Background Paper And Brief For The Review Of
Junior Cycle Modern Languages

Contents

1. Introduction

Modern Languages will be introduced in 2017 as a Phase Three subject as part of the new junior cycle. The curriculum and assessment specification for the subject will be published a year earlier in September 2016. This paper provides a background for the development of the specification for Junior Cycle Modern Languages. It begins by presenting a brief overview of the existing integrated curriculum for French, German, Italian and Spanish, and of the format of the Junior Certificate examinations in those languages, before commenting on the relationship between the syllabus and current assessment practices.

The paper outlines significant developments at European and national level since the introduction of the present syllabuses which are relevant to the development of the new specification. It explores the experience of students in language classrooms, and presents some outcomes and trends regarding performance and uptake in the Junior Certificate examination. The paper goes on to consider three criteria necessary for language vitality and linguistic diversity. Finally, it sets out the brief for the development of the specification.

The appendices present the common reference levels and the self-assessment grid of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and an example of a syllabus based on the Framework.

2. Background: theory, syllabus and assessment

2.1 The "Communicative Revolution"

In 2003 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published a discussion paper, authored by Professor David Little of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin.[1] *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a discussion paper* was intended to stimulate discussion on a range of issues as background to a review by the NCCA of languages in post-primary education.

The paper begins by citing a definition of the curriculum category "language" from a 1987 publication by the NCCA's predecessor, the Curriculum and Examinations Board:

Language is

- the chief means by which we think—all language activities, in whatever language, are exercises in thinking

- the vehicle through which knowledge is acquired and organised

- the chief means of interpersonal communication

- a central factor in the growth of the learner's personality

- one of the chief means by which societies and cultures define and organise themselves and by which culture is transmitted within and across societies and cultures.[2]

The 2003 discussion paper is as relevant today as when it was written. Two of its sections in particular are essential background reading for the present review of languages in junior cycle: Section 5, "The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio" and Section 6, "Trends in Language Teaching".

Section 6 of the discussion paper describes what the author refers to as the "communicative revolution" of the 1970s and 80s.[3] This development was in part a reaction to "the growing frustration at the failure of traditional teaching approaches to develop learners' communicative proficiency in the target language".[4] The teaching of foreign languages up until the 1960s had largely been dominated

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[1] D. Little, *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a discussion paper* (Dublin, NCCA, 2003),

[2] Curriculum and Examinations Board, *Report of the Board of Studies for Languages* (Dublin 1987), p. 2.

[3] For a series of informative Vimeo presentations by Professor Little on models of teaching and learning languages, see http://languagesinitiative.ie/resources/teachingandlearning/approaches-methodologies/models-of-teaching-and-learning-languages-with-prof-david-little.

[4] Little, p. 34.

by the grammar-translation method, modelled on the teaching of Classical languages. Students were presented with points of grammar and items of vocabulary, which they then practised by translating texts from and into the target language. The focus was almost entirely on content, and paid scant attention to the skills of communication. The grammar-translation method was succeed briefly in the 1960s by the audio-lingual and audio-visual methods, in which students learned language by listening and repeating sentences containing various structures in the target language, often in language laboratories— drill and practice, in other words.

While the audio-lingual and audio-visual methods remedied some of the deficiencies of the grammar-translation method, they did not go far enough in providing students with the skills necessary for effective communication in the target language. The "communicative revolution" came about with the recognition that language learning involves **process** as well as **content**. If using language is a skill, then the best way to learn it is by doing it. In other words, the communicative approach is one where using the language to communicate is the **means** as well as the **goal** of learning. Students learn to communicate by communicating in the target language. However, this does not do away with the need to teach grammar. As the discussion document explains:

> *Communicative theory recognised that language learning involves process as well as content, but it also recognised that explicit knowledge about language, including grammar, is essential to the development of communicative efficiency. However, communicative theory was more than a combination of the best elements of the grammar-translation and audio-lingual/audio-visual methods. One of its key principles was that meaning should always have priority over form. This had two consequences: (i) that the primary goal but also the preferred channel of learning, should be the communication and (especially) the negotiation of meaning; and (ii) that the explicit treatment of target language grammar should always be firmly embedded in a communicative context. Under the impact of research into second language acquisition, communicative theory also emphasised the importance of providing learners with a rich diet of authentic texts from which they could derive the input required for acquisition. These principles remain as valid now as they were in the 1980s. [5]*

This "communicative revolution" of the 1980s is the background against which the Department of Education introduced the present Junior Certificate modern language syllabuses.

2.2 The Junior Certificate Modern Language syllabuses

The Junior Certificate French, German, Italian and Spanish syllabuses, examined for the first time in 1992, share a common framework, developed initially for French and German in the 1980s. The

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[5] Little, p. 35.

syllabuses are virtually identical, apart from the examples or language exponents specific to each of the four languages, which are inserted at the appropriate points in the syllabus documents.

The syllabuses are communicative, "organised around the needs, expectations and interests which pupils bring to the foreign language classroom." They recognise that "the adolescent learner in the Irish context seldom needs to use the target language in an authentic exchange with a native speaker", and that the learner's real needs "centre around using and understanding the target language as a means of communication and instruction in the classroom." In other words, it is taken for granted that much of the classroom interaction will consist of communication with the teacher and with fellow-students in the target language. These communicative experiences are intended to prepare students for communication with native speakers when opportunities arise, something which happene less often for most students in 1992 than is the case now.

The **behavioural objectives** of the syllabus are organised under twenty-two **general activities or themes.** Of the twenty-two activities/themes, two involve only **receptive** use of the language, while the remaining twenty involve mainly **productive** use of the language.

The two receptive activities/themes are:

1.   Listening for information

2.   Reading for information.

The twenty productive activities/themes are:

1.   Meeting and getting to know people

2.   Engaging in and talking about leisure pursuits

3.   Making plans

4.   Visiting and staying in a [French/German/Italian/Spanish] speaking home

5.   Talking about your own family and home

6.   Talking about animals

7.   Talking about the weather

8.   Talking about things you have done, things that have happened, and the way things were

9.   Talking about school and communicating in the classroom

10. Travelling

11. Coping with not feeling well or with a minor accident

12. Finding out and telling people the time, the day, the date

13. Finding your way and helping other people to find their way

14. Eating and drinking and talking about food and drink

15. Shopping

16. Using the telephone

17. Writing a short note/postcard

18. Writing a short personal letter

19. Writing for holiday information or to make a booking

20. Filling in a simple form based on information based on information supplied

For each of these general activities/themes, a number of **communicative tasks** is listed. For example, under "Talking about the weather", the communicative tasks are: Asking about the weather, describing the weather, and saying what you do when the weather is good and bad.

Each communicative task is supported by some **exponents of language** which might be required to fulfil the task. In the case of talking about the weather, for example, the exponents for French are: "Impersonal *il + faire + beau/ mauvais/ chaud/ froid/ du vent* (...). Impersonal *il + pleuvoir (...). Quand il fait ... / pleut, je ...* "

2.3 The Junior Certificate Modern Language examination

The syllabus documents state that "the aim of the examination will be to test communicative competence in respect of the themes and tasks".

The present Junior Certificate examination in the four languages consists of a written examination and an optional oral examination. Assessment is at two levels, Ordinary and Higher: the syllabus is the same for both, but students at Ordinary are expected to execute the tasks in a simpler way. The written paper, set and marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), contains three sections:

Section I: Listening Comprehension

Section II: Reading Comprehension

Section III: Written Production

The optional oral examination is administered by the student's teacher, either using a series of questions and role-play scenarios prescribed by the SEC or a format devised by the teacher and submitted to the SEC.

The written examinations for the French, German, Italian and Spanish are similar in content and layout. Section I requires the candidates to listen to a series of short recordings and answer questions in English/Irish on the content. Section II requires the candidates to read a number of items—typically advertisements, posters, short journalistic excerpts—and to answer questions in English/Irish on the content. Section III requires the candidate to write, in the target language, a short letter and a note based on information supplied.

The total marks allocated to the written paper are 320. The weighting of the marks in the examination differs from Ordinary to Higher level, as follows:

	Higher Level		Ordinary Level	
	Marks	% of 320	Marks	% of 320
Listening	140	44%	140	44%
Reading	100	31%	120	37%
Writing	80	25%	60	19%

For candidates who take the optional oral examination, the total mark is 400, and the breakdown is as follows:

	Higher Level		Ordinary Level	
	Marks	% of 400	Marks	% of 400
Listening	140	35%	140	35%
Reading	100	25%	120	30%
Writing	80	20%	60	15%
Oral	80	20%	80	20%

The table below compares the balance between the marks allocated to receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) at both levels, for those students who take the written paper only and those who take both written and oral examinations.

		Receptive skills	Productive skills
Higher Level	**Written only**	75%	25%
	Written & oral	60%	40%
Ordinary Level	**Written only**	81%	19%
	Written & oral	65%	35%

2.4 Relationship between syllabus and examination

One of the most striking features of the syllabus is its strong emphasis on oral communication, and on oral production in particular. Twenty of the twenty-two general activities/themes are productive in nature, and sixteen of those twenty involve oral production. The accompanying communicative tasks are described using terms such as "asking", "saying", "discussing".

It is remarkable then, that the balance of marks in the Junior Certificate examination is weighted overwhelmingly in favour of the two receptive skills, listening and reading. This is especially true for the vast majority of students who do not take the optional oral examination. For these students, only 25% of the marks are awarded at Higher Level for productive language, consisting entirely of written production. In the case of Ordinary level students who do not take the oral examination, less than 20% is awarded for productive language.

The fact that the examination questions on listening and reading comprehension are answered in English/Irish reduces even further opportunities for candidates to demonstrate competence in the target language. It also creates the backwash effect in teaching and learning, whereby a significant amount of classroom interaction is in English/Irish rather than in the target language.

It could also be argued that assessing written production only for certification purposes unduly favours the more academically able student and places students with learning difficulties, who might well perform better in oral communication, at a disadvantage.

The mismatch between syllabus and assessment, then, is glaring. The question must be asked, Does the present Junior Certificate examination do what the syllabus says it will do? To what extent does it "test communicative competence in respect of the themes and tasks"? The 2003 NCCA discussion paper neatly sums up the issue:

> *In the end all curricula must be judged by the effectiveness of their implementation; and in Ireland as elsewhere implementation is largely determined by the ways in which students are assessed. If our purpose in teaching foreign languages is to develop students' communicative proficiency in the languages (and that purpose is*

stated very clearly in both syllabus frameworks), it should go without saying that listening and speaking are no less important than reading and writing. The Junior Certificate examination tests listening comprehension, but there is no test of oral proficiency; what is more, all comprehension questions are answered in English. As long as this situation persists, there is an inevitable risk that the pressure to achieve good results will tempt teachers to neglect spoken production of the target language.[6]

The introduction of the new, communicative syllabuses was predicated on the assumption that there would be a corresponding development in the area of assessment. The 1992 Green Paper on Education stated that the major focus in modern continental languages would be on improving communication skills, particularly aural comprehension and oral skills. The main emphasis in testing and examinations would be on the oral/aural component, "and the marks for this aspect will be not less than 60% of the total."[7] In the event, however, the main investment of examination resources went to introducing aural tests and an oral examination in the Leaving Certificate. The junior certificate oral examination continued to be optional, school-based and taken by a very small percentage of candidates, although there has been some increase in recent years (see 5.4 below for details). It is interesting to note, however, that in the case of candidates who take the optional oral examination, the oral/aural components of their assessment account for 55% of the total, close enough to the 60% envisaged in the Green Paper.

Section summary
The present Junior Certificate syllabus framework for modern languages dates from the 1980s and is based on sound communicative theory. It sets out to equip the learner to engage in communication in the target language in a variety of real-life situations, and particularly face-to-face encounters with speakers of the language. However, the Junior Certificate examination is open to criticism on the grounds that it does not include a test of oral proficiency and that all the comprehension questions are answered in English or Irish. The inevitable backwash effect of the current assessment arrangements militates against best practice in teaching and learning and particularly against the use of the target language for spoken communication

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[6] Little, p. 13.

[7] Government of Ireland, *Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education* (Dublin, Government Publications Office, 1992), p. 104.

3. Significant developments at European level

3.1 Ireland in Europe

Ireland's sense of belonging to a wider European community was reinforced by its becoming a founder member of the Council of Europe in 1949 and later by joining the then European Economic Community in 1973. Already a bilingual nation with a long tradition in Classical and modern European languages, from the 1970s onwards Ireland began to attach a new importance to the teaching and learning of modern languages, realising their importance for full participation in the economic, political and cultural life of Europe.

The Council of Europe and the European Union both place a high value on multilingualism, and through their policies and institutions have supported member States in improving the language competence of their citizens. The Council of Europe, in furtherance of its commitment to democracy, human rights and cultural cooperation, established a Language Policy Division based in Strasbourg, and later the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz as a catalyst for reform in the teaching and learning of languages. The European Union through its policies and through programmes such as Erasmus has sought to promote a healthy multilingual economy to facilitate the movement of people, goods and services.

3.2 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

About the same time as the introduction of the Junior Certificate modern language syllabuses described above, the Council of Europe took the decision to develop the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which was published in 2001.[8] The framework was the result of extensive research and consultation on the communicative approach to teaching and learning languages. Since its publication, the CEFR has become an indispensable reference point for policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, learners and bodies responsible for assessment of language learning throughout Europe and beyond.

As its full title suggests, the CEFR is concerned with learning, teaching and assessment. Although it is much more than a series of can-do check-lists, the CEFR is perhaps best known for its six Common Reference Levels, A1 to C2, which describe in can-do terms the developmental stages of language learning, from "basic user" (levels A1 and A2), through "independent user" (levels B1 and B2) to

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[8] Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

"proficient user" (levels C1 and C2). Each of these stages may be further broken down into intermediate levels, labelled A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, A2.2, and so on.[9] The developmental stages are described in relation to five skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. [10]

According to the NCCA discussion paper, the common reference levels answer three needs:

1 They provide an internationally accepted scale that can be used to compare different language examinations and different systems of certification.

2 They facilitate the planning and implementation of integrated language curricula, which may need to allow for different languages to be learned to different levels.

3 Because the common reference levels are defined in terms of short descriptions ("descriptors") of communicative behaviour, they can be used at once to specify language targets, select teaching and learning activities, and determine the criteria by which learning achievement is measured.

The discussion paper sums up the significance of the CEFR as follows:

> *For the first time we have a set of tools that can be used simultaneously by (i) curriculum developers, course designers and textbook authors, (ii) teachers and learners, and (iii) examination boards and other language test providers. In other words, the Common Reference Levels offer a means of integrating curriculum, teaching and assessment as never before.[11]*

Notwithstanding its usefulness and its widespread adoption throughout Europe and beyond, the CEFR has not, as yet, been adopted to any great extent in Ireland by the three categories of agents listed above. The State examinations are not benchmarked against the CEFR, and neither are the post-primary language syllabuses, which predate the publication of the framework.

A good example of a modern language syllabus benchmarked against the CEFR is the recently-developed L3 syllabus for the European Schools (see Appendix 3). The syllabus is a harmonised syllabus for all the L3 (second foreign language) languages taken by students in the European Schools. These students begin the study of their first foreign language (L2) when they enter primary school, and start learning their second foreign language (L3) when they enter secondary school. So the place of L3 in the European School system is comparable to the place of modern European languages in the Irish

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[9] See Council of Europe, pp. 32-33 for examples of the intermediate levels.
[10] The CEFR distinguishes two separate speaking skills: spoken interaction refers to conversational communication, while spoken production refers to the skills involved in addressing an audience of one or more listeners.
[11] Little, p. 28.

system, where students have been learning an L2 (Irish or English) from the beginning of primary school and begin learning an L3 (French, German, Italian or Spanish) in junior cycle. The syllabus sets the attainment level for the first three-year cycle at level A1+ on the CEFR. [12]

3.3 The RELANG initiative

In 2009 the Council of Europe published a manual on relating examinations to the CEFR,[13] and the ECML in Graz, Austria, has sponsored a number of research projects on similar themes. Most recently, in 2014, the RELANG initiative was launched by the ECML with the long-term objective that language examinations used in participating states would ensure the valid and equitable assessment of learners, and that learners' test performances would be expressed in terms of CEFR levels which are valid, understood and widely accepted.[14] As part of the RELANG initiative, a series of national workshops in participating states have being organised. In April 2015 a workshop was held in Marino Institute for Education, coordinated by the Post-Primary Languages Initiative and involving the State Examinations Commission, the Professional Development Service for Teachers, the NCCA, the Inspectorate, the MFL methodology providers in initial teacher education, and Junior Cycle for Teachers.

3.4   The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

Based on the reference levels of the CEFR, the Council of Europe developed the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as a tool for language learners. The portfolio has three components:

1   A language passport that summarises the owner's linguistic identity, language learning experience and language qualifications in an internationally transparent manner

2   A language biography that enables the owner to set learning targets, record learning and intercultural experiences, and regularly assess his/her progress

3   A dossier in which the owner keeps samples of his/her work in the language(s) he or she has learnt or is learning.

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[12] The full L3 syllabus is available on the European Schools website: www.eursc.eu. Follow links to Studies and Certificates, Syllabuses, Secondary Cycle, Languages, Syllabus for all L3 Languages.
[13] Council of Europe, *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment,* (Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2009).

[14] See http://relang.ecml.at.

The ELP is intended to serve both pedagogical and reporting purposes. The pedagogical purpose is to help students to become more reflective and autonomous learners, increasingly able to assess their own progress and to set learning targets. The recording purpose is not intended to replace certification based on examinations, but to supplement it by providing additional information about the learner's experience and concrete evidence of his/her attainments. Many versions of the ELP have been developed throughout Europe and beyond, and have been validated by the Council of Europe.[15]

Seven versions of the ELP have been developed in Ireland for various categories of language learners—adult learners and school-going learners of English as an additional language, for example. A version for use in Irish post-primary schools was developed by the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin, and validated by the Council of Europe. The portfolio is based on the communicative objectives of the Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabuses for Irish, French, German, Italian and Spanish, which it translates into descriptors anchored to the common reference levels of the CEFR. A number of teachers who used this portfolio in their own schools met regularly between 2001 and 2003, and empirical research on their work was carried out as part of a PhD. [16]

A joint proposal for a four-year pilot project in using the ELP to support the teaching and learning of Irish and modern languages at post-primary level was developed in partnership by the DES, the NCCA and the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, but has not been implemented.

3.6 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning is the teaching of non-language content through the medium of a second or subsequent language, e.g. teaching Physical Education through Spanish, or Mathematics through Irish in an English-medium school. This approach gives students more exposure to the target language without overloading the curriculum. It allows them to use the target language for authentic communication purposes outside the language lesson. The NCCA discussion paper notes that although we do have Irish-medium schools, Ireland has remained largely untouched by the upsurge of international interest in CLIL and that "as a result we have been largely excluded from a growing European movement that offers a number of benefits calculated to support the

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[15] See www.coe.int/portfolio.

[16] See E. Ushioda and J. Ridley, "Working with the European Languages Portfolio in Irish Post-Primary Schools: report on an evaluation project", CLCS Occasional Paper No. 61 (Dublin: Trinity College, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, 2002), and Emmanouil M. Sisamakis, The European Language Portfolio in Irish Post-Primary Education: a Longitudinal Empirical Evaluation. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dublin, Trinity College (Centre for Language and Communication Studies), 2006.

implementation of European policy in language education, especially teacher and student exchange of various kinds."[17]

3.5 "Mother Tongue Plus Two"

The European Union, founded on the idea of unity in diversity—diversity of cultures, customs, beliefs and languages—has always valued and promoted multilingualism, and the European Commission has been active in seeking to advance a multilingualism policy which has three aims:

- To encourage language learning and promoting linguistic diversity in society;

- To promote a healthy multilingual economy, and

- To give citizens access to European Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages.

The Lisbon Strategy, launched in the year 2000, included foreign languages among the basic skills necessary for a competitive economy and full employment. Two years later, at the Barcelona European Council, the heads of State or Government called for at least two foreign languages to be taught from a very early age—the so-called "Mother Tongue Plus Two" objective. In 2004, an Inspectorate report on the teaching and learning of foreign languages proposed a more modest target for Ireland:

> *The European Commission's action plan reminds us that "Member States agree that pupils should master at least two foreign languages with the emphasis on effective communicative ability". Notwithstanding the fact that most of our students study one foreign language, and many are offered the possibility of taking a second one, mastery of two foreign languages seems a very ambitious goal, given that all students must study Irish as well. However, in the context of changing circumstances and ongoing curriculum review, an overarching language policy should articulate the rationale for the study of languages by all students at all levels and clearly identify objectives as regards Irish, English and other languages. Ideally, all students should be helped to achieve a good level of competence in one foreign language and some partial competence in a second one.[18]*

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[17] Little, p. 39.

[18] Department of Education and Science (DES), *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues* (Dublin, Department of Education and Science, 2004), p. 9.

3.7   The European Survey on Language Competence (ESLC)

In 2005, the European Commission took the decision to commission a language competence indicator of language competence in order to monitor progress in the Member States against the Barcelona target of Mother Tongue Plus Two. The European Survey on Language Competence (ESLC) was the first survey of its kind, designed to collect information about the foreign language proficiency of students in the last year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education. [19]

The decision to launch the ESLC arose "from the current lack of data on actual language skills of people in the European Union and the need for a reliable system to measure the progress achieved."[20] Sixteen education systems participated in the ESCL; Ireland did not. Approximately 53,000 students were assessed in 2011. The tests covered the three skills of listening, reading and writing in five test languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The tests measured achievement of levels A1 to B2 of the CEFR. Language teachers and school principals also completed a contextual questionnaire.

This table shows the percentage of students achieving each CEFR level in first and second target language, by skill (average across education systems)

First target language			Second target language		
Level	Reading	Listening	Writing	Reading	Listening	Writing
B2	28	3	14	16	15	6
B1	14	16	29	12	14	17
A2	12	13	24	14	16	22
A1	32	23	24	40	35	35
Pre-A1	14	16	9	18	20	20

The final chapter of the report notes some overall conclusions of the survey:

- The higher achievement in the first foreign language is to be expected, given the earlier start and more amount of study.

- English is the first foreign language in most education systems

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[19] European Commission, *First European Survey on Language Competences: Final Report* (Brussels, European Commission, year?)
[20] European Commission, p. 8

- Even in systems where English is the second foreign language, performance in English tends to be higher than in other languages.

- In students' questionnaires, the perception of the usefulness of English and their degree of exposure to it are evident.

- There was a very wide range of achievement across participating education systems.

3.8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

In 2006 the European Council and European Parliament adopted a European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. It identifies eight key competences which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, for active citizenship, for social inclusion and for employment:

- communication in the mother tongue

- communication in foreign languages

- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

- digital competence

- learning to learn

- social and civic competences

- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

- cultural awareness and expression

These competences fit well with the key skills of the Framework for Junior Cycle.

Section Summary
Ireland's membership of the wider European community has important implications for our policy and practice regarding the teaching and learning of languages. Respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of both the Council of Europe and the European Union. Communication in foreign languages is a key competence for lifelong learning and is important for personal fulfilment, for active citizenship, for social inclusion, for mobility and for employment. The Council of Europe's CEFR and the ELP are useful tools for curriculum developers, for teachers and learners, and for all those involved in assessment

4 Significant developments in Ireland

4.1 Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: a discussion paper (2003)

In 2003 the NCCA undertook a review of languages in the post-primary curriculum, partly as a response to concerns regarding the extent to which the aims of the revised language syllabuses, with their emphasis on communicative teaching and learning were being achieved. The review included Irish and English as well as foreign languages, and it began with the publication of the discussion paper already referred to.

As well as criticising the current curricula on a number of grounds, the discussion paper raised questions about the sustainability of foreign languages in the longer term, given the fact that they were not obligatory at post-primary level and were commonly perceived as 'academic' and not appropriate for all students.

As regards classroom practice, the paper stated:

> *Anecdotal evidence suggests that a survey of post-primary classrooms (Irish as well as foreign languages) would reveal that (i) a great deal of English is spoken, (ii) there is little spontaneous target language use, (iii) little attention is paid to the explicit development of learner autonomy, and (iv) only very occasional recourse is made to media and information technologies.* [21]

In order to determine what actually happened in language classrooms, the paper recommended that a survey of teachers and students be carried out. Referring to teacher education, it made the point that if teachers were to teach effectively through the target language and to use the new technologies, these skills needed to be the focus of attention in initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

Regarding outcomes for learners, the paper had this to say: "Despite the strong communicative orientation of the current curricula, doubts persist about the levels of communicative proficiency achieved by post-primary students".[22] It recommended the design and administration of independent tests of proficiency to students who have taken the State examinations.

Finally, the paper referred to the effect of assessment practice on teaching and learning and recommended a reform of the examination system:

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[21] Little, p. 40.
[22] Little, p. 44.

In a system as strongly dominated by assessment as ours, the only sure way of achieving pedagogical reform is by first reforming the examination system. Specifically, priority should be given to developing an approach to assessment that clearly discriminates in favour of those students who are able to use their target language(s) spontaneously—who have moved significantly beyond memorised role plays.[23]

4.2 Inspection of Modern Languages

A survey to determine what actually happens in classrooms, as recommended by the NCCA discussion paper, has yet to be carried out. However, the year following the publication of the discussion paper, the Inspectorate published the first composite report based on an analysis of a number of individual subject inspection reports. *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues* was published in 2004, and was the result of an analysis and synthesis of inspection reports resulting from inspections in 45 schools completed between November 2001 and January 2003. The languages represented were French (22 schools), German (11 schools), Italian (6 schools) and Spanish (6 schools).

The report sets itself in the context of the national and European developments regarding language policy, provision and support already referred to. The final chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the inspection reports and the main issues identified. This summary largely confirms what the NCCA discussion paper had presented as anecdotal evidence regarding classroom practice

The place of languages in the school's curriculum	
Finding: Languages continue to occupy a central place in most schools and most students study at least one modern foreign language.	**Issue:** In the context of changing circumstances and ongoing curriculum review, an overarching language policy should articulate the rationale for the study of languages by all students at all levels and identify clear objectives as regards Irish, English and other languages.

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[23] Little, p. 44.

Student access and choice	
Finding: The inspection reports illustrate some excellent practice, where students are offered a choice of languages, and the possibility of studying more than one language.	**Issue:** Some students have little or no choice as regards which language they study, and students with special needs are sometimes denied access to the study of languages
Teacher professional development	
Finding: The reports highlight teachers' professionalism and commitment.	**Issue:** In order to ensure quality teaching and learning of languages, teachers' professional development must be a matter of high priority, and ongoing contact with the target language community should be emphasised.
Resources for language teaching	
Finding: Inspectors comment favourably on the range of resources available to language teachers, including designated language rooms, and a dedicated budget for language resources.	**Issue:** The relatively low level of utilisation of ICT for language learning and teaching is a matter of some concern.
Planning for teaching and learning	
Finding: The reports contain considerable evidence of on-going planning by individual teachers, and lessons observed were well-planned and purposeful.	**Issue:** There is a need to develop structures for formal, collaborative long-term planning for modern languages at whole-school level as part of the school planning process. Individual teachers should also prepare broad written plans of work based on the syllabus.
Lesson content	
Finding: The content of lessons observed was appropriate and in line with syllabus objectives. Acquisition of vocabulary, the	**Issue:** The absence of long-term syllabus-informed planning can result in over-reliance on textbooks and examination

teaching of grammar, and examination preparation were the aspects of lesson content most frequently observed by inspectors.	papers and a curriculum which is too narrowly focused on the requirements of the examinations.

Use of target language

Finding: In the reports, there is comment on much commendable use of the target language for classroom management, for the conduct of lessons and for transactional classroom communication.	**Issue:** There is considerable scope for development in the use of the target language by teachers and students alike.

Teaching strategies

Finding: Lessons observed were clear, purposeful and well-structured. Teachers used effective questioning techniques, clear explanations of concepts and vocabulary, with sensitive correction of students' mistakes.	**Issue:** There is a need for the use of a wider range of teaching methodologies with a view to greater oral participation by students. In particular, the use of strategies such as pair work, group work, games, songs and role play promotes greater student involvement in the learning process.

Learning strategies and student autonomy

Finding: Inspectors commended the opportunities afforded to students to engage in independent and self-directed learning and attempts by teachers to promote active participation by students in their own learning.	**Issue:** There is a need to encourage greater learner autonomy and to redress the imbalance between teacher-directed learning and independent learning. Greater oral participation, including opportunities for the generation of spontaneous oral language, is one of the most frequent recommendations in the reports.

Assessment of outcomes

Finding: Inspectors found that student progress was assessed through classroom activities, monitoring of homework, class	**Issue:** There is a need to employ a wider range of assessment modes, and to test all language skills. Specifically, the formal

tests and formal school examinations. Formal assessment of oral proficiency was generally confined to Leaving Certificate students.	assessment of oral proficiency at all levels should be prioritised.

Almost a decade has passed since the publication of this Inspectorate report, which claimed to present "a snapshot of provision and practice in the teaching and learning of modern languages in Irish post-primary schools at a particular point in time."[24] From 2006, inspection reports have been published on the Department's website, including over three hundred on the modern languages: French, German, Italian and Spanish.

A perusal of the main findings and recommendations in the more recently published reports provides an interesting insight into how things have changed in schools since the publication of the composite report in 2004. For example, formal, collaborative long-term planning, based on the syllabus objectives is widely practised and is often of very good quality. Inspectors now report on observing a wider range of methodologies in use in language lessons than was the case a decade ago. Much greater use is being made of ICT for teaching and learning. There is also, especially in the last year or two, a growing focus on learning and the support of learning, and the principles and practice of assessment for learning are beginning to be embedded in teachers' professional practice.

The use of the target language by teachers in conducting lessons is now the norm in most lessons observed by the inspectors. Many of the reports comment favourably on very good use of the target language by students. However, one of the most frequently recurring recommendations is that teachers create more opportunities for students to speak in lessons and provide them with the necessary language for classroom interaction. More regular assessment of students' oral competence is another frequently recurring recommendation.

4.3 NCCA Review of Languages: 2005 Report

The 2003 discussion paper was issued to all post-primary schools. Principals and language teachers and members of the wider school community were invited to respond, and an online survey was carried out. The discussion paper was also considered at a number of seminars and other meetings representing the various stakeholders. Submissions from individuals and organisations on the issues

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[24] DES, p. 4.

raised in the discussion paper were also sought and received. In April 2005 the NCCA published a report on the outcomes of the review. The report noted that there had been broad agreement with the general thrust of the discussion paper, and that "there was little contestation surrounding the naming of the issues themselves and the need to see those issues addressed through the development of policy and related initiatives."[25]

Some of the main issues and recommendations as they relate to modern foreign languages are the following:

Language Policy: It was agreed that an explicit policy on languages in education should be developed, addressing the interaction between languages in education and languages in society. Policy should be established regarding diversification of languages, especially criteria for including or discontinuing languages in the system.

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[25] NCCA, *Review of Languages in Post-Primary Education: Report of the First Phase of the Review (*Dublin, NCCA, 2005), p. 7.

Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy:

- The curriculum should achieve a balance between experiential learning (language learning through language use) and analytical learning (learning through acquiring knowledge about how the linguistic system of the target language works).

- Learning objectives should be realistic and achievable and should take into account the conditions that pertain in the average classroom, which are different from those that pertain in 'naturalistic' learning environments.

- A need was identified to address the issues of standards and to make clear what standards were being actually achieved. The CEFR levels could be used for comparative purposes.

- Consideration needed to be given to how the negative backwash effects on teaching from the current assessment methods could be minimised and how students' ability to cope with unpredictability and to use language spontaneously might be assessed.

- Aspects of pre-service and in-service teacher education needed to be addressed in relation to issues raised by both the discussion paper and the Inspectorate composite report referred to above.

- There was general agreement that both language and cultural awareness should be assessed in examinations, and that ways of integrating these two components in the classroom should be explored.

- The potential of information and communications technology was noted and it was recommended that a strategy for the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of languages be developed, including appropriate professional development for teachers.

Linking with developments in Europe: It was noted that the principles underlying developments in junior cycle and senior cycle were consistent with the emphases within the CEFR and the ELP on learner autonomy, skill development, plurilingualism and improved access to and transferability in the broad context of lifelong learning.

4.4 Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland, 2008

Between 2005 and 2007, the DES engaged with the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe to carry out a detailed analysis of the language education situation in Ireland with a view to focusing on possible future developments. The process included a visit by a team of Council of Europe experts

in 2005, the production of a country report some months later and then a round-table forum with various stakeholders to discuss the country report. Finally, the Language Education Policy Profile was published jointly by the Council of Europe and the DES.[26]

The scope of the profile process was broad, including as it did Irish, English, other modern languages, the languages of immigrants and Irish Sign Language. The Profile articulated a widely-reported concern regarding the sustainability of modern foreign languages in the system, given their optional status, the falling numbers taking them in the State examinations and the fear of a collapse that would probably follow any change in the NUI's third-language matriculation requirement. The paper strongly advocated the development of an integrated policy on languages in education, encompassing all languages and all sectors.

The Profile identified five 'transversal issues' which presented challenges and were—and still are—relevant to post-primary modern languages, as to other areas:

1 **Continuity:** students need to be able to continue with their chosen languages from one level/cycle to another

2 **Curriculum development:** this includes the question of diversification of languages on offer in schools and also the on-going developments with their emphasis on key skills and competencies, short courses, etc.

3 **Assessment and examinations:** this issue encompasses questions of conformity between syllabus and examination, the assessment of oral competence, the format of examinations and its possible negative backwash effect on teaching, the validity of the format of the examinations with regard to the measuring of the communicative capacities of the students, the assessment of language awareness and cultural awareness, the possibility of making use of the levels of the CEFR to define and describe levels of attainment, and the assessment of partial competences in foreign languages.

4 **Teacher education:** Many of the informants who interacted with the expert group expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of initial and continuing education of language teachers; many foreign language teachers (including recent graduates) did not feel adequately prepared to

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[26] Council of Europe, Language Policy Division and Department of Education and Science, *Language Education Policy Profile, Ireland* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe; Dublin: Department of Education and Science, 2008.)

implement the curriculum, and many language teachers were not aware of the latest developments in language teaching.

5 **The responsibilities of third level institutions:** a certain crisis regarding foreign languages at third level was noted, along with the effects on the teaching of languages in the school system. [27]

The Profile recommended as the first action priority the definition of "a clear policy position, in consultation with other government departments and agencies as appropriate, regarding the place and role of languages in Irish society and in the education system." Only on the basis of such a policy choice could a coherent languages in education policy be formulated.

4.5 Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally, 2012

In 2012, Forfás and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a report on the skills and talents required by enterprises to enable them to compete successfully in existing and emerging overseas markets. Among the key areas identified in the report were those of foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness:

> *Foreign language capability and cultural awareness are essential for enterprise to compete in an increasingly global marketplace. An improved supply of domestic foreign language capability would act as a major boost to enterprises achieving their export potential—and enhance Ireland's proposition for foreign direct investment. A National Foreign Language Education Policy needs to be developed with a 5-10 year horizon vision, to provide an integrated and coherent approach to foreign language teaching in all learning contexts. This would include scaling up the supply of foreign language skills (number, range, proficiency) being taught at third level—for German, French, Spanish, Italian and for emerging market languages including Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic (the latter at relatively low numbers). It would be valuable if the assessment of foreign language learning proficiency outcomes were aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). The contextualisation of language teaching at third level in terms of its value to students in business and science departments would be valuable—especially for managers, engineers and sales/marketing personnel.[28]*

The report goes on to emphasise the importance of communicating a message to students, parents and teachers that foreign language proficiency and intercultural awareness are essential skillsets for future employment opportunities. It also highlights the language and cultural resource which the 'new arrival' communities represent for employers.

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[27] See pages 28-31 of the Profile.

[28] Forfás, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally* (Dublin, Forfás, 2012), p. 12

One of the concerns expressed by the Forfás report is the fact that the percentage of students studying foreign languages at both lower and upper secondary level in Ireland is less than the EU average. In Ireland, 66% of lower secondary students were studying one foreign language in 2010 and 21% were studying two, compared with the EU average of 93% and 40% respectively. The percentages for upper secondary students in Ireland are 58% for one foreign language and 17% for two, compared with the EU averages of 83% and 39% respectively. [29]

4.6   Consultation on a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy, 2014

Following on from the Language Policy Profile activity, and as part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs, the DES launched a national online consultation in August 2014 with a view to developing a strategy for foreign languages in education, which would cover post-primary, further and higher education. Seventy-five submissions were received from individuals and organisations, and a forum was held in March 2015 to present and discuss the results of the consultation. Some of the main points arising from the consultation were:

- The need for a strategy covering all languages, not just 'foreign' languages

- The need to raise awareness in society at large of the benefits of varied language capacity for intercultural understanding and positive citizenship

- The need to raise awareness of the competitive advantage in terms of job opportunities to be had from language competence and cultural awareness

- The desirability of an early start (primary or early childhood) in learning foreign languages

- The critical importance of teacher education—initial and continuing—and of language proficiency at point of entry to initial teacher education programmes

- The need to diversify the range of languages on offer to meet the real and emerging needs in business and society

- The role of employers and higher/further education in supporting multilingualism

- The importance of the languages of migrants, seen as an asset rather than a hindrance, and the need to support migrant languages

- The need to reform foreign languages curricula and examinations at post-primary level

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[29] Forfás, p. 13, cited from Eurostat Statistics in Focus: 49/2010.

- The desirability of benchmarking all examinations with the CEFR

4.7   Diversification and support for language teachers and learners

In 1999 the DES undertook a feasibility study which resulted in the establishment of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI) under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. The aim of the PPLI was to diversify, enhance and expand the teaching of languages in post-primary schools. Initially, the Initiative concentrated on the promotion of the two lesser-taught languages in the system, Spanish and Italian, and on introducing Japanese in Transition Year and then in senior cycle. Later, support for the introduction of Russian in Transition Year and senior cycle was added to its activities. The PPLI supported the four target languages by giving grants to schools and, in the case of Japanese and Russian, by deploying peripatetic teachers. The Initiative set up and funded postgraduate diploma courses in language and pedagogy for teachers who had some knowledge of Spanish or Italian and who were interested in teaching the language. The Initiative also commissioned and produced textbooks and other materials for the four target languages.

When the National Development Plan 2000-2006 came to an end, the Department decided to continue the PPLI and subsequently broadened its remit to include support for the learning and teaching of all modern foreign languages at post-primary level. Through its website (www.languagesinitiative.ie) the PPLI provides access to a wide range of resources and materials, and offers opportunities for communication and discussion via Facebook and Twitter for students and teachers. It also provides opportunities for language upskilling and links to innovative and creative teaching methodology for teachers, as well as information for school managers and parents.

The PPLI continues to offer courses to teachers, both online and face-to-face, with a special emphasis on the use of ICT for teaching and learning languages. In March 2015, it organised a one-day workshop for language teachers on using tablets and apps. Reference has already been made above to the RELANG project, coordinated by the PPLI.

The Department also supports the teachers of modern languages through the Teacher Professional Networks, which fund the continuing professional development work carried out by language teacher subjects associations, and through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), which organises workshops for language teachers.

4.8   Integrated Language Curriculum in Early Childhood and Primary Education

In time, all students entering junior cycle will be coming from primary schools where they will have experienced the new, integrated language curriculum. The integrated curriculum, based on the findings of curriculum reviews, commissioned research reports and the NCCA's work with schools, will have the same curriculum structure and components for English and Irish.[30] In September 2014, the NCCA published an interim report on the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum: Infants to Second Class*, and the work of developing the new integrated curriculum is ongoing.

The draft curriculum recognises that "developing skills in one language will help children develop similar skills in another language provided they have adequate exposure to the language, adequate motivation and opportunities to engage with the language."[31]   The curriculum defines integration in terms of:

▪   interaction between the three strands of oral language, reading, and writing,

▪   connecting language across the curriculum, and

▪   the transfer of skills learned across languages.

The development of an integrated approach to languages in the education system was one of the key recommendations of the Language Policy Profile. [32] The fact that students beginning their study of foreign languages in junior cycle will have experienced an integrated language curriculum in primary school is a strong argument for an integrated approach at post-primary level, for making connections between students' learning of Irish, English and other languages, and for avoiding unnecessary compartmentalisation which, in the words of the Profile, "isolates languages from each other and impairs the development of a global plurilingual competence."[33]

4.9 Junior Cycle Short Courses in Chinese and other languages

Short courses are an integral component of the Framework for Junior Cycle. They are designed for approximately 100 hours of student engagement over two or three years. The NCCA has developed a

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[30] Modern European languages are not part of the primary curriculum. In 2012 the DES discontinued the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI), which had been launched in 1997 as the Pilot Project for Modern Languages in Primary Schools. For a detailed account of the Initiative, see Kildare Education Centre, *Final Report on the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative 1998-2012* (Kildare, Kildare Education Centre, 2012).
[31] NCCA, *Draft Primary Language Curriculum: for Consultation* (Dublin, NCCA, 2014)
[32] Profile, pp. 40-42, 52.
[33] Profile, p. 41.

number of short courses, including one in Chinese Language and Culture. The course provides students with a learning base in Mandarin Chinese (level A1.1 on the CEFR for speaking and listening, with a lower level for reading and writing) on which they can build later in their studies, and also an understanding of aspects of Chinese culture.

The Chinese short course adopts an activity-based and task-based approach to language learning. With the guidance of their teachers, students undertake tasks which require them to identify and call on the target language they need to achieve a 'real-world' outcome. Learner autonomy is promoted by the use of a student Learning Record (LR), based on the European Language Portfolio. The LR includes can-do statements and allows students to set goals and to record and document their learning as they progress.

The PPLI has developed short courses in modern languages other than those currently on the curriculum. Generic specifications were developed, based on the NCCA template, which can be used for the introduction of any new language as a short course in Junior Cycle.[34] The aim of these courses is for students to develop language proficiency in the chosen language within CEFR level A1. The course also enhances learning by developing language and intercultural awareness skills combined with digital literacy skills. The PPLI is currently working with language specialists to develop courses in specific languages (currently Irish Sign Language, Japanese, Polish, and Russian) and is planning to create short courses in some home languages too, along with support material.

The possibility of providing short courses in Chinese and another languages in addition to, but not instead of, a full 200-hour course in French, German, Spanish or Italian, allows schools to broaden and diversify the range of languages they offer and for students to broaden and deepen their own language learning experience.

Section Summary
Since the beginning of the new millennium, a variety of surveys, reports and publications has provided policy-makers and the wider education community in Ireland with many opportunities to reflect on the current state of modern languages in our system and to

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[34] The generic short course specifications, self-assessment checklists and learning journal may be accessed at http://www.languagesinitiative.ie/resources/all/junior-cycle-short-courses.

consider what is necessary to improve outcomes for individual learners and to develop greater capacity at national level. There is no lack of findings and recommendations; what is interesting is the extent to which there is broad agreement on the changes that need to be made. Recurrent themes are: the need for an overarching national policy for languages; the need for diversification of languages on offer and greater choice for students; the critical importance of teacher education; the need for an improved, integrated learning experience for students; assessment methods, aligned to the CEFR, which will reinforce best practice in teaching and learning.

5 Experiences, outcomes and trends

5.1 ESRI research on students' experiences in Junior Cycle

In 2002, as part of the review of junior cycle, the NCCA commissioned the Economic and Research Institute (ESRI) to conduct a longitudinal study of students' experiences of curriculum in their post-primary schooling. The research followed the student cohort as they completed each year of junior cycle, and in subsequent years too.

The resulting publications—*Moving Up: The Experiences of First-Year Students in Post-Primary Education, Pathways through the Junior Cycle: The Experiences of Second-Year Students,* and *Gearing Up for the Exam: The Experiences of Junior Certificate Students*—are a valuable source of information on students' experiences in junior cycle, and include useful data on their experiences in the foreign language classroom.

Among the sample of first-year students surveyed by the researchers, French was the least popular of nine subjects listed, and was found of have decreased in popularity among students between September and May of first year. Students considered foreign languages to be difficult. The report says: "Looking at the perceived difficulty of other 'academic' subjects, forty-seven per cent of students find foreign languages difficult (more than for any other subject except Irish)…".[35] Not surprisingly, first-year students prefer subjects with a practical orientation. Sixty-three per cent of students agreed with the statement: "I prefer more practical subjects where I can work with my hands". Students felt that too much time was spent on academic subjects, especially Irish and French. Notwithstanding the perceived difficulty and unpopularity of languages, almost three quarters of the students surveyed considered foreign languages to be useful, and girls were more likely to see languages as useful than boys. In their concluding chapter, the researchers note the generally negative attitude to Irish, Maths and foreign languages.

The picture does not change significantly in second year. The report discusses subjects which students were taking which they would prefer not to have taken. "The most frequently mentioned subjects were French (18%), Business Studies (17%), Irish (15%), Science (14%), German (11%) and History

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[35] E. Smyth, S. McCoy, M. Darmody, Moving Up: The Experiences of First-Year Students in Post-Primary Education (Dublin, Liffey Press, 2004), p. 216.

(10%)".[36] When asked to name the subject they liked least, "the most frequently mentioned subject was Irish (mentioned by 32 per cent of those taking the subject), followed by foreign languages […]".[37]

In third year, the pattern continues. "Interest levels are lowest in the languages: Irish, French and German".[38] And again, students found the languages difficult: "Around half of the students found Irish and German difficult".[39] In contrast, students found Science "challenging but interesting".

5.2   Chief Examiners' Reports on Languages in the Junior Certificate Examination

A valuable source of information on students' learning in the curricular subjects examined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are the Chief Examiners' Reports which the SEC publishes from time to time.   The most recent Chief Examiners' Reports on modern foreign languages in the Junior Certificate examination were published in 2008 (French, German and Spanish) and 2011 (Italian). These reports provide statistical data regarding grades achieved by candidates at Ordinary and Higher levels, they comment on how various sections and individual questions were answered, they highlight overall trends in candidates' performance, and they give advice to teachers and students. No information is provided on candidates' performance in the oral examination, although teachers are required to record the tests and to retain the recordings for submission to the SEC.

From reading the Chief Examiners' Reports some general trends may be observed, trends which are common to the four languages:

- In general, candidates perform better at the receptive skills tests, in the listening comprehension and reading comprehension parts of the examination.

- Candidates usually perform better in reading comprehension than in listening comprehension.

- Candidates' performance in listening comprehension is often hampered by lack of knowledge of basic vocabulary—numbers, days, items of food and clothing.

- The written expression part of the examination poses the greatest challenge for candidates, particularly at Ordinary level, and is usually the least satisfactorily answered part of the examination.

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[36] E. Smyth, A. Dunne, S. McCoy, M. Darmody, *Pathways Through the Junior Cycle: The Experiences of Second Year Students* (Dublin, Liffey Press, 2006), p. 146.
[37] Ibid., p. 148.
[38] E. Smyth, A. Dunne, M. Darmody, S. McCoy, *Gearing Up for the Exam?: The Experiences of Junior Certificate Students* (Dublin, Liffey Press, 2006), p. 86.
[39] Ibid p. 85.

- In commenting on the written expression section of the examination, the examiners frequently mention grammatical inaccuracy, spelling mistakes, poor sentence structure, and inadequate vocabulary.

- Some candidates have difficulty with basic elements of the target language, and in particular with numbers, days of the week and months of the year.

- Although spelling and grammatical accuracy can be a problem, particularly at Ordinary level, candidates who keep their answers simple and are familiar with basic vocabulary are able to gain good marks for written production.

- There is evidence of a need for a greater emphasis on cultural awareness.

Typical advice to teachers to help their students improve their performance in examinations echoes the advice given by inspectors:

- Use the target language regularly in the classroom and provide students with regular opportunities to practise in short dialogues, role plays etc.

- Encourage students to use the target language in the classroom as much as possible.

- Encourage students to practise the use of basic verbs in sentences.

- Give more emphasis to the teaching of grammar within an integrated approach, particularly in second and third year.

- Continue to revise and reinforce basic vocabulary and spelling.

- Continue to revise and reinforce grammatical elements such as verb forms, gender, articles,

- Ensure that students have regular practice in all the language skills.

- Expose students to a wide range of authentic texts.

- Encourage students to produce simple written texts from first year onwards.

5.3   Statistics and trends in uptake of languages in Junior Certificate

Reference has already been made to the concerns expressed during the Language Policy Profile process regarding the falling numbers of candidates taking languages in the State examinations. This table shows the uptake of French, German, Italian and Spanish in recent years, expressed as numbers of candidates and as percentages of the total cohort taking the examination in each year:

Year	French		German		Spanish		Italian	
2009	33,135	59.6%	9,330	16.8%	4,967	8.9%	437	0.8%
2010	33,247	59.3%	9,041	16.1%	5,691	10.1%	350	0.6%
2011	33,460	58.9%	8,974	15.8%	6,400	11.3%	392	0.7%
2012	34,757	59.1%	9,470	16.1%	6,698	11.4%	436	0.7%
2013	34,273	57.2%	10,152	17%	7,571	12.7%	544	0.9%
2014	33,908	56.2%	10,467	17.3%	8,414	13.9%	457	0.7%

It will be noted that French has declined in its share by 3.4% and German by 0.5%, while Spanish has grown by 5%. This pattern of the growth of Spanish at the expense of French and German is not peculiar to Ireland: similar trends are noted in other countries.

Comparing the figures for 2014 with those for a decade before and for two decades before, the pattern becomes even more obvious:

	French		German		Spanish		Italian	
2014	33.908	56.2%	10,467	17.3%	8,44	13.9%	457	0.7%
2004	36,299	63.6%	10,896	19.1%	3,032	5.3%	269	0.5%
1994	47,702	70.9%	18,642	27.7%	1,980	2.9%	242	0.4%

Over the two decades since the new Junior Certificate syllabus was introduced, French has declined by over 14% in its share and German by over 20%, while Spanish has grown by 11%.

The 2004 Inspectorate report commends as good practice students being offered the possibility of studying two modern languages.[40] The Language Policy Profile notes with concern "the significant reduction in the number of students taking more than one foreign language at second level".[41] This

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[40] DES, pp. 6, 9, 26.
[41] Profile, p. 19.

table shows the numbers of Junior Certificate candidates who took two or more language subjects (French, German, Italian, Spanish) in the years 2009 to 2014. It shows that the reduction referred to in the Profile has continued up to the present:

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
2,288	2,048	2,070	2,126	1,986	1,191

5.4   Uptake of the optional Junior Certificate oral examination

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of candidates taking the optional oral examination. A similar increase can be noted in the case of the optional oral examination in Junior Certificate Irish, where the numbers almost doubled between 2012 and 2014.

This table shows the numbers of candidates and the percentage of the total cohort in each language taking the oral examination between 2009 and 2014:

Year	French		German		Spanish		Italian	
2009	888	2.7%	272	2.9%	184	3.7%	4	1%
2010	1,037	3.1%	184	2%	229	4%	3	0.9%
2011	1,222	3.7%	280	3.1%	305	4.8%	2	0.5%
2012	2,285	6.6%	447	4.7%	698	10.4%	64	14.7%
2013	2,983	8.7%	597	5.9%	1,065	14.1%	142	26.1%
2014	4,245	12.5%	861	8.2%	1,524	18.1%	190	41.6%

Section Summary

The ESRI research indicates clearly that students find languages difficult and that many of them do not enjoy learning languages. They tend to see languages as 'academic' rather than as practical life skills. The Chief Examiners' Reports of the State Examinations Commission indicate that while students perform well in the written examinations, their receptive skills are more developed than their productive skills, many students have difficulty with written accuracy, and some fail to master even basic elements of the target

languages. The percentage of students taking French and German in the Junior Certificate has continued to decline year on year, while Spanish is growing. Fewer students are taking two modern languages. While we do not have any data on students' oral competence, there has been a welcome increase in the number of students taking the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate.

6 Learning for Life: Criteria for Language Vitality

Concerns regarding the future of modern languages in the education system have been referred to a number of times in this paper. Although most second-level students do study at least one modern language, until now languages other than Irish and English have been, strictly speaking, optional in the system. With the new Junior Cycle Framework and its Statements of Learning, however, all students are now expected to achieve competence in one other language in addition to Irish and English.

The review of junior cycle offers us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalise the teaching and learning of languages in post-primary education. The Framework for Junior Cycle, in its first two statements of learning, provides for effective communicative competence in L1, and a level of proficiency appropriate to the student's ability in L2 and one other language, L3. In addition, the short courses open up the possibility for more schools to offer a second foreign language. In this way, the goal of "a good level of competence in one foreign language and some partial competence in a second one"[42] can become a real possibility for many students.

In junior cycle most students will be learning a foreign language for the first time. Their learning experience at this level will be decisive in determining not only their success with the new language, but also their attitude to languages in general and their desire and capacity to learn other languages in the course of their lives.

In a speech to the European Parliament, Professor Hugo Baetens-Beardsmore, a member of the Council of Europe expert group who visited Ireland in 2005, said that there were three fundamental criteria necessary for preserving linguistic vitality and linguistic diversity:

> These are the **capacity** to use a given language, the **opportunity** to use it and the **desire** to use it. These three together are not only necessary for the management

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[42] DES 2004, p. 9.

of minority languages but also for the outcomes of any school project on language education, whatever form it may take and whatever language is involved. They are the cornerstones of any attempt to promote bilingual proficiency that takes into account the links between home, school and the wider world.[43]

If the new junior cycle is to make a real contribution to language vitality and linguistic diversity, all three cornerstones will need to be in place. Junior cycle will need to develop students' communicative capacity, provide them with opportunities for communication, and stimulate their desire to learn and speak modern languages.

Capacity

Until now, the main focus in teaching and learning has been on capacity—often understood as the capacity to complete the tasks required for success in examinations. Capacity is certainly important, but how we define it is also important. The new specification will need to be very clear as to what language capacity means and what skills learners will acquire in junior cycle. The learning objectives will need to be clearly stated in student-friendly terms so that the students can become active agents in their own learning. Assessment, both formative and summative, will need to be closely aligned to the learning objectives, and the modes of assessment will need to reinforce and reward the development of real communicative capacity.

Opportunity

Communicative capacity is of little value unless there are opportunities to use the language for real communication. Good language teachers know how to create a classroom environment where using the target language is the means as well as the goal of learning. 'Working Together' is one of the key skills of junior cycle: group work and task-based learning, where the nature of the task requires communication in the target language, can provide many opportunities for students to develop capacity and to use the language skills they are learning.

The expansion of ICT has multiplied the opportunities available to students to communicate with their peers and to pursue their own interests through other languages.

The 1992 syllabus mentioned foreign travel as an opportunity for language use: there are more opportunities now than ever for students to travel and for schools to participate in exchanges and partnerships with schools in other countries.

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[43] Extract from an address to the European Parliament by Hugo Baetens-Beardsmore, citing Grin, F. and Moring, T, *Support for Minority Languages in Europe*, (European Commission, 2008), p. 5. Emphasis added.

Desire

The third criterion for language vitality—desire—is probably the most challenging and the one which has received least attention to date. The ESRI research does not paint a very bright picture as regards students' desire to learn or speak languages: students often see languages as 'academic' rather than 'practical' subjects, and not very useful or relevant.

Motivation is fundamental to all learning, and for many students the desire to learn languages is not there. There is a job to be done in 'selling' languages to our learners, in convincing them that languages are a useful life skill, and in giving them an enjoyable and challenging learning experience. Having a choice of languages is an important factor in student motivation: those who have been allowed to make their own choice of language are more likely to be motivated learners.

The concept of learner autonomy is also critical is fostering students' desire to learn. Language portfolios can supplement formal certification and allow students to set their own targets and monitor their learning.

ICT, which opens up opportunities for language learning and use, can also be a powerful motivator: students enjoy using new technologies and social networks for learning and communicating.

Exposure to a rich diet of authentic texts, including songs, film, short stories and poetry, can stimulate students' creativity and their desire to engage with languages.

If students are to become lifelong learners of languages, it is important that they experience success in junior cycle, their first taste of learning a foreign language. This is their chance to discover that learning languages involves acquiring useful life skills and is something in which they can experience enjoyment and a sense of achievement.

7 Modern Languages specification in the new junior cycle

While some may have distinct characteristics, arising from the area of learning involved, all junior cycle specifications, for subjects and short courses, will have a number of features in common. They will:

- be outcomes based

- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression set out clear expectations for learning

- provide examples of those expectations

- include a focus on the eight key skills for junior cycle

- strive for clarity in language and for consistency in terminology.

To improve the connection with learning and teaching in primary school, these features are shared with the Primary Curriculum. The specification for each junior cycle subject and short course will include:

1	Introduction to junior cycle	This will be common to all specifications and will summarise the main features of A Framework for Junior Cycle
2	Aim	A concise aim for the subject will be presented
3	Rationale	This will describe the nature and purpose of the subject as well as the general demands and capacities that it will place on and require of students. The text will, as appropriate, aim to draw attention to challenges and any access issues associated with study of the subject for students with specific needs or disabilities.
4	Links with • Statements of learning • Key skills	How the subject is linked to central features of learning and teaching at junior cycle will be highlighted and explained.

5	Overview - Strands - Learning outcomes	An overview of the subject will illustrate how it is organised and will set out the learning involved in strands and learning outcomes.
6	Expectations for students	These will be linked with groups of learning outcomes and will relate to examples of student work. The examples will be annotated, explaining whether the work is in line with, ahead of, or behind expectations for students.
7	Assessment and certification	This section refers to both formative and summative assessment. It outlines the assessment component/s through which students will present evidence of learning on an ongoing basis, and for the purposes of recording achievement for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)[44] This description of assessment is supplemented by separate assessment specification and guidelines for use in second and third years

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[44] The JPA is the new award for all Junior Cycle students. It will replace the current award, the Junior Certificate

8 Brief for the review of Junior Cycle Modern Languages

The review of Junior Cycle Modern Languages will lead to the production of a specification in line with the template above.

The principles for junior cycle education as they appear in the Framework for Junior Cycle will inform key decisions made in the development of the specification for Modern Languages. In its work, the development group will be conscious of the extent to which the specification relates to various statements of learning in the Framework and in that context how it might assist a school in planning and evaluating their junior cycle programme.

The specification will be at a common level.

It will be designed to be taught in a minimum of 200 hours.

It will be structured or organised around strands and learning outcomes.

The key skills of junior cycle, as appropriate, will be embedded in the learning outcomes of the specification.

The key skills of literacy and numeracy will be promoted through specific aspects of the specification.

It will be completed for autumn 2016.

The development of the new specification for modern languages will take account of current research and developments in the field of language education and particularly developments at European level, including the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The development of the new specification will address continuity and progression, with a particular focus on consolidating learning from primary school regarding language awareness and acquisition, and also progression to senior cycle.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will address:

- The purposes of learning modern languages, making them transparent and evident to students, teachers and parents in the specification

- How the specification will make students aware of the relevance of modern languages to their lives as students and as life-long learners and users

- How the specification will promote a communicative approach to teaching and learning, and especially how oral communication will be given priority in teaching, learning and assessment

- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred, having a clear focus on what learners can do to develop and demonstrate their language skills and achievements

- The contribution that the specification can make to improving learner engagement with and enjoyment of languages

- How the specification will develop positive attitudes towards languages, foster students' confidence in their ability to learn languages, and give them an understanding of ways to go about adding new languages to their personal linguistic portfolio

- How the learning outcomes relate to the reference levels of the CEFR in each of the language skills

- How the teaching and learning of grammar, syntax and pronunciation will be embedded in a communicative context

- How the course will be organised and how the skills of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing are to be integrated in the teaching and learning of the target languages

- How cultural and intercultural awareness will be developed and assessed

- How the learning outcomes will specify clearly what students will be expected to achieve and be linked to samples of student work and learning that demonstrate achievement/s described in the learning outcomes and that provide support for teacher judgment

- Continuity and integration: How the specification will build on the students' experience of language learning in primary school and how connections will be made with their learning of Irish and English and with their experience of learning and using other languages, where relevant

- Continuity: how students' experience of learning languages in junior cycle can provide a basis for the study of languages in senior cycle

- How digital and social media can be used for teaching, learning, managing information and communication, and as a means of motivating students' engagement with language learning

- The definition of texts, and whether they will include literary texts in each of the four languages

- Assessment: specification for the formative ongoing assessment of student learning as well as the two assessment components and the examination; deciding on and describing the two assessment components.

- Whether a language portfolio will be used to promote learner autonomy and to supplement formal certification

- How the specification will relate to the short course in any other languages students which may be taking

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Appendix 1: The CEFR Common Reference Levels – global scale

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Proficient User</td><td>C2</td><td>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</td></tr>
<tr><td>C1</td><td>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Independent User</td><td>B2</td><td>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</td></tr>
<tr><td>B1</td><td>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Basic User</td><td>A2</td><td>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar</td></tr>
</table>

| | | and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. |
| | A1 | Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. |

Appendix 2: The Common Reference Levels – self-assessment grid

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	**Listening**	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	**Spoken Interaction**	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	**Writing**	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can

		address on a hotel registration form.			particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Appendix 3: European Schools: Syllabus for all L3 languages (edited extract)

Note: The full L3 syllabus covers the seven years of the European Schools' secondary curriculum and is divided into three cycles: S1-S3, S4-S5, S6-S7. The first cycle corresponds to Junior Cycle in the Irish system, although European Schools students begin this cycle at age 11. Students in the European Schools study their L2 (first foreign language) from the beginning of primary school, and begin L3 (second foreign language) when they enter secondary school. The full syllabus is available at: www.eursc.eu.

SYLLABUS FOR ALL L III LANGUAGES SYLLABUS IN ENGLISH

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1. Introduction:

The syllabus is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages and the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

The syllabus is based on expert advice and reflects in its objectives, content and methods a common, harmonised basis in the field of modern languages for the European Schools as already used by many national systems.

The syllabus focuses on the knowledge and the competences to be attained at the end of each cycle.

The syllabus includes general objectives, didactic principles, learning objectives, contents and assessment. It presents the linguistic items students will be expected to learn, and describe the knowledge and skills they will develop to be able to communicate effectively.

This syllabus is a harmonised syllabus for all L III languages. It will guarantee student equity in all L III languages and will increase opportunities for sharing good practice and professional expertise across language sections.

The syllabus for all L III languages will come into force in September 2012 for cycle 1 and cycle 2 and in September 2013 for cycle 3.

2. General objectives :

The secondary section of the European Schools has the two objectives of providing formal, subject-based education and of encouraging students' personal development in a wider social and cultural context. Formal education involves the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, concepts and skills within each subject area. Personal development takes place in a range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural contexts. It involves an awareness of appropriate behaviour, an understanding of the environment in which students work and live, and a development of their individual identity.

These two objectives, which are in practice inseparable, are nurtured in the context of an enhanced awareness of the richness of European culture. Awareness and experience of a shared European life should lead students towards a greater respect for the traditions of each individual country and region in Europe, while developing and preserving their own national identities.

The students of the European Schools are future citizens of Europe and the world. As such, they need a range of competences if they are to meet the challenges of a rapidly-changing world. In 2006 the European Council and European Parliament adopted a European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. It identifies eight key competences which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, for active citizenship, for social inclusion and for employment:

1. communication in the mother tongue
2. communication in foreign languages
3. mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. digital competence
5. learning to learn
6. social and civic competences
7. sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
8. cultural awareness and expression

The European Schools' curriculum seeks to develop all of these key competences in the students. The language syllabuses make a significant contribution not only to the development of communicative competences, but also to social and civic competences and to the students' cultural awareness and expression.

The study of an L III, *ab initio*, is compulsory for all secondary students from Year 1 to Year 5 and optional in Years 6 and 7. Students may choose any of the official languages of the European Union as L III, but the language chosen must be different from those studied as L I and L II.

The learning objectives up to the end of Year 5 are based on five years (two periods per week in Year 1 and three periods per week in Years 2 to 5) of continuous study of the language, and the objectives for the Baccalaureate are based on seven years of continuous study (four periods per week in Years 6 and 7).

The learning objectives are benchmarked against the reference levels of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The CEFR also allows for intermediate levels, defined as A1+, A2+ etc.:

For the learning and teaching of foreign languages in the system of the European Schools reference is made to the following CEFR benchmarks:

Cycle	Attainment level
1st cycleS1–S3	Level A 1+
2nd cycle S 4+5	Level A 2+

3rd cycle S 6+7	Level B 1+
L II	C1
L III	B1+
L IV	A2+

3. Didactic principles :

The following didactic principles are intended to guide the teaching and learning of L III.

- Communicative language competence is an overarching learning goal.

- The skills of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing should have their place, but their relative weighting depends on the cycle.

- Teaching should take account of students' progression through the various stages of language acquisition. Pupils' mistakes should be used constructively to develop learning.

- In teaching, the target language should be used as much as possible.

- Students should be encouraged to draw on their existing language skills and learning strategies.

- A variety of teaching methods and approaches should be used.

- The use of differentiated teaching methodologies is encouraged in order to meet the diverse needs of all pupils.

- Pupils' varied learning styles, pace of learning, social skills, strengths and weaknesses should also be used to best advantage.

- Pupils will achieve fluency and independence by making use of a range of learning resources including ICT (Information and Communication Technology)

- A good command of the language in context presupposes a progressively constructed understanding of the language as a system.

- Priority should be given to functionality when it comes to teaching grammar, morphology and vocabulary.

- Students' sociolinguistic competence should be developed to include awareness of aspects such as linguistic register, language varieties, etc.

The above list is not exhaustive and not in order of importance.

4   Learning objectives:

Learning objectives for the 1st cycle (S1-S3)

   By the end of the first cycle, the student should be able to

1.   understand familiar words and phrases related to areas of immediate personal   relevance and experience when people speak slowly and clearly
2.   read and understand short written texts containing familiar words and phrases
3.   take part in simple conversations about areas of immediate need or on very familiar   topics with some support
4.   describe in simple terms his/her personal world with some reference to the past and   future

5.   write short simple messages, notes and letters about everyday matters
6.   demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of the cultures of the target   language countries/communities
7.   relate his/her acquired cultural knowledge to that of the target countries/communities
8.   identify and apply a range of basic strategies for learning languages
9.   apply a range of basic study skills and tools to the learning of the target language

5   Contents:

Cycle 1 (S1-S3)

By the end of cycle 1 the student should have acquired

- a basic knowledge of pronunciation, intonation and spelling rules

- a knowledge of simple vocabulary and idiomatic phrases

- a knowledge of word patterns and simple grammatical structures

- a basic knowledge of how to use dictionaries and other resources including ICT

- awareness of the culture of target language countries/communities

- some knowledge of basic language learning strategies including an awareness of   their own progress

6. Assessment:

Cycle 1 (S1 - S3)

The assessment should be mainly formative. By means of teacher observation, tests and self-assessment the students acquire an awareness of their level and their progress throughout the course. The basis of the assessment should be the learning objectives for the cycle. Use could be made of the self-assessment grids in the CEFR and of the European Language Portfolios.