



THE WORLD LEARNS **SPANISH**

IRELAND

2018



Spanish is the third language in the Irish education system according to the number of students taking it, slightly below German and at quite a distance from French. It's important to point out that in the last few years the number of students taking Spanish has been rising significantly.

In 2006 there were 19409 students taking Spanish in Irish secondary schools. In the school year 2017-18 that figure had increased to 51637 students. In the same period French went from 176205 students in 2006 to 159258, while German experienced a modest increase going from 54483 in 2006 to 61836 students in 2018.

Expectations are that the demand for Spanish will continue expanding in secondary schools and also at university level. The language is perceived as modern, attractive and useful, linked to growing economies and interesting cultures in Spain and South America. Every year over 1.5 million Irish people visit Spain, which offers them the chance to practice the language in a meaningful way. As anecdotal evidence of this interest, in 2017 the learning app Duolingo made public the fact that Spanish is the most popular language among their users in Ireland.

Primary and Child Education

With the disappearance of the Primary Languages Initiative (MLPSI) in 2012, the teaching of Spanish and all other foreign languages in primary education was discontinued. Only a reduced number of schools kept languages as extracurricular activities, usually with the support of parents.

Secondary School and Professional Education

In the school year 2017-18 a total of 279 secondary schools offered Spanish in Junior Cycle. In Senior Cycle, 276 schools offered the language for Established Leaving Certificate and 83 offered it for Leaving Certificate Applied. Since 2011 the number of schools that offer the subject has been growing steadily. This growth has to be gradual as most schools have staff trained in other languages, mainly in French. If the demand for Spanish continues, schools will forcibly have to hire more Spanish language teachers.

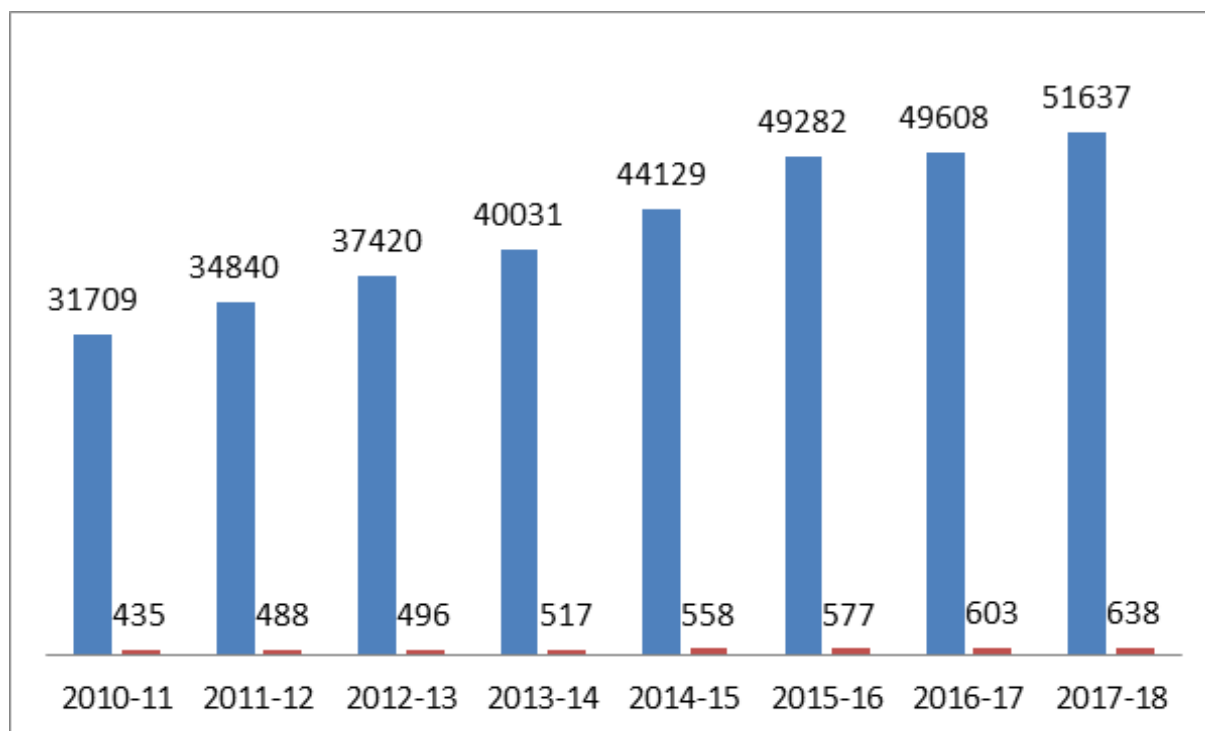
Number of schools offering Spanish								
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Junior Cycle	182	198	204	212	222	249	259	279
Leaving Cert. Applied	75	71	61	66	77	73	81	83
Leaving Certificate	178	219	231	239	259	255	263	276

The methodology of teaching of Spanish in Irish schools has evolved positively in recent years. The need to respond to the increase in the number of pupils, described in the previous paragraphs, has forced schools to incorporate a good number of newly trained **young** teachers, who have brought a renewal of pedagogical methods and an increased use of information and communication technologies.

However, the teaching-learning process, as well as the choice of materials, is highly influenced by the external examinations that are carried out at the end of each cycle: Junior and Leaving Certificates. The nature of these examinations, with a rigid and prefigured structure, makes it difficult for teachers to resist the pressure of “teaching for the test”, which sometimes leads, especially in the last years of Senior Cycle, to memorization of content and a non-communicative approach. Efforts are being made to correct this situation. Currently, the Department of Education and Skills is **embarking** on a comprehensive reform of the Junior Cycle. The design of the new language curriculum for this stage is being developed with the intention of avoiding these drawbacks and it is expected that, if the results are satisfactory, the same approach can be extended to the Senior Cycle.

Approximately 850 teachers teach Spanish in secondary education. Most of them are Irish, non-native speakers on permanent, full time contracts. Continuous professional development for these teachers is mainly provided by the Association of Teachers of Spanish, the Instituto Cervantes, the Spanish Education Office and several agencies of the Department of Education and Skills, particularly the Post-Primary Languages Initiative, the Professional Development Service for Teachers and Junior Cycle for Teachers.

The graph below shows in blue the number of students taking Spanish and schools that offer the language, in their programs.



Higher Education

Spanish is not only present in traditional philological and cultural studies, but also to a certain extent in degrees related to the fields of business, economics or law. In addition, various universities and Colleges of Further Education offer Spanish courses to the general public.

Although the economic crisis had a negative effect on the demand for modern language courses for adults in general, it does not appear that the offer of Spanish courses in private language schools, language centres of universities and technology institutes, as well as post-secondary education, has been dramatically affected. In the 2017-18 academic year, the Instituto Cervantes in Dublin had an enrolment of 1706 students and 170 candidates in the DELE examinations.

The Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Ireland

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has a Counsellor of Education accredited in Ireland and an office at the building of the Embassy of Spain. The office is staffed with an Education Advisor who is permanently stationed in Dublin.

In September 2015, the ALCE program was implemented in Ireland for the first time with two classrooms, in North and South Dublin, which are part of the ALCE cluster in London. During the school year 2015-16 the programme catered for 140 students, divided into 8 class groups. In 2016-17 there were almost 300 students in 16 groups. In 2018-19 the programme will have over 400 students in 18 groups.

The Office of Education of Spain manages the bilateral programme of English language assistants in Spain and Spanish language assistants in Ireland. Spanish assistants in Ireland receive information and support in the months previous to their moving to Ireland, as well as initial and continuous training during the year. The Spanish Office of Education works with the Department of Education and Skills in the selection of English speaking assistants for Spanish schools. Information sessions are held in universities and institutes of technology to present the programme to prospective candidates. Selected Irish language assistants attend an orientation session in Dublin and receive continuous support during the application and selection process, and before travelling to Spain.

	Language assistants							
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Spanish LA in Ireland	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Irish LA in Spain	68	71	84	74	49	59	55	76
Total	80	83	96	86	84	71	67	88

The Spanish Office of Education promotes agreements between institutions and professionals from both countries. During the 2015-16 academic year, Spanish teachers were offered the opportunity to do professional stays in Ireland. Since then, every school year ten Spanish teachers have had the opportunity to spend two weeks at an Irish school sharing good practices and exploring opportunities for cooperation.

The Office of Education also manages the application process for grants for summer scholarships for foreign teachers of Spanish, sponsored by the Ministry of Education and held at the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo. In the summer of 2015, five Irish teachers enjoyed one of these scholarships and in 2016 six Irish teachers benefitted from the same opportunity.

The Office participates in activities to promote the study of Spanish in schools and universities all over the country, organising workshops and teacher training activities in collaboration with the Association of Teachers of Spanish (ATS), the Instituto Cervantes and other institutions such as Professional Development for Teachers (PDST) and Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI).

The Cervantes Institute has a centre in Dublin that maintains a wide range of learning activities, teacher training courses, classes for children, teenagers and adults as well as a broad program of cultural events related to the language and culture of the Spanish speaking countries.

In 2012 the Council of Spanish Residents in Ireland (Consejo de Residentes Españoles en Irlanda, CREI) was constituted; the board of management was renewed during the year 2016. The Council is a great support for the activities of the Ministry, collaborating in the organisation of events and in the dissemination of information about the programs and initiatives of the Office of Education.

In February 2016 the Spanish Research Society of Ireland (SRSI) was formally constituted, with the objective of creating links of collaboration between Spanish researchers based in Ireland, Spain and other countries.

Conclusion

Recently there have been some positive developments in the teaching of modern foreign languages in Ireland.

In the last term of 2014, the Irish Department of Education and Skills started a consultation process with all stakeholders in the sector of modern foreign language teaching. This process took to the publication in December 2017 of the document “Languages Connect. Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026”. The document details actions that have already started their implementation in the framework of the Implementation Plan 2017-2022. This publication will probably bring a new impulse to the teaching of foreign languages in Ireland.

According to the number of students, Spanish is the third language in the Irish education system. It’s studied by 18.8% of students, while 22.5% take German and 58% take French. One of the factors impeding the growth of Spanish is the lack of qualified teachers with accreditation by the Teaching Council. The Spanish Office of Education is working with the Department of Education and Skills, the Teaching Council and other organizations to put in place different actions and strategies that could help alleviate this shortage of qualified teachers.

Other actions that will benefit the position of Spanish in the education system is a further increase in the number of language assistants, both in Ireland and in Spain, as well as the facilitation of contacts and exchanges to increase the mobility and collaboration between students, teachers and administrators in both countries.

The period 2017-2022 will see the implementation of the first group of initiatives proposed in the document “Languages Connect”. It’s crucial that the Spanish institutions in Ireland, especially the Office of Education and the Instituto Cervantes, collaborate with Irish institutions in order to maximise any opportunities to advance and improve the teaching of Spanish in Ireland.