

Draft of Plean Teanga (Language Plan) Mhaigh Cuilinn Summary

Context

The Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007), highlighted the severe decline in the use of Irish as a community language in the Gaeltacht. In response to these, and other, findings, the government published the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (2010) and Gaeltacht Act 2012 was signed into law to give a legislative basis to some of the aims of the Strategy.

Under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, the Gaeltacht was divided into 26 Language Planning Areas (LPTs) and the community of each LPT was required to produce a language plan to strengthen Irish as a community language in the area. This Plean has been prepared for the Maigh Cuilinn Gaeltacht LPT according to the provisions of the Act.

Background

In 2017, Gaeilge Mhaigh Cuilinn was established by Conradh na Gaeilge and Forbairt Pobail Mhaigh Cuilinn and then appointed the lead organisation for the Maigh Cuilinn LPT, and would be responsible for the preparation of the language plan. A committee, Coiste Pleanála Teanga Ghaeltacht Mhaigh Cuilinn met on a monthly basis for the following two years until March 2019. With the help of Ursula Ní Shabhaois and Mait Ó Brádaigh, language planning consultants, research and surveys of various kinds were carried out as to the position of Irish in Maigh Cuilinn and also as regards attitudes towards the language.

The Language Planning Area of Maigh Cuilinn:

(a) Topography and Population

Most of the parish of Maigh Cuilinn is in An Ghaeltacht, except for 6-7 townlands (or parts of), mostly to the north around Tulach Uí Chadhain.

According to the 2016 Census, the LPT has a population of 4,470. Census statistics show that the population of the LPT has increased by approx. 18% over the last decade (2006-2016). A new Gaeltacht socio-economic report by Seanadóir Pádraig Ó Céidigh (2018) points to Maigh Cuilinn faring better economically than the stronger language areas farther west in Connemara. It describes how the population commutes in large numbers to Galway City, itself about to be a Gaeltacht Service Town. Nearly 50% for instance have a third level qualification.

(b) The Irish Language - An Ghaeilge

Maigh Cuilinn is in what's known as a Category C Gaeltacht area while the strongest language areas are A & B. Although the population of the LPT has risen in recent years, census statistics show that the percentage of the population with Irish language ability, as well as the number and percentage of daily Irish speakers, has fallen since 2011. In the 2016 Census, 62% (66% in 2011) of the population claimed to have Irish-language ability, and 7% (8.4% in 2011), on average, reported to speak Irish on a daily basis, outside the education system. This rises to 12% in the over 65's and in the Baile Nua area and falls to 3.3% amongst teenagers. Nonetheless the average is 4 times the national level. It is estimated that there are some 670 quite fluent speakers in the area, many originally coming from the Category A Gaeltacht areas. However at least 50% of the 670 only speak on a weekly basis.

There are a small number of families where Irish or mostly Irish is spoken with children.

A similar decline of 8-12% from 2011 to 2016 is noticed in all other areas between Galway City and the main Gaeltacht west of An Spidéal.

The Education System

Naíonra Mhaigh Cuilinn is the only Irish-medium naíonra in the LPT. Of the 4 primary schools situated in the LPT only Scoil an Bhaile Nua applied to join the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (GSRS) under the 2017-22 Policy for Gaeltacht Education. There is no secondary school located within the LPT boundaries, and students attend up to 10-12 schools including 2 in the GSRS. Many students from the

area attend NUIG/GMIT and other institutions. Adult learning is served by a Further Education Centre of GRETB, a small Irish language class and various voluntary classes.

Other Language Activities

Almost all are centred on Teach na Gaeilge, built in 2011, by local volunteers. As well as Conradh na Gaeilge and Gaeilge Mhaigh Cuilinn, a youth club, a successful summer camp, a parent and toddler group, an adult Irish class and other activities are based here. Aisteoirí an Bhaile and some other groups have a regular output of activities in Irish. Roinn na Gaeltachta and Údarás na Gaeltachta generally have a low profile in the area, spending relatively small amounts of funds.

Local Services

Maigh Cuilinn has a number of retail outlets, two supermarkets and a number of small employment enterprises have received Údarás na Gaeltachta grants since 2008. Banking and Hotel services are somewhat absent. 2 Nursing Homes provide a lot of employment.

Sport / Other Leisure Activities and Planning

There are over 50 groups in the area active in the voluntary sector covering a very wide range of interests. GAA participates in Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta, has hosted 2014 Nationals and is also due to host Comórtas na Gaillimhe in 2020. Tourist activities include Brigit's Gardens, Páirc Feirme Leamhchoille and proposed Green and Blueways and other adventure activities. Over 350 new houses have planning permission which will lead to another big increase in population. A bypass is planned for the village and 20% of new housing estates are to be kept for Irish speakers.

Gaeltacht Service Town of Cathair na Gaillimhe

The city dominates life in Maigh Cuilinn and a similar Language Plan is being prepared at present which should complement the local plan.

Preparation of the Language Plan

During the preparation of the language plan, a coordinated awareness campaign was employed to keep the community informed about the process, to incite debate about language issues in the LPT and to encourage the local community to take part in the research and the make an input in the plan.

GMC's logo was developed early on and was clearly visible on all questionnaires and on other material which was used during the research project and this helped the committee to raise awareness of the process. The language planning consultants analysed the various research results between September 2017 and July 2018.

A total of 7 questionnaires were distributed amongst parents, senior primary and all secondary pupils as well as a randomly selected sample of adults. A very high number of respondents wrote in 'further comments' when given the opportunity to do so. A further questionnaire was sent to social organisations and a number of written submissions were also received from various groups. Focus groups were organised for the Campa Samhraidh leaders, the Primary school principals and 4 regional consultation meetings took place in November 2018.

As a matter of Action Research (trailing possible activities) An Féasta Sráide was held on June 9th 2018 and collaborative work has begun on a bilingual walking guide to the area. The previous surveys of 2007 and 2009 were also taken into account.

Research Results

The results of the research conducted in the preparation of this language plan adhere to overall national and Gaeltacht trends: results from the general community and from the various target groups show positive attitudes towards Irish and towards the language planning process in the LPT, and research amongst school children, in particular, show a reasonably high level of interest in Irish-language events

and activities. While support for the importance of the Gaeltacht status is high a small number echoed the opinion that it is of lesser importance.

Proposals were made across a wide selection of topics: The Family and Child Care; Youth activities; Schools and Pre-schools; Adults learning Irish; Shops and Irish; Social organisations; Galway City's role; TG4, RnaG and the media; and others.

Possibilities include building on the favourable attitudes and the existing Irish language groups structure and ongoing activities. While only one school chose to apply for Gaeltacht status (which An Coiste Stiúrtha will be aiding in every way it can), all schools wish to participate in a Schools Irish Language Forum which would have an annual programme of in-school and cross-parish events focussing on maintaining pupils' ability in Irish to a satisfactory level. As the main Connemara Gaeltacht is so near and also that many Gaeltacht arts are strong in the Maigh Cuilinn area opportunities for development exist. With 60%+ having ability in Irish, almost 700 being quite fluent potential is there for many new activities in Irish. The success of the Campa Samhraidh shows what else could be done for the youth. While teenagers mightn't have much chance to use Irish their high level of ability (88%) also shows need for speaking activities. Due to longstanding Conradh na Gaeilge work, there is a tradition of adults learning Irish throughout the year.

Challenges on the other hand include addressing the lack of a variety of opportunities to converse overall for many Irish speakers, as quite often fluent and not-so-fluent speakers don't know one another. Also that people spend so much time in Galway and in commuting that they little time left. It is also noted that in years past that adults did try to (re)learn Irish, did not succeed and felt unsupported. The overall benefits of being bilingual are not that widely known nor are people aware that it is a lot easier to acquire Irish at a young age through immersion programmes. That these programmes do not effect ability in English is another point that people are not that aware of. Parents are also not so inclined to use Irish at home perhaps due to a perceived lack of support if they try to do so. It is a further challenge that Irish is in a weak position in childcare and that only one Naíonra exists in the area. Irish also isn't heard that often in pubs, shops, etc nor indeed around the public services.

Summary of the Main Recommendations included in the Language Plan

A. Implementation of the Language Plan:

- Have a structure that will ensure the effective implementation of the language plan.
- Recruit, employ and introduce a Language Planning Officer (OPT) who will work under the direction of An Coiste Stiúrtha of GMC and will be responsible for implementing the recommendations of the language plan.
- In general, raise awareness of bilingualism and bilingual education, the role of Irish in our identity as a community, the language planning process and provide a point of contact for the community.
- Summarise Plean Teanga Mhaigh Cuilinn in a bilingual booklet for all households.
- Lobby to achieve a fair share of resources from Roinn na Gaeltachta and Údarás na Gaeltachta including community facilities.

B. Irish in the Home and in Child Care

Every effort will be made to support parents using Irish at home, by organising local support groups and activities but also tapping in to the Dept of the Gaeltacht support schemes i.e. "Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta", information packs, and indeed lobbying with other LPTs for the return of the Family Language Support Scheme (Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge), stopped by Roinn na Gaeltachta in 2011. Creches are to be assisted in introducing Irish language care but also over the life of the plan work will be done with all interested parties as to the feasibility of introducing an Irish-medium Childcare Centre for children of all ages.

C. The Education System (including early education services)

Assist all schools with their promotion of Irish. Grant-aid if feasible and assist with the organisation of annual all-parish events through a Schools Forum. Carry out obligations under Criteria 9 of the Gaeltacht Schools Status Scheme to any school applying for same.

Work with Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta assisting the existing Naíonra, establishing others and promoting Irish in pre-schools.

Make best practice Irish medium second level education available in Maigh Cuilinn. Facilitate work placements for second and third level students through the medium of Irish locally.

Have lifelong learning opportunities and outreach education courses be available in Irish, complementing the aims below for adult learners of Irish.

D. Youth Activities in Irish

Establish a comprehensive Irish language after-school Youth service based on the concept of the 'language sanctuary'. An tOifigeach Pleanála Teanga will give the highest priority to this section of the Language Plan. Resources will be provided so that trained, enthusiastic youth workers assist families in the organisation of a range of appropriate after-school activities. Emphasis will be on both language acquisition and on use.

As regards youth groups (incl. sport) having Irish language activities, this will be supported by facilitating training for trainers in how to conduct sessions 'as Gaeilge'.

E. Adult Learning of Irish

Extensive, continuous and multifaceted assistance will be provided to adult learners of Irish. Not alone will the programmes build on the traditional classes but Conversation Circles, mentors, apps and more will be added. Alongside it is intended to have an increase in the opportunities for learners to use their Irish in social situations with the help of the community including retired and older speakers.

F. Oral and Linguistic Gaeltacht Heritage of Maigh Cuilinn including Writers, Singers, etc

It is intended to embark on a programme of collecting and archiving through audio- and video-taping of speakers, writers, artists and singers.

G. Other: In **Tourism** that Irish be part of the Greenway/Blueway experience as well as Teach na Gaeilge providing, through young employees, an Irish Language and Gaeltacht Arts experience in summer. Also that existing attractions continue to provide visits through Irish especially for school groups. In the **Services** (Shops, Public Services, etc) emphasis will be placed initially on Seachtain na Gaeilge but also extended so that Irish be welcome and responded to as much as possible. In **Planning** it is proposed, in view of the amount of Irish speakers that have taken up residence in Maigh Cuilinn, and the village's proximity to the main Connemara Gaeltacht, that the Co Council increase the % of houses retained for speakers, both local and other, in new estates to 33.3%. All **adult social organisations**, like those for youth, are asked to have an annual programme of activities through Irish and will be assisted with terminology, translation and other ways. Respondents to the surveys also mentioned the need for more Irish at **Church Services** and again help can be provided. As regards the **media**, RnaG and TG4 will be asked to cover Maigh Cuilinn more often but also to cater for learners in a more pro-active way. Print media in Irish locally and nationally has declined but will have to be addressed as it has long been held that reading of Irish supports both spoken ability and use.

Financial Costs, Monitoring and Publicity: All of the above are addressed in the plan, especially how the estimated grant of €100,000 per year will be spent.