



Team Ireland aims to translate talent into success at International Linguistics Olympiad

Talented young linguists prepare to take on the languages of the world

Dublin, Ireland, 22 July 2011 – Four of Ireland’s brightest young problem solvers are preparing to pit their wits against the world’s toughest puzzles in language, logic and linguistics when they compete in the International Linguistics Olympiad at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, USA from 25-30 July. Team Ireland, which comprises two secondary school students from Northern Ireland and two from the Republic, will go head to head with budding linguists from 19 countries as they attempt to decipher the grammar of unfamiliar languages from around the globe. The Irish competitors will depart for Pittsburgh on Sunday (24 July).

The International Linguistics Olympiad challenges secondary school students to develop their own strategies for solving problems in fascinating real languages. In past editions of the Olympiad these unfamiliar languages have included the Budukh language of Azerbaijan, the Incan language Quechua, and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. In solving the problems, students learn about the diversity and consistency of language, and how to apply logic to problems of language understanding and translation.

Representing Team Ireland at this year’s Olympiad will be 18 year old Medbh Campbell of Methodist College Belfast, 17 year old Niamh Dhondt of Loreto Secondary School Kilkenny, 16 year old Declan Manning of Ballincollig Community School, and Alec Fair, also aged 16, of Methodist College Belfast. The four students were selected on the back of their strong performance at the All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO), which was hosted at Dublin City University in March 2011. More than 300 students from 42 schools across Ireland took the challenge this year.

AILO is run by the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL), a dynamic academia-industry research centre funded by Science Foundation Ireland and ten industry partners. Researchers at CNGL are producing advances in ‘localisation’, the process by which computers adapt and personalise software and digital content for different languages and cultures. By introducing students to linguistics and the application of logic to problems of language understanding and translation, AILO aims to inspire students to pursue careers in localisation and other export-focused activities. Current estimates put the value of the localisation sector in Ireland at over €680 million.

Speaking in advance of the team’s departure for Pittsburgh on Sunday, Medbh Campbell of Team Ireland said, “If it weren’t for the Linguistics Olympiad, I might never have heard of linguistics - now that I have, learning about it has helped me so much, not only in studying a foreign language, but in understanding my own language’s little quirks as well. I’m literally counting the days until the competition starts!”

Team mate Declan Manning is equally excited about the contest. “I’m really looking forward to the competition in Pittsburgh as I am sure it will be an extremely educational and enjoyable experience and a trip to remember”, said Manning. “The trip will definitely improve my knowledge of linguistics, as spending a week surrounded by the best young linguists in the world could only have this effect.”

Team Leader Professor Harold Somers is anticipating a strong performance by the Irish competitors at next week’s International Olympiad. Somers said, “The logic and problem-solving skills displayed by the students are truly impressive. Their tremendous aptitude for applying these skills to decoding unfamiliar languages bodes well not just for the country’s performance at the International Linguistics Olympiad, but for the future of the highly valuable localisation and language services sectors in Ireland.”

The opening ceremony of the International Linguistics Olympiad 2011 will be held on Monday 25 July. The competition gets underway with the individual contest on Tuesday 26 July, followed by the team contest on Thursday 28 July. The winners will be announced on Friday 29 July. The teams can also look forward to a jam-packed agenda of fun linguistic and cultural activities throughout the week. Follow Team Ireland’s progress at www.cngl.ie/ailo

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The International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)

The International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL) is one of 12 International Science Olympiads, and has been held annually since 2003. Each year, teams of young linguists from around the world gather and test their minds against the world's toughest puzzles in language and linguistics. No prior knowledge of linguistics or languages is required: even the hardest problems require only logical ability, patient work, and willingness to think around corners. Teams from 23 countries have participated in at least one of the first eight IOLs. Ireland has entered a team each year since 2009, and the team members are selected on the basis of their strong performance in the All-Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO). AILO is run by the Science Foundation Ireland-funded Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL) based at Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and University of Limerick.

<http://www.ioling.org/>

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