Press Release - European Language Label 2011 and the Language Learners of the Year

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the European Day of Languages, four Irish projects were awarded the European Language Label for innovative ways of teaching and learning languages by Maura Clancy, former Assistant Chief Inspector at the Department of Education and Skills, at an awards ceremony in All Hallows College today.

Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Chair of the Irish National Jury, commented that the large number of applications this year is evidence that excellent work is being done in the promotion of languages - our own official languages, other languages taught in our schools, and languages spoken by those of different nationalities who now live in Ireland. Ms. Ní Mhóráin observed "As our education system seems to be focusing more and more on literacy, we must not forget that the foundation of literacy is the spoken language, and that all languages, be they spoken in the home or learned in school, contribute to the development of literacy as well as contributing to the development of multilingual citizens ready to embrace the challenges of the current world economy".

In her keynote address, Maura Clancy stated that award-winning projects like those celebrated at today's ceremony provide a potential source of inspiration for others working with different languages and in different contexts. She added "The winners of today's European Language Label awards illustrate how it is possible to overcome the challenges of current curricula by thinking 'outside the box'. A recurring feature of this year's projects is the use of ICT in the learning of languages and in the practical application of language learning to the workplace. One might say that this year's winners have justified the "C" in ICT!"

The four winning projects are:

- **Online German Homework Submission Wiki**
- **Multicom 112 Extension Project**
- **Content and Language Integrated Learning training (CLIL) for mainstream teachers in the Post Primary classroom. Making the curriculum more accessible and inclusive for EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners**
- **Authentik Language Interactive**

The Language Learners of the Year 2011

Four Language Learners of the Year were also honoured at this event. The purpose of this award is to recognise outstanding achievements of individual language learners. This award targets learners, of any age and from any sector, who have tackled the challenges of learning a language and have emerged with significantly improved language skills.

The 2011 Language Learners of the Year are:
Jessica Gough, University of Limerick
Partly through her innate flair and passion for languages, but also through an exceptional level of assiduity and conscientiousness, both in and beyond the classroom, Jessica has invariably managed to achieve a high level of success in all three of her languages - Irish, French and Spanish. Tackling significant challenges, her excellent linguistic proficiency has also been complemented by undertaking a Comenius Assistantship and an Erasmus placement. During her time abroad, Jessica learned both Occitan and Catalan, a further example of the joy she experiences from language learning. The depth and consistency of her commitment to achieving an exceptional level of multilingualism is extremely impressive and a great credit to her motivation, determination and talent.

Simon Sztyrmer St. Brigid's N.S., Singland
Having started in 2nd Class with no English at all, Simon's progression in language learning has been impressive. As well as his native tongue, Polish, Simon also excels at English and Irish and shows great promise in French. He has acquired these skills with hard work, schoolwork, enthusiasm, motivation and perseverance. In school, he has volunteered at times as a translator/interpreter for new Polish children. He seizes every opportunity to use the language skills he has acquired as he encounters people who speak a language, e.g. in the corridor, on the yard etc. He has gained confidence and has integrated marvellously through his learning of languages.

Ralph Hurley O'Dwyer Newbridge College
Ralph has just completed his Leaving Certificate in Newbridge College, Co. Kildare, where he sat exams in Irish, French, German and Spanish. His genuine interest in languages, their patterns, similarities and idiosyncrasies drives him forward in independent work. He speaks Irish, French, German and Spanish fluently and has captained both the French and German debate teams. While Spanish was not taught at the secondary school he attended, he has pushed himself to master it at home primarily through his own diligence. Not only is Ralph concerned with deepening his own knowledge of languages, he promotes them to his peers through his competence, hard work and enthusiasm.

Paddy O’ Connor Central Library, ILAC Centre
Paddy embodies the principles and values of Lifelong Learning. Despite only taking up Japanese two years ago through the Open Learning Centre, Paddy has shown diligence and commitment in his linguistic endeavours and has achieved an Intermediate mastery level of Japanese. His determination at the age of 65 is remarkable. Through language learning and cultural appreciation, Paddy hopes that his new skills will enable him to continue working and to start a new life for himself in Japan. He hopes to do Sales Promotion for English Language Schools, when many would be happy to just retire. He is living proof that with a stimulated and enquiring mind, the possibilities are limitless, and that age is simply a number.

Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Chair of the Irish National Jury, praised the very significant achievements of each of these Language Learners and said that their experience served to underline the importance and relevance of language learning in Ireland today.
The European Language Label, which is simultaneously run in over 20 European countries, has been a major event in the languages' calendar since 1998. The Award recognises creative and innovative ways to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This year's winners were selected on the basis of excellence, innovation, creativity and their ability to serve as a model for others. The projects this year were exceptionally innovative, with learners ranging from primary school through to adults. The projects highlighted the importance of language learning in the creation of an inclusive multicultural society and the significance of real life situations in providing motivation for learners to develop and enhance their linguistic competence. For further information contact: Ariane Seitz or Lisa Fox, Léargas, 189 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, Tel: 01 887 1263 or languages@leargas.ie

Léargas is Ireland's National Agency for the management of national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training. Léargas is a not-for-profit organisation that operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. Léargas works on behalf of the Department to manage European, national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, training and youth and community work. For more information, go to www.leargas.ie or call Fionnuala Broughan at 01 887 1220.