



## Linguistics Olympiad helps address Language Skills Deficit of Irish Students

### *Secondary schools competition introduces a problem-based approach to language study*

21 October 2011 (Dublin, Ireland) - Secondary school students across Ireland were today challenged to test their logic and language skills with a novel competition designed to help address Ireland's language skills deficit. The All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO), which is run by the Centre for Next Generation Localisation, tasks students to develop their own strategies for solving problems in fascinating real languages from around the globe. In solving the problems, students hone their language and lateral thinking skills; skills which are vital to the success of Ireland's export-focused sectors.

In recent weeks the Royal Irish Academy and IBEC have expressed concern that the lack of foreign language skills among the Irish population is hindering Ireland's ability to compete internationally. Just 34 per cent of Irish citizens know a language other than their mother tongue – the lowest proportion in the EU. AILO aims to kindle students' interest in languages and introduces them to linguistics - the scientific study of human language.

Now entering its third year, AILO has attracted over 650 participants from schools in almost every county in Ireland. These budding linguists apply their logic to decipher ancient Oriental scripts, decode Sanskrit poetry, and interpret Old Norse expressions. No previous knowledge of foreign languages is required, as participants learn to use the diversity and consistency of language formation to solve even the toughest puzzles.

"Instead of learning languages by rote, AILO encourages students to analyse the underlying structure of language formation", explains competition coordinator, Cara Greene. "Participants are fascinated that, by simply using their ingenuity, they can understand exotic languages, even those with different writing systems. This discovery motivates them to learn more about the languages of the world."

Ireland is currently experiencing significant demand for multilingual graduates across diverse industries. Among these is the €680 million localisation sector, which enables companies to adapt digital products, services and content to the needs of global users. The language skills and computational thinking fostered by AILO are essential to this process.

Schools can sign up for the competition and try out sample puzzles at [www.cngl.ie/ailo](http://www.cngl.ie/ailo). The top performers at the national finals of the competition at DCU in March 2012 will be selected to represent Ireland at the International Linguistics Olympiad in Slovenia in July 2012.

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**The All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO)**

The All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO) is a contest which challenges second level students to develop their own strategies for solving problems in fascinating real languages from around the globe. Students must use their ingenuity to solve puzzles such as deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics and writing the names of football teams in Chinese. AILO introduces students to linguistics (i.e. the study of human language) and to the application of logic to problems of language understanding and translation. The goal is to develop students' problem solving skills and to inspire them to consider the broad range of careers at the intersection of language, linguistics and computing. For more, see [www.cngl.ie/ailo](http://www.cngl.ie/ailo)



Fionn O'Maoileoin, Cormac Byrne, Alex Young and Rachael Meehan of Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Clontarf are sharpening their problem-solving skills ahead of the 2012 Season of the CNGL All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad. The novel competition challenges students to use their ingenuity to decode the languages of the world. (Nick Bradshaw, Fotonic).