



Early Irish as a New Minor Subject

Details for 2026/27

Why take this New Minor Subject?

Early Irish is the language in use in Ireland from the earliest period for which there are records up to the year 1200. The course covers the language and literature from the emergence of writing at the arrival of Christianity in Ireland to the production of the great saga manuscripts of the twelfth century.

If you are interested in acquiring a reading knowledge of Medieval Irish, in which the great saga literature of our manuscripts was written, and if you want to understand where today's Irish language comes from, then this is the course for you.

What will I learn?

The Early Irish course is taught through the medium of English. It covers the history of the Irish language from its first appearance on the Ogam inscriptions at the dawn of the Christian era in the fifth century, to the highly polished language of the sagas and law texts preserved in the medieval manuscript collections held in the libraries of Trinity, the Royal Irish Academy and the National Library.

What will I do?

In the first two years you will study the basics of Old Irish. At this stage you will read most literature in translation but you will be introduced to the original texts gradually and you will see how the language emerged and developed through the early Christian period.

Later in the course, the horizons are expanded; your study of the history of the language will take you back to its Celtic origins and forward to the dawn of Modern Irish. At this stage you will be reading prose and poetry as well as law and history in the original language, and a special course in palaeography will teach you how to read the manuscripts themselves.

How will this be assessed?

At all levels, you will be assessed by a combination of continuous assessment and exams. We use a mix of traditional and innovative continuous assessment methods: essays, project work, presentations, book reviews and dossiers, podcast creation. Language modules are assessed by written examination.

Contact Hours and Indicative Workload

4/5 hours per week in each semester. Language modules have weekly homework and an end-of-year exam. Literature modules have a blend of in-class tests and / or an essay / task during the term.

Entry Requirements

No additional requirements

Contacts

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