

# Léitheoirí na Gaeilge (Read in Irish)

## Executive Summary of the Advisory Process December 2020 – January 2021

### Contextual information

- An information package, questionnaire and electronic link to a survey were shared with approximately 180 relevant parties connected with reading.
- The electronic link to the survey was also shared on the website, léitheoirí.ie (readinirish.ie), so that the general public would have access to it.
- The advisory period began on 15 December 2020 and ended on 29 January 2021.
- Feedback was received from 73 relevant parties based in different sectors (including education, language planning, publishing, book sales, the arts etc.) as a response to either the MS Word questionnaire or anonymously through Survey Monkey.
- There were 12 responses by email and 61 responses through Survey Monkey (16% : 84%).
- The information was laid out bilingually. 18 of the respondents answered in English and 55 in Irish (25%: 75%).

### Main points expressed in the responses

1)

#### The main challenges involved with promoting reading in Irish at the moment:

- Lack of marketing and information, or difficulties with distribution and access to the books.
- Lack of information about the target readers and target age groups of the books, language levels etc.
- Gaps in the market: lack of reading material in every genre and for every age group and language level. General fiction, pleasure reading, material for children (especially 6-9 and 9-12) and material for teenagers (YA) were all mentioned specifically.
- The education system: starting the practice early in childhood, and maintaining interest in teenage years; common opinion amongst school students and teachers that Irish is only a school subject; the study-focused Irish curriculum instead of an interest-focused and fun-focused curriculum; the ability of parents to take part in reading with their children.
- Difficulties with the language/learning Irish and finding suitable material. It's not easy for those who have a medium level of Irish (i.e. TEG B1-B2) to find reading material that suits them. For example, getting an answer to a question like 'I'm an adult reader with B1 level Irish, what novels are available that I would be able to read?'
- Promoting the habit of reading itself.

2)

#### Policies that would benefit the development of reading in Irish:

- Some of the aims of the project were mentioned often in the responses: a central digital platform; graded reading system; publishing lists of books; more reviews; a way to find suitable material depending on the reader's language level and interests etc.

- Many young people stop reading in Irish around the age of 9/10 (around 4<sup>th</sup> Class in primary school). The same can be said for reading in general, but those who do carry on reading turn to books in English due to the lack of material for this age group in Irish. A writing campaign is much needed in order to provide this age group with more newly written books.
- Technology: publishing more audiobooks and making them available on the likes of Audible; e-books are available on BorrowBox (the public libraries' free app) but more material should be available; online resources for e-books on Kindle etc./creating an e-reader app for books in Irish that could use the old-type ('seanchló'); Whispersync.
- Developing a reading module for the post-primary Irish curriculum.

3)

#### **Specific recommendations involving libraries:**

- Stronger emphasis on Irish in the public libraries; more visible shelves of Irish-language books; wider choice of material.
- Creating a 'Reading Challenge' in Irish for every age group. Every summer there is a reading challenge to encourage children to read at least 6 books. If a young reader succeeds in reading 6 books and meeting that goal, it is shown that this has a positive effect on their confidence as a reader.
- A once-off grant for libraries to purchase more stock and increasing the book fund year on year. And that Irish-language books would be exempt from clearance if they aren't borrowed often.
- A national marketing campaign for clubleabhar.com in partnership with the public libraries, BorrowBox, booksellers and Irish-language publishers so that the 'Book of the Month' would be well-known in advance and made widely available in e-book or audiobook formats for purchase or borrowing. BorrowBox can make multiple copies of 'campaign titles' available so that people would have almost unlimited access to the e-book at the same time, something that would be suitable for online book clubs.
- Creating a database of writers who would be available to read their work at bilingual and Irish-language events online and in libraries, schools and book shops etc. It can be difficult to find Irish-language authors for events in libraries.

4)

#### **Recommendations to add to the 'Read in Irish' project as it was announced:**

- A lot of interest was shown for the reviews that would be available on the website and the importance of the likes of these, if they were visible enough, was acknowledged. Organising a competition to develop reviewing skills.
- Short articles about the authors, extra information about the books, interviews with the writers etc.
- Events and book clubs aimed at different age groups and suitable for all language levels. A book club on the radio and television.
- Encouraging young people to take an interest in writing; creative collaboration with TG4/RTÉ and animators such as Cartoon Saloon to create recognisable characters for children which would be linked with books about their adventures; a link with the Laureate

na nÓg, a series of videos or something similar; a ‘World Book Day’ strategy for Irish (Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht aren’t included in the current ‘World Book Day’ agenda).

- For new Irish-language books to be discussed by the English-language media.
- Resources to help people who have dyslexia or other learning difficulties.
- Other relevant parties were mentioned that could participate in the project.

It is worth noting the goodwill that certain organisations and groups showed for supporting the project and some of them expressed that they would be very happy to collaborate with Léitheoirí na Gaeilge (‘Read in Irish’) in the future.