

[English translation]

Under *Acht na Gaeltachta 2012* every Gaeltacht community must now prepare and implement a language plan to support and develop Irish language use in their area. If they don't do this, they could lose their Gaeltacht status. This new legislation signals a departure from the historic emphasis on geographic Gaeltacht boundaries and puts the onus on each Gaeltacht community to decide for themselves (i) whether they want to retain their Gaeltacht status (ii) and if so, whether they want to prepare and implement an Irish language plan for their area, which will involve making some commitments to Irish language use and development.

Gaeilge Iorrais is responsible for overseeing this process in Maigh Eo Thuaidh (North Mayo Gaeltacht area), in consultation with local communities and various stakeholders. 7,199 people or c.70% of the Mayo Gaeltacht population live in this vast area (584.43km²), which spans from Fód Dubh to Béal Deirg, Ceathrú Thaidhg to Dumha Thuama and everywhere in between. Dr Laoise Ní Dhúda, an independent language planning advisor, was appointed to facilitate and co-ordinate the work required.

Gaeilge Iorrais met for the first time in June 2015 under the guidance of Ní Dhúda to examine the language planning process in the North Mayo Gaeltacht as set out under *Acht na Gaeltachta*. This marked the first time that there was widespread participation and effective co-operation between organisations and parishes on one committee for the benefit of language planning in this area.

Their language planning work has consisted of two main parts to date (i) conduct research to assess the current state and status of the Irish language in North Mayo Gaeltacht (ii) prepare a specific language plan for the area, based on the findings of this research. The result is a seven-year community language plan (2018-2024), which aims to improve ability in, and increase usage of the Irish language in the education system, in youth activities, in the household, and as part of public, commercial, social and recreational activities.

The Gaeltacht status of the North Mayo area depends on the effective implementation of this plan, instead of geographical boundaries alone, as was

previously the case. Therefore, this process and the plan itself is a very important initiative for the entire North Mayo Gaeltacht community.

This plan is the result of the most extensive piece of sociolinguistic research ever conducted in the North Mayo Gaeltacht, on Irish language ability, use, attitudes and recommendations. Some 1,600 individuals (22% of the area's population) took part in the research which was conducted over the past two years and focused on four main strands (i) an extensive examination of Census statistics and other relevant data (ii) a community survey (on paper) with a random sample of the population (iii) targeted (online) surveying of key stakeholders (iv) extensive consultation with the wider community. Huge thanks to all the volunteers and scheme participants who helped to distribute our community Gaeltacht survey, as well as to all those who took part in this research.

The purpose of this language plan is to bridge gaps between the hugely favourable attitudes to the Irish language and to create more opportunities to use Irish based on the demand and trends shown in the research. To achieve this goal, 34 recommendations or specific measures are proposed in 11 key areas with targets for the next 7 years. Adequate funding and human resources, as well as active community and agency participation will be required to implement the plan effectively, achieve targets and ensure community participation. If the process is to succeed, the approach must be progressive, systematic, reliable and long-term, aided by a strong support structure, courage, patience and continuous effort.

An Dr Laoise Ní Dhúda was appointed as language planning officer in 2019 to begin the implementation phase of the seven year language plan for our North Mayo Gaeltacht area.

It is the vision of Gaeilge Iorrais, in co-operation with the local community and local organisations, to gradually increase and support the daily usage and knowledge of the Irish language in the North Mayo Gaeltacht and specifically to ensure that (i) there is no further decline in key Irish language statistics in the area in Census 2021 (i.e. Irish language ability and daily use, inside and outside the education system) and (ii) by the 2026 Census there will be some improvement (c.3%) in the aforementioned key Irish language statistics.

This process affords our community a golden opportunity to shape and sustain our linguistic and Gaeltacht future on our own terms. Is féidir leatsa difríocht mhór a dhéanamh ach is féidir linne, le chéile, an t-uafás a bhaint amach má sheasann muid le chéile ar son na Gaeilge. Together we have the power to secure a positive future for our Gaeltacht.