

KICKING OFF WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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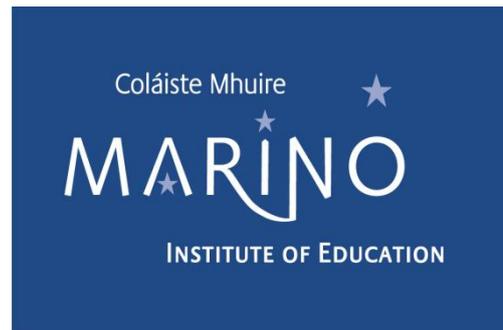
*Pilot Programme
Assessment*

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1. Summary

The aim of this report is to accurately document the feedback of teachers, coaches and children involved in the pilot phase of *Kicking Off with English Language Skills* and collate the recommendations that emerged from the research process. At a broad level this assessment found that *Kicking Off* was received positively by the teachers, coaches and children in the five participating schools. A summary of the strengths, limitations and the teachers recommendations are briefly summarised here and expanded in the following chapters.

Strengths of 'Kicking Off':

- The pack was assessed as well laid out and comprehensive.
- The units were judged as providing well thought out lesson plans which were easy for teachers to prepare.
- The subject matter made the lessons fun and engaging for children who were interested in football.
- The subject matter seemed to engage children who otherwise were not as interested in language learning or academic pursuits.

Limitations:

- The teachers felt lesson plans and games should be differentiated by age and by level of English language proficiency.
- A wider vocabulary should be included in the pack.
- The programme was not as engaging for those not interested in football.

Teachers' Recommendations:

Most of the teachers felt the class groups which would benefit from the *Kicking Off* the most are those:

- Already interested in football.
- Made up of diverse ethnic and linguistic origins.
- Taught by a teacher familiar to them.

All the teachers felt the resources and visuals in the pack should be updated:

- For use on a computer or interactive white board.
- Visuals redesigned using photographs or new illustrations to make the appearance of *Kicking Off* more appealing to children.
- A DVD of players demonstrating football moves should be made with a commentator clearly repeating the vocabulary of the movements shown.
- Copies of the resources on DVD should be made available for weaker students to practice at home.

Further Recommendations:

From the research and analysis process four further recommendations became apparent:

- The best results seem to come when teachers were involved in both the in-classroom lessons and coaching aspects of the programme.
- For maximum results teachers interested in sport should administer the programme.

- Good communication and co-operation between teachers and coaches should be fostered.
- The sports commentator and reporting element of the programme should be emphasised.
- A good sportsmanship ethos should be included in the pack, through which the teachers and coaches should stress that bad behaviour; bullying and racism are the antithesis to fair play and healthy competition.

2. Methodology

All five schools in the pilot participated in the assessment. In three of the five schools the researcher was able to talk with children who participated in the programme, however in two of the schools this was not possible as the children involved had aged out of primary school.

In four of the schools the researcher was able to talk with the teacher who administered the programme, in one case the teacher interviewed was one of two teachers who oversaw the programme, the second teacher had since left the school. In the fifth school the teacher who administered the programme was no longer in the school and no other staff member was directly involved in running the programme. The current English language support teacher was nominated by the school to talk about *Kicking Off*, she was in the school at the time the programme was administered and had known the children involved in the programme. She gave her impressions of how *Kicking Off* had worked, described the notes the previous teacher had given her and gave her impressions of the children's experiences and her recommendations as an educational professional.

All five schools were contacted by letter in first instance¹, which was then followed up by phone calls and emails. In the three schools which still had pupils who had participated in *Kicking Off* enrolled, a parental consent form was emailed to the schools to be

¹ See Appendix 1

signed by the children's parent or guardian² before they spoke to the interviewer. In schools that had more than one child the children were interviewed in a group.

Interviews were semi-structured and a separate teacher³ and child interview⁴ schedule were designed, as well as a child protection protocol which was explained to the children before the interview began. All interviews were electronically recorded and thematically transcribed. In school 1 through to school 4 interviews were conducted face to face, in school 5 the interview took place over Skype.

After the analysis and write up of this data a second phase of fieldwork was undertaken with the FAI coaches. These interviews were facilitated by Des Tomlinson from Football Association of Ireland [FAI]. All the coaches were contacted in the first instance by email. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and were recorded using a speaker phone. These interviews were guided by interview schedule 3⁵ and were thematically transcribed and analysed. One coach had since left the FAI and attempts to contact him by phone and telephone failed. In total, 12 qualitative interviews were conducted with 17 participants, 9 adults and 8 children. These interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 35 minutes in length.

² See Appendix 2

³ See Appendix 3

⁴ See Appendix 4

⁵ See Appendix 5

Fig 1: Summary of Respondents

School	Teacher	Coaches	Nominated Speaker	Children
1	1	1	N/A	Aged out
2	1	1	N/A	1/1 ⁶
3	1	N/Contact	N/A	2/1
4	1	1	N/A	5/1
5	N/A	1	1	Aged out
Total	4	4	1	8/3

⁶ The first number is the amount of children interviewed and the second amount of interviews; children were typically interviewed together in a group setting.

2. Structure of Class Groups

Description

The five class groups that participated in *Kicking Off* were largely similar in their demographic composition. In four of the five schools, children with English language support needs from 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th classes were selected by their school to take part in this programme. In one of these schools native English speakers⁷ were also included in the programme, as the teacher considered these children also needed support with their literacy and believed the subject matter would be engaging for them. In one school a full class group in 3rd class at the time were selected for participation in *Kicking Off*, as this class group was identified as requiring additional English language support. In this group, children with ESL needs and native speakers also jointly participated.

In four of the five schools, the groups varied in terms of their ethnic and linguistic origins, however in one group all the children who participated were Polish in origin and their first language was Polish. All the teachers reported that the standard of English language abilities in the class group varied, ranging from those with almost no verbal or written English language skills, to those with good conversational English but with low levels of English literacy. The gender composition of each class tended to favour boys, excluding the 3rd class group, there was an average 3:1 split between boys to girls. In the 3rd class group the gender composition of the class was more evenly distributed.

⁷ 'Native' speaker describes those for whom English is their first language, and largely describes those from the long standing community and those of Nigerian origin.

Teachers' Reflections

When the teachers reflected on the composition of the class groups, a number of common themes emerged. All the teachers felt that a child's prior interest or disinterest in football did impact on their enjoyment of *Kicking Off* and their engagement with the language lessons⁸. Likewise the level of English a child had at the start of the course was reported as somewhat important for their successful engagement with the lessons⁹. The ethnic mix of the class groups also seemed to be important. The teacher of the class group in which all the participants were of Polish origin reported that the excitement and novelty of spending time together, did seem to encourage the children to speak Polish and it took time to encourage them to speak English in class and become engaged in the lessons¹⁰.

However, most of the teachers felt that many of these difficulties could have been ameliorated if they had known the children in the group better before the course began. They pointed out that familiarity with the children prior to the course beginning would have helped them tailor the lessons specifically to the children's interests and language levels, and/or they would be quicker to control any behaviour issues that arose. Many also felt that knowing what the children were learning in their regular lessons would have also helped adapt *Kicking Off* to reinforce or build on the children's regular lessons.

⁸ Described in detail on page 29

⁹ Described in detail page 25

¹⁰ Described in more detail page 31 & 32

Therefore in general, most of the teachers felt that the class groups which would have benefited most from the *Kicking Off* programme were those of:

- Mixed linguistic and ethnic origin groups.
- With a prior interest in football.
- Moderate to strong English language skills.
- Taught by a teacher familiar to them.

3. Structure of Lessons

Description

Kicking Off with English Language Skills was rolled out in each school as once a week lesson over a consecutive 10 week period. It was piloted in four schools within the '09/'10 academic year and in one school within the '08/'09 academic year.

In four of the five schools *Kicking Off* was run as an after school programme. In all five schools the lessons were split into two 30 - 45 minute sections. The first half was devoted to in-classroom lessons and the second half to football skills training. In one school the in-classroom lessons were done within regular school hours and the training session after school. In this school the training session was optional and only children interested in football stayed after school to participate. Three schools reported that the children received a healthy snack after school and before the *Kicking Off* programme began in the afternoon.

In all the schools the teachers ran the in-classroom lessons and an FAI coach ran the training session. In two schools the teachers assisted the FAI coach in the training sessions, in the remaining schools the teachers did not participate in these sessions beyond a supervisory role. Three of the four coaches interviewed also sat in on all the classroom lessons while one coach sat in on most of the classroom sessions.

Children's Perspectives of Training Sessions

The children interviewed enjoyed the training sessions. They all remembered the FAI coach by name and described them as *cool*, *fun* and *funny*. They enjoyed practicing football skills and they found the activities fun. Some boys who described themselves as *very good at football* also said it allowed them to show off their skills in front of their peers¹¹. The children who received healthy snacks and said they enjoyed them and delighted in the novelty of eating snacks in class.

Teachers' Perspectives on Training Sessions

The teachers reported that the FAI coaches were very good and reinforced the language lessons the children had learned in class¹². However, all the teachers emphasized that it was important to have good communication with the FAI coach, so he knew which lessons they had undertaken in-class and could incorporate this into his training session. While the FAI coaches were praised by all parties interviewed, the teachers who took an active supporting role in the training sessions reported the most positive experiences of *Kicking Off*. Those involved in both halves of the programme reported the most satisfaction with the *Kicking Off* programme as it currently stands and interpreted the children's experiences and engagement with the programme the most positively of all the teachers interviewed.

¹¹ Discussed in more detail page 29

¹² No information on this could be received from school 5

Coaches' Experience of Training Sessions

All four coaches interviewed were positive about *Kicking Off*. They reported that the teachers and principals of the schools seemed interested in the programme and they were welcoming towards them. While all the coaches said they had good communication with the teachers, the coaches from the two schools where the teachers were more involved in the training sessions reported the best communication with the class teachers.

In one of these schools the FAI coach had previously visited that school and somewhat knew the teacher beforehand; the coach argued that the enthusiasm of this teacher and his love of sport made him easy to work with. In the other school the FAI coach sat down with the teachers before they started the pilot, and all three of them put together a plan of what they would do over the 10 weeks. As a team the teachers and coach planned out how to link the classroom lessons to the training sessions. For instance, after a lesson on adverbs they planned for the coach to play a game called *Treasure Chest* where the children would have to pick a card and then do the actions on that card, e.g. take a shot at goal, which reinforced the earlier in classroom lesson.

However, even though the coaches in the other two schools did not report as much communication with the teachers as those described above, they still described communication between themselves and the teachers as good. They believed sitting in on the classroom work helped them link training to the lessons. While all the coaches were positive about the resources pack, one coach

did believe more work could be done to tie-in the training sessions to the language lessons, so both halves of the programme reinforced each other and strengthened the children's language skills. Of the four teachers interviewed, one was slightly less positive than the others; the coach involved with this school was unavailable for interview. In this teacher's interview communication between the teacher and the coach was not described as positively as in the other interviews¹³, it could be tentatively speculated that communication issues between the teacher and coach may have impacted slightly on the effectiveness or enjoyment of *Kicking Off* in this school, but this is supposition only.

¹³ Although the teacher was overall still very positive about Kicking Off and the FAI coach, just not as effusive as the other teachers. This could also be simply be due to a difference in expression between this teacher and the others, or as her interview indicates the class group they used *Kicking Off* with were not a sporty group of children in general.

4. User Friendliness of Pack

Training

All the teachers reported they received enough training and good quality instruction on how to use the pack from Marino Institute of Education. They were also satisfied by the support available to them from Marino Institute of Education and the Football Association of Ireland. Barbara O'Toole and Des Tomlinson were singled out as especially helpful. The coaches reported they received enough training but one coach believed the link between the in-class lessons and training sessions could be made stronger.

Materials and Resources for Each Unit

All the teachers reported there was too much material to get through in each unit within one lesson. They felt there was enough material for at least two weeks in each unit. However, all the teachers added that this was a 'good complaint' as it gave them many options to use with their class, and if one lesson was not working they could change to another activity. The additional resources provided, such as the key visuals and maps were also described as good¹⁴.

Preparation

All the teachers said the *Kicking Off* pack and resource kit was well organised and provided them with almost all the resources they needed. However, each teacher reported different levels of preparation time required to organize the lessons. Some teachers said very little preparation time was needed, while others

¹⁴ This will be discussed in the next chapter

contended that a good bit of time was required to organize each class. The reason for this differential is difficult to assess, as all the teachers reported they used the photocopier and newspaper clippings to prepare materials. Indeed some teachers used an interactive white board, a T.V. or computer to show YouTube clips, yet the teachers who described using the most resources were not necessarily those who reported their preparation time as the longest. Therefore it seems likely that teachers' subjective ideas of what constitutes a long preparation period are largely responsible for this divergence. Moreover though, it is possible that some teachers had busier schedules than others at the time of implementation and therefore 15 minutes [for example] is a bigger portion of a class teacher's day than a resource teacher with fewer lessons. Another possibility is if a teacher is interested in football to begin with, preparation such as finding YouTube clips and preparing newspaper clippings may not be perceived by them as time consuming, in comparison to those who do not normally participate in such activities.

Teachers' Recommendations

In general the teachers were very happy with the pack, training, support and resources provided, however they did suggest that the pack would be more user friendly if it was updated for use on computer or interactive white board. Many teachers scanned the key visuals, resources and lessons so they could be used on a computer or interactive white board. They also pointed out that for many children the use of these resources was more engaging than a flip chart. They argued that having such resources on a disc

would save them some preparation time and in some instances would save on photocopying costs.

5. Effectiveness of Lessons and Games

Limitation of this Chapter

As at least two years have passed between the pilot of *Kicking Off* and the assessment, teachers and students could not provide an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of all the lessons and games in the pack. However the passing of time does allow an assessment of what has remained particularly memorable from the pack.

Lessons and Games

Vocabulary Cards

All the teachers used the vocabulary cards and generally found them good to very good. Indeed one teacher has continued to use the cards since completing the pilot. However, many teachers felt the visuals could be clearer as some of the pictures confused the children. For instance the visual to represent the word 'sideline' shows a line with a first aid kit beside it, two teachers reported that the children tended to fixate on the first aid box and could not understand how the picture represented a 'sideline'. Many teachers suggested that photographs may be clearer than drawn illustrations.

Team of the Week

Team of the week seemed to have mixed results in the schools. From the four class teachers interviewed, two reported it worked very well and two reported mixed results. In the schools that reported positive results the teachers said the children really got into the idea of team of the week, they enjoyed learning facts

about the clubs, the team jerseys and collecting information about the clubs throughout the week. Indeed in one school, the teacher reported that the children seemed to adopt each club for a week and gathered facts about them to tell the teacher. They also tried to catch the teacher out on club facts. All the teachers reported that using the map to pinpoint where in the world the clubs came from was engaging for the children, and learning about clubs from a child's country of origin was particularly enjoyable for the class. The children's interviews bore these assumptions out, as the children remembered *team of the week* and the use of the map, they also said it was interesting to learn about the clubs.

In the other two schools the teachers were not as sure how much the children enjoyed *team of the week*. They believed that many of the children were not very interested in football¹⁵ or the clubs chosen for inclusion. One teacher decided to incorporate different clubs into *team of the week* as they believed the children would not be interested in the clubs included in the pack. Some teachers also felt that the jerseys of the teams included were not diverse enough in colour or style for the children to distinguish between them easily. Indeed, for one teacher the colours used on the fact sheets were difficult to photocopy and they suggested that the sheets could be redesigned with the team colours restricted to a smaller space on the card.

¹⁵ This will be discussed further on page 29

Reporting and News of the Week

In most of the schools the use of *football news of the week* worked well. Many teachers used the format of collecting newspaper clippings to encourage the children to act as reporters or football commentators to describe the football events of the week. In one school this element of the lesson was described as the most popular part of *Kicking Off* amongst the children. In this school the teachers extended this activity by filming the children pretending to be reporters and playing this back to the class. The children from this school who participated in this activity remember it well and described it as 'fun' and 'cool'. However, some teachers commented that a format such as *news of the week* is one that is used with younger children and one has to be very careful about how it is presented to older children as they will disengage from an activity if they feel they are being infantilised.

Story: Pawel, Sinead, Ling and Abdul

The teachers reported they used the story of Pawel, Sinead, Ling and Abdul, however many could not remember the story or if the children were engaged by it. Some teachers remembered the pictures used to represent the characters in the story and they said the children did not seem convinced by them and tended to fixate on inaccuracies in the illustrations such as the children's shoes and the lack of socks on the characters. These teachers recommended that the visuals be redesigned or photographs be used instead of the current pictures. The teachers also felt that the children did not really 'buy into' the characters as kids like themselves; the teachers felt the storyline was pitched at a younger

age group. Indeed many of the teachers emphasized that even though the children may have weak English language skills many were approaching their teenage years and were very conscious of not being treated like younger children. They contended that even simplistic language lessons need to be packaged in such a way as to appeal to maturing children.

Red-Card Man and Beach Ball

Red card man also had mixed results. In three schools teachers reported it worked well, however in the other two schools one teacher reported it was too difficult for the children, while the other teacher thought it was not engaging enough for the older children in the class. Only one child remembered red-card man and she reported liking the game very much.

Two schools also opted to use the beach ball game. Both teachers reported that this worked well. The children in these two schools remembered the game and were enthusiastic about it, they were able to describe in detail how they had to catch the ball and make a sentence with the word that was under their finger. One boy even remembered having to do a 'silly dance' when he caught the ball and his finger landed on a certain word. Remembering such details after a substantial time lapse does indicate this game had a lasting impression.

Teachers' Recommendations

From the teachers interviews three recommendations are apparent:

- The visuals should be redesigned using photographs or new illustrations to make the appearance of *Kicking Off* more appealing to the children.
- Lessons and games should be differentiated by age
- Lessons and games should be differentiated by language ability.

6. Assessment of Language Outcomes

Teachers' Assessment

All of the five teachers interviewed contended to varying levels that the main strength of the *Kicking Off* programme was its development of descriptive language. Many of the teacher believed the children became more confident at offering information and participating in class. One teacher reported that other teachers informed him that:

Definitely the children were more participatory in class; they were offering more information in class and giving more news based on what they did at the weekend they had more vocabulary to describe what they had done, sport, games and T.V which they wouldn't have done before.

Other teachers stressed the strength of *Kicking Off* for developing oral language as it encouraged the children to speak instead of simply emphasising written work. Some teachers felt the inclusion of informative text such as reports and sports statistics were good for developing the children's descriptive language abilities. Most of the teachers liked that one aspect of language was focused on in each unit, such as nouns one week and verbs the next. Other aspects of the language lessons had a mixed response from the teachers. Some teachers believed the grammar aspects of the programme were good, while others felt grammar was one of the weakest aspects of the programme. One teacher felt the comprehensions were good in the pack while another described the comprehensions as adequate.

However many of the teachers stressed that the vocabulary learned in *Kicking Off* was very specific to football and they were not sure how well it translated to other contexts. Many of the teachers were concerned that some children had very poor language levels and they were not sure if learning vocabulary specific to football was appropriate before they had developed more basic language skills.

Children's Assessment

Of the eight children that were interviewed, six children said they required help with their English; the other two boys already had English as their first language. Of these children all agreed that *Kicking Off* had helped their language skills. Indeed one girl said that *Kicking Off* was good for picking up new words, and she felt more relaxed trying out new words in the class. She also said that her Mother said '*I was better at describing things afterwards, better than I was before it.*' The two children who did not need English Language support said that *Kicking Off* helped the '*Polish boys in our class know what to say.*' The children could not remember any language lessons they did not like.

Comparison to Other ELS Programmes

Most of the teachers rated the *Kicking Off* programmes slightly better than other ELS programmes they had used. They believed for children interested in football it was a good 'hook' to get them interested in English language learning. They believed the children's interest in learning about football encouraged them to work harder to gain English language skills so they could communicate their opinions of teams and players with greater ease to their peers.

Indeed, all the teachers said that *Kicking Off* was better fun for the children than traditional ELS packs and the light-hearted aspect of some of the lessons did seem to free some children from the embarrassment that sometimes comes with learning new words and trying new sentences structures for the first time. In one school a resource teacher used the *Kicking Off* pack to engage a 6th class boy with very little English language not in the class. She reported to the *Kicking Off* teacher that the lessons worked quite well as this boys' enthusiasm for football made him engage with the language lessons more than she believed he would have otherwise.

However, some teachers did feel that other ELS packs offered a greater variety of vocabulary development in more diverse areas which they believed would be more useful for children in the long run. Some teachers also felt other ELS programmes contained more basic language lessons such as phonics which is useful for those with very little English language proficiency. Some teachers were concerned that the lessons in *Kicking Off* were too advanced for many of the children and a more simplistic version of the lessons must be developed for those with very weak English skills. They also stressed that the benefits of the *Kicking Off* programme were only useful for those interested in football, otherwise *Kicking Off* was simply another ELS lesson for children not interested in football and perhaps was a little less effective at engaging these children than other ELS programmes¹⁶.

¹⁶ Explored in more depth page 29

Teachers' Recommendations

In terms of the language lessons the teachers had a number of suggestions:

- A wider vocabulary should be included in the pack
- Weaker students should be given next week's work a week beforehand so they can prepare lessons themselves, which would save them from the embarrassment of not being able to keep up with the class.
- A DVD of players doing certain football moves should be made with a commentator clearly repeating the vocabulary of the movement shown. The words should be clearly spelled out on the DVD. This DVD could also be copied for weaker students to practice at home.
- The English learning strategy of 'Total Physical Response' [TPR] should be included in the pack. The objective of this strategy is to integrate lessons such as vocabulary and sentence structure with physical movements which help children understand the context of words and help them remember the lessons better.
- Include 'native' English speakers who need help with their literacy, as the subject matter would be interesting for them and those learning English could practice with 'native' speakers. This may also lead to friendships which would encourage ELS children to join other clubs after school and have a wider impact on their integration.

7. Children's Experience of 'Kicking Off'.

Children's Reported Experience of 'Kicking Off'

The children interviewed for this assessment were very positive about *Kicking Off*, three children remembered the programme well and the others recalled it after some prompting. The children largely remember the training part of the programme and described how they liked learning football skills, the FAI coach and having a snack during the class. Moreover, many of the boys boasted that the programme allowed them to show off how good they were at football and how 'sporty' they were. All the children in the sample described themselves as sporty and all the children but two said they really enjoyed football. Two children said they liked football but enjoyed volleyball and basketball more. The children reported that those children in their class who liked football enjoyed *Kicking Off* the best.

However, all the children reported that there were children in their classes who did not enjoy *Kicking Off* as they did not like football. They reported that many boys and girls did not like the lessons or training because they were not 'into football'. Of the children interviewed both the boys and girls said the girls were not as interested in *Kicking Off* as the boys, they also reported that non-sporty boys did not like *Kicking Off*. In one school the child interviewed said one boy in particular 'hated football' and he did not like *Kicking Off*. She also said he did not like the other children in the class because they were all interested in football and liked to show off their football skills in front of him.

Teachers' Assessment of Children's Experiences

The children's comments that girls and non-sporty boys did not really like *Kicking Off* were mirrored in the teachers' assessments. Even the teachers that were the most positive about *Kicking Off* believed it worked particularly well for their groups as the children involved were into sports, but even in these classes they reported that the girls and some boys were not interested in football and therefore they were not as enthusiastic about the programme as the others. However, these teachers felt the non-sporty children still got something out of the programme, and argued that while the children may not have been as interested in lessons like *team of the week* they still enjoyed the geography aspect of this lesson. Another teacher felt the class group the programme was piloted with were a non-sporty class in general and therefore didn't really get into *Kicking Off*. She believed that if it was used with a class interested in sport it would have been more engaging for the children. However, in one school, the teacher argued that by the end of the programme two girls who were not into football had developed an interest in the game and joined the school team in the next academic year.

One teacher believed a non-sporty boy in her class may have been bullied during the *Kicking Off* programme. As this was the same school in which the child interviewed said one of the boys in the class did not like football or those in the class, it is possible that this boy's disinterest in football opened him up to some sort of bullying during the *Kicking Off* programme. However, the teacher in this school did not believe this bullying was solely due to this

boy's lack of interest in sport, but also drew from the novelty of the class which caused some of the boys to become boisterous. She pointed out that when the school day ends sometimes the authority of the school can diminish and teachers must work extra hard to contain the children's behaviour and their tendency to push boundaries. She also felt that the shared linguistic and ethnic origin of the children in this class allowed them to use Polish to ridicule each other without the teacher being fully aware of it. She also argued that their shared linguistic knowledge and the teachers' lack of Polish proficiency subverted the power balance between them to a certain extent.

Teachers' Recommendations

In light of this there were several recommendations from teachers:

- *Kicking Off* should be targeted at specific groups that are already interested in football.
- Children should sign a 'good behaviour contract' in the presence of the principal to remind them to be fair to all the children in their class and do their best in the lessons.
- Class groups should be made up of those from diverse ethnic and linguistic origins.

8. Concluding Recommendations

Further to the summary which started this report, there are a number of issues which became apparent through the research process that have possible implications for development of this programme for roll out at a larger scale.

Differentiating Lessons by Age and Language Level

It is likely that the lessons and games in the pack will need to be differentiated by age group and English language levels. Two separate strands of lessons and games seem to be required; one strand for those from the younger years which span English language proficiency levels from basic to advanced, and a programme for older age groups which also ranges from basic to advanced. It is unlikely that language lessons that are designed for the younger years would be appropriate for use with older children with lower levels of English language proficiency, as older children regardless of their language skills are likely to draw back from lessons they feel are infantilizing.

Redesign of Visuals and Resources

Indeed, in order to help engage older children a redesign of the visuals in the pack is recommended. A polished visual presentation is likely to enhance the reputation of *Kicking Off* as 'cool' among the children and encourage them to become involved in the programme. An update of the visuals onto softcopies is also recommended, both for the reduction of teacher's preparation time and also as the use of technology can also be engaging for children. The addition of a DVD illustrating some of the vocabulary

and demonstrating football skills also offers a novel way to engage children and may provide a way to reach more basic learners.

Administration of Kicking Off

From the feedback process it can be tentatively suggested that the best results seemed to come from the classes in which the teachers were actively involved in both the in-classroom lessons and the training sessions. This seemed to be the case for two reasons, firstly, the teachers and coaches in these schools appeared to work well together and communicated well, secondly the coaches reported that these teachers had an interest in sport and were enthusiastic about the programme. Therefore in administering *Kicking Off* it is desirable to have a teacher interested in sport involved, and for the teachers and coaches to communicate well with each other, ideally meeting before the course begins to jointly develop a teaching plan..

However the feasibility of this must be examined. Many of the coaches argued that at a broad level schools and teachers do not always prioritise sport and few teachers have the skills to teach P.E. to a high level. Indeed they argued that a minority of teachers with sporting skills are under a lot of pressure to take on extra-curricular activities such as coaching or to take P.E. lessons for teachers who lack the skill or confidence to teach sport. They were therefore worried if this programme was rolled out it would further pressurise teachers who already put in extra hours at their schools. Moreover, if *Kicking Off* was expanded the workload on FAI coaches would need to be examined. While all the coaches said they

enjoyed the programme a number of them pointed out that they had to travel a considerable distance to the schools and it wasn't always easy to fit *Kicking Off* comfortably within their other duties. Some of the coaches believed they could take on the extra work conducting *Kicking Off* in several schools would entail, others were more sceptical and believed extra coaches would need to be recruited or local coaches outside the FAI would need to become involved in the programme.

One solution to this may be for the FAI to provide training to teachers so they can deliver the training sessions themselves. Two advantages of this are apparent; firstly if one person delivers both aspects of the course it is more likely there would be continuity between the lessons and training to reinforce the language lessons. Secondly, if teachers deliver the training sessions the workload of FAI coaches would not be disturbed beyond the initial period of the teachers' upskilling. However there are some disadvantages to this, having two people deliver the programme halves the workload on teachers and makes it less demanding on their time, and working collaboratively with an outside expert has the potential to develop new ideas among the stakeholders which may enhance the delivery of *Kicking Off*. Also there is the problem, already touched on, that teachers' abilities to teach the training sessions may be limited if they are not already sporty, and those teachers that do possess these skills may already be taking on extra-curricular activities.

Football Theme

However, no matter the administration or visual presentation of *Kicking Off* it is important to bear in mind that football is not universally liked by all children and some children may find *Kicking Off* at best no different from other ELS programmes and at worst may actively dislike the programme due to their dislike of football. Indeed, it is advisable to remember that while the use of football for language development is an innovative approach, sports can also encourage gendered performances from children [for instance macho conduct or submissive behaviour] which may exacerbate competition and antagonism among children unless it is explicitly diffused by teachers, or negated by the structure of the programme. Conversely though, while bullying behaviour was found in the pilot, *Kicking Off* also proved to be engaging for children interested in sports generally and football in particular. The programme appeared to have the capacity to engage children [from both migrant and long-standing communities] in language learning who may otherwise not be as interested in academic pursuits.

Augmentation of Pack

In light of this, an extension to the *Kicking Off* programme seems advisable. This assessment suggests two particular suggestions for incorporation into the programme, a greater emphasis on the reporting/commentary element of the toolkit and the development of a good sportsmanship ethos within the lessons and games.

Reporting / Commentary Extension

As discussed above, the reporting and commentary aspects of the pack were generally reviewed positively by the teachers and students. These activities seemed to be engaging, fun and productive in terms of language development. The extension of this aspect of the toolkit would seem to have two possible advantages. Firstly, by broadening the programme to include sports commentary it would perhaps be easier to include a wider vocabulary into the language lessons which many of the teachers felt was necessary. Secondly, a focus on reporting may be more enjoyable for those not as interested in football, while staying within the theme of football and sports in general.

Inclusion of a Good Sportsmanship Ethos

While the majority of children seemed to enjoy *Kicking Off*, as discussed above, others may have been bullied during the programme. Thus, while the theme of football has the potential to be engaging and ‘hook’ children into language learning, their wider associations with football as a ‘macho’ sport or as an opportunity to show off to their peers may have the unintentional consequence of compounding some children’s reputation as ‘un-sporty’ or ‘strange’ through their dislike of the sport.

However, within the ethos of football there is also a potentially powerful antithesis to this in the foundation of sport in fairness, healthy competition and sportsmanship. Therefore, it is recommended that *Kicking Off* be redeveloped to include modules on sportsmanship and for the programme to be administered with

a specific focus which emphasises that bullying, intolerance and cheating are unacceptable in sport, as being a good sportsperson is based on a foundation of respect and fair play. Indeed including modules on respect also has the potential to widen the scope of vocabulary development and may have wider implications for the children's behaviour, both during the programme and for their interaction with their peers in general.

Appendix 1

Letter to Principal



Dear Principal,

In 2009 Marino Institute of Education [MIE] in association with the Football Association of Ireland [FAI], produced a resource pack entitled 'Kicking off English Language Skills' which was piloted in your school.

It is now time to conduct an assessment of the effectiveness of this resource pack. I will contact you this week to arrange a time between the 3rd and 11th May, to call to your school to gain feedback from key personnel on their experiences of using the materials.

I would like to talk individually with yourself, teachers and/or coaches who used the resource pack and if possible any children or parents who may still be in the school and remember the programme. Interviews will take between 10 and 30minutes (max).

Your feedback will be written into an anonymised assessment report, which will highlight ways in which this approach to teaching language skills can be improved upon in the future.

I look forward to gaining your crucial insights on this project as a service user and as an experienced educational professional. Please do not hesitate to contact me on the details above if you have any questions or Barbara O'Toole at MIE on Barbara.O'Toole@mie.ie . I will be in contact with you soon.

With Kindest of Regards,

Lindsey Garratt, PhD, HDip (Stats), MSocSc, BA

Appendix 2

Parents' Permission



Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to you to request your permission to talk to your child.

In 2009 he/she took part in a programme called 'Kicking Off with English Language Skills', which aimed to improve English language skills through sport based activities. I have been employed to find out from the children if they liked these lessons and what their experiences of learning English through these lessons were like.

I will talk to your child for no more than 30 mins in a group of three. I will record the conversation we have and write a report on the children's experiences. Your child will not be asked any personal questions or any questions about their family. In the final report your child's name will never be used and no details given which may be used to identify them. The final report aims to highlight ways in which this approach to teaching language skills can be improved upon in the future.

If you are happy for your child to take part please sign below.

With Warmest Regards,

Lindsey Garratt.

Child's Name:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule 1 – Teacher / Coach, Primary user of Resource Pack

1. General Impressions, lasting memories

- Can you remember when you started using the pack?
- Over what period of time did you use the pack, days/weeks/over a term?
- Which classes/age group did you use the pack with?
- Did you complete all 8 units or part/none of the pack?
 - o Why?

- Overall what did you think of the 'Kicking off with English Language' skills pack?

- Does anything in particular stick out in your memory as working well?
 - o Example?
 - o Why do you think that worked well?

- Does anything in particular stick out in your memory as NOT working well?
 - o Example
 - o Why do you think that did not work well?

2. User friendliness of pack

- How easy / difficult was it for you [as a teacher] to use the pack and prepare lessons from it?

- How long on average do you think it took you to prepare each lesson?
- Were there any resources that you had in the school which made it easy to use the pack – i.e. internet, televisions, access to printing in school, access to maps other?
- Where there any resources that you **lacked** in the school which you think would have made the lessons more effective/fun? - i.e. internet, televisions, access to printing in school, access to maps other?
- Would you have liked additional support from the developers of the pack in the use of the pack?
 - o Additional training / background information /resources? Other? Please specify
- Would you have liked additional support from the FAI in the use of the pack?
Additional training / background information / resources?
Other? Please specify.

3. Effectiveness at achieving Language Skills Goals

- Did you use ‘team of the week’?
 - o If so, how well did it work / not work
 - o Why do you think it worked well?
 - o If not, why not?

- What did you think of the visual aids?

- o Why?

Did the visual aids enhance the lesson delivery?

If so, how?

If not, why not?

- o Examples of visual aid(s) that worked well
- o Example of visual aid(s) that did not work well

- Can you remember any of the activities you used? [leave open, then prompt]

- o Guess the word
- o Red card man [hang man variant]
- o Pasting words on beach ball, throwing ball
- o Vocabulary cards in a bag link to key visuals
- o Who am I? yes/no
- o Placing cards on visuals, maps?
- o Commentary games?
- o World cup games / designing quiz

- For each game mentioned - how effective was it for developing vocabulary and grammar? [Use pack as prompt if they cannot remember game]

4. Impression of children's experience

- How interested do you think the children were in these lessons?
- Do you think they had any favourite parts?
 - o Examples

- Why do you think the children related to these aspects in particular?
- If not, why not?
- Did you use the story of Pawel, Sinead, Ling and Abdul?
 - If so, how well did it work / not work
 - If not, why not
 - Did the children seem to like/not like care/not care about the characters?
- Was it easy/hard to motivate the children engage with this programme?
- Did some children particularly seem to like it?
 - Why do you think?
- Did some children seem to particularly dislike it?
 - Why do you think that?

5. Assessment and Recommendations

- Do you think the use of sport to encourage language learning had any particular **benefits**?
 - Examples
- Do you think the use of sport to encourage language learning had any particular **drawbacks**?
 - Examples

- Do you think the children's language skills had improved by the end of the programme?
 - o Why?
 - o Examples?
- Do you think this pack was better/ worse/ about the same, at engaging the children as other language programmes?
 - o Why?
 - o Examples?
- Did you do anything different than what was not in the pack?
 - o If not, why not?
- If yes, please describe what you did?
 - o How well did it work?
 - o Would you recommend this to be included in the pack?
- Have you continued to use any aspects of the pack / games in the pack in your language lessons
 - o If so why? / If not why not?
- Would you recommend the use of this pack in other schools the way it currently is?
 - o Yes/ no why?
- What changes would you recommend is made to the pack?

- Why/ examples?

-Anything else you want to tell me about the pack before we finish?

Appendix 4

Child Protection Protocol and Interview Schedule 2

Thank you **[Names]** for talking to me. I am going to talk to you about some lessons you did with **[teacher's name]** in **[class year they participated]** to see if you liked the lessons / didn't like them, or liked some things and not others. This little thing here will record your voice so I will remember what you said later because I can't write as fast as you can talk. If I ask you about anything you don't want to talk about tell me, and we can skip it and if you want to stop at any time that is no problem.

Everything you tell me will be private and your name will not be used when I write about what you tell me. I won't be telling your teacher, your friends or your family anything we talk about today but if you tell me something that worries me we may have to tell someone else to make sure you and other people are safe, but if that happens we will talk to you about it first.

Are you happy to have a chat with me for a little while?

- Can you remember having English class with [teacher name] in [class year]?
 - *[Open and then prompt?]*
- Can you tell me some of the things you used to do in that class?
 - *[Open and then prompt?]*
- Did you do any games like:
 - Guess the word
 - Red card man
 - Pasting words on a beach ball, throwing ball
 - Who am I? Yes/No
 - World Cup games
- *[If they can't remember games begin to describe them as prompt]*
- *[When they remember]* Please tell me about these games/ do you have any stories about playing them?
- Do you think you learned any new words when you were playing these games? Yes/No Why/Why not?
- Do you remember the story about Pawel, Sinead Ling and Abdul?
 - *[If not remember describe story]*
 - What did you think of them?
 - Did you like them/not like them?
- What did you think about team of the week?

- *[Describe if they cannot remember]*
 - What did you do for team of the week
 - Did you like it / not like it? Why/Why not

- Do you think anyone else in your class really liked these lessons? Or really didn't like them? Why?

- Did you like these lessons on football better/worse/or about the same as other English language lessons? Why?

- At the end of your lessons on football with [teacher's name] in [class year] do you think your English was better/worse/about the same as before you started?

- If a new boy/girl were to start doing the lessons that [teacher's name] did with you what advice would you give them so they can get on well with the lessons?

Appendix 5

Interview Schedule 3 - Coaches

- Which school were you involved with?

- Can you describe for me a typical coaching session with Kicking Off?

- How well did you get to know the children?

- What would be your impression of the children's experiences?
 - Some love
 - Some not love

- What was your impression of the teachers' experience of Kicking off?

- How much contact did you have with the teacher?
 - keep you up to date on what language lessons they had completed so you could structure your coaching practice accordingly

- Did you feel welcome in the school?

- What would you say is the biggest **strength** of Kicking Off?

- Anything you would **change** about Kicking Off?