

## **The Role of the University in meeting the needs of Linguistic Communities - An Irish Case Study.**

*Joe Mac Donnacha*

### **1. Introduction**

The National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI, Galway) has had a statutory obligation to provide third level courses through the medium of Irish since 1929. In the period 1929-2000 this obligation was fulfilled by encouraging and facilitating staff members who were competent in Irish to teach their courses through the medium of Irish where sufficient demand existed among the student body. In addition, a small number of scholarships were provided to high achieving students who opted to follow their course through the medium of Irish. By the year 2000, the University had a total of 204 students following courses or part of their course through the medium of Irish in the faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce. In addition, the University provides undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Irish language and literature and provides a diploma course in applied Irish language skills that students studying through the medium of English can take on a voluntary basis.

In the year 2000, the University decided to review its approach to the provision of third level courses through Irish. In undertaking this review it was decided to adopt an external customer led approach and to undertake an analysis of the current needs of the Irish-speaking community and of how NUI, Galway as a third level institution could best meet these needs. The result of this review was the adoption by the University of a development strategy for Irish-medium University Education (NUI, Galway 2000), and the establishment of a new Irish-medium Academy – *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* (NUI, Galway 2003).

The underlying philosophy of the new development strategy and of *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* (*An tAcadamh*) is

‘the desire of NUI, Galway to provide for the specific needs of Irish speakers and Gaeltacht [Irish-speaking districts] communities, through the promotion of academic programmes, courses and research activities in subject areas that are seen as being of over-riding importance to their future development, and through initiatives in other related areas. The Development Strategy aims to increase the Irish-medium educational opportunities available to Irish speakers, in the Gaeltacht and throughout the country, and to contribute in a positive manner to the social, economic, cultural and linguistic life of their communities and of the country.’ (NUI, Galway 2003: 44-45).

A key part of the University's approach in this area is its desire to create stronger educational linkages with other institutions working with linguistic and other minorities. Within this context one of the objectives of its new approach is the creation of 'a third level education model that can be emulated by other minority language communities as a vehicle for their sustainable development.' (NUI, Galway 2003: 45)

This paper will go over the background that led NUI, Galway to adopt this particular third-level Irish-medium model. It will include a brief introduction to the current status of the Irish language and the history of NUI, Galway's promotion of Irish-medium studies. The paper concludes with an outline of the main principles which *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* sees as central to its future success and development.

## **2. The Irish Language**

With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the Irish Language was accorded the status of 'National language' (with English being equally recognised as an 'official language') under Article 4 of the Constitution of the Irish Free State (*Saorstát Éireann*) Act, 1922. A new constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, enacted in 1937, declares that 'The Irish language as the national language is the first official language,' with English being declared as 'a second official language.'

However, by 1926, the number of Irish-speakers in the Irish Free State was only 543,511(18.29%), out of a total population of 2,971,992. By 1936, a year before *Bunreacht na hÉireann* was enacted, the number of Irish-speakers had increased to 666,601 (23.75%), out of a total population of 2,140,324. This dichotomy between the constitutional status of Irish and its de facto position as a minority language is, perhaps, best explained in a reference from a 1934 court case in which Justice Ó Cinnéide, in referring to the constitutional status of Irish in the 1922 constitution, stated:

'The declaration by the Constitution that the national language of Saorstát Éireann is the Irish language does not mean that the Irish language is, or was at that historical moment, universally spoken by the people of the Saorstát, which would be untrue in fact, but it did mean that it is the historic distinctive speech of the Irish people, that it is to rank as such in the nation and, by implication, that the State is bound to do everything within its sphere of action ... to establish and maintain it in its status as the national language and to recognise it for all official purposes as the national language. (*Ó Foghludha V McClean* (1934) IR 469 68 ILTR 189 (1934).

And indeed the Irish State has invested heavily in the intervening years in efforts to maintain Irish as a living language in those areas where it is still spoken and to revive it in the rest of the country. This investment has had mixed results. Census returns show the number of Irish-speakers steadily increasing in the intervening years with the latest Census in 2002 reporting the Republic of Ireland has a total of 1,570,894(42%) Irish-speakers out of a total population of 3,750,994. In one sense this represents quite a considerable achievement. However, the census returns of the number of Irish-speakers,

are an insufficient indicator with which to analyse the success or otherwise of any language planning effort.

<i>Support Activities</i>		<b>Organisational Structure and Effectiveness</b>				
		<b>Language Planning Process</b>				
		<b>Human Resource Management</b>				
		<b>Research</b>				
		<b>Corpus Planning</b>				
		<b>Convergent Planning</b>				
<i>Primary Activities</i>		<b>The nurturing of positive attitudes towards the language</b>	<b>Increasing the level of ability in the language</b>	<b>Increasing the level of language usage</b>	<b>Nurturing and strengthening the language community</b>	<b>Increasing the level of organic inter-generational language transmission</b>

FIGURE 1: INTEGRATED LANGUAGE PLANNING MODEL  
 SOURCE: MAC DONNACHA 2000

An analysis based on an integrated language planning approach (Figure 1: Mac Donnacha 2000), and using other sources of data in addition to the census returns allows us to gain a more sophisticated understanding of how language planning in Ireland has impacted on the fortunes of the Irish language.

### 2.1 The Irish Language Planning Process and Structures (*Support Activities*)

The Irish Language Planning process has developed ad hoc over the years, and has led to a large number of organisations (*circa* 5,000, when we include schools as individual organisations) involved in promoting the Irish language in some way. However, no one organisation appears to have responsibility for the overall guidance of the language planning project, with the result that much of the work and many of the initiatives being undertaken tend to be ad hoc, unfocused and, in many cases, to have no sustainable outcomes.

Several initiatives have been undertaken by various language planning bodies since the 1940's onwards to initiate a formal language planning process, using the latest available knowledge from strategic planning initiatives in other areas. Some of these initiatives have produced significant outcomes, however, in no case has the language planning process itself proved sustainable in the long-term. Foras na Gaeilge, the All-Ireland language body, set up under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, is currently preparing to initiate a new language planning process, which will have a long term focus. While part of their preparation is focused on the content of the strategic plan to be produced, one of their main concerns is in relation to how the planning process itself can be maintained and re-iterated over a long time period.

Human resource management has been one of the main absences in Irish language planning to date. Partly because of the focus on teaching and learning Irish in the

education sector practically all of the investment in the development of what might be called 'language planning expertise' has gone into training people to become Irish language teachers at primary and second level, and into Irish language cultural and literature studies at third level. To date, very little investment has been made in the broader range of skills needed to sustain a language planning process, which include the various linguistic, administrative and managerial disciplines.

Research, particularly with the establishment of the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research and of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann<sup>1</sup> (ITÉ) in 1972, has been to an important extent one of the success stories of Irish language planning. These initiatives have produced a significant corpus of research on Irish language attitudes, ability and patterns of usage that gives us a sophisticated insight into the relationship of Irish people with the Irish language. In addition, census data in relation to Irish language ability is available from 1841 onwards, and the two more recent Censuses of 1996 and 2002, have produced data in relation to Irish language usage. Conversely, due in part to the lack of investment in language planning expertise, referred to above, and the lack of a formal language planning process, the research data available has been put to very limited use in practice.

Corpus planning for Irish has also been reasonably successful. A standard for the language, covering the three main dialects, has been developed and has a high level of acceptance among native speakers and learners. In general, the language does not have a major difficulty in dealing with modern day life and issues. None the less, work in this area needs a more structured approach and further investment is needed in the development of up to date dictionaries, thesauri, and computer based language tools.

Convergent planning, which aims to ensure that organisations which don't have a specific language planning brief but whose area of activity is, none the less, of significant importance to the viability of the language and of the Irish-speaking community, has until recently been almost completely overlooked as an element of language planning in Ireland. Since the late 1990's, however, this area has received significant attention, with specific provision for the Irish language being made in legislation covering areas such as education, the courts, and local planning and development. In 2003 the Government enacted the Official Languages Act, which will place an onus on a broad range of public bodies to provide their services through the medium of Irish as well as English.

## **2.2 Language Planning Outcomes**

The language planning process has been successful in achieving positive outcomes in relation to language attitudes and language ability. Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1994) report that the vast majority of Irish people are favourably disposed towards the Irish language, the main reason being that they see the language as an integral element of their own identity as Irish people in an Irish nation. Language ability among the population, when defined by the number of people who can speak the language to some degree of competence, has increased steadily, from 18% in 1926 to 42% in 2002. Much of this 42% is accounted for, however, by young people learning the language while going through

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<sup>1</sup> The Linguistics Institute of Ireland

the education system, and the percentage of Irish speakers declines rapidly in the post school age cohorts.

Census returns for 1996 and 2002, suggest that only 9% of the population use Irish on a daily basis. Again, however, when the school age cohorts are eliminated, it is estimated that less than 3% of the population use Irish on a daily basis (Ó hÉalaithe 2003).

Since the early 1970's in particular much of the social and organisational infrastructure needed to maintain a viable Irish-language community has been put in place. This includes the provision of Irish-medium education at primary and second level; a national radio broadcasting service (1972), an Irish language television service (1997), national weekly and daily newspapers, a locally elected development authority for the Gaeltacht (1980); and a broad range of community development, social and cultural organisations.

The main weakness in Irish language planning outcomes over the past eighty years, however, has been the inability, indeed, one might conclude, until quite recently, the lack of understanding of the need, to increase the level of intergenerational transmission of the language through the medium of the home. While no accurately comprehensive data is available covering this aspect of language planning, analysis of what little data is available suggests that the number of 'Irish-speaking' families is lower than 3%. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that, while the very small number of Irish-speaking families living outside the Gaeltacht is stable or growing at a very slow rate, the number of Irish speaking families in Gaeltacht areas has declined significantly over the last 80 years and continues to decline at a worrying pace. Little attention had been paid to this aspect of language planning until the early 1990's. This changed with the establishment of *Comhluadar* a voluntary self-support group for Irish-speaking families in 1994. The establishment of this group, which currently has 480 Irish-speaking families (most of them living in non-Irish-speaking areas) registered with it, has focused more attention on this aspect of language planning, with the result that it now receives considerable attention, although, as yet, no clear strategy has emerged for dealing with it.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

In summary, the Irish language planning process appears to be successful in nurturing positive attitudes towards the language among the populace in general, and is capable of teaching Irish with some effect to a significant proportion of its school going population. In addition, it has developed a broad social and organisational infrastructure capable of delivering key services through the medium of Irish to Irish-speakers living in Gaeltacht areas and elsewhere. It has so far, however, not managed to develop clear strategies for increasing levels of language usage among the population or for increasing the level of home based intergenerational language transmission.

A large number of people living outside the traditional Irish-speaking (Gaeltacht) districts are now capable of speaking Irish to various levels of competence. While some of these participate in various social and organisational language networks, Irish has not taken hold again as a social and community language in any place outside of the traditional

Gaeltacht districts. Within the Gaeltacht districts it appears that the pattern of language shift to English continues unabated and is now at a critical stage.

The remaining Gaeltacht districts are dispersed over 7 different counties in small communities, ranging in size of population from 1,300 to 36,000. The National University of Ireland, Galway is located on the periphery of the largest of these Gaeltacht communities – *Gaeltacht Chonamara* – which has a total population of 35,983 of which 57% use Irish on a daily basis (Ó Cinnéide *et al* 2001).

### **3. National University of Ireland, Galway**

The National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI, Galway), was founded in 1845 as Queens College Galway. It was one of the three Queen's Colleges founded under the provisions of The Queen's Colleges (Ireland) Act, 1845, the others being located in Belfast and Cork. The College was opened for students in 1849 and functioned as a constituent college of the Queen's University from 1850 until that institution was dissolved in 1882, with the establishment of the Royal University. The Royal University was dissolved under the provisions of the Irish Universities Act, 1908, which created two new universities – The Queen's University of Belfast (into which Queen's College, Belfast was converted) and the National University of Ireland – a federal University with its seat at Dublin and with three constituent colleges at Dublin, Cork and Galway. Thus, under a new charter issued in December 1908 the College became University College, Galway. Under the Universities Act/Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997 University College Galway was reconstituted as a University under the name of *Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh*/National University of Ireland, Galway and became a constituent University of the National University of Ireland (together with the National University of Ireland, Dublin; the National University of Ireland, Cork; and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth). (NUI, Galway 2003).

The University today has 7 faculties: Arts, Celtic Studies, Commerce, Law, Engineering, Medicine and Health Sciences, and Science. In the 2003-04 Academic year it had 13,300 students and 1,600 staff members.

### **4. NUI, Galway's commitment to the Irish Language.**

Under the University College Galway Act, 1929 the Governing Body of the College committed to providing an increasing proportion of its courses through the medium of Irish and to making better provision for the study of the Irish language and literature in return for a commitment by the Government to provide extra resources for such activities. This Act also made it incumbent on the College authorities to appoint people to positions in the College who are 'competent to discharge the duties thereof through the medium of the Irish language: provided a person so competent and also suitable in all other respects is to be found amongst the persons who are candidates or otherwise available for such appointment.'

With this legislative provision in mind, the College in the intervening years committed itself to increasing the use of Irish across a broad range of its administrative and academic activities. In pursuit of this aim the University provides courses through the

medium of Irish in a number of disciplines and provides a broad range of courses in the Irish language for members of staff and students.

However, the development of Irish-medium courses in the University did not keep pace with the development of the range of English-medium courses and the number of students taking them. This was particularly so in the period of the late 1980's and early 1990's, when the number of students attending Irish universities increased rapidly, but when no 'strategic plan was implemented, nor even outlined, to ensure that third-level education through Irish would be developed proportionately, concurrently and in parallel with third-level education through English.' (Ó Cinnéide 2004).

## **5. Strategic Review**

In the year 2000 the University decided to review its approach to the provision of courses through the medium of Irish. This review was brought about partly by the movement towards a strategic approach to planning in Irish Universities generally.

Underlying this review, was the knowledge that although the University had continued to provide courses through the medium of the Irish language in the period since 1929, the responsibility for this activity was left mainly at the departmental level and, in many cases, the commitment to Irish language provision was dependent more on the commitment of individual members of staff than on any coherent strategy at University level. Within this context, the provision of courses through the medium of Irish within the University had become ad hoc and while courses were being provided through the medium of Irish in a range of academic departments it had become increasingly difficult for students to access a sufficient number of Irish-medium modules/courses to allow them to complete a full degree course through the medium of Irish.

Under this system, for teaching staff, the decision to teach through the medium of Irish was in the main a personal commitment that invariably led to an extra workload, and often the decision to teach through Irish was seen to be in conflict with the need to commit time to academic research. Within academic departments, debates regularly ensued around the issue of whether staff should be using scarce departmental resources to teach a small number of students through the medium of Irish, when those same resources might be better utilised teaching a much larger body of students through the medium of English.

This *laissez faire* approach to Irish-medium studies within the University also meant that no structure existed to support staff committed to teaching through the medium of Irish. Very little was done in developing Irish-medium teaching resources, or in providing training for staff teaching through Irish, or to ensure sufficiently attractive career paths existed for staff wishing to commit to teaching through Irish on a long-term basis. Neither could it be claimed that what was being provided was 'an Irish-medium university' model, as, with a small number of notable exceptions, the Irish-medium activities were, in the main, restricted to the provision of courses only, with very little provision for encouraging research and facilitating publication of academic material through the medium of Irish. These misgivings culminated in the knowledge that

although the University was providing a reasonably broad range of services through the medium of Irish it did not add up to a coherent strategy for meeting the needs of the Gaeltacht and Irish-speaking community.

Some considerations were foremost in underpinning the University's review of 2000. These included issues related:

- The role of the University in Society
- The needs of the Gaeltacht/Irish-speaking community with regard to the third-level sector
- Current developments within the Gaeltacht

### ***The role of the University in society***

The University was concerned that one of its primary roles was to serve the needs of the society of which it is part. This role has been given a legislative basis in Section 12 of the Universities Act, 1997, which states, for example, that the objects of Universities shall include the promotion of learning in society generally; the promotion of the cultural and social life of society; and the promotion of the official languages of the state, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language.

Within this context, the University felt, that given its obligations under the University College Galway Act, 1929, and in view of its location in proximity to one of the strongest Irish-speaking communities, that it should play a leading role in facilitating the sustainable development of the Irish-speaking community.

### ***The Needs of Gaeltacht/Irish-speaking community with regard to the third-level sector***

The University identified several specific issues relating to the Gaeltacht and Irish-speaking community generally which it felt were relevant and should be the focus for the development of Irish-medium studies in the future:

- The large number of Irish language and Gaeltacht institutions/organizations involved in various aspects of language planning has led to a corresponding need to educate and train students and language planning practitioners through the medium of Irish in a broad range of related linguistic, administrative, planning and managerial disciplines.
- The continued development of Gaeltacht based business organizations and the shift from manufacturing to knowledge based industries within the Gaeltacht required the University to provide degree level and life-long learning opportunities through the medium of Irish in related disciplines for individuals working or available to work in these sectors.
- The development of Irish-medium education at primary and second level in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland was being hampered by:
  - (i) A lack of a similar comprehensive provision at third level.
  - (ii) The lack of appropriate teaching training programmes for teachers wishing to teach in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.

- A predicted increase in demand from all public sector organizations for fully qualified employees who are competent in Irish, as a result of the enactment of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

### ***Current developments within the Gaeltacht***

Major changes have taken place in the Gaeltacht in recent years. A 1997 ESRI report (Watson & Fahy 1997), showed that those sectors with obligations in relation to planning and policy issues in the Gaeltacht (including the third level sector) faced many new challenges if we were to provide Gaeltacht communities with the instruments in terms of education, skills and leadership, necessary to enable them to fulfill their personal, social and cultural aspirations, while at the same time maintaining Irish as the primary home and social language of the community.

One of the main points highlighted by the Report was the number of young people leaving the Gaeltacht in search of employment opportunities elsewhere which were commensurate with their educational qualifications and with their aspirations. Referring to this the Report stated:

‘Recent emigrants from the Gaeltacht over five years numbered in the region 6,000 in total, or 1,200 per year...These emigrants are heavily comprised of well-educated young people who get good jobs elsewhere in Ireland or abroad. Gaeltacht students coming to the end of their education number up to 1,500 per year...over half of these say that they expect to leave the Gaeltacht to find jobs, even though the majority say they would be happy to live in the Gaeltacht on social grounds.’ (Watson & Fahy 1997).

The Report also stated that:

‘The groups who depart are a major loss to Gaeltacht economic and social life, particularly when the cumulative effect over the years is taken into account.’ (Watson & Fahy 1997).

This report suggests that although young people in the Gaeltacht were availing of the third level opportunities available to them, this is happening in a social and economic context, which results in young Gaeltacht people being educated for employment opportunities that exist mainly outside of their own communities. Thus Gaeltacht communities, despite having invested heavily in their youth, end up being deprived of the input of these young people in the social, economic, and cultural life of the community. This further reduces the viability of these communities and increases the likelihood that the Gaeltacht will not survive as a distinct language community unless these issues, which are essentially planning issues, can be resolved.

In this context, NUI, Galway, came to the conclusion that there was a need for a third level education strategy for the Gaeltacht:

- (i) Which could deal with the challenges facing the Gaeltacht of today and in which the Irish language is seen as a central factor.
- (ii) Which could be integrated with an appropriate economic development strategy.

- (iii) Which would ensure that a high proportion of Gaeltacht students have access to third level education which is being delivered within the Gaeltacht, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will undertake a venture or a profession within the Gaeltacht at the end of their third level education period.

## **6. Strategic Development Plan**

The University published its *Strategy for the Development of Third Level Education in the Gaeltacht* in May 2000 and started the process leading to the establishment of *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* (Academy for Irish-medium University Studies), a new academic and administrative structure charged with the future development of Irish-medium University Studies under the auspices of NUI, Galway. *An tAcadamh's* brief would include three distinct elements:

- The development of a broad range of University courses through the medium of Irish, with priority given to meeting the particular needs of the Irish-speaking/Gaeltacht community.
- The development of a range of research activities through the medium of Irish, again with priority being given to covering the research needs of the Irish-speaking community.
- The development and implementation of a capital investment programme that would allow an *tAcadamh* to deliver on its academic commitments on campus and within the Gaeltacht. This included a proposal to develop four Irish-medium university centres – one of which is located on the University campus, with 2 located in the Connemara Gaeltacht and the fourth located in the Donegal Gaeltacht.

Within this context, the following ten academic areas were proposed for prioritization in relation to course development and research activity:

- Translation Studies.
- Language Planning.
- Education Studies.
- Information Technology.
- Communication Studies.
- Courses in applied Irish language skills
- Community development studies
- Studies in the development of natural resources
- The Arts
- Management and business studies

In the next section I give a brief introduction to the first five areas of priority identified above, with an outline of the reasoning that lies behind their identification as areas of priority and the type of activity being undertaken in relation to each area.

### **6.1 Translation Studies**

The demand for translation services from English to Irish, and for other services in which a high standard of written Irish is required has grown considerably in recent years. The existing translation services are currently experiencing an enormous increase in demand for their services as a result of the provisions of the recently

enacted Official Languages Act which places an onus on all public sector organizations to produce a range of documents and reports bilingually. There is, therefore, a high level of demand for qualified translators and good employment opportunities exist for young graduates as well as opportunities for young entrepreneurs who want to start their own business. *An tAcadamh* currently offers two courses in translation studies, a post-graduate course leading to a Masters Degree and a part-time Diploma in Translation studies which is due to have its first intake of students in September 2004. Consideration is also being given to the possibility of offering translation studies as a degree level programme.

## **6.2 Language Planning**

The Irish State has invested a lot of effort in the preservation and promotion of Irish over the past 80 years. As a result of this a lot of experience and expertise has been developed in relation to many aspects of language planning. A broad range of organizations are involved in language planning of one kind or another. These include public sector organizations, voluntary organizations, private sector organizations, third level institutions and other organizations in the education sector. The number of individuals working in the public sector with direct responsibility for various aspects of language planning shall increase significantly as a result of the Government's recently enacted language act, as all public sector bodies will have to develop a strategy that will enable them to ensure that their services meet the needs of Irish speakers and can be delivered through the medium of Irish. *An tAcadamh* is of the view that a key element in ensuring the overall effectiveness of the language planning effort lies in the education and training of both current and future language planning practitioners.

*An tAcadamh* is already active in research into language planning issues in Ireland and, in partnership with the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, at NUI, Maynooth has been recently commissioned by the Government to undertake a language study into current language patterns within Gaeltacht areas. We also provide consultancy services to public, private and community organizations in this area.

## **6.3 Education Studies**

The Irish-medium education sector has grown considerably since the early seventies. In addition to the 171 Gaeltacht schools, there are 149 Irish-medium primary schools and 33 Irish-medium secondary operating in non-Gaeltacht areas. As evidenced by the continuous growth of new Irish-medium schools over the past twenty years, this sector is likely to continue to grow. Despite this growth there is still a huge gap between the level of supply and potential demand. Currently only c. 6% of primary school children are receiving their education through the medium of Irish. However, research by Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994), shows that up to 30% of parents would be willing to send their children to an Irish-medium school if such a school was available locally. Given these figures it seems likely that there will be a continuous demand for teachers and services in this sector in the foreseeable future.

*An tAcadamh's* objectives in this area are to support the continued development of Irish-medium education by providing support services and by ensuring that teachers are available who are qualified to teach through the medium of Irish in gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools in non-Gaeltacht districts) and in Gaeltacht schools. The University currently provides a postgraduate diploma in education through the medium of Irish, and last year offered a new part-time Diploma in Language Acquisition and Child Development for people working as language assistants in Gaeltacht schools. Further courses envisaged in this area include teacher training programmes at degree level, and courses in preschool education, remedial education, career guidance and school management and development. Our current research work in this area is focused on producing a baseline study of linguistic and other conditions currently applying in Gaeltacht schools for *An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta*, the recently established Government Counsel for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education.

#### **6.4 Information Technology**

In order to ensure that the Gaeltacht and the Irish language can take advantage of the information era, continuous investment is necessary to ensure that the necessary information, concepts and skills are available in Gaeltacht communities to enable them to avail of the opportunities that new information and communication technologies provide. *An tAcadamh* has already invested successfully in this area, through projects initiated on its Gaeltacht campuses. Projects undertaken to date include a post-graduate course in software development, and a diploma course in Applied Computer Skills. A new diploma course in applied computer skills for business users is due to have its first intake of students in September 2004.

#### **6.5 Media and Communications**

The Irish speaking community currently has access to a broad range of Irish language media, which includes broadcast and print media. These play an important role in the future of the Irish language and of the Gaeltacht. They provide recreation, education and information for the community through the medium of their own language, and they act as a forum in which community organizations, elected representatives, journalists and other experts can communicate and debate their views and opinions on various issues which relate to the life of the Gaeltacht and of the country. They provide a platform for Gaeltacht and Irish speaking artists – actors, writers, musicians, dancers etc. - which enables them to perform and celebrate their art. It is estimated that between them Irish language broadcast and print media provide fulltime employment, of a kind attractive to young graduates, for in excess of 500 people.

A broad range of professional skills is needed by these media services. In addition they need professionals who have excellent spoken and written Irish and they also need access to people with the necessary management and strategic planning skills. *An tAcadamh* currently offers a post-graduate course in applied communications and diploma courses in the areas of applied television and radio broadcasting techniques. We have also established a television production company on one of our Gaeltacht

campuses, which produces programmes for the TG4, the Irish language television service.

## **8. Conclusion**

An *tAcadamh* currently has a full time staff of 48 people. We provide a total of 4 post-graduate courses and 6 diploma courses. These courses, in addition to other courses provided through the medium of Irish in the University, cater for a total of 170 students. We also provide a part-time diploma course in spoken Irish for a total of 660 students, both on and off campus, and run an access course for adults wishing to return to fulltime education.

For the future we see several principles as being critical to the way in which we wish to develop *An tAcadamh*. Firstly the focus of *An tAcadamh* will not be on the provision of courses through the medium of Irish. Our focus will be on providing courses that meet the needs and requirements of the Irish-speaking community. By definition, this means that the courses will be delivered through the medium of Irish – and this is not a debatable issue. However, a focus on meeting the needs of the language community rather than focusing on providing courses in the target language, in our view, allows for a more strategic approach to the provision of university education in lesser-used languages and results in more sustainable outcomes.

Secondly, the focus of *An tAcadamh* will not be limited to the provision of university courses through the medium of Irish. A key element of its development will be the nurturing of research activity and the development of consultancy type services which allow *An tAcadamh* to share its expertise with other public, private and community organizations active in the Irish-speaking community. We want to be an Irish-medium university institute in the broadest sense of what a university should be – encompassing both research and teaching activities.

Our purpose, as an Irish-medium institute is not simply to ensure that the major ideas, issues, theories and practices of the day are borrowed from the rest of the world and considered, discussed and debated in Irish, important and all as this may be. Our major challenge is to ensure that we as an Irish-medium university academy have the self-confidence to create, develop and inspire new ideas, theory and practice and thereby contribute to the intellectual diversity of the world rather than simply borrowing from it.

*An tAcadamh* will provide a significant proportion of its courses on our Gaeltacht campuses, thereby ensuring that a significant proportion of Gaeltacht residents have access to third level education without having to leave their own community – to ensure that they are educated to benefit their own community rather than being educated out of their community.

Finally, *An tAcadamh* will seek to make a difference – and that is how we shall measure our success in the future. Have we made a difference? Have we made a significant contribution to the creation of a sustainable future for the Irish language

community? Have we made a significant contribution to the development of language planning theory and practice – not just in Ireland but internationally? And have we created a university model that can be emulated in other places as a means of ensuring that other indigenous communities have access through the medium of their own language to the full range of benefits that a university can bestow?

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**Biography:** *Joe Mac Donnacha is Academic Co-ordinator at Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, National University of Ireland, Galway. His brief concerns the development of a range of Irish-medium academic and research activities in academic areas that are seen as vital to the future of the Irish-speaking community. His main research interest is in the development of an organisational approach to language planning and in language planning as a strategic process.*