



# WINNING ABROAD: IRELAND'S STRUGGLE WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGES

This Panel Discussion takes place in the context of the consultation process initiated by the Department of Education and Skills in relation to "A Foreign Languages in Education Strategy for Ireland". The particular focus of the gathering will be on the Post Primary Sector.

The need for a Foreign Languages in Education strategy is well made in the Framework for Consultation document issued by The Department of Education and Skills. Stark among the statistics presented is that:

In 2012, Ireland was found to have one of the lowest percentages in Europe of citizens who were able to hold a conversation in at least one foreign language – **40% compared with an average of 54%.**

Other challenges identified in the Framework for Consultation document include:

## THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGE

As an island nation dependent on service industries and overseas markets our challenge is that:

- Less than half the EU population know English well enough to be able to communicate.
- In the world of international business, where competence in English is increasingly taken for granted, it is companies with additional language capabilities that will enjoy competitive advantage.

## THE POST PRIMARY LEVEL CHALLENGE

As highlighted in the Framework for Consultation document, the uptake of foreign languages at post-primary level is worrying:

- Ireland is almost unique in Europe in that the learning of foreign languages is optional in Post Primary education.
- Fewer students than in the past are choosing to study two foreign languages, and in some schools it is not possible to do so.



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## PANELISTS



**Tony Donohoe**  
Head of Education and Social Policy, IBEC



**Tanya Flanagan**  
One Voice for Languages (OVFL) Communications Officer and Second Level Representative, Languages Teacher in St. Farnan's Post-Primary School



**Seánai Kiely**  
LL.B (ling. Germ) Candidate, Trinity College Dublin, Past participant on an EIL Study Abroad programme



**Philippe Milloux**  
Director of Alliance française de Dublin and Chief Representative of Alliance française in Ireland



**Karen Ruddock**  
National Coordinator at Post Primary Languages Initiative



**Joanna Tuffy, T.D.**  
Chairperson of Dáil Committee on Education and Social Protection

## CHAIRPERSON



**Joe Humphreys**  
Education Correspondent, The Irish Times