



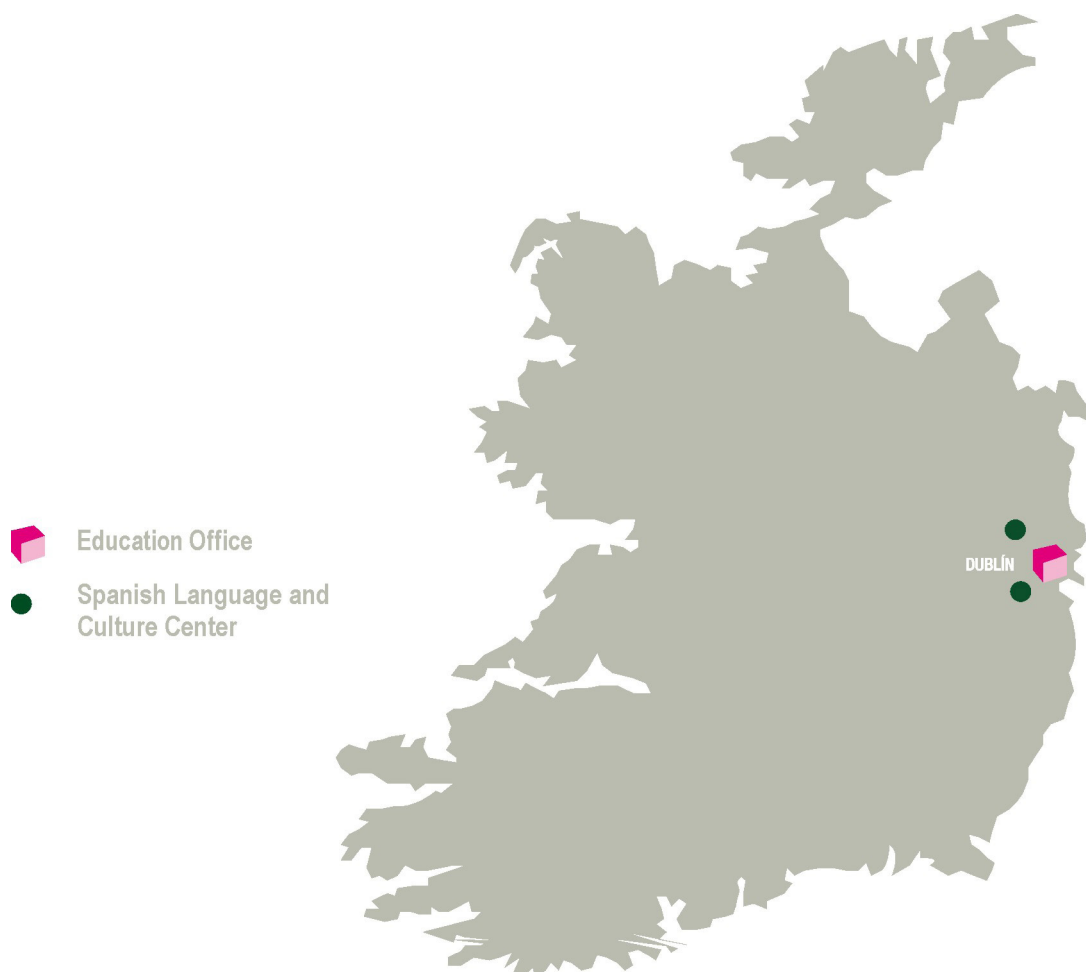
THE WORLD LEARNS

SPANISH



IRELAND

2020



Introduction

Irish education is experiencing changes in relation to foreign language learning and in recent years curricular reforms have been introduced in order to adapt the education system to the needs of current society. The convenience of learning other languages is becoming increasingly important as they are considered to help expand the horizons of the country globally, in international markets and beyond the English-speaking world. Given these circumstances, expanding the offer of languages taught at schools, making the study of a language compulsory at certain stages in the curriculum and improving the quality of language teaching are, at present, crucial considerations. This new trend is expected to positively affect the teaching of foreign languages in Ireland, including Spanish, which is already beginning to notice its effects.

In order to implement the changes deemed necessary in the teaching of foreign languages, the government has published “Languages Connect. Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026”, which lays out short and long term language objectives. Some of the measures included in the Strategy include a diversification of languages, a renovation of the teaching methodology and the evaluation system, and an increase in the number of teachers and language assistants. Within the framework of the Strategy, making the study of a foreign language compulsory in some years of Primary Education is also being considered. Should this be decided it would be without doubt an important step for the subsequent study of a language in Secondary Education.

According to the statistics published by the DES, Spanish is the third foreign language chosen to be studied in Leaving Cycle and the second one in Junior Cycle. If the new Primary

curriculum is approved, it could be an important boost for Spanish since a foreign language would be taught on a compulsory basis in the last two years of Primary Education and indications point to Spanish being one of the most requested languages. Apart from the importance of the introduction of a language in the Primary curriculum, it should be noted that at this moment Spanish is already the most demanded language after French in Junior Cycle, so the prospects for its growth are very positive both in Primary and Secondary Education.

Teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Ireland

In Ireland, Spanish is traditionally the third study option after French and German, but in recent years the demand to study it has increased. Specifically speaking, there are 45,291 students who study Spanish in Secondary Education. Spanish is seen less and less as a language for tourism as the perception of its usefulness for the business world and international relations is growing.

The only data that exists on the presence of Spanish in the education system are the statistics published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) which are based on the number of students who take the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Spanish exams. We must bear in mind that in Ireland the study of a language is not mandatory at school at any age. Each school has the freedom to decide which languages to offer and, as such, are not obliged to provide information on enrolment to the central services of the DES. Bearing this in mind, it is not possible to know the exact number of students who actually study Spanish but despite this, we know that the number is much higher than the number of students who take the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate exams.

There are 45,291 high school students of Spanish in Ireland. Spanish is seen less and less as a language for tourism as the perception of its usefulness for the world of business and international relations increases.

Spanish in Early Childhood and Primary school education

With the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) coming to an end in 2012, the teaching of Spanish and all other foreign languages in Primary Education has disappeared or has been reduced to informal learning contexts and extracurricular activities which schools, usually with the support of parents, manage to offer. In these circumstances it is difficult to know the number of students studying Spanish in these stages and the number of schools that offer it as a study option.

Spanish in Post Primary and Further Education and Training

Offering Spanish or any other foreign language is optional for Secondary schools but they are required to offer a modern language in Vocational Training courses. At the same time, students are not obliged to study a language.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, four hundred and two secondary schools offered Spanish, a considerable increase compared to the 2017-2018 academic year in which only two hundred and seventy-nine schools offered it. This is one of the many signs that the demand for Spanish is growing.

In fact, during the last ten years the number of students studying Spanish has risen considerably. Thus, during the 2007-2008 academic year, 16,487 students studied Spanish in the Junior Cycle compared to the 38,859 students that studied it in 2018-2019. As for the Leaving Cycle, 7,210 studied Spanish in 2007-2008 and 17,115 studied it in 2018-2019.

The increase in the number of students studying Spanish can also be appreciated in the statistics published by the DES on the number of students who decide not only to study a language but also to take the end of Cycle tests (Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate) as shown in the following tables. Out of the 47,869 students who took the Junior Certificate foreign language tests in 2009, 4,967 took Spanish, while in 2019 12,099 pupils sat the Spanish tests out of a total of 55,693 students:

Evolution of students that take the <i>Junior Certificate</i> exam											
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
French	33.135	33.247	33.460	34.757	34.273	33.908	32.044	31.609	31.484	31.066	31.070
German	9.330	9.041	8.974	9.470	10.152	10.467	11.423	11.833	12.030	12.466	12.013
Spanish	4.967	5.690	6.400	6.698	7.571	8.415	8.459	9.044	10.231	10.561	12.099
Italian	437	350	392	436	544	457	434	459	433	414	511
Total	47.869	48.328	49.226	51.361	52.540	53.247	52.360	52.945	54.178	54.447	55.693

Source: State Examinations Commission, Statistics

The language that most students take in Junior Certificate is French, but in the last ten years the number of those doing French has decreased. On the other hand, as can be seen above, the demand for Spanish is on the increase and in the 2019 academic year, for the first time, more students took the Junior Certificate Spanish test than those who took the German test.

In 2009, 3,277 students took the Leaving Certificate Spanish exam. This figure doubled ten years later reaching a total of 7,711 students.

Evolution of students that take the <i>Leaving Certificate</i> exam											
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Francés	27.675	27.575	26.768	25.977	25.515	26.496	26.798	25.757	25.383	23.361	23.361
Alemán	7.574	7.305	6.955	6.788	6.644	6.857	7.272	7.615	7.937	8.544	8.544
Español	3.277	3.645	4.004	4.330	4.903	5.340	5.793	6.579	7.086	7.027	7.711
Italiano	318	292	361	384	352	333	436	512	497	473	473
Total	38.844	38.817	38.088	37.479	37.414	39.026	40.299	40.463	40.903	40.089	40.089

Source: State Examinations Commission, Statistics

Spanish in Higher Education

As mentioned above, Spanish is present in Higher Education both in linguistic studies and in technical, economic or legal courses. There is no official centralized data on the number of students who study a foreign language in higher education, but the institutions that include Spanish in their studies are universities and technical institutes as well as higher education institutions that offer teacher training courses or art.

Spanish teachers: origin, qualifications and teaching methodology

Based on information provided by the Association of Spanish Teachers of Ireland, the PPLI, the Teaching Council, some school principals who we have been able to speak to and the DES itself, we can confirm that the great problem that Spanish faces in order to be able to grow is not student demand but the shortage of Spanish teachers. On the one hand, few teachers graduate each year and, on the other, teachers of Spanish origin who wish to teach in Ireland are faced with strict Teaching Council registration requirements which take time to fulfil. In addition to this, schools find they cannot offer Spanish as they are unable to increase their teaching staff or they have French or German teachers with sufficient knowledge of Spanish to teach it but who cannot do so due to lack of training.

To become a Primary or Secondary school teacher in Ireland it is necessary to first of all complete an undergraduate four-year teaching degree. In addition to obtaining a degree, Primary school teachers must speak Irish perfectly and be able to teach different subjects in Irish. Secondary school teachers are only required to speak Irish if they apply to work in a Gaeltacht, a school where Irish is the language subjects are taught in.

Once teachers have completed their studies they must register with the Teaching Council to be able to teach in Ireland and after that apply for any vacancies that they are interested in. Registering with the Teaching Council is a long process for teachers of Spanish origin who wish to work in Ireland since first of all they must complete a qualification assessment before applying for the registration itself. Currently there is a shortage of teachers in general and more specifically of Spanish teachers, so many Foreign Language Assistants go through the procedures to become teachers in Ireland.

Foreign language teaching methodology in Irish schools has evolved positively in recent years. This innovation is due to different reasons such as the incorporation of teachers with greater linguistic and didactic training, the new higher education teacher training syllabuses that include the use of more communicative approaches and the greater participation of teachers in European projects. Apart from factors such as these, the change that is probably affecting class activities the most is the modification of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate tests. In the first case students are now required to do an oral exam and in the second one a greater value is given to oral exams when calculating the final result.

Within the framework of the reform that is currently taking place, the Department of Education and Skills is trying to promote the revision and improvement of foreign language teaching methodology and teachers are making an effort to adapt to the changes that are being introduced. It is still too early to leave behind the practices that have been applied for years and that consist mainly in doing controlled activities and repetitions in class. Therefore, despite the introduction of new guidelines that recommend using a more communicative approach, the practice for oral exams, which include the presentation of a topic and a role-play, frequently consists in getting the students to memorise a text or parts of a conversation.



Two hundred teachers at a conference organised by the Association of Teachers of Spanish in Ireland.

Institutions that offer and promote Spanish

In Ireland there is a wide range of Spanish courses in private academies, in language centers and technological institutes, as well as in post-secondary education institutions such as the Colleges of Further Education, where Spanish is in high demand. At an official level, the organisation that most supports language teaching, including Spanish, is Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), a dedicated unit providing expertise and support for foreign languages education in Ireland. There are also several associations that are working on the promotion of Spanish such as: the ATS (Association of Teachers of Spanish in Ireland), OVFL (One Voice for Languages), Mother Tongues, a non-profit association dedicated to promoting and supporting multilingualism, and the Spanish departments at the different universities.

As far as Spanish institutions are concerned, the Embassy of Spain and the *Instituto Cervantes*, the official Spanish government cultural centre, are undoubtedly the ones that work the most to promote Spanish in Ireland and make the culture of Spanish speaking countries known worldwide.

The *Instituto Cervantes*, located in the centre of Dublin, organises all kinds of courses and cultural activities throughout the year. On many occasions the *Asesoría de Educación* collaborates in the events and workshops organised by the Institute. In addition to this, the *Instituto Cervantes* shares its facilities with the Education Office whenever needed, for example, to hold meetings, to administer the Spanish Language and Culture programme (ALCE) exams or the official Primary or Post Primary distance learning exams (the CIDEAD exams), to deliver presentations or talks or to organise teacher training workshops. During the 2018-2019 academic year two hundred and fifteen people took the DELE (Diplomas in Spanish as a Foreign Language) exams. This represents a 12% increase compared to the previous academic year in which one hundred and ninety-two people sat the exams.

Finally we must mention the Council of Spanish Residents in Ireland (CREI) as it also makes great efforts to promote the Spanish language and culture in Ireland. It specially provides support to the ALCE programme and to the Spanish families who move to the county and seek information on how to adapt without detaching from its linguistic and cultural roots.



Mr Ildefonso Castro, the Spanish Ambassador to Ireland, with students and teachers from the SEK International School Dublin during a Miró exhibition at the Ambassador's residence.

Spanish International Education Programmes in Ireland

The Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (hereafter MEFP) has a foreign language advisor posted in Ireland. The education advisor works at the Education Office (*Asesoría de Educación*) located at the Embassy of Spain in Dublin. The *Asesoría* depends on the main Spanish Embassy Education Office in London (Consejería de Educación en Reino Unido e Irlanda). Several of the MEFP international education programmes are managed, coordinated or supported from the Education Office in Ireland.

The language assistant scheme

The MEFP coordinates both the Foreign Language Assistant (FLA) scheme (Spanish assistants who come to Ireland) and the English Language Assistant (ELA) scheme (Irish assistants that go to Spain). In both cases, young undergraduates or candidates who have recently finished their university studies, come to Ireland or go to Spain to help teachers in class and enable students to practice either their English or their Spanish. In order to present the programme and attend the queries of potential interested candidates, the *Asesoría de Educación* normally gives presentations about the programme at different universities in the country throughout the year, and also participates in the selection of Irish assistants and offers FLAs information and support when they first arrive in Ireland.

For years the number of positions for Spanish Language Assistants in Ireland remained the same (12 assistants per year), but in 2018-2019, in view of the increased demand for Spanish in schools, the scheme experienced a significant growth. During the 2019-2020 academic year, there was a further increase in the number of Spanish assistants required by the DES, resulting in thirty positions instead of the twenty needed the year before. The prospects for the future are also positive since initially the DES has suggested an increase in positions in the years to come.

Language assistants in Ireland and Spain										
School year	2010 -2011	2011 -2012	2012 -2013	2013 -2014	2014 -2015	2015 -2016	2016 -2017	2017 -2018	2018 -2019	2019 -2020
FLAs	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	20	30
ELAs	68	71	84	74	49	59	55	76	73	92
Total	80	83	96	86	84	71	67	88	93	122

Source: Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP)



Spanish language assistants in Ireland 2019-2020.

The Spanish Language and Culture Programme (ALCE)

In September 2015, as part of the Spanish Language and Culture Programme (hereafter ALCE), the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) started to offer Spanish classes to meet the demands of Spanish children residing in Ireland. Currently lessons are delivered in classrooms facilitated to the *Consejería de Educación* by two schools in Dublin, one in the north of the city and the other in the south.

Through the ALCE programme, the MEFP provides extracurricular Spanish language and culture classes to children of Spanish origin living in the Dublin area. These lessons are free of charge and are aimed at children and teenagers between the ages of seven and seventeen. The objective of the programme is to enable students to reach an adequate level of linguistic competence in Spanish, to help them strengthen their linguistic and cultural ties with Spain and to acquaint them with the Spanish sociocultural reality while at the same time contributing to their intercultural and social enrichment.

This programme is well received by families in Ireland as the enrolment figures in the table below show. The programme began with one hundred and fifty-six students and a single teacher and during the 2019-2020 academic year these figures have doubled.

The ALCE classes follow a blended teaching programme which combines both in-person and online learning. Students attend a weekly ninety minute lesson which takes place from Monday to Thursday, after school hours, in one of the schools mentioned before. The online sessions, which also last ninety minutes, are held on the MEFP online virtual environment platform called *Aula Internacional* (International Classroom). The curriculum, divided into five levels of progression (A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1) places special emphasis on the development of Spanish social and cultural awareness and autonomous language learning techniques.

The Spanish Language and Culture Programme (ALCE) Evolution of the programme		
	Number of students	Number of teachers
2015-2016	156	1
2016-2017	311	2
2017-2018	314	2
2018-2019	334	2
2019-2020	345	2

Source: Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP)



One of the teachers and students from the ALCE programme during their visit to the Sorolla exhibition in the National Gallery of Ireland.

Publications

The Education Office in Ireland participates in the publications of the *Consejería de Educación* by writing articles and teaching materials, by identifying and contacting authors, by reviewing proposals for publication, etc. The publications edited by the MEFP are available to the public through its website and they fundamentally consist of the Tecla and Acti/España magazines, the biannual publication “The world studies Spanish”, promotional material and the guides for advisors, teachers, language assistants and visiting teachers who come to work to Ireland or the United Kingdom.



Covers of the 2019 editions of Tecla magazine

Teacher training

The *Consejería de Educación* organizes training events for Spanish teachers in Ireland in collaboration with various organizations related to the teaching of Spanish, including the *Instituto Cervantes* in Dublin. It also coordinates the Annual Teacher Training Programme which is designed for teachers who are working in the different education schemes run by the MEFP in the United Kingdom and Ireland (mainly teachers from the ALCE programme and the Vicente Cañada Blanch Spanish Institute in London). These courses are subsequently certified by the Spanish National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF according to its name in Spanish) as long as participants meet the relevant participation requirements.

Apoyo a los ciudadanos españoles e irlandeses

As it is located in the Embassy of Spain in Ireland, the *Asesoría de Educación* attends a wide variety of inquiries from both Spanish and Irish citizens on a daily basis. The most frequent queries

are related to student mobility, qualification and certificate recognition, student apprenticeships and exchanges and how to become a teacher in Ireland.

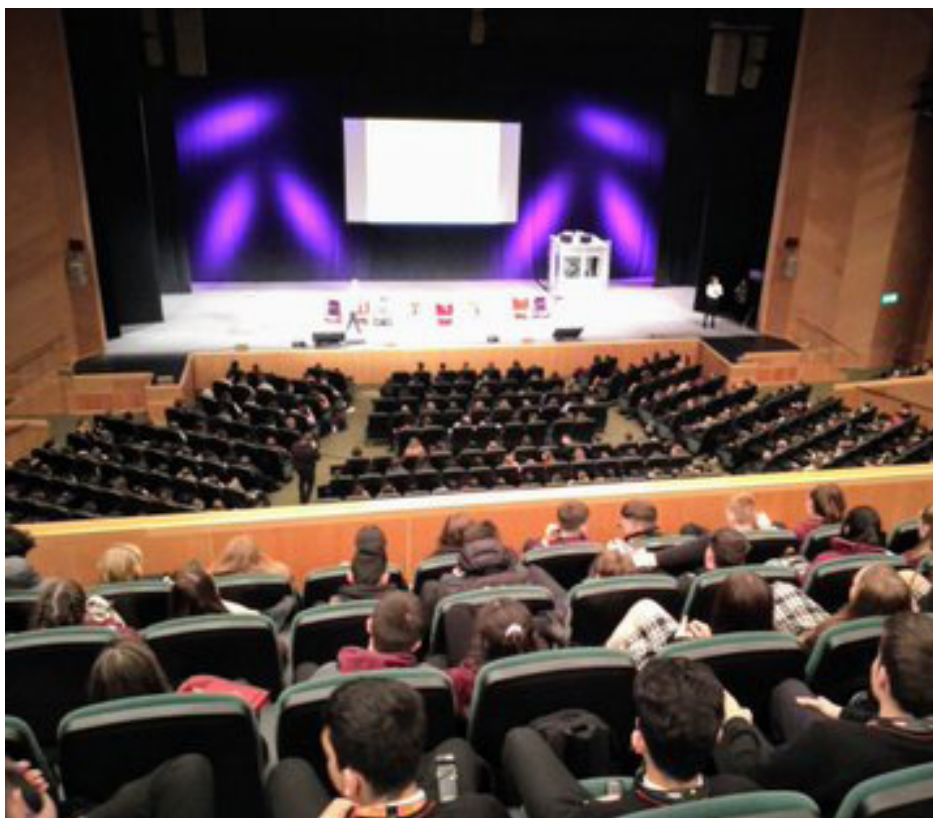
In addition to this, the advisor who works at the Education Office is responsible for administering official exams like the ones organised by the Centre for the Innovation and Development of Distance Learning (CIDEAD according to its name in Spanish) and the end of Baccalaureate exams for students who are over the age of twenty.

Collaboration with local institutions

The Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Studies (MEFP) is in charge of maintaining and strengthening institutional relations with the different official bodies of the country related to language teaching. These include the DES, the PPLI, Universities, the Teaching Council, etc. The MEFP also collaborates with all kinds of associations whose mission is to promote languages, including Spanish, such as the Association of Spanish teachers, One Voice for Languages (OVFL), or Mother Tongues.

Participación en eventos

Throughout the year the *Asesoría de Educación* participates in all sorts of events to support and promote the teaching of Spanish. Some of these events include ThinkLanguages, attended by more than three thousand secondary school students each year, university fairs, specially to present the language assistant scheme or explain the procedure to enrol in a Spanish university, and teacher training sessions organized in collaboration with the *Instituto Cervantes* in Dublin or various Irish organizations such as Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI).



Opening ceremony of ThinkLanguages 2019. Dublin Convention Centre.

Social media management

Amongst its responsibilities, the *Asesoría de Educación* also manages and updates the [website of the MEFP in Ireland](#) and frequently publishes news on its Twitter account that is considered relevant for its followers.

Other activities

In addition to the above, the *Asesoría de Educación* participates in the management of other programs and activities organised by our main Education Office in London (*Consejería de Educación*) and the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Ireland such as the publication of scholarships or the selection of supply teachers and visiting teachers in the UK and Ireland. Finally, it is important to highlight that the Office of Education provides support to the Embassy of Spain in Ireland in matters related to education.