

# Are Languages losing their voice in the Institutes of Technology?

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## **Abstract**

A recent nationwide investigation conducted in the Republic of Ireland suggests that there is a disconnect between current practices in the IoT/TU sector and the national priorities set in the government's Languages Connect Strategy. The government aims to increase the number of third level students learning languages to 20% and increase the level of participation in international mobility programmes; however, language provision in IoTs across the country is slowly disappearing off the radar and the proportion of third level students availing of Erasmus Plus remains low. The empirical study, which investigated the impact of institutional language policy on attitudes towards languages, revealed that the appetite for both language teaching and mobility is not currently being met in the majority of IoTs/TUs. There is clearly a need to provide institutional support in the IoTs, in order to bring these HEIs into step with government policies.

**Keywords:** Higher education; language learning; multilingualism; institutes of technology; language policy

## **1. Introduction**

The silence is deafening in the Institutes of Technology with regard to the government's new targets in the Languages Connect strategy (Department of Education and Skills 2017). Launched almost two years ago, the Strategy set some ambitious goals for second and third level education providers, in an effort to equip the Irish workforce with the linguistic skills necessary to compete on the global stage. Indeed, given the economic uncertainties surrounding the UK's imminent departure from the European Union, Irish businesses would do well to acquire the language competencies necessary to explore mainland European markets. Apart from the obvious economic arguments in favour of language education, there is also the sociolinguistic reality of the vastly changed demographics in the Republic of

Ireland.<sup>1</sup> At the very *least*, this new reality deserves to be acknowledged at an official level, as a previous study has already highlighted (Conrick 2012). Will Irish HEIs acknowledge their multilingual, multicultural student population in language policies, or simply default to a monolingual, monocultural worldview? The new Strategy clearly states that this complacent mindset will not equip Ireland to face future challenges. “English may be a *lingua franca* of international communications, but knowing English is not enough” (DES 2017, p. 13). What are the implications of the government’s new strategy for the Institute of Technology (IoT) sector? The findings of a recent nationwide study may shed light on this question, as it investigated the impact of institutional policy on attitudes towards the teaching and learning of languages (Carthy 2017). It revealed that current practices are out of step with national strategic priorities. Crucially, it has emerged that most IoTs do not have institutional Language Strategies/Policies in place and certainly need to discuss possible strategic measures to address this important issue.

One of the targets set in the new Languages Connect strategy is to increase the number of third level students learning languages to 20%; it currently sits at just under 2%, according to HEA statistics.<sup>2</sup> Other goals relate to increasing third level participation in international mobility programmes and reducing the number of students availing of Erasmus for English-speaking destinations. These ambitious targets have been set within the timeframe of the government’s strategy 2017–2026. Arguably, the existence of a short term strategy is no guarantee of lasting change within the IoT/TU sector, unless there is a willingness on the part of IoT management to make adjustments to their current practices.<sup>3</sup> It will require resources and time on their part to ensure that the government’s targets are met. Another consideration of relevance to the investigation mentioned above is the distinction between ‘strategy’, on the one hand, and ‘policy’, on the other. While certain scholars go to great lengths to differentiate between them, the study in question uses them interchangeably. Both ‘policy’ and ‘strategy’ are understood here to be official, institutional, management positions

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<sup>1</sup> See generally, CSO report on Census 2016:

[https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter\\_5\\_Diversity.pdf](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_5_Diversity.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Further information at: <http://hea.ie/statistics-archive/>

<sup>3</sup> The IoTs are currently in a state of flux, due to the recent passing of The Technological Universities Act 2018, recommending that individual IoTs should merge into so-called ‘clusters’ and that these mergers would be called Technological Universities (TU). More information at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2015/121/>

on a given issue. Typically, institutions might have institutionally agreed positions on ethics or learning disabilities. These official positions are articulated in written documents which have been debated and negotiated at a formal level. This formal debate process reflects an awareness of the importance of these issues and the need to adopt an institute-wide approach to them, as opposed to dealing with them in an ad hoc manner. Each IoT/TU has a mechanism for dealing with such issues. Academic Councils<sup>4</sup> and other quality assurance procedures (overseen by QQI<sup>5</sup>) allow issues of national priority to be raised and discussed. Furthermore, each IoT/TU draws up its own Strategic Plan every five or six years, giving additional scope for an alignment with national priorities. In spite of all these mechanisms, the inertia and lack of prioritisation around language provision has led to the redeployment of many language lecturers (O'Shaughnessy, 2011). It appears that the IoTs are failing to join the dots and get into step with the national agenda.

This paper will begin by describing the specific context of this investigation and briefly explaining the role of the Institutes of Technology on the higher education landscape in the Republic of Ireland. This will be followed by discussion of the theoretical framework, informed by the critical theorists, underpinning this nationwide study. This theoretical framework provides the rationale for the chosen methodology and data collection. Finally, the data will be analysed and the main findings will be highlighted.

## **2. Context**

The restructuring of the IoTs into Technological Universities forms the backdrop to this recent nationwide investigation. Some mergers have already taken place; others are pending. There were originally 14 IoTs throughout the Republic of Ireland: the older more established institutes were founded in the 1960s and some of the newer ones were founded as recently as 1990. The Regional Technical Colleges (as they were originally called) were set up to address local social and economic training requirements and were to have a distinctive role in providing practical skills for the workplace. Back then, language education was

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<sup>4</sup> Each Institute of Technology has its own Academic Council, as part of its governing structures. These councils meet regularly to discuss issues of academic importance and make recommendations to the Executive Board or Governing Body.

<sup>5</sup> QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is the national agency responsible for qualifications in further education and training and higher education in Ireland. More information at: <https://www.qqi.ie/>

acknowledged by the original founding fathers of the regional technical colleges as being a core skill. The Steering Committee on Technical Education highlighted the diverse nature those workplace skills as follows: “a broad spectrum of occupations ranging from craft to professional, notably in engineering and science but also in commercial, **linguistic** and other specialities” (Mulcahy 1981, p. 11, emphasis added). The current changing landscape provides an opportunity for IoTs/TUs to re-establish the importance of linguistic skills in their graduate attributes. By devising their own institutional policies, they would be responding to the call of the European Language Council (Lauridsen, 2013). In the context of the changing higher level landscape, it makes sense for each merger to devise an overarching policy for each TU.

Indeed the current prioritisation of language at both national and European level has been there for a number of years in scholarly investigations. More than a decade ago, various studies called upon Irish HEIs to broaden language provision to students of all disciplines (Tudor 2009; Bruen 2004; Chambers 2003). The more recent nationwide study, described in this article, reveals a significant disconnect between attitudes among lecturers and students on the one hand and institutional policy, on the other (Carthy 2017). Current practices would suggest that these scholarly insights have largely gone unheeded. Confining language provision to Business Studies and Humanities, as has traditionally been the practice in the vast majority of IoTs, is out of step with EU policy and is preventing students from all academic backgrounds from accessing language teaching.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

As already established above, the vast majority of IoTs do not currently have formal institutional language policies (apart from the Irish language policies which each IoT has a statutory obligation to adhere to); does this perhaps suggest that the research question had no foundation? On the contrary, in the absence of an explicit language policy, where languages are prioritised, an implicit language policy usually prevails. Spolsky’s distinction between policy and practice provides a useful theoretical backdrop to this investigation (Spolsky 2004). Language policy may be recognised easily when it is clearly articulated in a formal document. However, very often language policy is not articulated explicitly at an official level, and it can be difficult to decipher an accurate picture of practices, ideology and management decisions and desires. According to Schiffmann, there are covert, unwritten and

unofficial forces at work which may have a bearing on the reality of language practices (Schiffmann 2009). Drawing on examples from India, United States and France, Schiffmann argues that researchers need to look more deeply than explicit policy to come to grips with how policy works in practice. The United States is a case in point, as it has no explicit policy in relation to English, but it has an implicit default to English as the dominant language, to the detriment of all other languages and linguistic groups in American society (Carthy 2016). Failure to acknowledge that policy is necessary in the vast majority of IoTs, i.e. 'best policy is no policy' is reminiscent of this mindset in the United States, where the hegemony of English and the undermining of all other languages (and cultures) is subtly perpetrated, in the absence of an official policy.

The theoretical backdrop has also been informed by the critical theorists whose dissatisfaction with the status quo formed the basis of their research in order to create a better world. Among other things, the critical theorists have examined the role of language policies (explicit or implicit) in upholding a modern form of 'colonialisation'. Habermas introduced this term to refer to powerful market mechanisms and controls in capitalist societies that lead to the undermining of local, indigenous and minority identities and cultures (Habermas 1987). Elsewhere, critical theorists have investigated the spread of English in the context of globalisation in educational settings, by exposing underlying ideologies which give rise to social inequalities. Baugh investigates the role of school language policies in racist educational systems in the Ebonics controversy in the United States (Baugh 2000). Lippi-Green studies the impact of standard language ideology on attitudes toward African American Vernacular English (Lippi-Green 1997). McCarty sought to expose efforts by the US government to eliminate indigenous languages and orchestrate a shift to English only (McCarty 2004).

It is also useful to draw upon the insights of studies based in non-Anglophone societies in mainland Europe, where the hegemony of English is also apparent. In his examination of policy documents in Estonian universities, Soler talks about an 'implicit' hierarchy between English and Estonian, claiming that English is taking precedence over the indigenous language, in the name of internationalisation (Soler-Carbonell 2015). Elsewhere, Haberland and Mortensen warn about the Anglicisation of European universities, observing that English is

perceived as being synonymous with internationalisation, to the exclusion of all other languages (Haberland & Mortensen 2012). Indeed, the tension between top-down policy and grass-roots practices is nowhere more apparent than in the European context. Official policy puts forward a vision of a multilingual society thriving in diversity; the reality is, however, that there is a growing trend to conduct intercultural exchanges through the medium of English. The debate between de Swaan and Phillipson illustrates this tension. De Swaan dismisses EU plurilingual policy as much ado about nothing. According to his global language system, languages are perceived as hypercollective goods, with English at the top of the linguistic pyramid (de Swaan 2001). His narrow definition of language overlooks the crucial role language plays in societies on a social and cultural level, as a badge of identity. Consequently, de Swaan's model is limited, as it operates in purely economic terms. Phillipson, on the other hand, warns about the risk of de Swaan's *laissez-faire* attitude towards language policy. While conceding that the forces of globalization may be moving European language practices in the direction of monolingualism and monoculturism, Phillipson nonetheless, puts forward a convincing case for plurilingualism. He criticizes those who regard multilingualism as a barrier to European integration and proposes a more level linguistic playing field, where the rights and integrity of all European cultures are respected (Phillipson 2009).

In conclusion, these critical theory studies have guided the recent IoT investigation and informed the choice of methodology for data collection. This approach has enabled a deeper understanding of latent, implicit ideologies to emerge.

#### **4. Methodology and data collection**

The rigorous methodology, using a mixed method approach, allowed a rich, multifaceted understanding of the prevailing situation to emerge. The initial quantitative phase (2011–2014) consisted of two online questionnaires circulated to both students<sup>6</sup> and lecturers in all IoTs across the sector. On the basis of the data gathered, a subsequent qualitative phase (2014–2015) followed, using the signposts which had emerged during the quantitative phase: some of these signposts will be described below.

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<sup>6</sup> There were two discrete sets of quantitative data from students over two academic sessions.

At the time of data collection, eight out of fourteen Institutes of Technology did not have explicit language policies, while five were in the process of drawing one up. Only one had a recently approved language policy in operation. This snapshot was established on the basis of a short questionnaire distributed to all IoT Registrars in 2016. This 'management' survey was conducted in the final stages of the investigation, after the main body of data had been collected.

Overview of Data Collection				
Phase 1 - Quantitative		Year	Number of participants	
Student Dataset 1		2011-2012	1814	
Student Dataset 2		2013-2014	1291	
Lecturer Dataset		2012-2013	420	
Phase 2 - Qualitative				
Student Interviews		2013-2014	68	
Lecturer Interviews		2013-2014	68	
Snapshot survey of all Registrars		2015-2016	14	

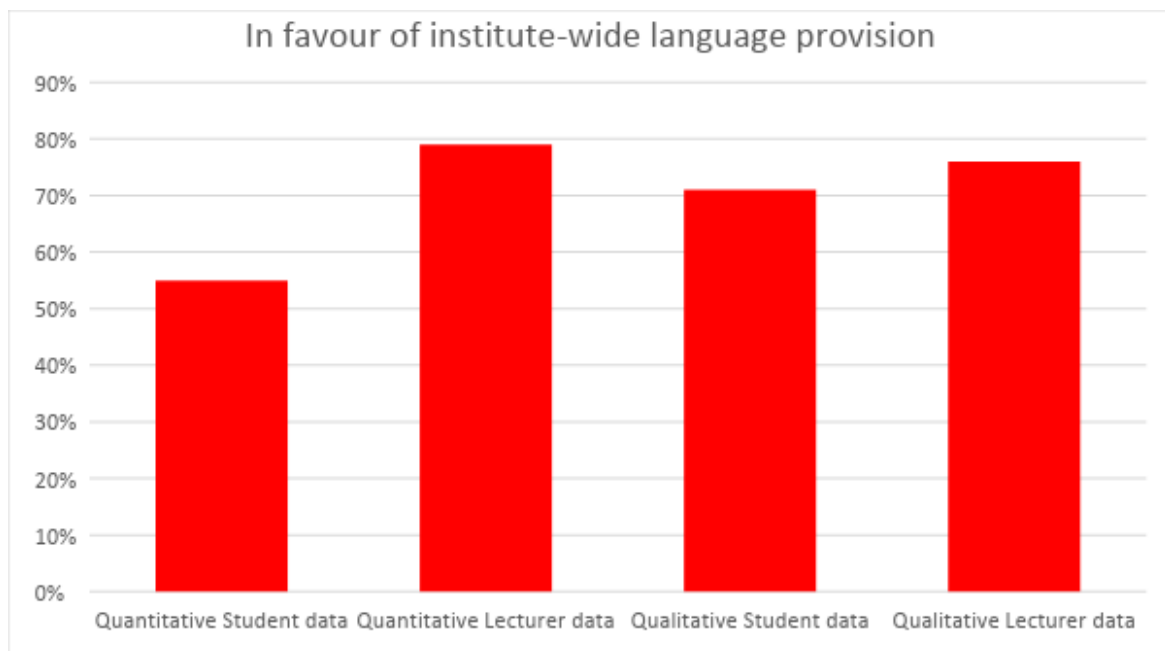
*Table 1: Overview of Data Collection Phases*

The fact that only one of the IoTs under investigation had an institutional policy in place, while five were considering one, with the remaining eight having no institutional awareness whatsoever, presented a dilemma for data analysis. How could the impact of policy on attitudes be measured, given the complexity of the situation? It was decided to divide all 14 IoTs into two categories an A and a B group. Group A would include all IoTs that were either currently considering a policy/strategy or already had one in place, while Group B would include all IoTs that had no institutional discussion around language policy. For ethical reasons, all IoTs were numbered to protect their identity. At the time of data collection, 5 IoTs (IoT 2, 3, 4 and 5) were considering policies at institutional level; these have been categorised along with IoT 1 which was the only IoT with an explicitly approved institutional policy in operation. The remaining IoTs, all of which have no institutional discussion around language policy, have been categorised as IoT B. Furthermore, given the researcher's role as an insider

in the establishment under investigation, the question of potential bias needed to be addressed. For this reason, there is a certain amount of negative data in both quantitative and qualitative data (highlighted in red in the tables below).

## 5. Data Analysis

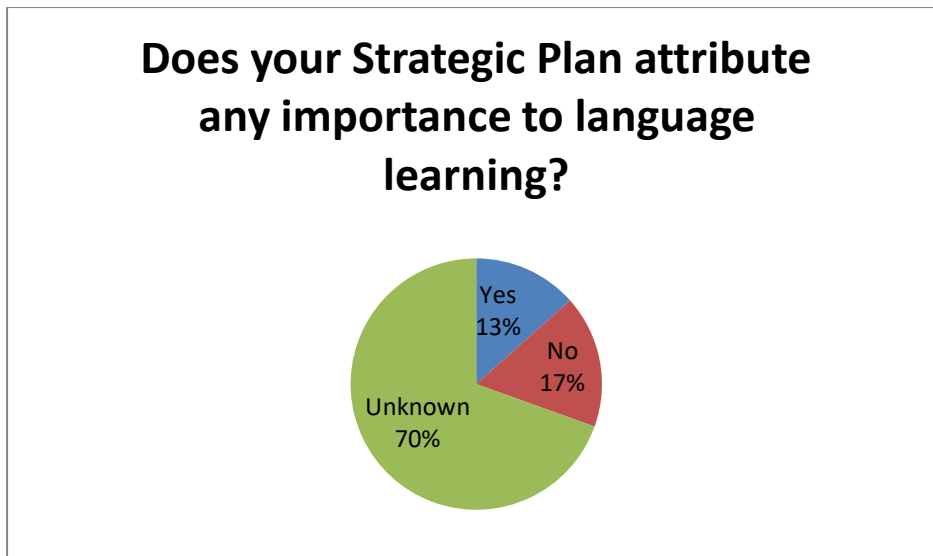
As already outlined above, the A and B categories emerged in the latter stages of the investigation, after the main quantitative and qualitative phases were complete. The appetite for language learning and international mobility was evident in both quantitative and qualitative data from both students and lecturers, as illustrated in the figure below:



*Figure 1: Percentage of lecturers and students in favour of institute-wide language provision*

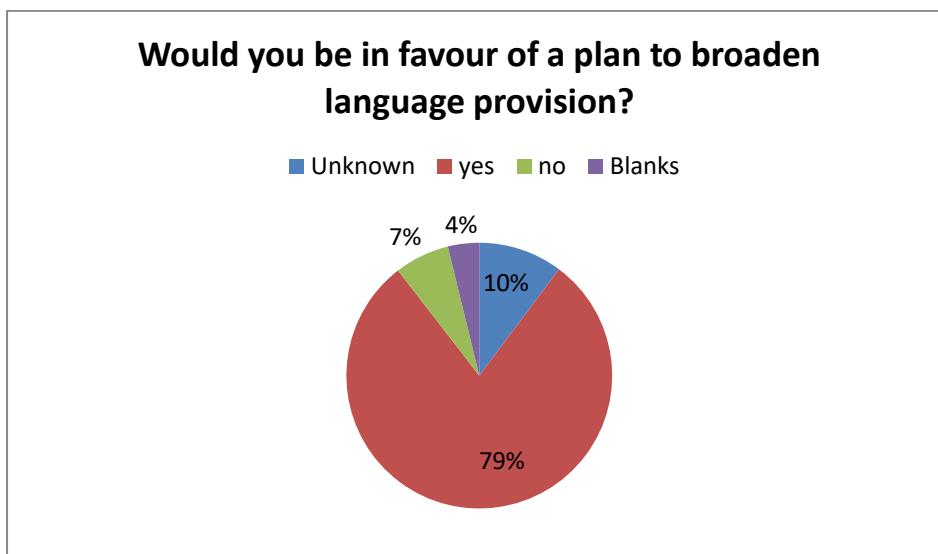
In spite of the grassroots awareness of the manifold benefits of linguistic skills among the majority of lecturers from all academic disciplines, this was not being mirrored in Strategic Plans or current practices. The following chart illustrates the quantitative data contributed in the lecturer's questionnaire:





*Figure 2: Lecturers' awareness of their IoTs' Strategic Plan*

The prevailing uncertainty regarding Strategic Plans contrasts sharply with the overwhelming support among the majority of lecturers for more language provision, as illustrated below:



*Figure 3: Lecturers' attitudes towards a broadening of language provision*

The questionnaire provided scope for qualitative contributions from lecturers regarding the main obstacles to a broadening of language provision. One of the issues which emerged from this qualitative data was around curricular space for languages. This theme was explored further during the interview phase.

### *5.1. Lack of Curricular scaffolding*

One of the signposts that emerged in the quantitative findings was the issue of curricular space. This line of investigation in the semi-structured interviews produced rich qualitative data, when explored further. The term ‘curricular scaffolding’ refers to structured pathways which are integrated and accredited to support and encourage language learning. Many interviewees raised the issue of curricular support for language, even though they were studying at IoTs in the A Group. The table below gives a summary of these data in Group A, according to IoT, programme and preferred language (please note that the number in the left hand column of Tables 1, 2 and 3 refers to the IoT number and not the number of students; all IoTs are numbered from 1 to 14 to protect their identity).

<b>Student demand for accredited language modules to be incorporated into the curriculum</b>		
<b>IoT A</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Preferred Language</b>
1	Social Sciences	Irish, French
1	Financial Services	French
2	Event Management	Spanish
5	Engineering	German
5	Childcare	German
4	Human Resources	Spanish, Italian
4	Fine Art	French
4	Hospitality	English
4	Social Care	French
4	Engineering	German
4	Culinary Studies	German
3	Music and Drama	Italian, French, German
3	Engineering	German
3	Civil Engineering	Japanese
3	Business Studies	Japanese
3	Culinary Arts	French
3	Hospitality	German

3	Aviation Studies	German
3	Automation Engineering	Spanish
3	Civil Engineering	German
6	Veterinary Nursing	French
6	veterinary Nursing	French
6	Veterinary Nursing	German
6	Digital Media	Spanish
6	Fire Safety	French
6	Legal Studies	German
6	Legal Studies	German
6	Quantity Surveying	German

*Table 2: Student demand in IoT A Group for accredited language modules*

A similar picture emerged from IoT B Group, as illustrated below:

<b>Student demand for accredited language modules to be incorporated into the curriculum</b>		
<b>IoT B</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Preferred Language</b>
7	Management	German
7	Business Studies	Mandarin
7	Computing	French
7	Nursing	French
7	Business Management	Spanish
7	Social Care	German
8	Business Studies	German
8	Early Childhood	Irish
9	Bioscience	French
12	Software Development	German

*Table 3: Student demand in IoT B Group for accredited language modules*

## *5.2. Lecturer support for broadening of provision*

Lecturers also expressed their support for a broadening of language provision to include students from all academic disciplines. The table overleaf illustrates their IoT and academic backgrounds:

<b>Lecturers in favour of broadening language provision in their IoT</b>			
<b>IoT A</b>	<b>Academic Background</b>	<b>IoT B</b>	<b>Academic Background</b>
1	International Politics	7	Computing
1	Economics	7	Marketing and BS
1	Tourism + hospitality	7	Languages
2	Finance	8	Operations Management
2	Language lecturer	8	Engineering
2	Electronic	8	HOS Business
2	French	9	Languages
2	Accounting and IS	9	German
2	Engineering	9	Social Care
3	Engineering	9	Marketing and BS
3	Quantitative Techniques	10	Civil Engineering
3	Physics	11	BS Economics
3	Engineering	11	Information Technology
4	Spanish lecturer	12	Languages
4	Music	12	Engineering
4	Computing	13	MIS
5	Languages	13	Nursing
5	Fitness and Health-Science	13	Gastronomy
5	Electronic Engineering		
5	Computing		
5	Engineering-mechatronics		
6	Engineering		
6	Science		
6	Computing		

6	Veterinary Nursing	
6	Nursing /computing	
6	Sports	
6	Information Tech	
6	Accountancy	
6	Computing	
6	Nursing - early childhood	
6	Engineering	
6	Human Resources	
6	Marketing and BS	

*Table 4: Lecturers in favour of broadening language provision in their IoT*

The lack of curricular scaffolding for languages was the main theme that emerged from these interviews. Lecturers from diverse academic backgrounds believed that languages needed to be offered as accredited electives; extracurricular simply does not work. Three Engineering lecturers from IoT Group A (i.e. IoT 3, 5 and 6) believed that languages would be a huge advantage for their students; however, offering them on a Friday afternoon extracurricular basis has failed. A Computing lecturer from IoT 5 was disappointed that languages were not introduced for her students, even though it was discussed during a recent PPE. A similar scenario prevails for students of Health and Fitness in IoT 5, according to a Science lecturer there. The fact that such views have been expressed by lecturers at institutionally aware IoTs would suggest that current practices are out of step with fundamental perspectives.

### *5.3. Lack of progression paths*

Linked to this lack of curricular scaffolding is a lack of progression paths. Interviewees expressed concern about the lack of progression paths for those students who wished to continue their language learning. Students in IoT 6, who had language modules in first and second year, were unable to take them in third and fourth year. Eighteen interviewees in IoT B Group were in favour of broadening language provision, however, language modules are even more curtailed in these IoTs. For the most part, language modules are confined to Business Studies and Humanities. German has been discontinued in IoT 9 and French has been

discontinued in IoT 13. These data would suggest, that in spite of positive attitudes among lecturers from a diverse range of academic backgrounds towards broadening language provision, students are missing out on language learning, due to a lack of institutional policy.

#### *5.4. Negativity among lecturers*

Given the grassroots demand for language provision, it was necessary to investigate what the main obstacles to change are. The negative data contributed by a small minority of lecturers in IoT A Group gave some insights. This vehement opposition to incorporating language into the curriculum was also apparent in the quantitative findings. Three lecturers in IoT 1 were opposed to having language modules as an accredited part of their programmes, in spite of the recent approval of an explicit language policy in 2015. This would suggest that institutional policy can be ineffective in the face of deeply entrenched negativity among lecturers.

#### *5.5. Perceived Lack of relevance and space*

Two interviewees from IoT 1, one from Psychology and the other from Law, failed to see the connection between language skills and their subject. She 'doesn't see the point of it', and it is 'too much effort for too little gain'. She wondered about the content of such modules; would they be 'for fun', or specific to the law area. Two Design lecturers from IoT 6 believed that language modules would take up too much space, leaving less for core subjects.

A recent PPE<sup>7</sup> initiative to introduce language modules to Design students had already been reversed, due to the lack of take-up among students. This would indicate that positive steps to introduce languages to Design students have not been allowed to develop. This may be due to the negativity, expressed here, among a small number of lecturers.

#### *5.6. Anglocentrism*

In some cases, this negativity was associated with anglocentric attitudes. A Psychology lecturer had spent a year in Hungary and had spoken English most of the time, i.e. she got by with English. With regard to international mobility, she maintained that most students have

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<sup>7</sup> Periodic Programmatic Reviews (PPEs) take place every five years in order to review programmes, as part of quality assurance procedures. A visiting panel of experts conducts the review and makes recommendations.

a preference for other Anglophone societies when choosing their semester abroad, i.e. ‘we don’t really see ourselves as Europeans’. It would appear that these anglocentric attitudes persist, in spite of the recently approved language policy at IoT. Two Engineering lecturers, one from IoT 3 and the other from IoT 6 shared the view that language modules should not be integrated into the curriculum, due to lack of space. Time would be better spent on core subjects such as Maths etc. Interestingly, one of these interviewees has spent time in Malaysia and believed that it was unnecessary to learn the indigenous language, as most people speak English. In short, these views reveal complacency and cultural narrowness and are part of an anglocentric mindset obstructing the broadening of language provision.

### *5.7. External Accrediting Bodies*

Lecturers also highlighted the constraints that external accrediting bodies put on IoT programmes. PSI (external accrediting body for Psychology), Engineers Ireland and the Veterinary Council seem to be highlighting other transferable skills in their Reports and insisting that these skills should be prioritised in programmes. Space was needed in the curriculum for these skills and, even though language skills would be desirable, it simply was not possible to provide them as an integral, accredited module, as they are not being prioritised by external professional bodies. A Veterinary Nursing lecturer at IoT 7 believed that languages should not be offered at third level, as they belonged solely to the primary and secondary level curriculum. The consensus among these lecturers was that languages should be offered as extracurricular modules. Even though these lecturers acknowledged the demand for languages in the workplace, they were convinced that they should be offered as extracurricular modules. The views expressed here give some insight as to why the positive views illustrated above have not yet been harnessed and implemented at institutional level.

### *5.8. International Mobility: a great motivator for language learning*

Given the importance attached to international mobility in the government’s Languages Connect strategy, it is interesting that this issue also emerged in the quantitative data of this study for further investigation at the qualitative stage. Indeed, the quantitative data gathered in the online questionnaire had established that mobility is a motivating factor for students across all disciplines. The figure below illustrates this finding:

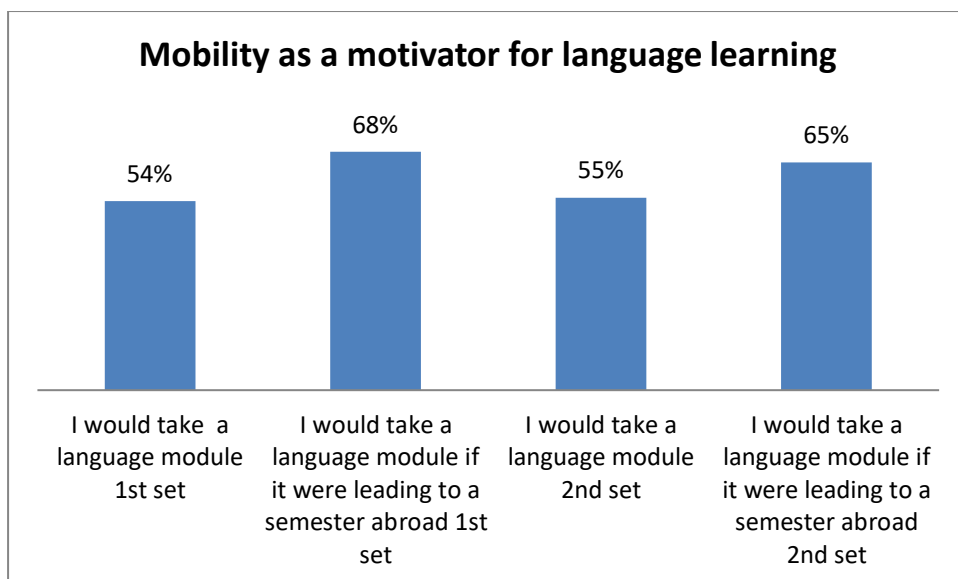


Figure 4: Mobility as a motivator for language learning

The above chart clearly illustrates how the prospect of international mobility affects students' appetite for language learning. The initial question simply asked them whether they would take a language module if it were offered by their IoT – 54% /55% in first and second sets respectively, indicated that they would. The subsequent question asked students the same question, but linked it to a semester abroad. There was at least a 10% increase in the number of students who would opt for a language module. This constitutes a significant increase and an indication of the motivating effect of mobility on students' desire to learn a languages.

#### 5.9. Awareness of the link between mobility and language learning

Having established this finding in the quantitative data, this theme was further investigated at the qualitative stage. Some of the data gathered simply reinforced this finding at the qualitative stage, as illustrated below:

<b><i>Students who emphasised the link between mobility and language learning</i></b>	
<b><i>IoT A &amp; B</i></b>	<b><i>Programme</i></b>
2	<i>Hospitality</i>
4	<i>Computing</i>
5	<i>Engineering</i>



6	<i>Business studies</i>
7	<i>Social Care</i>
7	<i>Management</i>
7	<i>Nursing</i>
12	<i>Engineering</i>
12	<i>Computing</i>

*Table 5: Students who emphasised the link between mobility and language learning*

These students, all from diverse academic backgrounds, were convinced about the motivating effect of international mobility on language learning. They highlighted the fact that international mobility impresses upon them the relevance of learning a language, in order to be able to integrate into the society they are visiting and get some insight into the target culture. This empirical finding is also prevalent in the scholarly research, highlighting the importance of integrative motivation in second language acquisition (Masgoret & Gardner 2003).

This set of findings is substantiated by some interview data from the ‘no’ dataset. Attitudes towards learning languages changed among those in the ‘no’ dataset, whenever the prospect of mobility was introduced. A Chemistry student from IoT 4 would be interested in a work placement in America or Germany; he feels he would need language preparation to build up confidence for mainland Europe. An Engineering student from IoT 12 explained that language is not currently offered to Engineers, but he would see the relevance of learning a language if the semester abroad were part of his programme. Similarly, a Veterinary Nursing student from IoT 6 agreed that mobility is a great motivator for learning a language. These qualitative data reinforce the quantitative data above.

#### *5.10. Appetite for mobility not currently being met*

Students (from IoT A and B) from diverse academic backgrounds highlighted the lack of opportunities to avail of international mobility programmes, as illustrated below:

Students whose programmes do not have international mobility opportunities			
IoT A	Programme	IoT B	Programme
1	Financial Services	7	Computing
1	Social Sciences	7	Social Care
3	Hospitality	7	Management
3	Music	7	Veterinary Nursing
3	Engineering (2)	7	Computing
3	Computing	8	Business Studies
4	Mechanical Engineering	8	Early Childhood
4	Culinary Studies	9	Bioscience
4	Social Studies	12	Computing
4	Engineering		
4	Hospitality		
5	Engineering		
6	Veterinary Nursing (3)		
6	Criminal Justice		
6	Engineering		
6	Business Studies		
6	Digital Media		

Table 6: Students whose programmes do not have international mobility opportunities

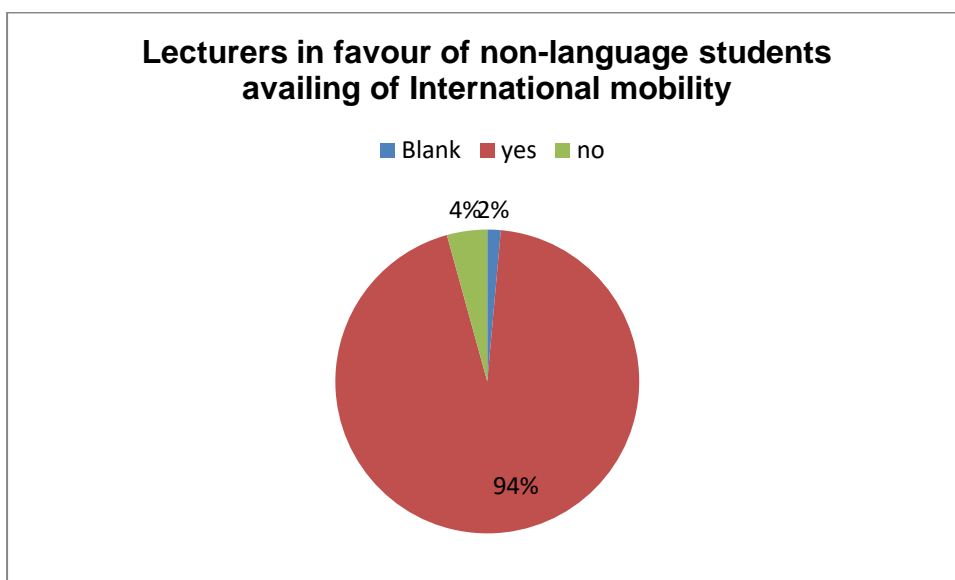
Two students felt constrained by having to do their placements in Ireland, due to a lack of opportunity in their IoT. While a semester 'abroad' to another English-speaking destination is available, an Engineering student from IoT 3 explained, an Erasmus semester to mainland European countries has never been offered on her programme. Interviewees also raised concerns about the overall lack of awareness about international mobility. Another Engineering student (IoT 5) would favour a work placement over a study placement, if he had the option to do a semester abroad; he believes there is not enough awareness about it.

In the absence of structured pathways for students to avail of international mobility, some highly motivated students have taken their own initiatives. An Engineering student in IoT 4 organised her own placement in Germany through her own contacts; she took private German classes, as there were no structured classes in her IoT. Similarly, an Engineering student at IoT 5 found her German placement through personal contacts. She feels that Irish students are being held back by their lack of language skills and constrained in their choice of destination for Erasmus placement.

These qualitative data suggest that current practices are out of step with attitudes, given the number of students from diverse academic backgrounds whose appetite for mobility is not currently being met.

#### *5.11. Lecturers in favour of international mobility*

This empirical evidence is corroborated by the quantitative data from lecturers who were overwhelmingly in favour of all students (even those who are not studying language) availing of international mobility, as the chart below illustrates:



*Figure 5: Lecturers in favour of non-language students availing of international mobility*

This quantitative finding was reinforced by the qualitative data gathered at the interview stage later on in the study, as the table below illustrates:

Lecturers who felt that semester abroad could motivate language learning			
			no dataset highlighted in red
IoT A	Academic Background	IoT B	Academic Background
IoT 2	Engineering	IoT 9	Veterinary Nursing
IoT 3	Engineering	IoT 10	Engineering
IoT 3	Music	IoT 13	MIS
IoT 5	Science		
IoT 6	Nursing		
IoT 6	Marketing		
IoT 6	Design		
IoT 6	Computing		

Table 7: Lecturers who felt that a semester abroad could motivate language learning

#### 5.12. No explicit link between language learning and mobility

Moreover, lecturers from both IoT A and B Groups felt that the motivating effect of international mobility was not being harnessed at institutional level in their IoT.

Lecturers who believed that their IoT has no link between mobility and language learning			
			*No dataset highlighted in red
IoT A	Academic Background	IoT B	Academic Background
1	Economics	7	Marketing
1	Business	8	Engineering
1	Politics	9	Language
2	Accountancy	10	Engineering
2	Engineering	10	Engineering
2	Language	12	Social Care
3	Engineering	12	Engineering
3	Engineering		

4	Computing	
4	Language	
4	Music	
4	Computing	
5	Science	
6	Engineering	
6	Computing	
6	Nursing	
6	Veterinary Nursing	

Table 8: Lecturers who believed that their IoT has no link between mobility and language learning

### 5.13. IoT A Group Summary

By far the most striking aspect of these data is the fact that so many lecturers from institutionally aware IoTs believed that the link between language learning and mobility is not being highlighted in official policy. There is no language preparation for students' semester abroad, according to a Computing lecturer at IoT 4. In practice, there appears to be a growing trend of students going to English-speaking partner colleges for their Erasmus semester. Several lecturers relayed anecdotes, where both students and lecturers participated in Erasmus programmes, without acquiring the local language. According to an Engineering lecturer, there is 'watered-down' internationalisation in IoT 4, with students visiting English-speaking destinations. Partner colleges are offering their modules through English, in order to attract more Anglophones and non-EU students to their programmes, according to an Accountancy lecturer in IoT 2. At IoT 1 there is an overriding trend to go towards 'Boston rather than Berlin', with students availing of their 'flexible semester' to get international experience, according to an Economics lecturer there. She observes that, even though there has been an increase in student mobility, languages are not on the radar. A Computing lecturer from IoT 4 lectured in English to local students during his staff mobility stay in Finland, without needing to learn the local language; his visit was primarily intended to improve their English. This case illustrates how internationalisation and language learning are linked, but only to the spread of English; the dominant language becoming stronger.

#### *5.14. IoT B Group Summary*

In spite of the absence of institutional policy in IoT B Group, there is an awareness among lecturers of the link between international mobility and language learning. IoT 12 is certainly on the 'international bandwagon', according to a lecturer in Social Care, but the link between mobility and language learning was not being made. An Engineering lecturer (also IoT 2) did not believe that the link was being used as a strategic tool, as current links with China and India are operating through English. An Engineering lecturer (IoT 10) also believed that this link was absent at institutional level, even though he himself would welcome a placement abroad as a great motivator for language learning. At IoT 7 there is a growing trend of mobility without the language learning, according to a Marketing lecturer; as all of their partner colleges are English-speaking, mobility does not necessarily promote language learning, according to a Computing lecturer. Engineering students in IoT 10 are availing of Erasmus Plus to do their placements in Spain, without having language modules in the target language to prepare them. Language learning is not being prioritised and students are expected to fend for themselves, by picking up survival Spanish or simply relying on the English proficiency of the Spaniards.

In the absence of an explicit link between mobility and language (other than English!) learning at institutional level, there is an implicit default to English-speaking partner institutions and work environments for staff and student mobility programmes. These practices prevail in both A and B Groups. While the number of Irish undergraduates availing of Erasmus Plus has slowly grown in recent years, the current 2% participation remains well below the government's target (Hilliard 2017).

### **6. Are Languages losing their voice?**

To return to the question posed at the outset, i.e. are Languages losing their voice in the IoTs, a final piece of qualitative data will allow some light to be shed. The following account was contributed by a lecturer in IoT 9 (IoT B Group) in 2015.

I understand that you are currently surveying IoT management with regard to Language Policy and Strategy. Further to my participation in your study, I would like to make you aware that, in response to a request from management on 9 January last, the language

lecturers in ... drafted a collective and strategic response for languages. This response documents 10 initiatives we have taken to address the decline in languages over the last number of years and identifies 6 action points for the future. The response concludes by outlining the importance of languages to the ... Strategic Plan 2014-2018 which may be accessed at: .....

We provided management with this response on 9 March. To date, we have not received any reply. Furthermore, we have just undergone Programmatic Review and disappointingly, the opportunity that this process presented for languages to be positioned more strongly across our programmes, in line with the objectives of the Strategic Plan, has not been realised.

The disconnect between this grassroots perspective and the official institutional position is glaringly illustrated in the completed questionnaire from IoT 9 below:

1. Has your IoT got a Language Policy?	Yes ____	No <u>X</u>
2. If so, please provide a copy of it.		
3. Has your IoT got a Language Strategy?	Yes ____	No <u>X</u>
4. If so, please provide a copy of it.		
5. Since when has it been in operation?	_____	
6. Is your IoT currently considering a Language Policy?	Yes ____	No _____
<i>It has been considered but is not currently a debate.</i>		
7. If your IoT has never had a Language Policy or Strategy, has it ever been raised at Academic Council or other such forum?		
	Yes _____	No ____
<i>It has been discussed.</i>		

*Figure 6: Completed Registrar Questionnaire from IoT 9*

In short, management considers the matter closed, while grassroots efforts to have this important issue debated, are being dismissed. Interestingly, in this context, a PPE panel visit to IoT 6 in 2017 recommended that institute-wide language provision should be made available to students from all disciplines; to date, this recommendation remains unheeded. These qualitative data suggest that voice of change has been silenced in at least two of the IoTs under investigation during this nationwide study of language policy. Further research is certainly needed in the light of the new Languages Connect Strategy, in order to establish what, if anything, is currently being done to create learning pathways for students from all academic disciplines to take on the challenge of acquiring a second language.

## **7. Conclusion**

As outlined above in the theoretical section, implicit language policies often prevail in societies and institutions that have opted not to adopt official positions regarding languages (Spolsky 2008). In the absence of an explicitly articulated language policy, it is likely that an implicit default to English will prevail, as many studies, outlined above, in both Anglophone and non-Anglophone societies have demonstrated. Having established that most IoTs/TUs do not currently have explicitly articulated language policies, this study has identified a major disconnect between attitudes at grassroots level and institutional practices on the other. This was apparent in both quantitative and qualitative data from both students and lecturers. The appetite for language provision and international mobility is not being met in either A or B Groups and the link between international mobility and language learning, that has so clearly been made in the minds of both students and lecturers, is not being harnessed and used as a strategic tool to motivate language learning. It is particularly noteworthy that Engineering and Computing students were aware of this, given that the prevailing practice in their IoT is *not to offer* either mobility or language learning on their programmes. Once again, a glaring disconnect between practices and grassroots attitudes. In this respect, this empirical research, based in the Republic of Ireland, has added substantially to the growing body of language policy research throughout European higher institutions. The critical theory approach adopted has identified the salient issues which need to be addressed by policy makers. Creating innovative learning pathways for third level students from diverse academic disciplines would satisfy the demand for language teaching that has emerged from this study. Moreover, these learning pathways could/should have international mobility opportunities



embedded into them. In order to be effective in the third level education context, the new government Languages Connect strategy needs to have some impact on institutional practices in IoTs/TUs. Only then will the ambitious targets set in the Strategy be met and Ireland will be linguistically, economically and culturally armed for the challenges ahead. In conclusion, while Ireland appears to have more in common, linguistically speaking with other Anglophone societies, Irish HEIs should strive to strengthen the Republic's role as an EU member, by aligning themselves with the plurilingual ideals and values enshrined in the European Union. The economic uncertainty associated with Brexit along with the changing HE landscape require innovative and visionary leadership. IoTs/TUs should seize this opportunity to reinvent themselves as centres of excellence in the international education market, celebrating multilingualism as an asset and prioritising language education as a core skill.

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