



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2014–2015**



Altram is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC103690.

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Chairperson's Foreword

On behalf of Altram's Board and Staff, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for 2014-2015. It shows the range and quality of Altram's activities and demonstrates, despite a difficult funding climate, another successful year for Altram.

In February 2014, ETI published *An Evaluation of the Role of the Early Years Specialist*. It concluded that the quality of support provided by our EYs has "remained consistently high" and "all of the support provided in 2012-13 was evaluated as good or better." (p.6) We were also pleased to read that those accessing our services were "satisfied or very satisfied with all aspects of the support provided." (p.9).

Our staff has continued to deliver a wide range of specialist support across the north, from helping settings meet their statutory and regulatory obligations, to providing support for language and immersion methodology or supporting parents in their interaction with their children or committees in the Irish-medium early years settings. Altram has continued to provide the only tailored training course for staff in Irish-medium early years settings, the Certificate in Irish-medium Education: Early Years, which is validated by UU.

Both staff and Board have continued to offer a strong voice for the sector, representing it across key stakeholder groups such as DE, HSCB, SureStart. We have also played a key role in the development of DE research into the outcomes for children who avail of Irish-medium early years education.

Altram continues to support DE to implement the new *Learning to Learn* strategy and ensuring that the proposed *Bright Start Childcare Strategy* meets the needs of children in the Irish-medium early years sector.

Following a process of restructuring, funding from our main funder Foras na Gaeilge ceased in June 2014 and funding was directed to a Dublin-based organisation.

Altram lobbied intensively against this decision, noting that conditions north and south differed widely and that the expertise and experience to deliver services in Northern Ireland simply did not exist in the south at that point. Altram's reputation is such that a vigorous campaign was begun to save the organisation and the services it delivers to the Irish-medium early years sector.

In June 2014, the Minister for Education, John O'Dowd MLA, announced interim funding arrangements, stating that "In light of the priority which I attach to the role for early years education services in the delivery of the Department's vision and goals I have agreed to provide some short-term transitional funding to provide security of service in the immediate future." (Ministerial Statement on the 27 June 2014)

Altram awaits the outcome of the Department's deliberations as to the longterm funding of Irish-medium Early Years support services. Despite these challenges, improving outcomes for children and their families in Irish-medium settings remains at the heart of Altram's work.

I would like to congratulate our Staff, our membership and my colleagues on the Altram Board for their continued commitment and dedication. In the current climate, some members of staff have felt the need to move on. We thank them for their service to Altram and wish them every success in their new positions.



Two members of our management team also retired this year. We wish them a happy retirement. We are indebted to them all for their dedication and commitment and their contribution to the work of Altram at all levels.

It is a testament to the dedication of our Staff and the support of our Board that we have continued to deliver a wide range of high quality support services and training to Irish-medium Early Years settings across the north in what has been a most challenging year for Altram and for the Irish language voluntary sector in general.

I am pleased to announce that Altram has successfully registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. We look forward to 2015-16 and remain strongly committed to improving the quality and standards of education and the outcomes for children in the Irish-medium Early Years sector. I hope I will be reporting to you next year about securing the longterm funding it needs and deserves.

Áine Andrews

Chairperson

Mission Statement and Purposes

Mission

Altram's mission is to promote high quality Irish-medium early years childcare and education which is open to all and to support family involvement as a keystone in the development of an Irish Language community.

Purposes

- The advancement of Irish-medium early years care and education.
- The promotion and delivery of quality Irish-medium early years care and education services to meet community need and demand.
- The involvement of families, parents and carers in the early learning experiences of their children.
- The provision of related training and support to the Irish-medium early years sector.
- The development of Irish-medium early years care and educational services as the foundation for Irish-medium education.

Work Programme

2014-2015

BACKGROUND

Altram was founded in 1990. It is a regional training, advocacy and support group for Irish-medium Early Years settings in Northern Ireland. It has an office in Belfast and in Derry.

Altram seeks to advance Irish-medium early years care and education by developing, sharing and enhancing good practice, particularly in addressing the pedagogical challenges of the Irish-medium immersion context. We seek to maintain and improve standards, by providing a wide range of specialist support and training services to practitioners, committees and families.

We advocate for the Irish-medium Early Years sector in a number of ways. We represent the sector to government bodies, statutory agencies, educational, policy development and programme delivery organisations. We also regularly contribute to statutory consultation exercises on issues of relevance to the Irish-medium Early Years sector.

Altram supports staff, parents and children in immersion settings including crèche, parent and toddler projects, playgroups, afterschool projects and family support centres.

In planning our activities for the year our Trustees kept in mind the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. The focus of our activities remains the advancement of Irish-medium early years care and education. Our programme of specialist training and support and our advocacy for the sector benefits children, families, carers and the wider Irish language community, through capacity building, improved skills and confidence, and gaining a wider appreciation and knowledge of the Irish language and culture.



MEMBERSHIP

Altram services are provided to Irish-medium Early Years settings which sign-up and become members of Altram. Membership entitles settings to on-site visits, training and advice, and access to our Toy and Book Library and to our online resources.

A list of our current membership is available on page 17.

Training and Support Services

Altram provides a wide range of specialist support and training services to practitioners, committees and families.

Over 80% of the Irish-medium early years settings it serves are in areas of disadvantage. Twenty-one of the 34 Sure Start areas in the north contain one or more Irish-Medium early years settings.

Altram's Early Years Specialists made over 400 support visits to Irish-medium settings this year. They included pre- and post-inspections visits, visits to new and emerging Irish-medium settings and those that were carried out in response to identified need or demand.



Our Early Years Specialists: Róisín, Bridgeen, Aisling and Caitlín

Our Early Years Specialists offered on-site support and advice to practitioners in relation to:

- regulatory and statutory obligations
- curriculum planning and delivery
- language immersion methodology
- the development of self-improvement and action planning
- assessing children's progress
- care and play
- parental involvement
- facilitating designated officer training

Written reports of visits are made and distributed to settings and committees.

Our Early Years Specialists also provided advice and guidance to settings with respect to practical operational matters, providing, for example, roll books and calendars and also advising on statutory and regulatory requirements. Settings were also regularly informed of any changes in legislation.

Our Regional Capacity Officer ensured settings were informed about possible sources of funding.

Regular contact has been maintained with ETI and with the HSCB through

meetings and inspection processes. Altram staff also attended Early Years specific events and training delivered by these agencies.

Altram established an effective partnership with regional Early Years Inclusion Service this ensures that Irish-Medium Early Years settings are kept informed of specialised training and support services as they become available.



Cluster Training

Altram developed and delivered initial and in-service training programmes in relation to the care, play and language immersion preschool curriculum.

Our Early Years Specialists prepared for and delivered eight cluster training days for almost 250 early years staff. Training was delivered across the region.

Certificate in Irish Immersion Education: Early Years



Altram identified the need for training in immersion methodology among early years staff. As no tailored training was available in Ireland north or south, Altram developed a course which provides learners with the opportunity to develop a sound knowledge and understanding of Immersion Education while developing the learners' ability to provide effective language immersion experiences to young children. The course focuses on the practical skills required to work with children in Irish-medium early years settings.

The Certificate in Irish Immersion Education: Early Years was further developed and supported by the North West Regional College, Ultach Trust, the University of Ulster and Comhairle na Gaelscol-aíochta. It was validated by the University of Ulster in 2011.

This year's course commenced in March 2015. Prior to course delivery, Altram disseminated information to all early years staff regarding the Certificate Course, handled queries, ran an information evening and processed the applications forms for the course and bursaries.

Altram also developed a 10 week Language Access Programme to facilitate a successful application to the Immersion Certificate Course.



Parents and Voluntary Committees



There is near universal acceptance of the the critical importance of parental involvement in early years education. It is of particular importance in areas of social deprivation and disadvantage. It is also vitally important in the context of Irish-medium education and the creation of a cohort of Irish-speakers who will become fully-fledged members of the Irish language community.

Altram encouraged all parents in Irish-medium settings to engage in positive quality interaction with their children, particularly in relation to the development of second language competence. We provided language and play resources for parents to help with this interaction and to improve parent and child confidence in the second language.

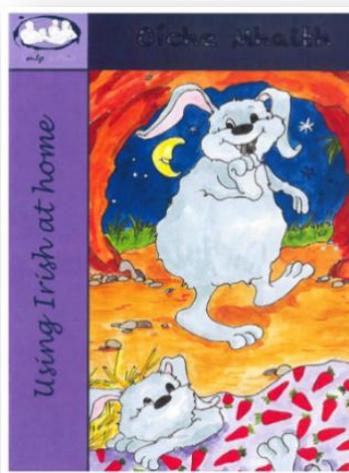
Our Early Years Specialists provided advice to Irish-medium settings on the development of programmes of activities which could be delivered through the Extended Services Funding. The main focus of these activities was the increase in parental participation and support of their child's learning.

The key role Irish-medium education plays in the development of a cohort of Irish speakers is universally recognised. Irish-medium early years education is a fundamental step in the process as it prepares children for transition to Irish-medium primary schools. Altram also played a role in advising on the transition from home to preschool and primary school to ensure continuity and progression for the child.

Altram cooperated with Book Trust to ensure that Book Start Packs were available to parents in Irish-medium Early Years settings and that the pack included suitable bilingual material. Book Start Treasure gifts were delivered to all 45 settings.

Altram provided advice and support to a number of Irish-medium early years voluntary committees, from the initial stages of setting up a preschool to preparing premises, recruiting staff and engaging parents in their child's learning. Advice was provided on statutory and regulatory requirements; on language planning; child assessment and appropriate procedures for transition to Irish-medium preschool and primary school. Our Regional Capacity Officer provided request-based support and sign-posting to all relevant agencies.

Resource Development



Altram develops and disseminates specific Irish language support materials to help increase the use of Irish in the family home and the wider the community.

During this funding period, we secured funding from HSCB to deliver a pilot project aimed at supporting parents' interaction with their children and increasing the use of Irish within the home.

In co-operation with another partner, we published a series of nine readers. Each reader includes a story in Irish, the English meaning of the sentences and a phonetic rendering of the Irish sentences. The readers are accompanied by a CD, with music and sound effects, on which all stories are read.

These are a stand-alone resource and can be used by parents who may have little or no Irish. They provide parents with common Irish language phrases to use with their child.

Should further funding be secured, this project will be rolled out to all Irish-medium early years settings.

Altram also continued to create and produce resources to support and

enhance the Irish language competence of preschool children.

Regular in house targeted resources were developed by the Early Years Specialist team in order to meet the individual needs of specific groups.

A range of resource packs were designed by the Altram team to compliment training and they were distributed to all settings. These packs support staff in their delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum and effective language immersion experiences.

These included resources to support:

- Personal Social and Emotional Development;
- World Around Us activities;
- Creativity and the Arts;
- Language and Literacy;
- Planning, Observation and Assessment;
- Self-evaluation and planning for improvement.

Guidelines and handbooks to support the use of these resources were also devised and provided by Altram.

To further support language immersion methodology, ten revised Altram story boards and book stand were provided to each Naíscoil.

A number of Story Sacks were developed to include Irish language stories and support materials such as puppets and games. The stories and activities introduce the Irish language to children in a structured, fun way. They have proved to be very popular with practitioners and children. We hope to build on these in the future.

Membership of Altram allows access to our Book and Toy Libraries. Our Early Years Specialists assess need and deliver materials to Irish-medium settings as required.

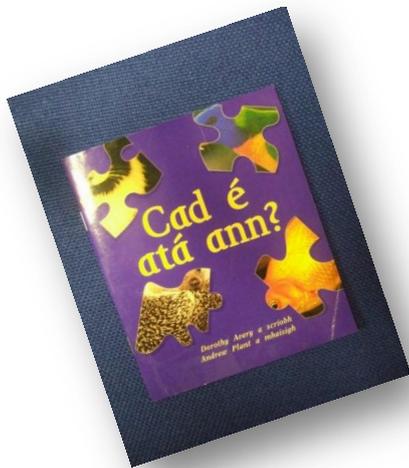


Toy and Book Library



Ar an Traen Story Sack

Advocacy



Altram continued to seek to influence the strategic direction of Irish-medium education through:

- collaboration and interaction with relevant statutory and Irish-medium organisations
- representation on relevant statutory and Irish-medium organisations
- responding to policy initiatives

Altram sought to maximise engagement and influence

and shape policy by developing effective partnerships with a range of relevant educational and social care bodies. They included key stakeholder groups such as DE, ETI, HSCB, Childcare Partnerships, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Altram representatives currently hold the following positions:

The Altram Chairperson is a board member of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (The Council for Irish-medium Education).

Two Trustees sit on the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme. Altram is also represented on the South Eastern Childcare Partnership Board by Trustees. Our Regional Capacity Officer is the Irish-medium Early Years representative on the Western Area Childcare Partnership and is also currently chairing that Partnership. He also chairs both the Strategic Funding Panel Sub-group and the Quality Assurance Sub-group.

Altram is also represented on the Regional Training and Workforce Development Group and the Regional SureStart Development Group.

We were actively engaged in the development of an

Irish-medium programme for 2/3 year olds (Sure Start). Representatives attend monitoring visits by DE/HSCB Sure Start; HSCB Workforce Development Group and DE's 2 Year Old Developmental Programme meetings.

Altram has always recognised the importance of research in the Irish-medium Early Years field and lobbied successfully with DE for a targeted research project. The organisation also made a major contribution to the Steering Group, in both written and oral form, and undertook to ensure good uptake of research interviews among Irish-medium early years staff. The research will investigate the outcomes for children in Irish-medium early years settings and produce recommendations.

Sectoral Funding

Altram has played a key role in advocating for the continuation of services for the Irish-medium early years sector. Decisions by the North South Ministerial Council led to a restructuring of the Irish language voluntary sector and a withdrawal of funding from all northern-based core-funded organisations. Altram was one of the organisations affected.

Funding for Irish-medium early years education was directed to the Dublin-based organisation, Gaelscoileanna. Altram made representations to the CAL Committee, to DE, engaged with the print and broadcast media to highlight its concerns about the new funding proposals and the real danger of a break in services to the Irish-medium early years sector in the north.

In particular, Altram noted the difficulties a Dublin-based organisation would face when attempting to work effectively across two jurisdictions.

It would involve:

- two differing legislative and regulatory contexts;
- two differing organisational and funding infrastructures;
- differences in the educational budgets and support infrastructures;
- differences in curriculum, assessment, inspection, initial and continuing professional development;
- differences in the role and regulation of early years education;
- differences in approaches and support structures for Irish-medium education.

When it became clear that no suitable support mechanism would be put in place to service the Irish-medium Early Years sector while the new arrangements were being considered, the Minister for Education, John O'Dowd MLA, announced interim funding arrangements, stating that "In light of the priority which I attach to the role for early years education services in the delivery of the Department's vision and goals I have agreed to provide

some short-term transitional funding to provide security of service in the immediate future."

(Ministerial Statement on the 27 June 2014)



Altram continues to advocate for secure longterm funding for the provision of services to the Irish-medium early years care and education sector.

Financial Review 2014-2015

Altram is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC103690. It operates under a Constitution dated 5th March 2012. It is classified under the following descriptions of charitable purposes:

- The advancement of education
- The advancement of arts, culture, heritage or science.

Altram is established to advance the following aims:

- The advancement of Irish-medium early years' care and education.
- The promotion and delivery of quality Irish-medium early years' care and education services to meet community need and demand.
- The involvement of families, parents and carers in the early learning experiences of their children.
- The provision of related training and support to the Irish-medium early years' sector.
- The development of Irish-medium early years' care and educational services as the foundation for Irish-medium education.

PRINCIPLE ACTIVITIES

Altram exists to promote high quality early years childcare through the medium of Irish and to support family involvement as a keystone in the development of an Irish Language community.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Reserves policy

The Charity's policy is to retain a level of free reserves, which matches the needs of the organisation both at the current time and in the foreseeable future. The Charity has developed a plan to establish and maintain this agreed level of free reserves. The Charity will continue to monitor compliance with this policy on a regular basis and the Committee will review the appropriateness of the policy annually.

Principal funding sources

The main sources of funding during the current year were as follows:

- Eastern Childcare Partnership
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Health and social Care Board
- Department of Education NI (through Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta)

Altram's funding from Foras na Gaeilge ceased in June 2014.

Altram
Balance Sheet
at 31 March 2015

	31.3.15	31.3.14
	£	£
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible Assets	3,438	6,303
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	34,204	20,616
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>29,207</u>	<u>47,286</u>
	63,411	67,902
CREDITORS		
Amounts falling due within one year	<u>(1,600)</u>	<u>(22,027)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS	<u>61,811</u>	<u>45,875</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIBALITIES	<u>65,249</u>	<u>52,178</u>
NET ASSETS	65,249	52,178
FUNDS		
Unrestricted Funds	8,564	9,103
Restricted Funds	<u>56,685</u>	<u>43,075</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>65,249</u>	<u>52,178</u>

This financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 28 September 2015

Structure, Governance and Management

Trustees are appointed or reappointed annually at the Annual General Meeting. All Trustees gave their time voluntarily and received no remuneration or other benefits.

Altram complies with regional child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures, and has its own policy in place. It observes regional vetting guidance and all staff are compliant with regulations.

TRUSTEES

Áine Andrews, Chairperson	Danny Cassidy, Regional Capacity Officer (Derry Office)
Theresa Brady, Treasurer	Aisling Walls, Early Years Specialist (Belfast Office)
Maureen Murray, Board Member	Bridgeen McGlinchey, Early Years Specialist (Derry Office)
Aoife Ní Phóilín, Board Member	Cáitlín Gamble, Early Years Specialist (Belfast Office)
Sue Pentel, Board Member	Wendy Finn, Early Years Specialist, Sure Start (Belfast Office)
The Head of Planning and Policy acts as Secretary to the Trustees.	

STAFF

Patricia K. Mc Alister, Head of Planning and Policy (Belfast Office)	Dónal Patton, Administrator (Belfast Office)
Máirín Murray, Head of Curriculum Development (Belfast Office)	Dáithí Mac Cába, Administrator, from February 2015

STAFF CHANGES DURING 2014-2015

Both Patricia Mc Alister and Máirín Murray, who job-shared, retired in 2014-15. During the year Dónal Patton and Wendy Finn moved on to other posts.

Altram welcomed Róisín McCann as a Sure Start Programme Support Specialist in January and Dáithí Mac Cába as Administrator in February 2015.

Public Benefit Statement

This year Altram registered with the Charity Commission for NI. It registered its purposes and the public benefits which flow from them as follows.

1. The advancement of Irish-medium early years care and education in Northern Ireland

Altram advances Irish-medium early years care and education through ensuring access to the high quality Irish-medium early years care and education, and promoting and representing the early years' sector to relevant agencies and authorities.

Children who attend Irish-Medium early years settings benefit as they are better prepared for successful transition to Irish-Medium primary schools. This benefits the child, families, carers, the school and ultimately the wider Irish language community.

Staff, professionals and committees gain hands-on training in support of their respective roles. Parents and carers access a range of language resources which support positive play and learning.

Relevant authorities and support agencies are better informed of the benefits, needs and challenges of the sector and the value of bilingual education.

2. To promote and deliver quality Irish-Medium early years care and education services to meet community need and demand

Benefits are demonstrated through the year-on-year increase in demand for Irish-Medium Early Years Education which now includes over 65 settings across the north. Children benefit from a quality early years' experience and the recognised benefits of bilingualism.

Government policies and statements (Belfast Agreement, Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, NI Programme for Government, 2011-2015) have identified the Irish language as a shared expression of our cultural wealth and therefore of public benefit. Increased numbers of speakers make a contribution to our intangible heritage.

3. To involve families, parents and carers in the early learning experiences

Benefits are demonstrated through:

- the increased uptake of places at Irish-Medium early years' settings;
- the number of parents and families opting to receive advice and support and learning opportunities;
- the enhanced confidence and self-esteem of children and parents;
- the increasing engagement of participants in government family support initiatives.

4. To provide related training and support to the Irish-Medium early years' sector

Benefits are demonstrated through uptake and delivery of services in a given year (2014–2015):

- ➔ over 400 Early Years Specialists' on-site support visits;
- ➔ attendance of almost 250 early years staff at cluster/in-service training and curriculum and child protection courses;
- ➔ positive outcomes from the Education and Training Inspectorate inspections;
- ➔ increased compliance with DHSSPSNI and Minimum Quality Standards.

Young children and families benefit from appropriately trained staff who, in turn, are more confident and competent as a result of additional training and support. Children benefit from parents who are more engaged and involved in their early education. Committees benefit from training in support of their roles.

5. The development of Irish-medium early years' care and educational services as the foundation for Irish-Medium education

Irish-medium education is the most effective way of producing fluent, confident Irish speakers who will contribute to the Irish language community, helping to maintain and preserve an important part of our shared cultural heritage.

The direct benefits which flow from this purpose are children who become fluent second language speakers and schools which benefit from the quality foundation experience of children and the early engagement of parents in their children's education.

Benefits to the wider community include enhanced awareness of the value of education and increased knowledge of a variety of aspects of our intangible culture such as language, literature, art, folklore etc. These benefits are demonstrated through:

- ➔ the growing numbers of children attending all phases of Irish-medium schooling;
- ➔ the increased involvement of parents and carers;
- ➔ the increased numbers of workers in the early years sector who opt for further training in language pedagogy and immersion language methodology.

Altram Membership 2014-2015

Ionad na Fuisseoige	Naíscoil Dhoire
Ionad Uíbh Eachach	Naíscoil Dhomhnach Óg Teo
Naí-aonad na bhFál	Naíscoil Dhún Pádraig
Naíonra an Droichid	Naíscoil Éadain Mhóir
Naíonra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Naíscoil Eoghain
Naíscoil an Chaistil	Naíscoil Ghleann an Iolair
Naíscoil an Chreagáin	Naíscoil Ghleann Darach
Naíscoil an Droichid	Naíscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
Naíscoil an Iúir	Naíscoil mBraithre Críostaí
Naíscoil an Lonnáin	Naíscoil Mhachaire Rátha
Naíscoil an Traonaigh	Naíscoil Mhic Reachtain
Naíscoil an tSeanchaí	Naíscoil na Banna
Naíscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Naíscoil na Daróige
Naíscoil an tSratha Báin	Naíscoil na Deirge
Naíscoil Aodha Rua	Naíscoil na gCrann
Naíscoil Ard Eoin	Naíscoil na mBeann
Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin	Naíscoil na Mona
Naíscoil Bhreandán	Naíscoil na Speiríní
Naíscoil Bhun Cranncha	Naíscoil na Tamhnaí Móire
Naíscoil Chamlocha	Naíscoil Naomh Éanna
Naíscoil Charn Tóchair	Naíscoil Neachtain
Naíscoil Chill Locha	Naíscoil Pháirc Ghlaise
Naíscoil Chois Feabhail	Naíscoil Sliabh gCuillinn
Naíscoil Chois Locha	Naíscoil Uachtar Tíre
Naíscoil Cholmcille Carrick Móire	Naíscoil Uí Neill
Naíscoil Cholmcille Seantalamh	

Sponsors and Acknowledgements

Our thanks also to our current funders and to all our partners who helped us achieve our goals in 2014–15:

The Department of Education, NI

Belfast and South Eastern Childcare Partnerships

The Health and Social Care Board