

**Research Report on New Irish Speakers launched at Oireachtas na Samhna 2015**

The Language Commissioner, Rónán Ó Domhnaill, has launched Research Report on New Irish Speakers, prepared by Dr. John Walsh, National University of Ireland, Galway, Professor Bernadette O’Rourke, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, and Dr. Hugh Rowland, National University of Ireland, Galway for Foras na Gaeilge, on Friday, 30 October at Oireachtas na Samhna in Citywest, Dublin.

This report is a joint venture between the National University of Ireland, Galway and Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, presenting the results of research on the background, practice and ideologies of ‘new speakers’ of Irish. ‘New speakers’ are those who regularly use a language who are not traditional native speakers of that language. New speakers usually acquire the target language through the education system or through immersion education or, depending on the sociolinguistic context, the acquisition may take place as a result of language revitalisation programmes. The report is based on research conducted in recent years by a network of European researchers titled *New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges* under the auspices of COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology). There are 50 researchers from 27 European countries in this network and the authors of this report are engaged in research on new speakers of Irish.

‘Above all, this research demonstrates that anyone can become a new speaker, regardless of their language background,’ said Dr. John Walsh, Senior Lecturer of Irish in National University of Ireland, Galway. ‘One of the interesting results is that of the role of the Irish teacher in an ordinary English-medium school: many new speakers referred to inspirational teachers they had at school who fostered an interest in Irish, which encouraged them to use it as a social language after school. The new speakers believe that the Gaeltacht is important but some of them have social anxiety trying to speak Irish with Gaeltacht natives. People need more support to become new speakers and we have made some policy recommendations which will help people make that transition if implemented. These include proper investment in a wide range of physical spaces in which Irish could be spoken socially and Irish language awareness campaigns in social media.’

‘The findings of our research on Irish have many parallels with other languages in Europe including Basque, Catalan, Breton, Galician, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic, and this report will provide invaluable insights into the broader opportunities and challenges that new speakers bring to a multilingual Europe. The recommendations we have made in relation to new speakers of Irish will feed into a broader set of recommendations at EU level and help identify a common framework of understanding and policy implications at European level’, said Prof. Bernadette O’Rourke of Heriot-Watt in Scotland, one of the report’s authors.

Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge, welcomed the report and said, ‘Foras na Gaeilge caters to a broad range of Irish speakers nationwide, north and south, as well as within and outside the Gaeltacht. We recognise that new speakers are of great importance and we welcome this positive research revealing their aspirations and needs. We look forward to discussing the recommendations in the report to determine how best we can provide additional support to new speakers in the future.’

A copy of the report is available on the Foras na Gaeilge website at [www.gaeilge.ie/nuacht/](http://www.gaeilge.ie/nuacht/)

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