

How International Education can support Ireland's FDI strategy A White Paper

Who we are

The International School of Dublin (ISD) is the only dedicated international school in Ireland serving families employed by FDI companies. The school delivers the gold standard International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) to a diverse, dynamic and internationally minded school of about fifty students in Dublin city centre.

This White Paper sets out our vision and plans for expansion to become The International Education Foundation of Ireland, meeting the needs of the growing number of international families expected to relocate in coming years, in Dublin and in other regions.

Why is international education important to Ireland's FDI strategy?

In order to support Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Ireland must offer educational options that are attractive to incoming executives. Despite the strengths of the local education system, relocating executives tend to prefer an international curriculum of which the International Baccalaureate (IB) is the most widely recognised and respected.

A recent study by Grant Thornton for the ISD indicated that there are already a sufficient number of international families in Dublin to fully populate two or three medium-sized Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) international schools, and that this would be their preferred option if places were available at schools operating from conveniently-located and good quality premises. The survey also uncovered anecdotal evidence of senior executives who had turned down posts in Dublin because of the lack of a suitable international school.

This survey was conducted before the Brexit vote.

As international companies - particularly in the financial services sector - consider relocating some of their functions from the UK, the availability or otherwise of international education will be an important factor in the decision on whether to move to Ireland or elsewhere in the EU.

What kind of international schools does Ireland need?

Based on the evidence of the Grant Thornton study, and on our own experience of international education in Ireland and in other economies, we consider that the following

characteristics are essential in an international school that would enhance Ireland's FDI proposition.

| | Characteristic | Rationale |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Scope | Kindergarten to sixth form | Families arriving in Ireland may have children of several ages, and they will prefer them to attend one school. They will also want to be confident that their children can continue their education for as long as the family remains in Ireland. |
| Curriculum | IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP) | The IB is the most widely-respected international curriculum, is suitable for families moving from one overseas posting to another, as well as for students returning from Ireland to a national education system in their home countries. |
| Fees | Comparable to, or a little more than, other fee-paying schools in the Dublin area | Financial modelling suggests that an international school would easily be viable with fees around €10,000-€12,000 a year. This is comparable to the level charged by many non-profit schools in some other economies, but around half the level often charged by profit-making schools. Where school fees are paid by companies, this will be one of the costs of doing business and it will assist Ireland's competitiveness if the fees are at an affordable level. Moreover the school will be more attractive if it can attract self-funded employees from FDI companies, returnees from the Irish diaspora and internationally-minded local families as well as families in the Financial Services sector. |
| Class size and enrolment policy | Class sizes limited to 20 students, with flexibility if needed to accommodate families arriving from overseas at any point in the school year | Small classes are attractive to parents and assist in teaching and learning under the IB approach. However, flexibility is needed to ensure that new arrivals can be accommodated. The aim is that concern about education should not be a factor in a family's consideration of whether to relocate to Ireland. |
| Corporate status | Not for profit | A not for profit school can be relied on to focus solely on the mission of providing affordable high quality international education that supports Ireland's FDI proposition, without the risk that maximising shareholder returns would conflict with this mission. In addition, a not for profit is in a better position to create a strong and involved parent community, which will enhance the experience of living in Ireland for relocating families. |
| Profile of student body | Ideally 65%-75% expatriates, 25%-35% returnees from the Irish diaspora and internationally-minded local families | International families value the opportunity for their children to make friends with children from the country they are living in. And from the school's perspective, it adds stability and continuity for there to be a cohort of students who expect to complete their entire education at the school. A small proportion of boarders could be accommodated but boarding places are peripheral to the central mission of the school. |

What international schools does Ireland currently have?

Currently there is only one IB Primary Years Programme school in Ireland - the International School of Dublin - which occupies the top floor of the Sancta Maria Primary School in Synge Street. The school achieved authorisation from the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) based in Geneva several years ago. While it provides a very high level of education and good parent satisfaction, the temporary nature of its premises, the location and a lack of facilities are off-putting to many arriving families.

There is one Middle Years Programme (MYP) school - the SEK International School - in Greystones. Its student body consists mainly of students from schools in Spain spending one year in Ireland as part of their MYP course. This school rarely attracts expatriate families who have relocated to Dublin.

There is one school - St Andrews - that offers the IB Diploma alongside the Irish Leaving Certificate and a US High School curriculum. However it exclusively offers the Irish curriculums up to the age of 16. This school is popular with international families, but places are limited and most international families would prefer the IB curriculum throughout their children's schooling.

How can we contribute to Ireland's FDI strategy?

The charity which operates the existing International School of Dublin is adopting a broader mission in support of Ireland's FDI strategy. We plan to adopt the name The International Education Foundation of Ireland (IEFI) to reflect this broader mission.

The mission of the IEFI is:

We will promote international education in Ireland that meets the needs of expatriate families and members of the diaspora relocating to Ireland, as well as of internationally-minded local families.

We will achieve this mission by operating our own IB schools, supporting other schools that wish to adopt the IB curriculum and expanding international education availability in regions across the country.

As the operators of Ireland's only authorised IB primary school, our next step is to expand that school to become a K-12 school at suitable premises in South Dublin. We will then consider the case for an IB school in Munster to support families working for inward investors in Cork and/or Limerick.

We are aware that there is a proposal to open a for-profit international school in South Dublin. If this project comes to fruition, this would be a useful contribution to the international education scene. However, given that there is enough demand for international places that more than one school is required in the Dublin area, we consider it preferable for the IEFI proposals to proceed independently.

IEFI complements the for-profit project by having the wider mission of supporting all the educational needs of FDI families. IEFI's fees will not be so high that many FDI families

would be excluded. And it will be easier for a not-for-profit school to establish a sustainable community spirit amongst parents, teachers and governors.

ISD is also aware from contacts with Embassies in Dublin that the provision of suitable educational provision is an issue of concern for them – both for Embassy staff and for their nationals working here in the private sector. One EU Embassy with a sizeable and growing diaspora is prepared to explore possible collaborative approaches including the establishment of an international campus that might include schools offering their national curriculum and the IB programme.

What are the next steps?

The existing ISD provides a good foundation for expansion to establish a high quality IB school in Dublin that has the desirable characteristics identified above. We already have the necessary authorisation (which takes some years to achieve) and we already have a student body, staff members, systems, educational materials and so forth to operate an IB school successfully.

In order to expand, ISD will need to move from our current premises to a site which can accommodate a larger school, with reasonable facilities and a location sufficiently close to residential areas favoured by international families. Once ISD had moved to such a location, there would be no need for further financial support for the primary school and surpluses generated by the primary school could fund a gradual expansion into secondary education. This process could, however, be accelerated by corporate or Government support for any necessary refurbishment and for the start-up costs of establishing the secondary IB programme. Such support could be in the form of grants or loans.

A variation on this approach would be to move to a campus designed to accommodate both ISD and a complementary school – possibly a school offering the national curriculum of another European country or a school offering the local curriculum.

Policy recommendations

We offer the following policy recommendations:

| | Recommendation | Rationale |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Site for IB school | Government to identify a site for an IB school and to invite proposals from not-for-profit operators to run an IB school on the site with the desirable characteristics identified above, at a nominal rent | This would overcome one of the most significant barriers to establishment of an IB school in the voluntary sector. It would also ensure that Government support was not subsidizing the profits of a business entity |
| Start-up funding | Government to offer a loan to cover a proportion of the costs for start-up or expansion of the school | This would help accelerate the expansion of the school, and would provide a focus for further fund-raising from the corporate sector or philanthropic individuals |

| | Recommendation | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Review of IB as an entrance exam for Irish universities | Ask CAO and/or Irish universities to review how IB achievement is used in allocating university places | There is evidence that the way IB achievement is converted into CAO points disadvantages IB students, compared to Leaving Cert students. This makes it difficult to recruit local students to IB schools, and leaves international schools without the desired 25%-35% proportion of local students. |
| Further studies by Government | <p>(1) Study of demand for international education outside Dublin.</p> <p>(2) Study on how the learning outcomes of the local curriculum could be achieved through an IB programme.</p> <p>(3) Study on opportunities for collaboration between the local and international school sectors.</p> | <p>(1) While Dublin is the most pressing priority for supporting firms relocating as a result of Brexit, expanding IB provision in other cities and regions could serve wider inward investment and industrial development aims. More study is needed to identify the priority areas.</p> <p>(2) Establishing how national learning goals could be delivered through an IB programme could create the possibility for existing schools to offer an IB programme while remaining inside the mainstream school system. In the long-run, this might prove a useful way of expanding the provision of international education into target areas for industrial development. Early studies by ISD found that the learning goals of the Irish primary curriculum could be delivered through the medium of the IB Primary Years Programme, but a similar study would be needed for secondary-level goals.</p> <p>(3) The aims of the IB are not dissimilar to the some of the objectives of education policy and there could be mutually beneficial opportunities for collaboration between the local schools sector and the international schools sector.</p> |