

curriculum for excellence: modern languages

principles and practice

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Modern languages

Principles and practice

What can learning in modern languages enable children and young people to achieve?

Learning other languages enables children and young people to make connections with different people and their cultures and to play a fuller part as global citizens.

Learning through the languages area of the curriculum enables children and young people to:

- develop their ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings and respond to those of other people
- develop the high level of skills in listening, talking, reading and writing which are essential for learning, work and life
- use different media effectively for learning and communication
- develop a secure understanding of how language works, and use language well to communicate ideas and information in English and other languages
- exercise their intellectual curiosity by questioning and developing their understanding, and use creative and critical thinking to synthesise ideas and arguments
- enhance their enjoyment and their understanding of their own and other cultures through literature and other forms of language
- develop competence in different languages so that they can understand and communicate including, for some, in work settings.

Building the Curriculum 1

It is important for the nation's prosperity that young people are attracted to learning a modern language and that they become confident users of a modern language, well equipped with the skills needed in the new Europe and in the global marketplace. This framework of experiences and outcomes is intended to help to address this national need.

Through their planning of a wide and rich range of learning activities in modern languages to develop literacy and language skills teachers will support children and young people to become:

- **successful learners**, who can reflect on how they have acquired and learned their first language and how this can assist them in further language learning
- **confident individuals**, who, through experiencing success and support, can interact with others in real-life situations, talk about topics of personal interest and deliver presentations in their new language
- **effective contributors**, who can work in individual, paired and group situations, and establish and maintain contact with other speakers of the target language
- **responsible citizens**, who have a growing awareness of life in another society and of the issues facing citizens in the countries where their new language is spoken.

The ability to use language lies at the centre of thinking and learning. The interconnected nature of language learning lies at the heart of the modern languages experiences and outcomes.

By the time they begin their study of a modern language, learners will have acquired their home language(s) and will have begun to study English in a school context. Both primary and secondary teachers are in an ideal position to help children and young people to reflect on what they have already achieved in English and in other home or community languages (for example, how to listen, speak, read, write and how to understand phonics), and how this will help them to learn a new language. However, the learning of a new language also provides the opportunity to help learners to reflect on their first language and actively seek comparisons between the features of their first and second languages. In this way, teachers of modern languages have a unique contribution to make in helping learners not only to reflect on the skills required to learn a new language, but also to revisit, improve and understand more securely aspects of literacy in their first language.

The study of a modern language has a unique contribution to make to the development of cultural awareness as it provides children and young people with a means of communicating directly with people from different cultures, enhancing their understanding and enjoyment of other cultures and of their own. They

gain insights into other ways of thinking and other views of the world and therefore develop a much richer understanding of active citizenship.

One of the key aims of modern languages teaching is to develop young people's 'communicative competence' so that they are able to use and enjoy the language effectively in real situations and for a range of relevant purposes in work and leisure throughout their life.

How is the modern languages framework structured?

The introductory statements for modern languages highlight three key aims of learning modern languages which make a unique contribution to the aims of Curriculum for Excellence: the interconnected nature of languages, active citizenship and communicative competence.

The experiences and outcomes for modern languages are described at second, third and fourth levels. Schools and centres which implement an earlier start should work towards the outcomes described at second level, providing children with stimulating opportunities for early achievement of some or all of the second level outcomes and, in the longer term, opportunities for depth and breadth of learning.

In order to make clear the links between learning in English, Gaelic, Gàidhlig and modern languages, the experiences and outcomes in all of these areas are organised within the same structure. The organisers are:

- listening and talking
- reading
- writing.

Experiences and outcomes within each organiser are subdivided to group together similar skills. Teachers will use these lines of development to support and track progression in each skill across the three levels.

The level of achievement at the fourth level has been designed to approximate to that associated with SCQF level 4.

What learning and teaching approaches are useful in modern languages?

How does the framework promote effective teaching and learning where children start their learning of a modern language before P6?

Although Primary 6 is currently the most common point at which pupils begin to learn a modern language, many children begin earlier, including in pre-school. The experiences and outcomes take account of differing starting points.

At early and at first levels, children will be developing generic skills in their first language. These include taking part in conversations, developing listening, reading and writing skills and knowledge about language. All of these are relevant to learning other languages. Within modern languages at these stages teachers will build on children's natural curiosity for sounds and words, and their strong desire to communicate. Activities will include playing games, singing songs, carrying out simple instructions, and playing with simple poetry and rhyme. In this way they can begin to be enthusiastic, confident language learners from the outset.

Whenever they start their learning of another language, children need to experience success by taking part in practical activities that they can enjoy. Language learning is greatly enhanced where it is linked to or embedded in the wider curriculum so that children and young people can enjoy exploring and using language in meaningful contexts. Very importantly, teachers can make great use of opportunities to link language learning with progress in English and with other languages used by people in the school community, enabling children to explore and experiment with sound patterns and make links and comparisons between languages.

What does the framework mean more generally for teachers?

Learning in the modern languages provides opportunities to create relevant, coherent, enjoyable and successful learning experiences which include the following four elements:

- awareness of the skills required to be an effective learner of languages
- awareness of social, cultural and geographical aspects of the countries where a particular language is spoken
- knowledge about language structures that allows the learner to check the accuracy of her/his language use and to create new language
- the ability to communicate in relevant and realistic contexts.

As children and young people develop their modern language skills, teachers will plan to achieve an appropriate balance between the development of language learning skills and the development of competence in the new language. This may involve changing the balance of these four elements: the first two of these elements being more predominant in the earlier stages of language learning and the final two being more predominant in later language learning.

The open-ended nature of the experiences and outcomes allows for creativity and flexibility and allows primary teachers to focus on teaching methodologies for skills development and for a deeper understanding without having to plan for too much content/topic coverage.

The statements of experiences and outcomes provide support to primary teachers as they plan to:

- establish a solid basis for the lifelong learning of modern languages
- ensure that young people experience success and retain initial enthusiasm
- achieve balance between coverage of language content and development of effective language learning skills
- discuss similarities and differences of how pupils have acquired and learned their first or home language and how this impacts on the learning of a second language
- encourage young people to investigate and report back on aspects of culture and geography.

As teachers use these statements of experiences and outcomes to support their planning, by the end of Primary 7, the majority of children will have learned the skills necessary to:

- give a short presentation about themselves
- take part in simple conversations and transactions
- understand classroom instructions and personal information
- enjoy listening to a story, song or poem
- read aloud a simple text
- read and understand a short text
- write a few sentences about themselves and others.

The framework supports secondary teachers in liaising closely with primary teachers to build not only on what has been achieved but also on the learning experiences with which children and young people will be increasingly familiar.

By embedding the principles of Assessment is for Learning within their classrooms, teachers will encourage young people to reflect on, to take increasing ownership of and to assume more responsibility for their own learning; they will make use of self-assessment to identify their strengths and development needs from the evidence of their efforts and act on feedback given from peers as well as teachers in order to plan their next steps.

The statements of experiences and outcomes provide support to secondary teachers as they plan to:

- create meaningful relevant contexts for learning including the appropriate use of ICT
- develop interdisciplinary projects where appropriate to build on collaborative learning
- make clear the links between the learning and teaching of modern languages and other areas of the young people's learning, including enterprise, international education and citizenship
- establish an acceptable level of competence approximating to SCQF Level 4 and achievable by most pupils by end of S3.

How can effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) help to improve learning and teaching?

Curriculum for Excellence offers an opportunity to further develop learning and teaching experiences that are relevant and enjoyable. This includes making effective use of information and communication technology to enhance teaching and learning, and to provide real-life contexts that motivate children and young people and help them to see a purpose to their language learning. Online research by teachers and learners alike will help them to develop their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the culture surrounding the language which they are learning, and the use of ICT can bring them directly into contact with people from around the world.

Will the framework help to address the need for our young people to be equipped with high levels of language learning skills? Are we ‘raising the bar’ in terms of what we expect from our learners?

We are certainly raising the bar to the extent that, without placing a ‘ceiling’ on higher levels of achievement, we expect the majority of young people to achieve by the end of S3 a level of performance in each language skill which approximates to the level of performance associated with SCQF level 4. The achievement of fourth level outcomes represents a substantial and useful level of competence closely linked to Basic User level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

How do we support progression through and between levels?

The experiences and outcomes for modern languages are described at second, third and fourth levels. The outcomes embody an appropriate level of proficiency at each level but do not place a ceiling on achievement. The range of experiences within the framework allows for different rates of progression.

Within the modern languages framework young people will demonstrate their progression as they move through levels in terms of:

- increasing independence and reduced level of support, including peer or teacher support, and support through wordlists and dictionaries
- increasing length and complexity of text and task in listening and reading
- increasing length, complexity and accuracy of response in talking and writing
- new areas of language content and language use (personal, transactional, language related to the world of work and to the culture of the countries in which the language is spoken)
- increasing awareness of language rules, including knowledge about language
- increasing confidence in taking the initiative (including asking for help) and sustaining communication.

What are broad features of assessment in modern languages?

Assessment in modern languages will focus on children and young people’s progress in developing and applying their skills in listening, talking, reading and writing.

Teachers can gather evidence of progress as part of day-to-day learning during individual and collaborative activities, for example engaging in relevant conversation or correspondence with peers and adults about people, places and daily life where the language is spoken, and through talks, writing, and presentations, using ICT as appropriate. Specific assessment tasks will also be valuable in assessing progress. From the time when children and young people begin their learning of a modern language through to the senior stages, they will demonstrate progress in their skills in communication and language learning, in their knowledge about language structure, and in their awareness of social, cultural and geographical aspects.

Approaches to assessment should identify the extent to which children and young people can apply these skills in their learning and their daily lives and in preparing for the world of work. For example:

- How well do they contribute to discussions?
- Are they increasingly able to extract key information from texts?

Assessment of progress in modern languages involves making judgements about the success of children and young people in extending and using their vocabulary, increasing their comprehension of the written and spoken word, developing their understanding of language structures and rules and applying these accurately

in familiar and new real-life situations, including in social contexts or in giving instructions or directions. For example, they:

- communicate with increasing confidence, accuracy and fluency
- demonstrate through responses their enthusiasm and motivation for modern language learning and their developing cultural and international awareness.

Assessment should promote enthusiasm, motivation and willingness to try out the language in other areas of the curriculum and beyond school. These will be indicators of children and young people's long-term success as modern language learners and global citizens.

How much time should schools devote to teaching modern languages?

There are no specific input requirements in terms of time allocations. The emphasis in modern languages is on ensuring that each learner achieves an acceptable level of proficiency in the language. This level of proficiency is linked to Basic User Level of the CEFR. The national expectation is that almost all young people study modern languages to the third level as part of their general education for our young people. This may be achieved in different ways:

Curriculum for Excellence allows for both professional autonomy and responsibility when planning and delivering the curriculum... The framework provides flexibility to organise, schedule and deliver the experiences and outcomes in ways that meet the needs of all learners, but also provides reassurance about consistency where necessary.

Such flexibility will result in a more varied pattern of curriculum structures to reflect local needs and circumstances.

Building the Curriculum 3

Connections with other areas of the curriculum

The study of any modern language plays a central role in the development of literacy skills. It can also contribute to the development of numeracy skills through, for example, learning and exploring the use of the number system in a new language. Learning a modern language provides opportunities for interdisciplinary work by providing a global dimension to a variety of curriculum areas and, particularly, to the areas of active citizenship and cultural awareness. Making connections between different areas of learning and developing relevant course content will be important in attracting our young people to learning a modern language.

Connections with other frameworks for language learning

The framework provides an opportunity for children and young people's achievement to be recognised at second, third and fourth levels. The level of achievement at fourth level is broadly equivalent to that associated with Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 4.

Curriculum for Excellence levels have been linked to those being developed as part of the CEFR so that the level of competence achieved by learners will have a European-wide equivalence. The CEFR comprehensively describes what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning on a lifelong basis.