



**Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment  
Experience of past pupils of  
Irish Medium Education in Belfast  
1970s to the present**

**Report of the Research**

**Janet Muller**

**May 2018**

**POBAL,**

13-3ú hurlár

Muileann Abhainn Bheara

81 Bóthar Chluanaí

Béal Feirste,

BT12 7AE

Teil: +44 (0)77 13 630325 - R-phost: [jmuller@pobal.org](mailto:jmuller@pobal.org); [eolas@pobal.org](mailto:eolas@pobal.org) - [www.pobal.org](http://www.pobal.org)



**Belfast  
City Council**

## **Contents**

- 1.** Why this research?
- 2.** Terms of reference
- 3.** Research questions
- 4.** Number of pupils – some statistical challenges
- 5.** The Survey Methodology
- 6.** Responses and schools
- 7.** If pupils attended both English and Irish Medium schools, which English medium schools did they go to?
- 8.** Post code data
- 9.** Gender of respondents
- 10.** Age of respondents
- 11.** Use of Irish
- 12.** Further, Higher Education and Training
- 13.** Language of the courses
- 14.** Employment since leaving school and titles of each post
- 15.** The workplace experience
- 16.** The Language of the Workplace
- 17.** Periods of unemployment
- 18.** Research conclusions
- 19.** Recommendations
- 20.** Acknowledgements

## 1. Why this research?

There is a lack of base line data regarding the education, training, and employment status of former pupils of Irish Medium schools in Belfast (and elsewhere), in spite of the fact that it is now more than 45 years since the first Irish medium primary school, Bunscoil Phobail Feirste opened its doors. There have been many positive developments since then, and it is clear that Irish Medium education is an important and established part of our education system, in spite of continuing scarcity of strategic support. Research aimed at gathering base line data can further develop best practice in strategic planning and capacity building within the city. In 2016-7, POBAL undertook an audit and needs assessment of Irish language groups in the city. To build on this work, we have now focussed on examining the training, further education and employment experiences of former Irish Medium pupils in Belfast. This research, carried out with funding from Belfast City Council under its Capacity Building programme, will provide a valuable information resource for educationalists, government bodies, Irish language groups, training providers and others. It will help to build capacity and strengthen ongoing work, including opportunities for forward planning, building the local labour market and matching capacity with employment opportunities.

## 1. Terms of Reference

Irish Medium education has grown and developed in the city since its earliest days in 1971. We determined that our research would encompass as much of that experience as possible and that therefore, we would allow potentially for gathering of information from among the first children to receive their formal education through Irish right to the present. In addition, recognising that for many past pupils, there would have been no opportunity to continue into post-primary Irish Medium education in the city until the mid-nineties, we decided to include the experiences of those who had received any part of their education through Irish.

There are now eight Irish Medium schools in the Belfast City Council area, including one post-primary school, Coláiste Feirste. Our research is focussed primarily on this area, but we also recognised that over the period covered, families may move house and children may move school, particularly when new bunscoileanna open, as has been the case in the Irish Medium sector within the city. In addition, city boundaries

may change over time as may the remit and catchment area of educational authorities. For these reasons, we have also included in the research two further Irish Medium primary schools, Scoil na Fuiseoige in Twinbrook and Gaelscoil Éanna, in Glengormley.

## 2. Research questions

We set out to gather base line data into the education, training and employment experience of the cohort of past pupils of Irish Medium education in the city in order that Belfast City Council with its important economic development, community relations and community planning roles, and a range of relevant bodies, including government departments, education and support service providers and others could better understand and fulfil their duties,

We asked which schools, both Irish-Medium, and where applicable, which English-Medium schools respondents had attended, but we also wanted to examine what happened to them once they left school. How had Irish Medium education prepared them for life in the world of employment? Were there discernible patterns in further education, in training and in periods of employment and unemployment? Were there gaps and identifiable needs that could be better met?

We investigated whether there were trends within the type of employment which our respondents had engaged in since leaving school. Were they clustered in particular socio-economic bands, or particular fields of employment? To get a clearer picture of this, we asked a series of questions about the job titles, duration and sustainability of the five most important posts respondents had held. We also asked what was the primary language of their workplaces, and where Irish was in use in the workplace, with whom they used it.

To complement this information, we asked if respondents used Irish in their personal lives, and if so with whom. An important part of the research is the identification of the needs of the past pupils of Irish Medium education in terms of their further education, training and employment. These elements do not exist in a vacuum, however, and we have also sought to assess their attitudes to the society around them in relation to the language, and what their aspirations are.

The results of the research provide crucial base line data which has never before been collected. The picture which emerges is of vibrant, diverse and positive outcomes which will be enhanced by targeted actions from a variety of key sectors.

### 3. Number of pupils – some statistical challenges

When POBAL first began this piece of research, we understood that there might be some difficulties associated with obtaining a definitive figure for the number of past pupils of Irish-medium education now of working age. Nonetheless, we were rather surprised to find that the information that had already been published regarding the number of pupils that had gone through Irish Medium education in Belfast (and indeed throughout the north) was not more complete. One of the main issues we foresaw was that historically Irish- medium schools were not initially recognised by the Department of Education. This recognition was not granted in some cases for a considerable period of time, and even when this situation changed, it normally took place only after a certain number of pupils were enrolled. In addition, although the first Irish medium school was set up in 1971, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta ('The Council for Irish- Medium Education') was not established until 2000. Whilst Comhairle holds figures from this period to date, they do not have statistics relating to the numbers of pupils prior to 2000.

We therefore contacted the Department of Education to ask for the number of past pupils from Belfast Irish Medium schools from the establishment of the first school, Bunscoil Phobail Feirste in 1971. We understood, of course that there had been no post primary education through the medium of Irish available in the city until 1991, and we knew therefore that there would have been an end to Irish medium education for a high number of primary school pupils during this period once they finished P7. We therefore asked the Department for the full number of pupils who completed Irish Medium primary education up to 1991, and for the number of pupils who completed post primary Irish Medium education from the date onwards. We received this reply from the Department of Education,

The Department only has information to be able to track pupils' movements from primary school to post-primary school from the 2010/11 academic year.

We then received the following information,

<b>Pupils in Irish medium primary education in the former Belfast ELB that continue on to Irish medium education in post-primary school</b>									
		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16		
Pupils in P7 in Irish medium primary education		122	125	142	138	123	135		
		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17		
Of this cohort, pupils that continue Irish medium education in post-primary school	N	65	62	78	94	82	102		
	%	53.3%	49.6%	54.9%	68.1%	66.7%	75.6%		
Source: NI school census									
Notes:									
1. Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. The Friday of the first full week in October (In 2016/17 this was the 7 October 2016)									
2. Cohort refers to P7 pupils that were in Irish medium schools or units in a school in the former Belfast Education and Library Board.									
3. A pupil is counted as staying on in Irish medium education if they attend an Irish medium school or unit in post-primary school in the subsequent year									
4. As numbers are quite small, data should be interpreted with caution to avoid drawing unwarranted conclusions from the data.									

Figure 1

As a result of the statistical gaps and difficulties relating to obtaining definitive figures, we have used a number of alternative sources to extrapolate information. Included in the Linen Hall Library's Irish language archive are a collection of newspaper cuttings compiled by Brigid Mhic Seáin, a founder member of the Shaw's Road Gaeltacht and of the first Irish medium primary school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste.

These contain newspaper reports, mainly from The Irish News and The Andersonstown News about aspects of Irish medium education. They show, for example, that by 1986 there was a need for a second Irish medium primary school in Belfast as twenty intending pupils for the existing Bunscoil Pobal Feirste had been refused places due to lack of space. Source: Andersonstown News 6/9/1986.

A second source for figures are the reports of H.M. Inspectorate obtainable from the Department of Education website at

<https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports>

In addition, the revised Department of Education Enrolment Statistics Bulletin for February 2018 states that throughout the six counties,

More than 6,160 pupils participate in funded Irish medium education, with 4,939 pupils educated in dedicated Irish medium schools and pre-school settings and a further 1,229 pupils educated in Irish medium units attached to English-medium schools.

The total number of pupils in funded Irish medium education has steadily risen over time, increasing by almost 1,500 pupils since 2012/13 and more than 300 pupils since last year. Most of this increase is coming from greater enrolments in Irish medium schools rather than units.

However, the Bulletin does not detail area breakdown of figures.

As shown below in Figure 2, currently the number of children enrolled in Irish medium primary schools in the former BELB area stands at 1205. A further 326 pupils attend two primary schools outside this area, Scoil Na Fuiseoige (141 pupils)

<b>Bunscoil Primary</b>	<b>Baile Mór Town</b>	<b>R1 P1</b>	<b>R2 P2</b>	<b>R3 P3</b>	<b>R4 P4</b>	<b>R5 P5</b>	<b>R6 P6</b>	<b>R7 P7</b>	<b>Líon Iomlán Total No.</b>
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	Béal Feirste Belfast	17	18	15	16	10	14	10	<b>100</b>
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Béal Feirste Belfast	51	54	43	42	42	34	36	<b>302</b>
Gaelscoil na bhFál	Béal Feirste	26	29	24	26	27	20	20	<b>172</b>
Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Béal Feirste Belfast	28	29	23	28	29	22	15	<b>174</b>
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin	Béal Feirste Belfast	28	26	23	17	18	12	15	<b>139</b>
Scoil an Droichid	Béal Feirste	28	24	21	22	20	17	15	<b>147</b>
Gaelscoil na Móna	Béal Feirste	16	15	17	16	18	13	13	<b>108</b>
Gaelscoil an Lonnáin	Béal Feirste	9	9	10	8	14	9	4	<b>63</b>
Scoil na Fuiseoige	Cill Uaigh/ Twinbrook	21	27	20	15	21	22	15	<b>141</b>
Gaelscoil Eanna	Gleann Ghormlaithe Glengormley	27	26	25	26	28	28	25	<b>185</b>

Figure 2

and Gaelscoil Eanna (185 pupils), making an overall total of 1531 children currently enrolled in Irish Medium primary schools. As noted, these schools have been included because over the period covered, families may move house and children may move school, particularly when new bunscoileanna open. In addition, city and educational authority boundaries may change.

Figure 3 below shows the numbers and overall percentages of children transferring to Irish Medium post primary education from Irish Medium primary schools in the city from 2002-3 to 2017-8. The figures in brackets are the totals when Gaelscoil Eanna and Scoil na Faiseoige are included. In the case of Gaelscoil Eanna, the most recently founded school, 2013-4 was the first year in which pupils reached P7.

Scoilbhliain School Year	Rang 7 P7	Bliain 8- Coláiste Feirste Year 8 – Coláiste Feirste	Céatadán / Percentage
02/03	120 (138)	84	70 (60.9)
03/04	106 (122)	105	99 (86.1)
04/05	115 (127)	91	79 (71.2)
05/06	111 (132)	106	95.5 (80.3)
06/07	144 (158)	89	61.8 (56.3)
07/08	136 (159)	99	72.8 (62.2)
08/09	143 (160)	82	57.3 (51.3)
09/10	125 (150)	90	72 (60)
10/11	122 (136)	86	70.5 (63.2)
11/12	125 (137)	76	61 (55.5)
12/13	142 (159)	75	52.8 (47.2)
13/14 *	151 (170)	94	62.3 (55.3)
14/15	131 (168)	111	84.7 (66.1)
15/16	135 (153)	103	76.3 (67.3)
16/17	124 (151)	124	100 (82.1)
17/18	128 (168)	102	79.7 (60.7)

Figure 3

\* first year in which Gaelscoil Eanna had P7 pupils

The number of children in Irish Medium education has risen from 9 in 1971 and therefore represents steady growth. It is worth pointing out that the cohort of children in Irish Medium education in the Belfast area represents a sizeable proportion of the overall number of children throughout the north receiving their education through the medium of Irish. It is clear therefore, that government institutions and service providers will wish to access base line data that will help guide current and future approaches to capacity building and maximising the diversity dividend for the benefit of the city as a whole.

#### 4. The Survey Methodology

From the earliest stages, POBAL recognised the importance of attracting the fullest possible participation in the research. Prior to drafting the survey, we held a series of discussions with educationalists, schools, representatives of key organisations and committees to identify specific areas of research interest and to assist us in devising the most appropriate format for the questionnaire, and the best time period to start and complete the research. After consideration and advice, it was clearly preferable to avoid the long summer hiatus, even though this would have given us a longer period for data collection and analysis. We determined to start the research in the autumn 2017, with a view to closing the data collection process in early spring 2018. Among those we met were Colma Mhic Aoidh of Gaelchúrsaí. Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh and Seán Mac Corraidh from St Mary's University College, and Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhríde from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. In addition we kept the Co-ordinating committee on Irish Medium Resources, Training, Education and Curriculum (CATOC) updated on the research and asked for views and suggestion regarding draft questionnaires and other issues.

During these discussions, we decided on an online survey because it appeared to offer the most respondent-friendly means of returning completed questionnaires. In addition, we recognised that some of those we would hope to reach might be difficult to target other than through social media and wide spread publicity work about the research and that in this case, an online questionnaire would be most widely available. Schools also advised us that they felt this approach would be most beneficial not simply in reaching past pupils in the local area, but also those who might have emigrated or who were working or living abroad. In addition, although the

age groups we were trying to reach were varied, with some of the first pupils of Irish medium education now being in their late forties, it was clear that due to the growth of Irish medium education over recent years, the bulk of potential respondents would belong to younger age groups and be familiar and at ease with the electronic media.

Following our discussions with Principals and other staff in the Irish medium schools in the Belfast area, we recognised that there would be no one simple way to contact past pupils. We therefore asked the schools themselves to help us publicise the research, distributing information about it to their staff members, pupils and parents, through their Sibling lists, through Facebook and Twitter, through school newsheets and so on. The schools were enormously helpful and engaged in the research and as well as pointing us towards many useful contacts, some organised in-house information sessions with staff members who had gone through Irish medium education to encourage them to fill in the survey and spread the word.

Furthermore, we contacted major Irish language employers, and were greatly assisted in this by the groups themselves who arranged for us to meet with some of their current employees who were former Irish Medium pupils in the city in order to talk to them about the research. These meetings resulted in a great deal of positive publicity about the research, and a number of helpful suggestions as to who else we could contact.

Of course, we used our own web site, Twitter feed and Facebook Page to publicise the research and to ensure that links to the survey were easy to find. We also made it known that we could email links out to people on request so that they or people they knew could fill the survey in easily. A small number of people contacted us on email to do just this.

## 5. Responses and schools

We received 159 responses, with 105 (66.9%) coming from past pupils of the longest-established school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste. 24 respondents (15.3%) had attended Belfast's second largest-established primary school, Gaelscoil na bhFál. This breakdown of responses corresponds with the history and make-up of the Irish medium sector in the city, which is still quite new. It is important to recognise that the newer schools have to date had a far smaller number of pupils reaching school-

leaving age. In the case of Gaelscoil Eanna, for example, the school has only had P7 pupils since 2013-4.

In addition to responses relating to primary schools, 70 people (44.6% of respondents) were past pupils of Coláiste Feirste, Belfast’s Irish Medium secondary school. Naturally, some of these respondents would also figure in the previous categories for primary schools. Figures 4a and 4b give a breakdown of the number and percentage of respondents according to school.

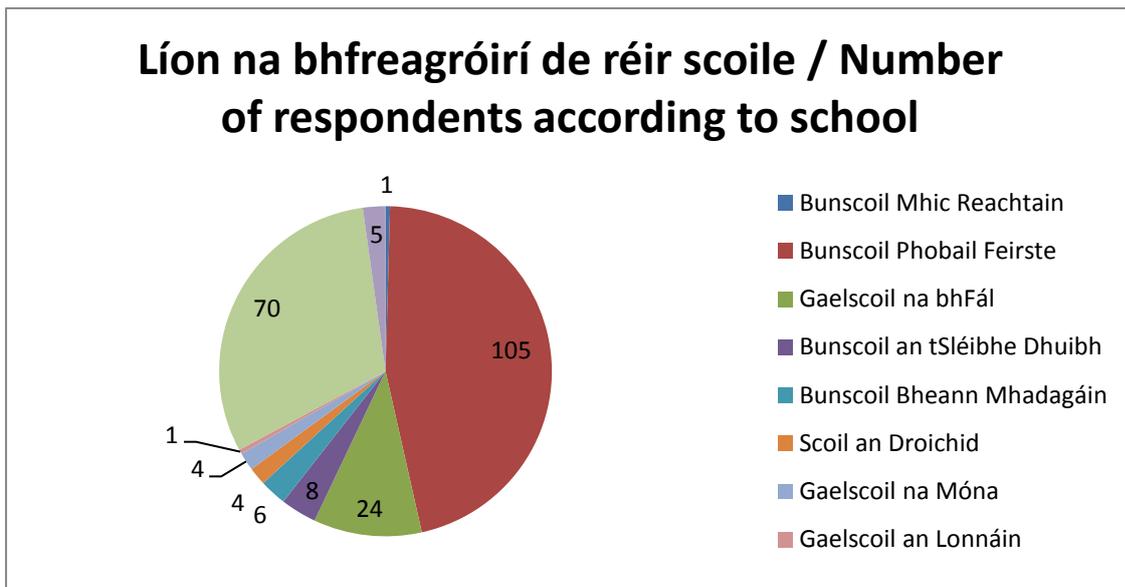


Figure 4a

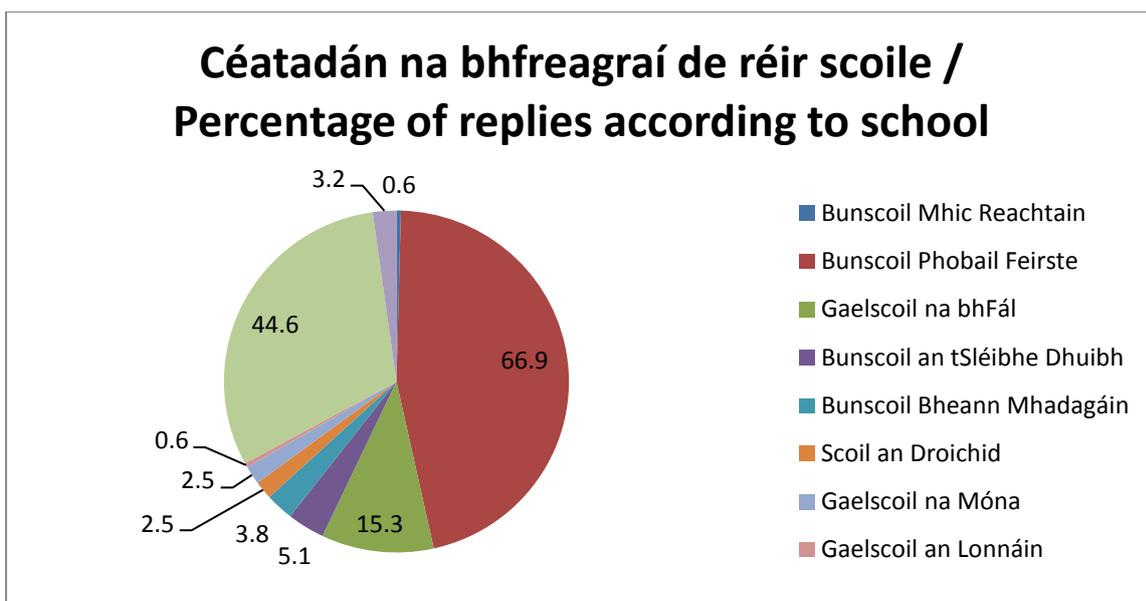


Figure 4b

6. If pupils attended both English and Irish Medium schools, which English medium schools did they go to?

Ninety-two respondents replied to this question. As noted, it was 1991 before the establishment of Meánscoil Feirste (now Coláiste Feirste) with 9 pupils enabled transition from primary to secondary school through the Irish medium. For this reason alone, it is to be expected that some past pupils will have also attended English medium schools. Nonetheless, 24 respondents (26.1%) stated that they had completed their primary and post-primary education entirely through Irish-medium schools in the city.

A number of English medium secondary schools are referenced by respondents, including:

St Mary's Glen Road / Scoil Mhuire na mBraithre Críostaí

St Dominic's Grammar School

St Genevive's

St Malachy's

St Louise's

La Salle

Little Flower Girls School

Lagan College Integrated school

Aquinas diocesan Grammar school

Dominican College Fortwilliam

Rathmore Grammar school

St Gemma's

St Paul's High School Bessbrook

Some past pupils of Irish Medium education also attended English Medium primary schools, although this appears to be less usual phenomena than those who also attended English Medium secondary. The primary schools referenced include, St Anne's primary school, St Catherine's PS, and St Mary's primary school, Beechmount.

## 7. Post code data

We received responses from 152 people to this question, with 2 of these giving no information. Several respondents gave the first part of their post code, but not the second part. From those who replied, there had been twenty house moves from one postcode to another during school years, with 5 respondents moving several times, including some within the same general post code area.

The greatest number of past pupils had lived in post code area BT11 during their school years (62 respondents, 40.8%). This number includes several who had moved within that area, and others who had moved to the area from outside. 36 respondents (23.7%) had lived in BT12, 27 respondents (17.7%) had lived in BT17, including several who had moved to this area from other post code districts, 15 people (9.9%) had lived in BT14 and 4 had lived in BT15 (2.6%), 4 others (2.6%) had lived in BT29, and 5 (3.3%) had lived in BT7 with the same number having lived in BT10. Three respondents had lived in BT5 and a further 3 in BT9. Two respondents had lived in BT35 and two in BT36, and one respondent had lived in BT13 and another in BT6. The spread of locations shows the importance of making adequate provision for the past pupils of Irish Medium education on a city-wide basis.

In the case of this research, it is important to note that census information and other research over a period of time has shown that those indicating knowledge of Irish come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. However, since all Irish medium schools in Belfast have always been and are currently located in areas of recognised deprivation within the city, it is legitimate to question to what extent this is reflected in the post code information in question. Because of the distances travelled by some children to access Irish Medium education, the relatively long time periods covered by the research and the changing economic and social factors in some parts of Belfast since the 1970s, without further in-depth research however, generalised comments linking post code areas with Deprivation rankings should be treated with

some caution. In 2017, when the statistics were most recently updated, the rankings allocated to each Super Output Area show variation within ward areas which may have not applied when various respondents were in full-time education.

The BT11 and BT12 post codes, for example, (40.8% of respondents and 23.7% respectively) currently include the Super Output Areas of Falls Park, Upper Springfield, Glencolin, Glen Road, Ladybrook, Andersontown, Clonard and Beechmount. In the NISRA list of 100 most deprived SOAs, thirteen of the SOA's listed in the worst 100 are located within these post code areas.

In relation to BT14 and BT15, Waterworks 2 SOA is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> worst out of 100, with different parts of Ardoyne ranked at 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> worst. Three different areas of the New Lodge are ranked as 7<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> worst out of 100. Other SOAs featuring in the research and the 100 worst SOA areas, include BT5 and BT7.

This project has identified the need for further research into this issue, which could include more in-depth analysis of geographic information linked to deprivation measures in order to give a clearer picture of how various factors may have affected different areas over a period of time. For example, during the timescale covered by the research, Ward boundaries and methodologies for establishing indices of deprivation may have changed and social mobility trends may also be a factor. Nonetheless, there is a clear indication from the research of the need for fit-for-purpose service provision and recognition of the labour market potential of past pupils of Irish Medium education on a city-wide basis.

## 8. Gender of respondents

As shown in Figures 5a and 5b, women were the majority of respondents. 108 women answered or 68.4% of the overall respondents, in comparison with 50 men, or 31.6%

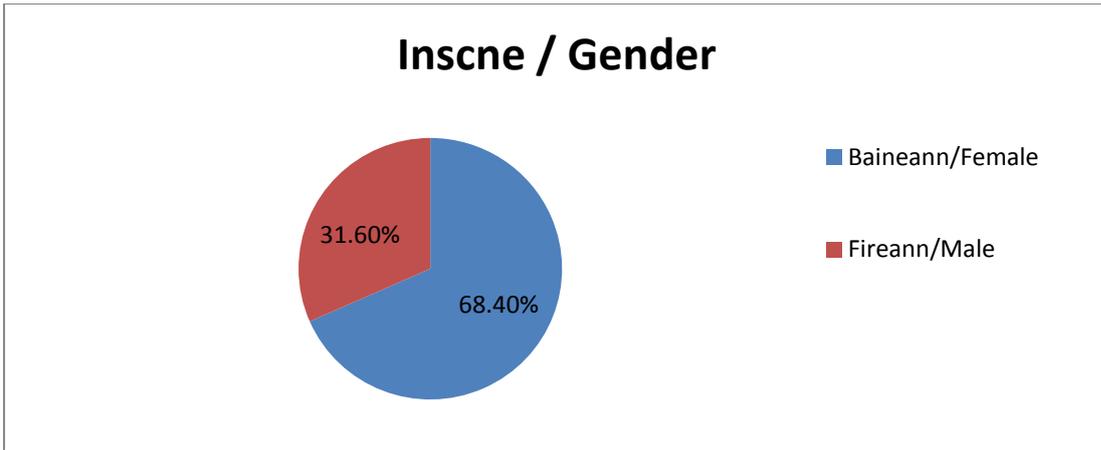


Figure 5a

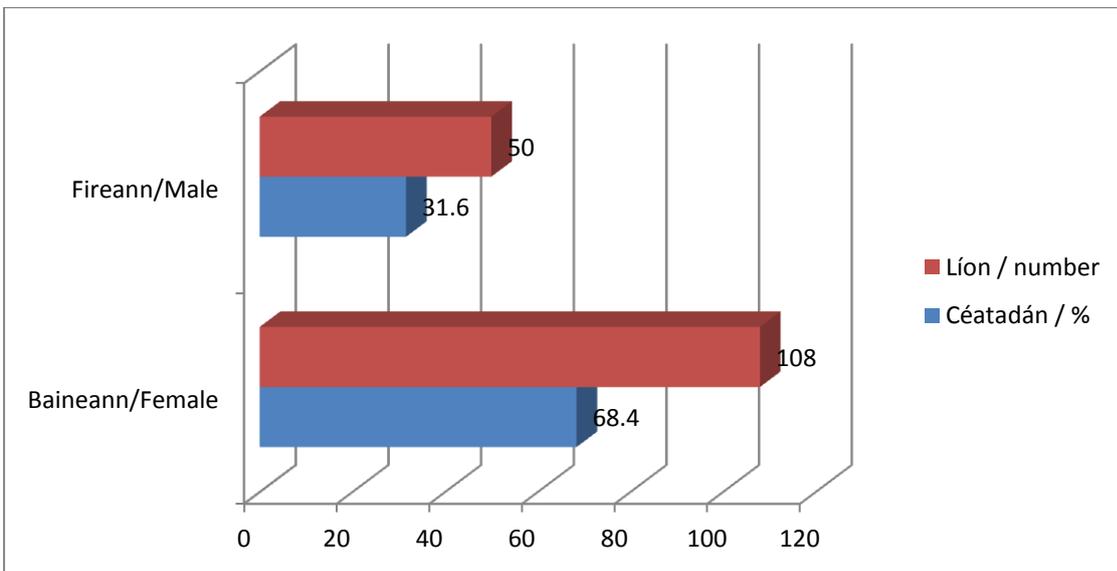


Figure 5b

### 9. Age of respondents

Respondents were asked to indicate their age group. As Figure 6 shows, the largest number of responses were received from the 24-29 years age group (50 responses, 31.8%); the second largest number came from 30-35 year olds (43 responses, 27.4%), then in third place, the 18-23 years group, with 32 responses (20.4%) and from the 36-41 age group, 28 responses (17.8%) were received. Naturally, we got a smaller number of responses from the older age groups that is from those who were among the first cohorts of Irish Medium pupils, when there was a very limited number of places available.

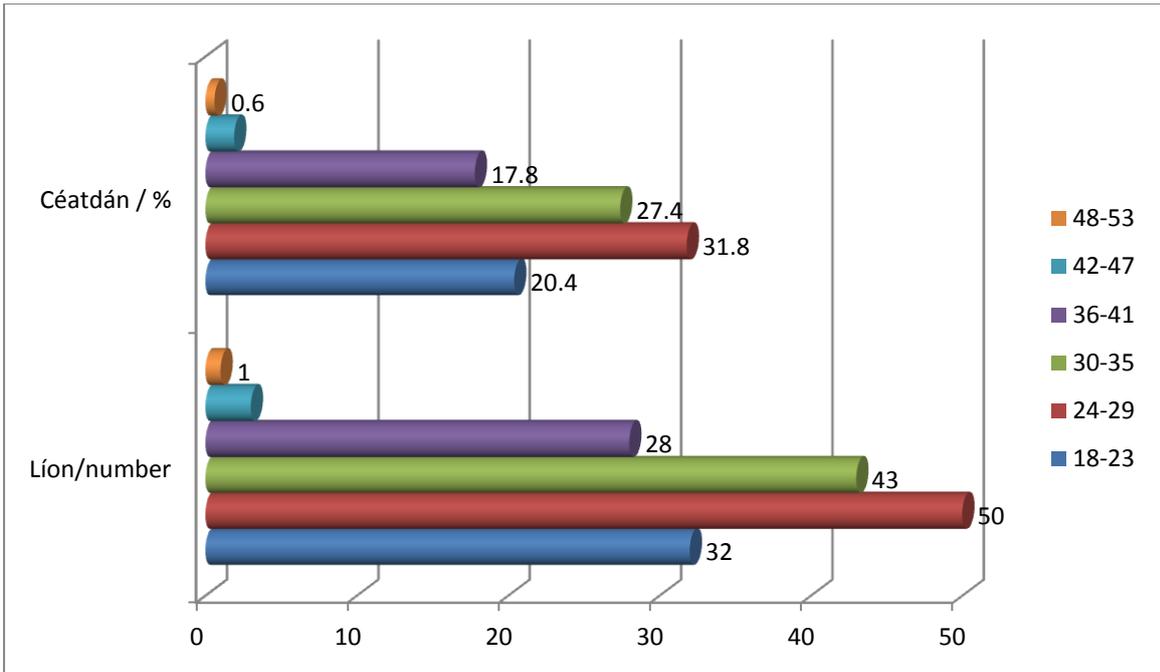


Figure 6 Age groups

10. Use of Irish

As part of the research, we asked a series of questions about day to day use of the Irish language. Out of 156 responses to the first question, 147 respondents (94%) said that they use the Irish language often or occasionally in their personal lives.

See Figure 7

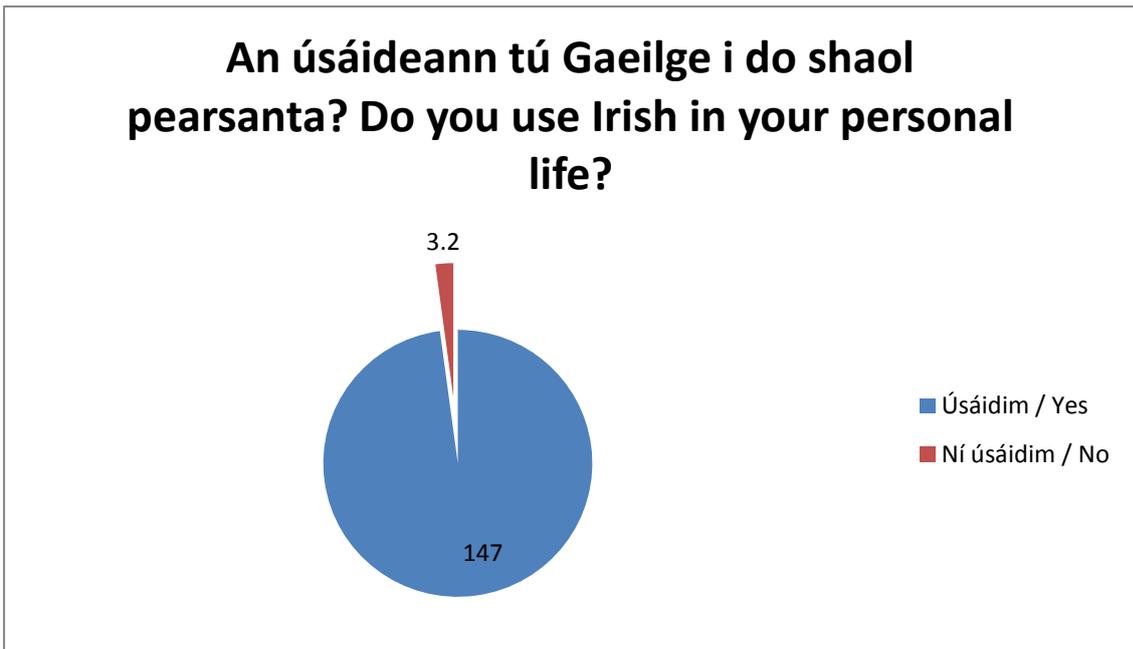


Figure 7a

We then asked respondents to tell us who they use the language with. From 149 responses, the majority said they used Irish with friends (86.6%). The second category most often selected was on social media (69.1%). It is interesting to note that similar percentages indicated they use Irish with their children (41.6%) and with their parents (44.3%). This implies an element of intergenerational transmission of the language, both with the older and younger generations. It is important to note as well, of course, that respondents in the younger age groups may not yet have children of their own.

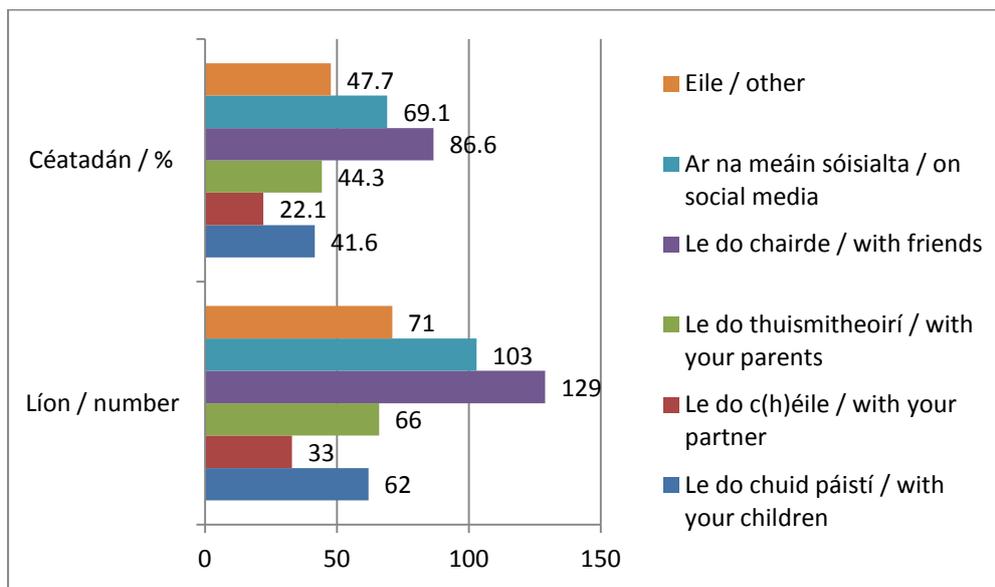


Figure 7b

For those who responded that they did not use Irish in their personal life, (16 respondents), 13 people (81.3% of those who answered this question) said that they do not have the opportunity. 4 others (25%) said that they are not confident about their Irish. Two (12.5%) said they didn't want to use Irish and two more (12.5%) said there were other reasons why they did not use the language in their personal lives.

On the questionnaire, we then gave respondents the chance to indicate what would help them to use the language in their personal lives. 88 people answered this question, and we received some interesting and varied replies. To quantify the data, we have attempted to break down the responses into categories according to the type of issue mentioned. Some respondents listed more than one thing which would help them use the language more in their personal lives.

20 of the responses made reference to the need for specific services or more services to be provided through the medium of Irish. Whilst the bulk of these replies refer to services generally provided by the state, including broadcasting services, some others make particular mention of localised services and retail, banking and others. A further 7 respondents specifically cite the need for an Irish Language Act to make adequate legislative provision for Irish speakers.

Further opportunities to use the language was also mentioned by 20 respondents, with some citing the need for more family events; or for specific social facilities such as Irish language centres, pubs or occasions for particular age groups relevant to the respondent (“for people of my age”, “for young people” etc).

Interestingly, there was a relatively high number of comments (16) relating to the category of demographics or ‘community’. A number of respondents refer to the need for more Irish speakers, or for more people able to use the language to do so, Others link this to their own personal circumstances, citing a partner who has less Irish than them, or friends or family who don’t use the language. Others make remarks which relate also to the status and or visibility of the language, with 8 comments specific to the need for a more Gaelic-friendly environment with Irish language signage on building, on street signs, in shops and local facilities.

Other forms of personal circumstances also rate high, with 14 comments highlighting the issues around using Irish if you live or work abroad, or are now located in an area where the use of the language is less common. A number of these respondents point out the value in these circumstances of television programming in Irish and social media and online services.

Given that some respondents may have received only primary school education through Irish, either prior to the establishment of Coláiste Feirste or for other reasons, and that others, even having received their secondary education through Irish may now have spent a number of years working in English-language environments, it is perhaps not surprising that 10 comments relate to classes, conversation groups or reasonably priced continuous courses to boost ability and / or confidence in fluency and the use of the language.

Three respondents specifically mention that it would be an advantage to be able to find work in the Irish language sector and for work places in general to welcome and encourage the use of Irish among staff and clients / customers.

#### 11. Further, Higher Education and Training

We asked what Further Education and Training respondents had undertaken. 141 people answered this question, some of whom had undertaken a range of courses of study and obtained more than one qualification. Of those responding to this question, 102 people (72.3%) had obtained degrees (4 people were still completing the course at the time of their response); 31 people had undertaken PGCEs (with one person still to complete the course at the time of responding); 2 people had obtained LLM qualifications in Law; 8 people had Masters degrees of various kinds (one person still studying at time of responding) including masters in Electronics, Archaeology, Social Work, Clinical Dentistry, Human Rights' Law and Criminology; and 5 respondents had a PhD.

Professional qualifications included from the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at QUB, and the Professional Qualification for Headship.

Nineteen people had obtained various diplomas, with one person still to complete the course at the time of responding. Again, the subject areas were varied, including Executive Communications, Industrial Studies, Management and Leadership, Playwork, Language Planning, Irish, Rights and Responsibilities etc.

Three respondents referred to Higher National Diplomas in Computing, Health and Social Care and Health and Beauty Science.

A wide range of NVQ qualifications had been obtained, including 10 in Business Administration; 1 x level 1 in Childcare, 7 x level 2 and 10 x level 3 Childcare, with one of these to be completed at the time of responding. Two people had Early Years levels 2 and 3 with a third person also having level 5. Two had level 2 in Playwork and one person also had level 3.

Two people had carried out specific study into Special Education Needs and one person had a City and Guilds qualification.

Some respondents mentioned subject areas but without specifying the qualification: Animal Management Now, Biology, Rights and Responsibilities, Media Studies, Future Skills, Training for Trainers and Drugs and Alcohol Awareness.

## 12. Language of the courses

It is apparent from the responses that with the exception of courses either in Irish language and literature, or linked with this in a combined course, the vast majority of degree courses are taught entirely through the medium of English.

B.Ed and PGCE courses in Irish are available to relatively small numbers of applicants at St Mary's University College Belfast, and a number of respondents specified that this was where they obtained their qualification. Others obtained PGCE's through English in other institutions.

NVQ, diplomas and other specific qualifications such as GCSE and A levels taught through Irish were mentioned by a number of respondents who cited Gaelchúrsaí or Forbairt Feirste as the provider.

## 13. Employment since leaving school and titles of each post

The main employment was in teaching with 29% employed in the Irish Medium sector including as classroom assistants and teachers. There were also two school principals. The majority were working in Irish medium education with a few teaching in English medium schools. Two were university lecturers. Three respondents mentioned Special Educational Needs and several referred to youth work. There were two doctors and two lawyers. 10.3% or four of those who replied were full-time third level students.

Of the other posts, there is a wide range of employment in question, ranging from professional occupations to work in retail; in various political institutions on this island and overseas; or within government departments in the north; building work; hospitality and bar work; agency contracts; call centres; work in information technology, design, programming and software engineering; various posts within the media; posts in the Irish-medium and English-medium community and voluntary sector; work within the financial sector; administration work; occupations connected

with various branches of the sciences; health care; advice and support work; work in the arts and music. Several respondents referred to working abroad in various capacities. Because of the nature of the survey it would be impossible to list each of these posts without identifying individuals. However, the wide range of occupations cited by respondents shows clearly that, in spite of a lack of legislative protection and services through Irish, Irish Medium education from its inception to the present day prepares pupils to succeed both within the Irish language sector and outside of it, locally, throughout the country and further afield.

The 30+ age groups were more likely to have had fewer jobs as the younger ones almost all had some part time jobs while studying. Three people who were available for full time work were only working part time.

No one listed a voluntary (unpaid) position as their main occupation, something of significance for those involved in the language movement since its inception where paid posts were at a premium. However, several respondents referred to carrying out voluntary work previously, and one person still studying also referred to ongoing voluntary work.

Three of those who filled in the survey indicated that they were in full time employment but did not give any further details. It is worth noting that no respondent specifically indicated that they 'worked in the home', or had full time childcare responsibilities in the home. Further research would be required to determine to what extent this is representative of the past pupils of Irish Medium in the city.

#### 14. The workplace experience

In relation to the five most important posts held by the respondent to date, we asked if these had been full-time or part-time. A significant pattern emerged. In each category of importance, numbered from 1-5, full-time posts were in the majority. However, as the posts themselves were rated in increasing importance to the respondent, the gap between full-time and part-time posts became wider. In respect of what respondents classified as the most important post they had had, 112 people said that this was full-time and for 40 other respondents (26.3%), the job was part-time. However, in respect of the post in 5<sup>th</sup> place, ie of having least relative

importance to the respondent, 23 people replied that this was a full-time job, whilst 14 said it was part-time (37.8%).

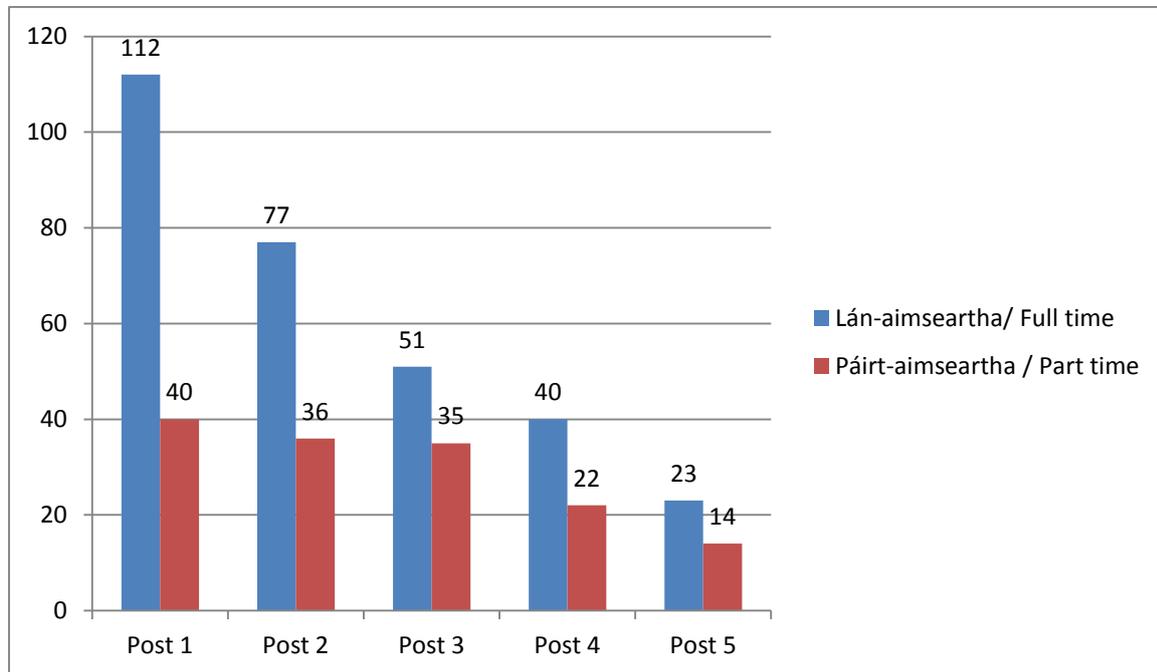


Figure 8a

Respondents were asked whether each of the five most important posts had been permanent, on a 3 year or more fixed term contract, a one year fixed term contract, less than one year, a post without any contract, or a post in other circumstances. As Figures 8b and 8c show, in each category of importance of post, the greatest number of respondents replied that the post was permanent, and even though the number of people with permanent posts fell as the importance of the post lessened, the figures are still significant. Eighty respondents said their most important post was permanent, in comparison with ten people in the ‘least important post’ category. On the other hand, it is a cause of concern that so many people (16) respond that they had no contract at all in the three most important posts they have had. In each category as well, there were more respondents who had had only had a one year contract than there were respondents with contracts of 3 years or over.

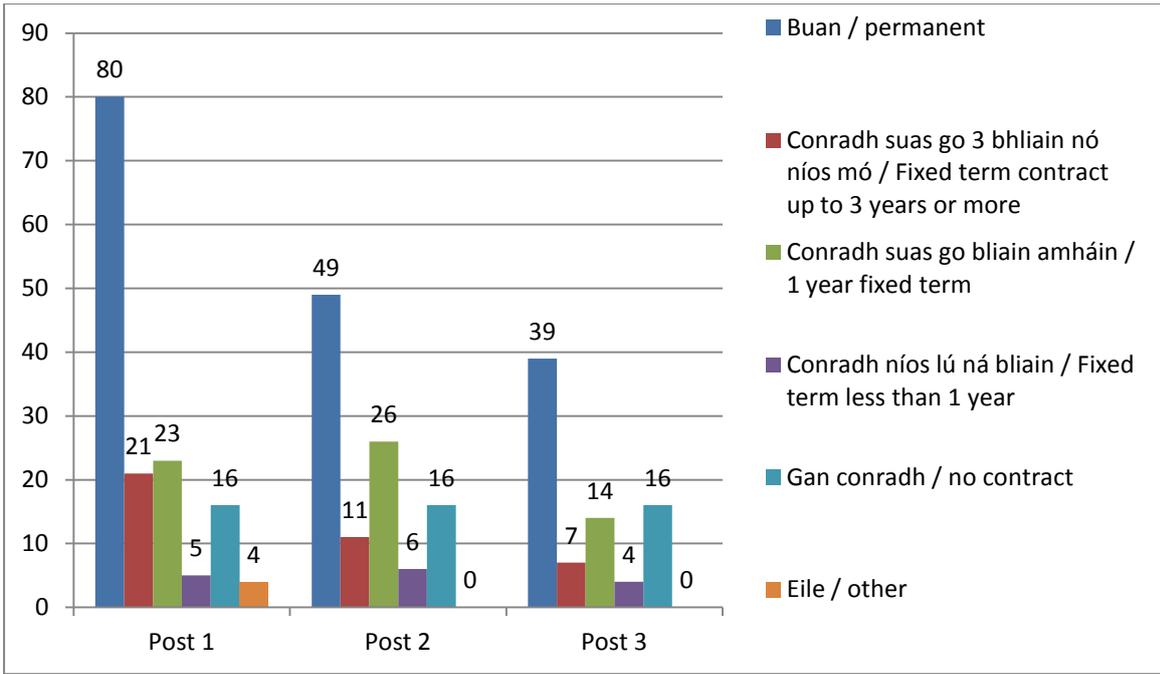


Figure 8b

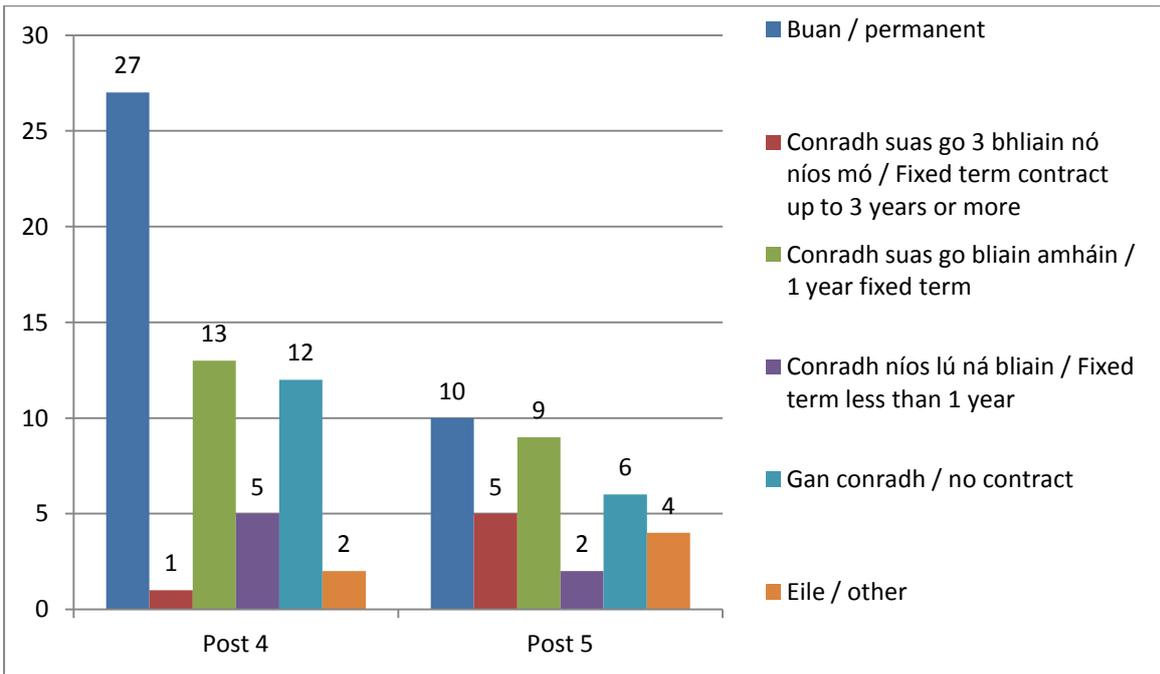


Figure 8c

To gather further information, we asked whether the posts in question in all 5 categories of importance were salaried, voluntary, internships or some other kind of work. Again, a significant number of respondents said these were paid posts, and although the number of people carrying out voluntary work was quite small, this kind of work was mentioned by some people in each of the 5 categories. It can be seen also in Figure 8d that a small number of internships were involved, even when this

relates to the 'most important' post, and since internships are a relatively recent phenomenon, this is a factor that may increase with time.

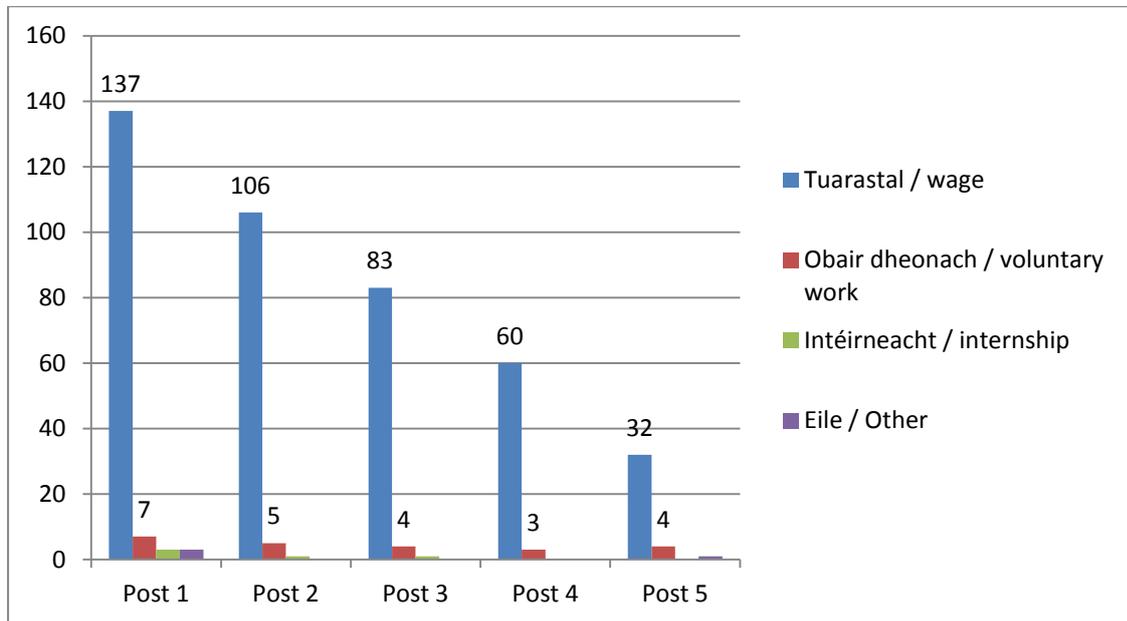


Figure 8d

## 16. The Language of the Workplace

We asked what was the main language of the workplace for respondents and it was interesting to see that 51.6% said Irish, with 40% saying English and the rest selecting a mixture of both. Of course, it is worth noting that the largest single sectoral employer of Irish speakers at present is the Irish medium education sector, where the main language would of course be Irish. In addition, the active engagement of Irish medium schools and of Irish language groups in the city in the research should be taken into account when assessing these figures. There can be no doubt that in terms of actual employment opportunities, far fewer exist within the Irish Medium environment than within the English language. That said it is also important to note the majority of respondents appear to choose continuity from Irish medium education into an Irish medium working environment. In addition, it is clear that the 40% of respondents who work predominantly in the English language have been well prepared by Irish Medium education for a variety of work through either language.

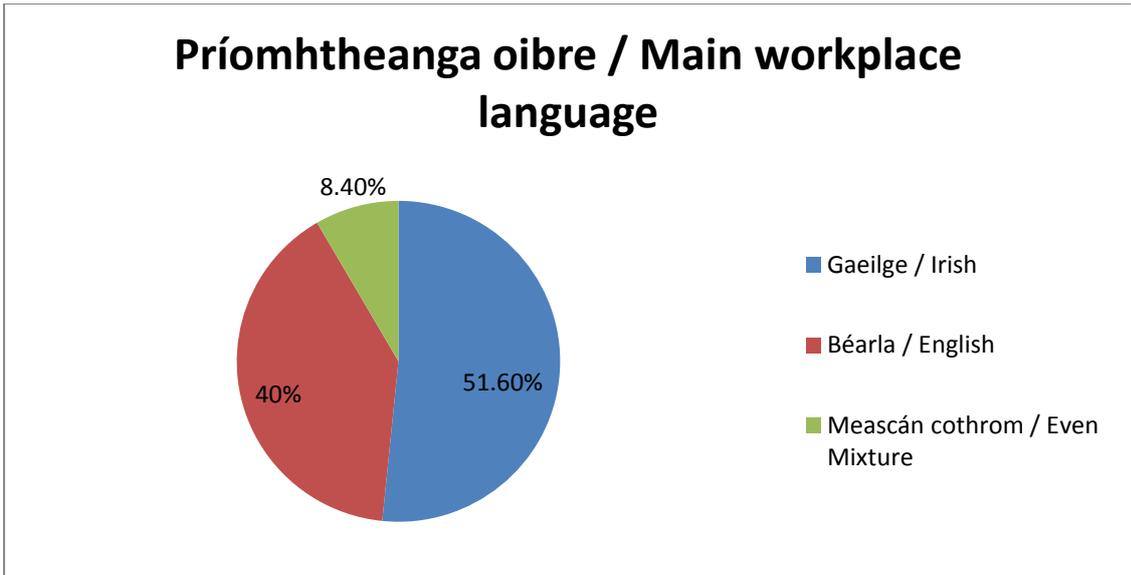


Figure 9a

To delve more deeply into this issue, we asked whether respondents used Irish in their workplaces, and with whom. 128 people responded to this question. The highest number (108 people, 84.4%) said they used the language with colleagues, with 91 people (71.1%) citing language use with Irish language groups. 87 people (68%) said they used Irish with service users or customers, and 72 people (58.3%) said they used it with managers.

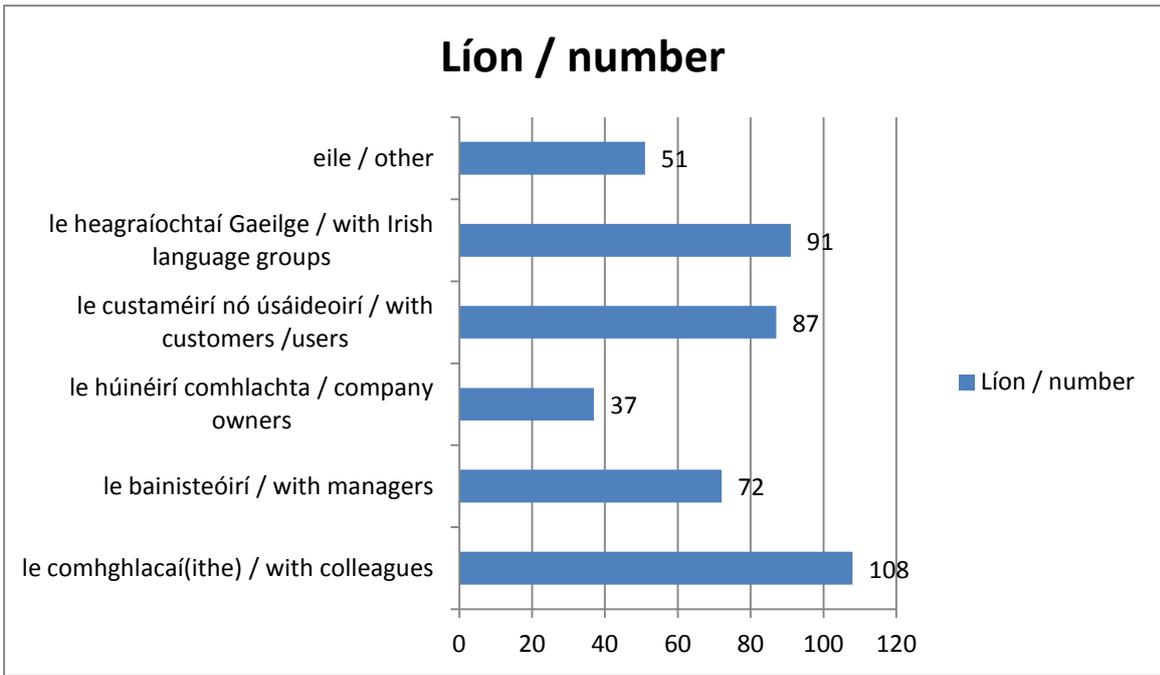


Figure 9b

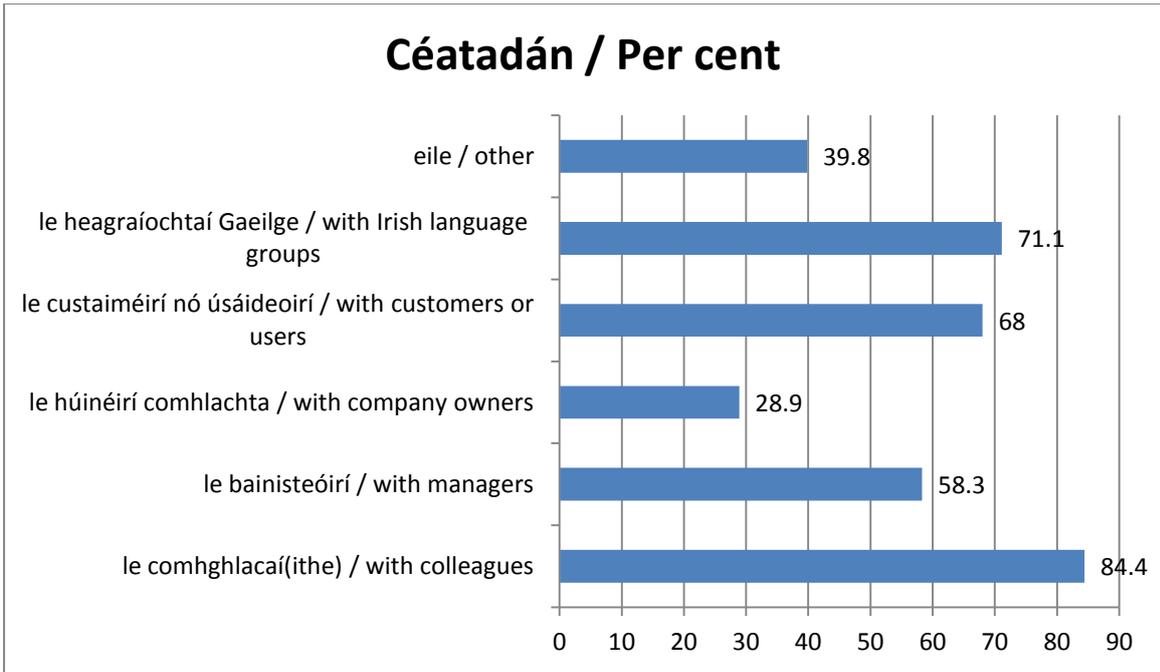


Figure 9c

We then asked those who did not use Irish in the workplace whether they would like to use it. 55 people answered this question, with the overwhelming majority (40 people, 72.7%) responding that they would.

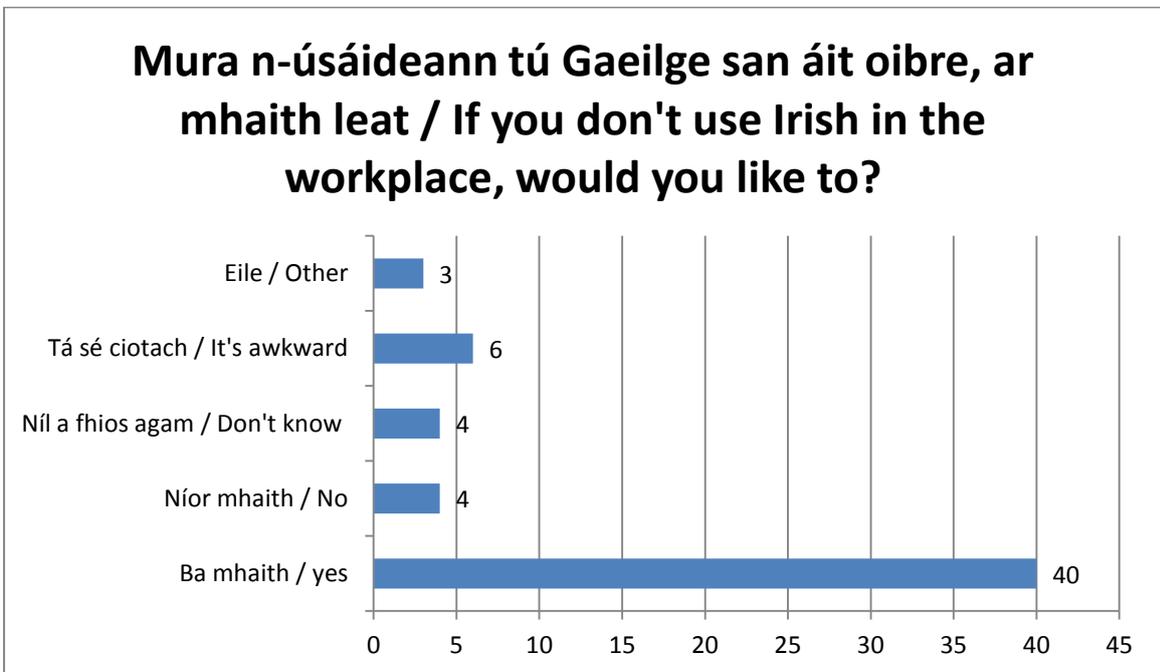


Figure 9d

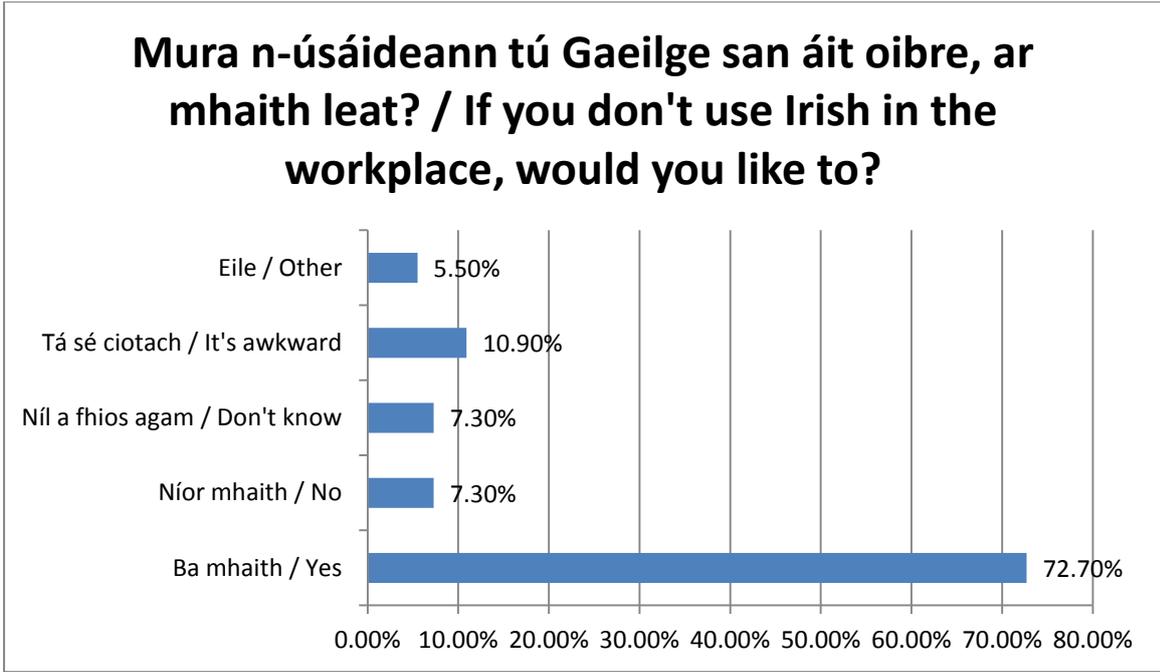


Figure 9e

We then asked what would help them to use the language in the workplace. We received 66 replies, 9 of which said that the question was not applicable to them, with 3 of these specifying that they were among those who use Irish in their place of work. One respondent answered simply, ‘Civil service’ with no further elaboration. One respondent said nothing would help since few people in the specific area in question spoke Irish, and four further people responded that they lived abroad. Three more respondents said that ‘Nothing’ would help them use Irish in the workplace but gave no further detail.

Nineteen respondents indicated that a greater number of Irish speakers in their own workplace, and supportive workplace policies would be of help. Five people mentioned the need for greater awareness that Irish speakers were employed in particular roles to encourage service users to ask for services in Irish, through signage, badges and visibility of Irish. Twelve said that more Irish speakers in general in society and their area would also be of benefit to them in work. Two respondents cited the need for certain sectors to incorporate more Irish into their work, eg financial institutions, retail etc.

Four respondents made comments about the overall number of Irish speakers in general, and the need for use of Irish to become more ‘commonplace’ and ‘normalised’. One of these respondents felt that this would mitigate against any

feeling that there was stigma attached to using Irish, or that political affiliation would be assumed. A further respondent felt that signage would break down stereotyping and help people understand that Irish was not ‘a dead language’.

Six respondents said that legislation and /or service provision would help. One of these said that greater visibility of Irish on documentation would change the stereotype that the language was a ‘political stance’. Two others mentioned further opportunities such as conversation groups, recognition through awards like ‘Irish Speaker of the Month, social events for learners or those wishing to learn.

Six people referred to issues around confidence and ability and the need to support the continuous improvement of fluency and accuracy in Irish as well as the need for computer software and resources to help in the use of Irish in administrative tasks.

Three respondents made reference to the type of work they did or would like to do. One commented that permanent or teaching posts for Irish speakers would help. Another stated that more interest from the media in the work the respondent does would be beneficial. One said that teaching through Irish in schools of a particular music form would help them access opportunities for work.

Work in the Future.

We asked whether respondents would like to work through Irish in the future. 146 people answered this question and 122 (83.6%) said that they would.

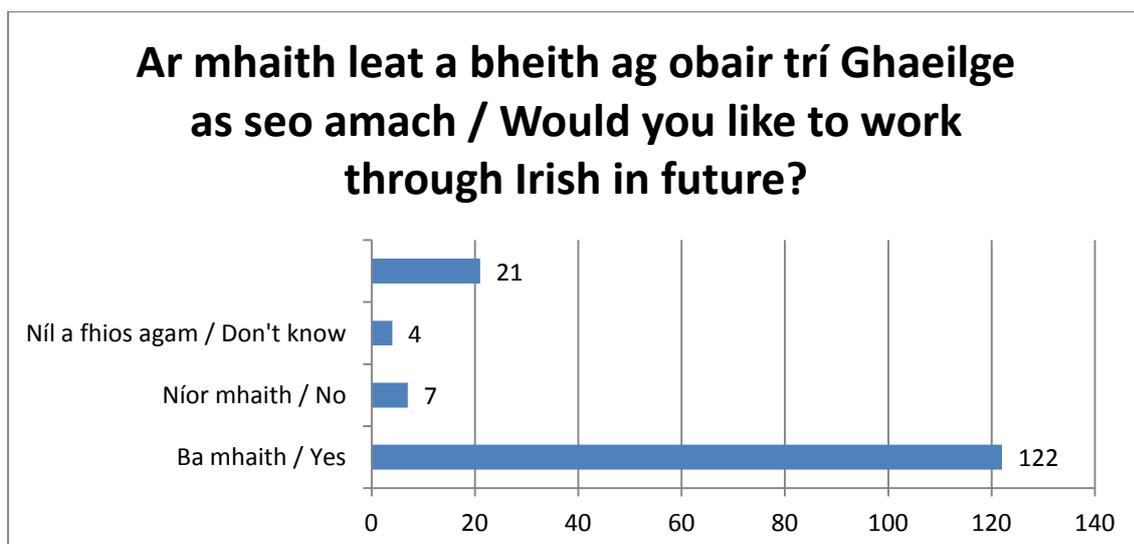


Figure 9f

21 people said that it would depend on the type of post itself. A small number of people (7 respondents, 4.8%) said they would not.

## 17. Periods of unemployment

We felt it was important to include questions on unemployment as well as employment. We therefore included two questions to find out when respondents who had been without paid work had been unemployed, and for how long these periods of unemployment had lasted.

It is interesting to note that it is only in the first period of their unemployment that respondents recorded being unemployed for longer than 3 Years. 10 people in the same period said they were unemployed for more than two years. The number of those then suffering sustained periods of unemployment in subsequent periods diminishes significantly, although it is worth noting how widespread the phenomena of periods without paid work remains.

Obviously, the research covers a period from the early 1970s to the present and it is important to recognise that during that time, there have been substantial changes to the economy and employment prospects of much of the population.

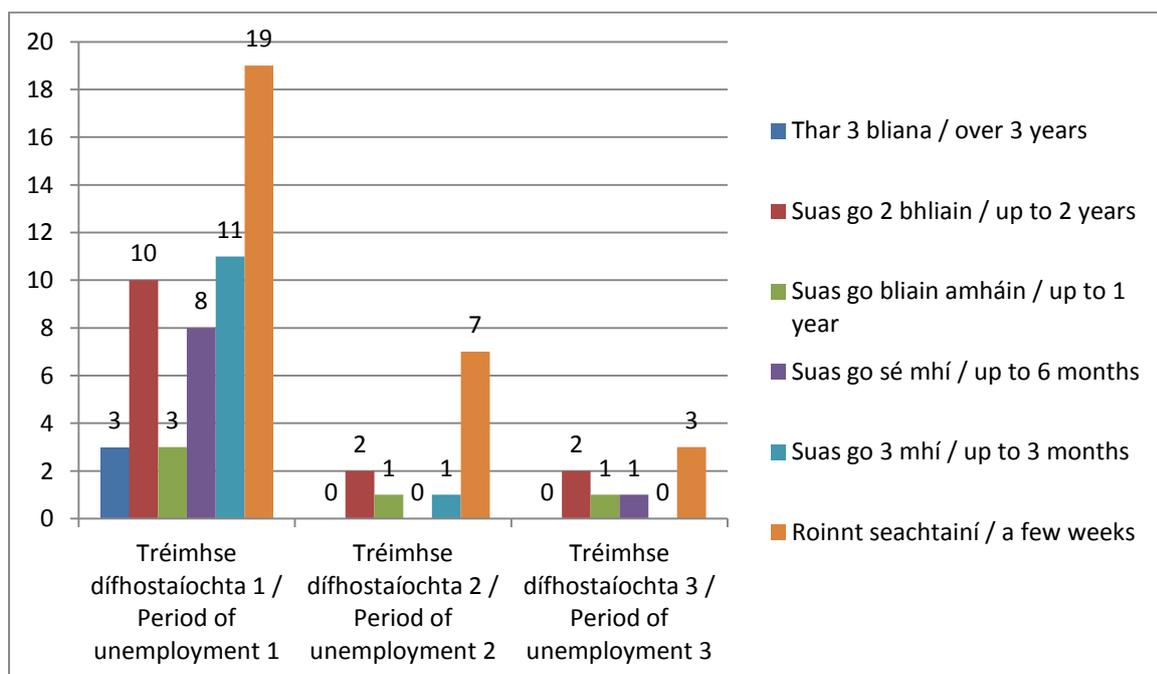


Figure 10a

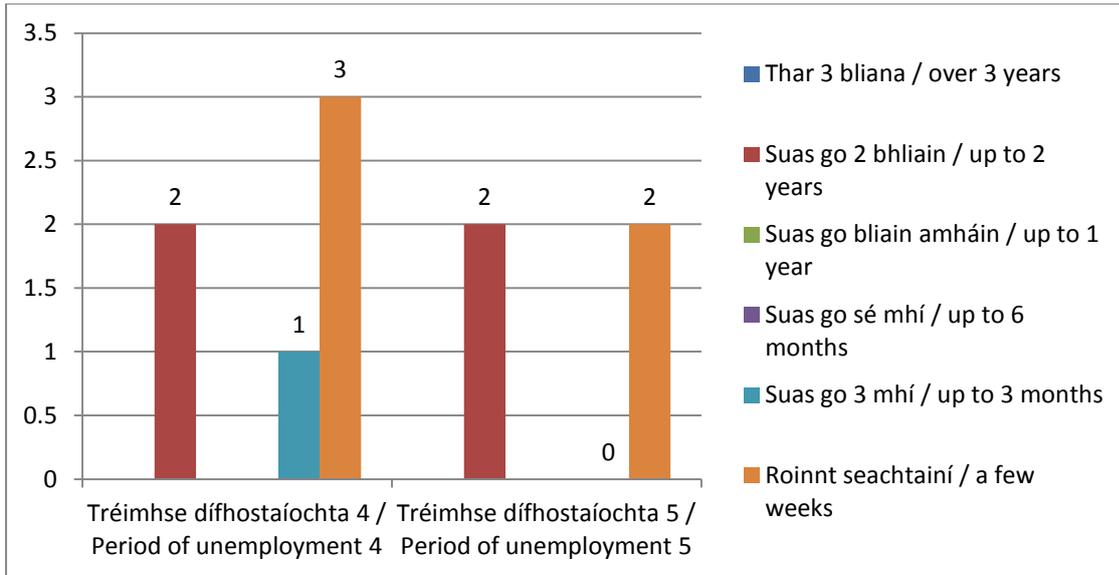


Figure 10b

We asked which were the worst periods of unemployment respondents had undergone, if any. We received 65 answers to this question. It could be said that there is correspondence between the numbers of people who suffered unemployment periods and the number of respondents in various age groups, in that 24 people (36.9%) said they had periods of unemployment between 2015-7, and 22 people (33.8%) between 2011-14. 29 others (44.6%) said they were unemployed between 2006-15.

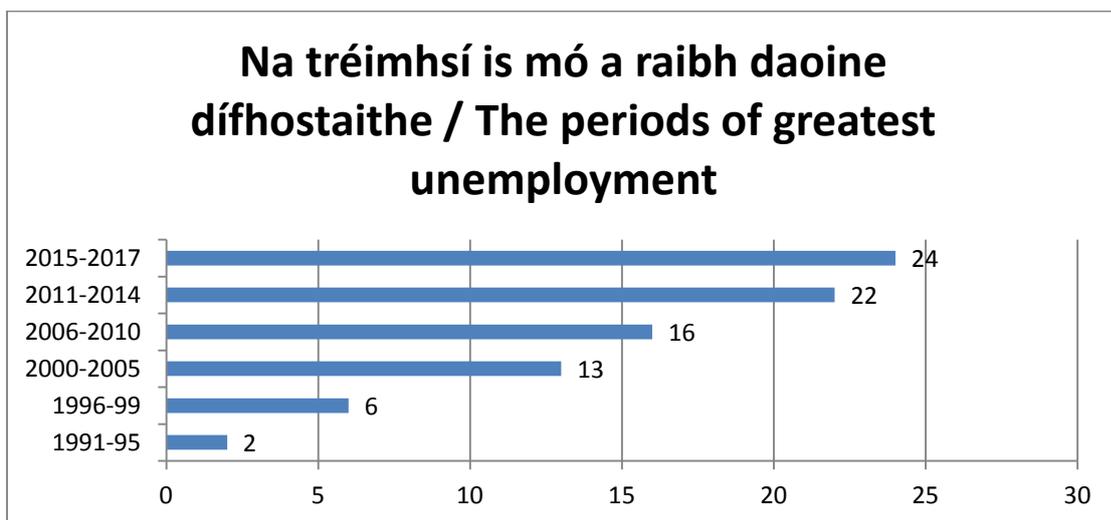


Figure 10c

Interestingly, no respondent said that they had been unemployed in the periods 1983-86, nor 1987-90 in spite of the fact that these periods are generally recognised as being high in unemployment. However, these periods also relate to the earlier

days of Irish Medium education and the numbers of respondents in these age groups correspond to the relatively smaller numbers of those school leavers who would have received their primary education through Irish in the city.

It appears reasonable to note that since the largest numbers of respondents report unemployment periods in more recent times, that the age groups of respondents are also a factor in the statistics. The growth in Irish medium education has led to more past pupils and this in turn has led to more respondents in certain age groups who have been in the labour market for a much shorter time.

#### 14. Research conclusions

The research reflects the development of Irish Medium education in the city in general, as well as the growth of numbers of children attending IM primary schools. There is obvious demand for continuity beyond primary education, with strong uptake of IM post primary education. Clearly, the emerging population of young people who have received their education through Irish represent a skills resource for the current and future labour market, and a dynamic part of the city's diversity. As such, the research highlights the opportunities for Belfast City Council and other government bodies with responsibilities for economic development, good relations and community planning to improve and develop services inclusive of the Irish speaking community, on a city-wide basis.

Past pupils of Irish Medium education within the current Belfast City Council area have been resident in many parts of the city, and indeed beyond its boundaries, travelling to avail of Irish Medium education within the city's schools. Whilst post code alone is not a reliable indicator of the full range of socio-economic factors, many of those attending IM schools in the past 45 years have lived in areas of recognised multiple disadvantage, and all of the schools themselves are located in such areas.

The status of the language and of Irish Medium education has changed in positive ways in the last 45 years. A sense of ability and confidence emerges from much of the responses to the research, Nonetheless there is also an awareness of marginalisation and exclusion from the mainstream. The research highlights the

concern of respondents at the lack of legislative protection for Irish and the paucity of Irish language services and visibility in their localities. It appears likely that in areas of multiple deprivation, where demand for support services is generally higher, the lack of such services through Irish impacts more deeply. Respondents are overwhelming in their call for more services and more support for Irish speakers and for the 'normalisation' of the public use of the language through legislation, increased visibility and new and improved services. Belfast City Council has recently supported the adoption of Irish language legislation and will also appoint an Irish language officer in due course. In its community planning role, it also has an opportunity to ensure that a wide range of public services are fit-for-purpose and able to meet the needs of school leavers from IM education and their families.

Respondents indicate a wide range of employment experience. Our research reveals professionals, civil servants, administrators, retailers, artists, IT and digital specialists, youth workers, teachers, hospitality workers, health professionals and more. There is a high percentage of Third Level education and qualifications in an extensive range of specialisms and areas of life. However, in the past very few courses have been offered through the medium of Irish and the choice remains extremely limited even at the present time. In general, degree and diploma courses in Irish language / literature, sometimes with an additional specialism such as Business Studies, or post graduate courses in Translation or other language-related areas such as Language Planning, are among the only Third Level courses taught through Irish. Respondents also highlight the importance of B.Ed and PGCE Initial Teacher Education places through Irish in St Mary's University College.

Respondents have also undertaken a limited range of training courses and obtained qualifications through Irish offered by the organisation Gaelchúrsaí /Forbairt Feirste. It appears however that, 45 years after the opening of the first bunscoil in Belfast, no other training or skills provider in the city offers a range of courses through Irish to Belfast's cohort of Irish Medium school leavers. In order to better support the growing diversity of the city, Belfast City Council, through its capacity building, economic development and community planning initiatives should encourage relevant government departments and Third Level institutions to carry out an audit of training needs through Irish and support development of new courses to meet emerging markets.

The majority of respondents to the research (51.6%) are currently employed in settings where the main language of the workplace is Irish. They, along with some of the 40% who did not work in predominantly Irish speaking environments, cited using the language with colleagues (84.4%), managers (58.3%), owners of companies (28.9%), customers (68%) and Irish language groups (71.1%). This shows not only a very high level of ongoing use of Irish in the workplace from past pupils, it also gives a flavour of the range of opportunities for people carrying out their day to day business to come into contact with the Irish language. Of the small number of people who said they did not use Irish in the workplace (16 respondents), 72.7% said they would like to. They indicated that among those initiatives which would help them to do so would be greater visibility of the language, positive workplace policies, awareness-raising that Irish speakers were available in particular roles to encourage users to ask for services through Irish, conversation classes and language support materials and social events in the workplace for those wishing to learn. Significantly, when asked if they would like to work through the medium of Irish in future, 122 people (83.6% of those who responded) said that they would.

Use of Irish among respondents is not however confined to the workplace. We asked if respondents used Irish either often or occasionally in their personal lives. 94% said that they did. Very high percentages (86.6%) stated that they used the language with friends, on social media (69.1%) and with either their children (41.6%) or their parents (44.3%). There is no doubt that the Irish language is a living part of the vibrancy of the city and that this presents opportunities for Belfast City Council and others to continue to develop initiatives, policies and practices that support a full range of services and provision for all sections of the community.

## 19. Recommendations

1. That Belfast City Council, through its capacity building, economic development and community planning responsibilities, should co-ordinate the development with other appropriate agencies of a wide range of new initiatives geared towards service provision for the pupils of Irish Medium education in the city in respect of:

- Liaison with Higher and Further Education and Training and Skills providers to ensure that a wide range of appropriate courses through the Irish Medium are developed
  - Liaison with a wide range of economic development agencies and employers to identify labour market gaps and effective means to address them
  - Provision of adequate educational support services including career, training and employment advice
2. Through the Belfast City Chamber of Commerce, to liaise and raise awareness with businesses in the city of the benefits of increased visibility of the Irish language in public and commercial life, and the benefits of positive workplace policies regarding the use of Irish in the workplace
  3. Establishing a new department within the Council with specific responsibility for co-ordinating inter-departmental initiatives: Language and community development, tourism, arts; Language and Economic Development, Training and Employment.
  4. Make available additional support for relevant research into the benefits that the Irish language can bring to the life of the city
  5. Developing criteria to recognize the added value of the Irish language within each funding scheme of the Council, including the multiple annual core funding scheme
  6. Making available Language Awareness Training courses to Council staff and Councillors

## 20. Acknowledgments

I should like to thank the funder of this research, Belfast City Council under its Capacity Building Programme. Many thanks too to the past pupils of Irish Medium education for their help with this research. School principals, teachers and staff members of the Irish medium schools in the city gave us exceptional support, as did Irish language groups. Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh from St Mary's University College gave invaluable advice as did Seán Mac Corraidh and Ciarán Ó Pronntaigh from St Marys and CATOC. Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhríde and Zoie Nic Amhlaoidh from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta shared useful information as did Colma Mhic Aoidh from Ghaelchúrsaí. Mary Delargy helped greatly with analysis of some of the research results. We got information and many contacts from the Irish speaking community – thanks to all of you! The media helped spread the word about the project as well and thanks to TG4 and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta news, to the BBC's Blas programme, to Raidió Fáilte, to the Belfast Media Group, to Irish Central, to the Irish News, and the other media. My thanks to POBAL's committee for its support.