficial to future careers (n=1);</li> <li>• Resources not available to include Irish (n=1);</li> <li>• Parents often have an influence and persuade pupils to choose other languages (n=1);</li> <li>• Irish can be seen as political (n=1); and</li> <li>• Languages in general are viewed by students as being more difficult (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional research needs to be taken to assess the decline in German and promote it more (n=2);</li> <li>• Provision should be made to introduce a qualification in Polish (n=1);</li> <li>• Latin should be promoted more (n=1);</li> <li>• Languages need to be made compulsory;</li> <li>• More resources are required (n=1); and</li> <li>• Irish teachers should meet to share ideas (n=1).</li> </ul>	

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

### 6.5.2. Parent

Additional comments provided by parents relate to the following:

<b>Table 40: Additional Comments [Parent]</b>	
<b>Areas of Support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appreciated the survey and opportunity to provide opinions (n=3); and</li> <li>Glad to see emphasis being on other languages aside from French and Spanish (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas of Concern</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uptake of Irish depends on enthusiasm of school and how it is delivered (n=1); and</li> <li>There is a stigma surrounding Irish. As a subject it can be perceived to be political (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irish needs to be promoted at a younger age (n=1);</li> <li>Irish could be used to break down barriers (n=1); and</li> <li>Gaeltacht, though beneficial, is expensive (n=1).</li> </ul>	

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

### 6.5.3. Student

<b>Table 41: Additional Comments [Students]</b>	
<b>Areas of Support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoy learning my native language (n=3);</li> <li>Irish subject is very rewarding (n=1); and</li> <li>All people should be taught Irish even just at a basic level, as it not only is it a beautiful language to speak, it also is a part of our culture (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas of Concern</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irish language is of no benefit outside of school or to career (n=2);</li> <li>Irish is perceived as being difficult (n=1);</li> <li>School is boring (n=1);</li> <li>Enjoy Spanish more (n=1); and</li> <li>Students find the gap from GCSE to AS-Level very hard, there should be more focus on grammar at GCSE to prepare these students for AS-Level Irish (n=1).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More promotion is necessary for Irish (n=1).</li> </ul>	

Source: CCEA Irish Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output, July 2015

## 6.6. Workshop Findings

As stated previously, in addition to the online questionnaire, two research workshops were hosted in Belfast during October 2015. These were held in the Europa Hotel and the Foras na Gaeilge office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October respectively. A breakdown of the attendance at each session is included in Table 42 below:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
Europa Hotel, Great Victoria St, Belfast.	3/10/2015	11
Foras na Gaeilge, Queen St, Belfast.	14/10/2015	4

Source: CCEA Internal Monitoring Statistics, October 2015

Again these focused on the skills developed through studying additional languages, progression routes from GCSE and GCE and ways of further encouraging and promoting language learning and acquisition, particularly Irish.

The findings from both of these events have been summarised below.

### **Europa Hotel (3rd October 2015)**

The research group consisted of a mix of teachers, youth workers, academics and parents.

### **Foras na Gaeilge (14th October 2015)**

Four teachers attending this research event and one written response was submitted from a teacher unable to attend.

### **Opinions on Current AS/A Specifications**

The Europa group did not comment on the current CCEA Irish A-Level specifications choosing to discuss skills and opportunities to promote the Irish Language in all schools. The following information is therefore from the second research event only.

In relation to the current AS/A specification, respondents were typically satisfied with the content and assessment structure of the course. One respondent who currently teaches the specification felt that it is well resourced, however, they noted that as

these are produced and provided mainly by external providers, there is typically a delay in receiving these along with the new specification. This respondent went on to say that any new resources that will accompany the new revised A-Level specifications (available for first teaching 2016) should be available as soon as the specification is live and available for teaching.

Overall the group did not have any real issues with the current AS/A specification. However, concerns were raised in relation to the levels of study which precede A-Level (i.e. GCSE and Key Stage 3). One teacher mentioned that there is no issue with students and the content at AS and A-Level as they tend to enjoy the subject. It was suggested however that the problem lies in getting students to progress and continue their studies after GCSE.

It was believed that GCSE Irish *'kills students' passion to learn language'*; one respondent believed that Controlled Assessment at this level is partially to blame; it was felt that the process of Controlled Assessment is stressful and off-putting for students. Furthermore, it was believed that there is a poor follow through from GCSE to A-Level which also puts students off the subject.

One respondent from the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICELT) stated that the issue goes back further. They stated that the content at Key Stage 3 needs to be looked at to ensure logical progression to GCSE. It was noted that there is a very loose curriculum in place with regards to language learning at this level. As such, it was believed that a lot of schools end up repeating content at GCSE; which results in disengagement from students. This respondent went on to suggest that a more prescribed Irish curriculum should be put in place at Key Stage 3 to ensure that it is a natural precursor to GCSE Irish and that this is building on skills learnt at Key Stage 3 rather than repeating content.

### **Issues surrounding Irish uptake**

Both groups discussed that there are a number of reasons which negatively impact on Irish uptake. These include the following:

The current NI STEM initiative was brought up as an issue which has negatively

impacted on uptake. It was noted that as more promotion and credence is being given to STEM subjects, the upsurge in numbers will affect other subjects. The groups felt that languages in particular have been hurt as a result of this promotion. This coupled with a growing perception that *'everyone speaks English anyway'* has compounded what was described as a *'decreased perception of the usefulness of language'* and a subsequent decline in numbers. A number of members of each group went on to say that this can be seen in most MLs taught in schools, with the exception of Spanish.

Additionally, in relation to the last point, respondents believed that this has further impact based on the type of careers guidance offered by schools to students. The focus, it was said, seems to be on promoting STEM as an academic and career path. One person in the second research group remarked that there is a lack of promotion with regards to transferable skills which can be developed through language. This was a long area of discussion in the first research group. They felt that skills developed through language learning needs to be publicised and encouraged to stop the general decline in languages. Skills mentioned were;

Mnemonics, listening skills, presentation skills, [cognitive] problem solving, and creativity. The group also discussed the long term benefits of bilingualism and how these should be promoted in N. Ireland to encourage Irish in schools.

Additional concerns were raised with regards proposals from the Education Inspectorate to DE to widen student choice with regards to the curriculum. The group were concerned that compulsory languages would be targeted if these were to be taken on board.

Another additional problem for Irish is with regards to its promotion compared to other languages. Both groups suggested that the politicised nature of Irish as a subject prevents some schools and some parents taking it as a subject. The first research group suggested that Irish communities need to welcome other communities and encourage involvement in the language. A number of youth groups have invited young people from different communities to Irish events and this could start to de-politicise the language and encourage uptake. The group discussed how the media and politicians do not help to encourage communities to

join together and hoped that this is starting to change. This group suggested that all political parties should become involved and commit to the Irish Language Act. This would help public perception change and may help to decrease the political perception of the language. The group also suggested highlighting areas of shared heritage, such as the environment and place names to encourage the use of the Irish language in a non-political way.

Another factor raised in both groups was the use made of Irish language, the fact that it is not as widely spoken as the other languages on offer at GCSE and A-Level, means that more effort needs to go into showcasing its importance and usefulness as a study option. They also mentioned that the perceived benefits of studying French or Spanish, i.e. a school trip to Paris or Madrid rather than a trip to Donegal, make Irish a less exciting option for students.

The groups also raised concerns about a lack of recognition for Irish with regards to certain governmental policies and regulations. A number of respondents noted that additional protections should be offered to Irish through the *'European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages'*, much like what is currently offered to the Welsh language in Wales.

Furthermore, the teachers in the groups expressed their concerns about the higher grade boundaries for A\* and A Grades in place for Irish compared to other subjects. They feel this is due to the number of Gaelscoil pupils taking Irish at this level along with the fact that grading is curved; students who would normally achieve highly will be hindered and thus put off taking the subject at A-Level.

### **What influences a student's decision to study A-Level Irish?**

When asked about what influences a student's decision to study A-Level Irish, one respondent in the second group (to the agreement of the rest of the group) indicated that the quality of the *'supply route'* is crucial in getting students to study A-Level Irish. When asked to elaborate, this respondent mentioned that effective engagement needs to be implemented with students from around Key Stage 3 to ensure they are interested in Irish and subsequently willing to progress with it to higher levels of study. The first group also commented on this and felt that students Irish in primary school does not progress at the same rate to post-primary school,

depending on which school they came from and that there is a large gap between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 Irish. This may have a detrimental effect on pupils motivation for the subject and may subsequently be discouraging pupils from studying Irish past GCSE

In addition to this, it was mentioned that the '*supply route*' post A-Level needs to be well catered for as well to ensure there is adequate uptake. Specifically speaking, this being that there are relevant jobs available for Irish students and that these are well advertised through newspapers and careers advisors in schools. The first group commented on the number of Irish speakers in the creative industries such as local Television and Film industry, radio, media and music. They suggested encouraging teachers and pupils to become involved in the creative arts and attend job fairs so that they can gain a better understanding of how Irish can be used in the work place. This group also suggested that schools use You Tube clips to highlight Irish culture and listen to spoken language. Electric Picnic Music and Arts festival have an Irish language tent offering young bands the opportunity to play at a major festival. Schools and youth groups should take the chance to attend these events and promote Irish language role models in the creative arts and sporting industries.

Other reasons are factors such as culture, community and identity which feed into the study of Irish language. One respondent noted that '*Gael Linn Public Speaking Competitions*' along with the opportunity to attend a Gaeltacht course in the summer encourages students to study A-Level Irish. With regards to the latter, all respondents, though they believed that Gaeltacht courses are beneficial in terms of increasing enthusiasm and engagement, felt that the courses are too costly and therefore inaccessible to some families; particularly those with multiple children.

### **What would make A-Level Irish a more popular choice?**

The groups suggested that, to make A-Level Irish a more popular subject choice we need to raise awareness of the value of the transferable skills that can be developed through Irish and how beneficial these can be.

As mentioned earlier the groups felt that students can develop a portfolio of skills through Irish such as, management, communication, administrative, problem solving and artistic skills. It was suggested that the development of these skills should be

promoted, particularly as there is a misconception that teaching and translation are the only career options available to people with Irish qualifications. It was agreed that promotion shouldn't be restricted to just students, but also businesses, as there is a lack of knowledge about what a qualification in Irish (or indeed any language) can provide to employers.

Furthermore, it was again suggested that collaboration between both the Irish and English-Medium school sectors in order to increase engagement and uptake for the latter; activity and collaboration days were considered to be a good initial step in regards to this.

Outside of education, respondents agreed that there needs to be more promotion at local youth clubs and the establishment of specific Irish-Medium youth clubs would encourage further engagement.

### **Written Feedback**

The second focus group discussion opened with an apology from an attendee who could not make it to the session. Alongside their apology they provided the group with an open letter which detailed their concerns and issues surrounding the Irish language, and how it is currently being taught in schools.

Concerns were raised by this respondent regarding the future of the Irish language; they stated anecdotally that certain schools will not offer an Irish A-Level course unless a threshold number of students (e.g. 20 students) is reached. They went on to state that many schools are not reaching this number due to the continual promotion of STEM subjects, and, as such, are not offering Irish as a subject option. The respondent went on to note that other schools have to teach composite AS/A classes to ensure that this threshold is met. Regarding these composite classes they were considered to not be ideal and counterproductive to learning. The respondent concluded by stating that DE should offer some sort of protection for the Irish Language through the '*European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*'.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS

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The research does not suggest that the uptake of A-Level Irish in English-Medium Schools has declined over the past number of years but rather there has been a general decline in language entries. The overall number of A-Level Irish entries across all schools types has maintained a level of consistency since the 2007/8 academic year. It was recognised that the number of entries and their proportional share of the total candidature has fluctuated year-on-year; however, as stated previously, since there has been no logical direction over time regarding the number and proportion of students choosing to study Irish, a decline cannot be concluded or observed.

Additionally, when progression is taken into consideration it was found that continuation rates have remained constant since the 2007/8 GCSE cohort progressed into AS-Level. Again, fluctuations were noted year-on-year; however, proportional decreases were not observed, suggesting there has been no real decline in the proportion of students studying Irish at this level.

Current literature (discussed in Section 5) suggests that students in English speaking countries are less motivated to learn a second language as English is the most used language internationally. Furthermore research suggests that studying an additional language is perceived as demanding and students and schools are concerned that top grades are more difficult to achieve than other subjects. The literature review discussed motivational factors such as parental input, teaching styles, interest and enjoyment as factors affecting language learning at school. However age and gender appear to be the strongest variables for motivating students in languages.

The literature review suggests that there is little research exploring A-Level students' motivations for continuing to learn a language. Therefore the study conducted in Section 6 can make a valuable contribution to the lack of research in this area.

The primary research revealed consistent findings from teachers, parents and students.

All respondents felt learning Irish at GCSE and/or GCE level encouraged the development of extended skills in communication, reading, personal skills e.g. team

work, problem solving and presentation skills . Respondents believed that studying Irish led to cultural enrichment and an ability to converse in the countries native language.

Parents and students both suggested that a love of the Irish language, family support and cultural benefits were crucial in decisions to study Irish. For AS and A-Level continuation, students and teachers stated that previous good grades in Irish influenced choice.

When asked why they did not offer Irish at GCSE or GCE level teachers suggested lack of demand from students and absence of specialist staff available to teach Irish as the main reasons. Students did not choose to study Irish due to interests and both parents and students had concerns about the relevance of learning Irish rather than another language.

Another reason offered for not continuing Irish studies was the perceived difficulty of AS and A-Level examinations and the ability to get high grades awarded.

Attendance at Gaeltacht was viewed as beneficial for Irish language studies by all respondents.

Gaeltacht courses were identified as a particular motivating factor for students choosing to study Irish at GCSE, AS and A-Levels. These views were supported by the focus group attendees with many commenting on the social and cultural benefits of the Gaeltacht. However the groups also mentioned the cost of the Gaeltacht and felt that many parents would be unable to afford to send their children.

Responses to the questionnaires and information collected during the field work suggest that many respondents believe the Irish language to be 'politicised'. A number of parents, teachers and youth workers advocated that Irish language needs to become more neutral if it is to develop. The research findings suggest that politicians and the media have a role to play in encouraging the use of Irish. Actively including other cultural groups in learning Irish and encouraging shared culture relevance would be beneficial to the language for all communities.

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## 9. APPENDICES

<b>Centre types which offer GCSE and A2-Level Irish (2008-15)</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>GCSE</b>	<b>A2</b>
2015	Grammar	31	25
	Non-Grammar	40	16
	FE	N/A	1
	Other	4	2
2014	Grammar	30	24
	Non-Grammar	45	14
	FE	N/A	1
	Other	6	2
2013	Grammar	29	29
	Non-Grammar	47	20
	FE	2	1
	Other	5	3
2012	Grammar	29	26
	Non-Grammar	44	15
	FE	1	1
	Other	6	2
2011	Grammar	31	29
	Non-Grammar	38	16
	FE	3	1
	Other	5	5
2010	Grammar	33	29
	Non-Grammar	45	14
	FE	4	4
	Other	10	4
2009	Grammar	31	31
	Non-Grammar	40	16
	FE	4	2
	Other	8	3
2008	Grammar	31	28
	Non-Grammar	53	14
	FE	4	1
	Other	5	1

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