Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland

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Languages in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland

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Introduction and Background

The Benefits of Language skills

- Intercultural understanding (Richardson and Gallagher, 2011; Purdy and Ferguson, 2012; Jones, 2015)
- Economic growth (British Academy, 2016; Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, 2014)
- Cognitive benefits (Foster and Reeves, 1989)

The Benefits of an Early Start?

- Positive influence on first language literacy (Murphy *et al.*, 2015)
- Boosts confidence and positive attitudes (DfES, 2002; Jones and Coffey, 2013)
- Time spent is proportional to proficiency (Driscoll *et al*, 2004; Kirsch, 2008)
- Inclusive (Muijs *et al,* 2005)

The Policy Context

- England – since 2014 all pupils aged 7-11 learn a modern or ancient language (DE, 2013)
- Scotland - *Language Learning in Scotland: a 1+2 Approach*; fully implemented by 2020; every child will learn two languages by Primary 5 (Scottish Government, 2012)
- Europe - 80% of primary pupils were learning an additional language in 2013 (Eurostat, 24 September 2015)
- Northern Ireland – *Languages for the Future - Northern Ireland languages strategy final report*. (DENI, 2012)
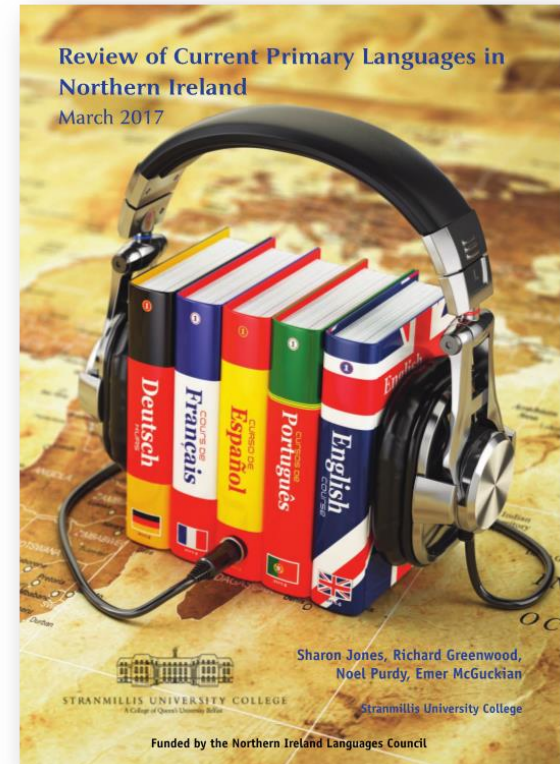
Review of Current Primary Languages in Northern Ireland Jones *et al* (2017)

- Commissioned by Northern Ireland Languages Council; funded by Department of Education Northern Ireland

- Research team: Dr Sharon Jones; Dr Richard Greenwood; Dr Noel Purdy; Ms Emer McGuckian, Stranmillis University College, Belfast

- Evaluative review of the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP)

- Mapping of languages provision in primary schools beyond the PMLP

- Opportunities and challenges for language learning in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland

- Recommendations for policy and practice

RESEARCH REPORT LAUNCH

REVIEW OF CURRENT PRIMARY LANGUAGES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

DR SHARON JONES, DR RICHARD GREENWOOD, DR NOEL PURDY & EMER McGUCKIAN

WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH 2017

4.00pm - 6.00pm
MOSES HILL ROOM, STRAN HOUSE
STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
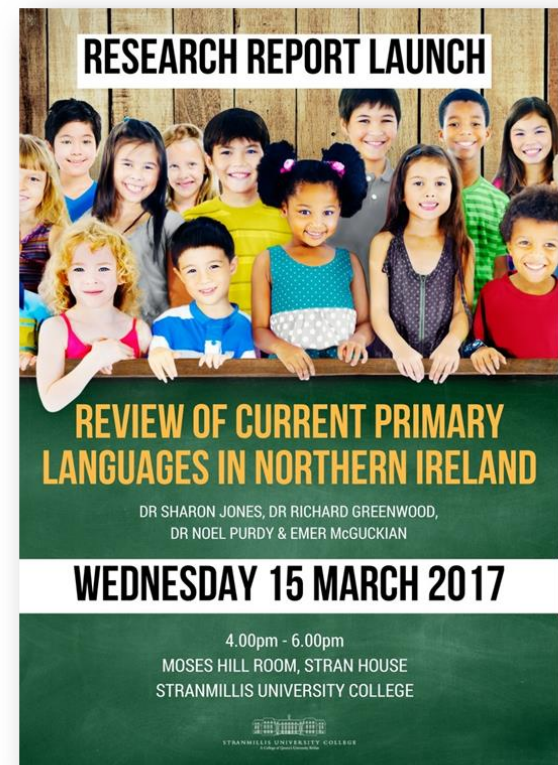
Research Methodology

- Sampling – inclusive; all primary schools in Northern Ireland; all school types

- Data collection over 10 weeks from January 2016

- Ethical Considerations

  o Compliance with BERA (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*

  o Stranmillis University College Code of Ethics (2015)

  o Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). All information held and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

Review of Current Primary Languages in Northern Ireland
March 2017

Sharon Jones, Richard Greenwood, Noel Purdy, Emer McGuckian
Stranmillis University College

Funded by the Northern Ireland Languages Council

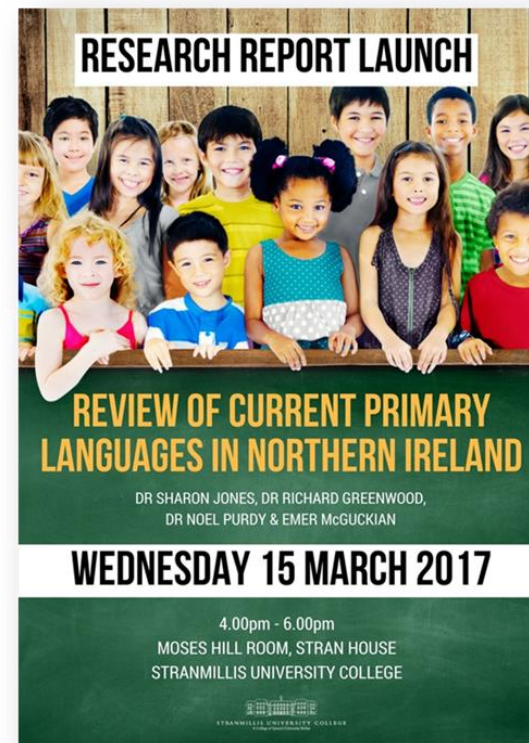# Research Activity

Strand One

Desktop review of literature

Strand Two

- Online Survey Questionnaire Principals and Teachers (n=101 schools)
- Paper questionnaire pupils (n=165 pupils)

Strand Three

In -depth face-to-face interviews with Principals and Teachers (n=8 schools)

Pupil focus group discussions in (n=4 schools)

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Key Findings: Principals and Teachers in NI Primary Schools

"Children learn best when they are young. They are able to absorb vocabulary, phrases and pronunciation easily when this is taught to them in early life. In class I have observed the children engage and stay focused whilst learning a new language as well as showing an enjoyment in what they are doing"

"Other countries provide foreign language learning from a very young age, which sets the children in excellent position for further learning and job opportunities later in life"

"I think languages should be…a language should be a core part of the curriculum"

• Learning a new language is important, valuable and enjoyable for pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland

• An early start is best; high levels of pupil motivation

• Raises school profile in the community

• Should be a statutory part of the primary curriculum; lack of equity in current provision

Key Findings: Principals and Teachers in NI Primary Schools

"It really is time that primary school pupils had access to language teaching and the opportunity to become proficient in a second language. The benefits educationally and socially would be enormous over a period of time."

• Range of languages taught in primary schools

• Spanish and French most popular; German, Mandarin and Irish are also offered

• Lack of consistency in terms of Key Stage and time allocated

• Assessment of language learning either absent or inconsistent in nature and regularity

• Absence of assessment requirements results in a low levels of prioritisation

Key Findings: Principals and Teachers in NI Primary Schools

"…if we are to seek to deliver a top class education regionally we need to teach our children in such a way that they are enabled to go into the world and communicate effectively"

- Partnerships with external stakeholders; vary from school to school

- Application processes can be off-putting

- Delivery by qualified primary classroom teacher is most effective:
    - greater flexibility
    - enhanced teacher expertise
    - developmentally appropriate methodologies
    - understanding of differentiation and inclusion

- Specialist provision in ITE and in teacher CPD

- More careful area planning

Key Findings: the views of Pupils in Primary Schools

"*Very useful, so you can go to different countries and get jobs there*"

"*If you are going for a world-wide job you need it!*"

"*I think it is going to be fun because I like learning languages and it is going to be easier if you learn it in primary school …*"

• Language learning at primary school is enjoyable, challenging and useful

• **All** pupils in **all** primary schools should have the opportunity to learn a new language

• The majority wish to continue language learning in the future

• Most stated a preference for French or Spanish; interested in a wide range of European and non-European languages including German and Mandarin

Recommendations for Policy

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1. *The inclusion of additional language learning as a statutory part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum*

2. *The development of a funded specialist qualification in Primary Education with modern languages in Initial Teacher Education*

3. *The development of appropriate curricular guidance and resources to support teachers in primary schools including Continuing Professional Development*

4. *Funded research into flexible pedagogical approaches, including Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths with Languages (STEM-L), and models of collaboration between schools to ensure progression in learning and a positive transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage*

6. *More effective area based planning to ensure effective linkage between languages offered in primary and post primary schools.*

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The full report can be accessed here:
http://www.stran.ac.uk/media/media,748093,en.pdf

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