



Northern Ireland
Assembly



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Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

Translating Values: Insights from Multilingual and Multi-ethnic Focus Groups in Northern Ireland

*Piotr Blumczynski, Queen's University Belfast
John H. Gillespie, Ulster University*

Policy Recommendations

These recommendations stem from our experience in consulting with multilingual and multi-ethnic groups as part of our research project. They also draw on the extensive research work carried out for *Languages for the Future: the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy* (DENI 2012).

Vision

Our vision is for the development of a society where cultural and linguistic diversity are celebrated and enjoyed; an open, stable and sustainable society in which all our languages, indigenous and newly arrived, are afforded equal dignity; a society in which multiculturalism and multilingualism can unlock latent creativity and engender personal and social enrichment.

Guiding Principles

We are guided by the following principles:

1. Linguistic and cultural diversity are rich social and economic assets which every individual has the right to participate in and enjoy.
2. Language policy should operate within and build upon existing legislation, safeguarding the principles of equality of opportunity and fundamental human rights.
- 3 All forms of linguistic intolerance and cultural discrimination are abhorrent and unacceptable in a democratic society.
- 4 The protection and promotion of cultural diversity presupposes a recognition of the equal dignity of all

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languages, including indigenous minority languages, sign languages and the languages of migrant communities.

5 Since culture is a mainspring of human progress, economic and cultural aspects of societal development, far from being distinct, are interdependent and complementary.

The Challenges

Northern Ireland is no longer a bipolar society - it is enriched because it is becoming more culturally diverse. As our society becomes more peaceful and prosperous – and as our demand for skilled labour exceeds what can be supplied locally – we are seeing greater ethnic diversity than ever before. Our study has shown that there are significant issues of understanding each other's values in the light of our linguistic and cultural differences.

However there are substantial economic and social benefits to be derived from this increased diversity (*A Shared Future. Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*, p.15 www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/good-relations-report.pdf)

Strategic Recommendations

Strategic Objective A

To increase our understanding of the contribution that enhanced language provision and intercultural awareness can make to the establishment and maintenance of a society of equality, inclusiveness and understanding

Strategic Target

A greater awareness of the Values of Multiculturalism and Multilingualism

Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet ... it is urgent to take action to promote multilingualism, in other words to encourage the development of coherent regional and national language policies which give the opportunity for an appropriate and harmonious use of languages in a given community and country.

(UNESCO A Pillar of Cultural Diversity, www.unesco.org/en/languages-and-multilingualism)

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard, in carrying out their functions, to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different racial groups.

Matters relating to language are fundamental to understanding, equality of opportunity and social harmony, should therefore be kept under constant review.

Policy Proposal 1: Multilingualism and multiculturalism

Recommended Action 1

That existing Northern Ireland language policies and legislation should be subject to ongoing review in order to ensure that they maintain fitness for purpose in an increasingly multicultural society, and remain consistent with national and international legislation.

Recommended Action 2

That steps be taken to ensure that all languages, spoken and signed, are valued within society, and that mother tongue maintenance is supported.

Recommended Action 3

That the recommendations of the Business Case Report on Sign Languages should be fully implemented to meet the statutory requirements and duties enshrined in UK disability and equality legislation.

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Strategic Objective B

To encourage communication and mutual understanding between members of different cultural backgrounds, including indigenous communities and others

Strategic Target

The development of greater respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and enhanced understanding of the needs of minority language communities

Policy Proposal 2: The encouragement of mutual understanding

Recommended Action 1

That the centrality of intercultural understanding to public policy, practice and the delivery of public services be enshrined in a code of practice, to be drawn up in consultation with stakeholders.

Recommended Action 2

That all possible steps be taken to ensure that users of languages are involved in the policy-making processes that affect those languages.

Recommended Action 3

That consideration be given to exploring the creation of mutually beneficial cultural/economic projects with the home communities of migrant workers living in Northern Ireland to promote openness in a global context.

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Strategic Objective C

To sustain, maintain and promote our linguistic and cultural identities and uniqueness

All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish Language,¹ Ulster Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

The British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it: take resolute action to promote the language.

(Point 3, Economic, Social and Cultural Issues. Rights Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity The Agreement, <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>, p.24)

Policy Proposal 3: The promotion and development of our indigenous languages

Recommended Action 1

That the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, ratified by the UK government, are fully applied and that, as an officially 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.

Recommended Action 2

That an awareness of and respect for Ulster-Scots traditions be encouraged, and steps taken to examine ways of employing Ulster-Scots linguistic and cultural icons.

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Strategic Objective D

Given the importance of language learning for society, for the economy and for general literacy, the commitment of significant resources for language teaching

Policy Proposal 4: Languages and education

Recommended Action 1

The development and promotion of language learning throughout the Education system through the adoption

¹ For an analysis of the current position of Irish in Northern Ireland, see McMonagle, Sarah. 2010. The Irish Language in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ulster.

of a STEM-L policy, ie Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Languages as a core subject, notably through:

- The development of language learning in Primary School
- The promotion of the centrality of language learning, and language and cultural awareness in Secondary School
- The development and extension of language provision in Further Education
- The strengthening and development of languages policy and provision in Higher Education

Recommended Action 2

A further development of specialist training in Translation and Interpreting to take account of the findings of this project, emphasising, in particular, the relation between languages and cultural values.

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Strategic Objective E

A commitment to supporting a body committed to strengthening language learning in Northern Ireland

Policy Proposal 5: The Northern Ireland Languages Council

Recommended Action

The provision of support for the Northern Ireland Languages Council to assist in the promotion and development of language learning, language awareness and cultural understanding in Northern Ireland.

