

**Perspectives on alignment with the Common European
Framework of Reference Companion Volume (CEFR CV) in the
context of Leaving Certificate Irish**

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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Abbreviations and Definitions

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CV	Companion Volume
CLIL	Content Language Integrated Learning
ELP	European Language Portfolio
TEG	Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge
CLIL	CLIL refers to the teaching of curriculum areas / subjects or parts of subjects through an additional language. These lessons have dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of the target language, for example, teaching Art through Irish. (From the Primary Language Curriculum)
Mediation	When using mediation skills and strategies, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning; collaborating to construct new meaning; encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning; and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic, or professional.
Plurilingualism	Plurilingualism is the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner in which they draw on all of their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to participate more fully in social and educational contexts.
Action-orientated approach	This approach views learners as social agents and active participants in their own learning. It implies the use of the target language by learners while engaging in purposeful, collaborative tasks. ¹

¹ Definitions are in keeping with the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019), Draft Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages specification (NCCA, 2024) and Draft Leaving Certificate Arabic Specification (NCCA, for introduction September 2025).

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Introduction

A public consultation on draft specifications T1 and T2 for Leaving Certificate Irish was conducted in 2021. Following this, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) reviewed the consultation feedback and recommended that research be undertaken on frameworks guiding curriculum development for languages, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). This series of three papers aims to address the NCCA's request to provide data for advancing this work and to inform Council-level discussions regarding the development of Irish language specifications for the Senior Cycle.

North (2014) asserts that "the CEFR is almost impossible to be ignored." Building on this assertion, the present paper examines the role of the CEFR within the redevelopment of Irish at Senior Cycle level. Specifically, it addresses the question: 'What are the perspectives on the opportunities, possibilities, and challenges associated with the use of the CEFR Companion Volume in the context of the redevelopment of Irish at Senior Cycle level?' To ensure alignment with the paper's objectives, the approach to the discussion paper was collaboratively established by the author and the NCCA prior to its commencement.

This paper focuses on three key areas:

- The curriculum development process within the context of Senior Cycle redevelopment;
- Curriculum design considerations;
- Teaching, learning, and assessment practices for Irish under Senior Cycle redevelopment, with particular emphasis on potential benefits and challenges.

To inform the paper, a systematic review and secondary analysis was undertaken. This review encompassed documents and publications related to the consultation on L1 and L2 specifications for Irish at the Senior Cycle level, curriculum and policy materials concerning the Irish language, relevant Council of Europe documents on the CEFR, and research literature on aligning curricula with the CEFR.

Contextual Backdrop

Redevelopment of the Senior Cycle

The redevelopment of Irish at Senior Cycle level is a core component of the Senior Cycle redevelopment. One of the primary objectives of this redevelopment is to transition from an exam-focused model to a more holistic approach that prepares students for diverse learning pathways. This approach emphasizes individualized learning experiences and the cultivation of skills such as critical thinking (NCCA, 2022). Furthermore, the Technical Form of curriculum specifications for subjects and modules in a redeveloped Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2023), which examines the structure and design of curriculum specifications for senior cycle education in Ireland, advocates for a more integrated approach that combines knowledge,

skills, values and dispositions. A revised template for curriculum specifications emphasises key aspects relevant to this paper such as;

- The development of key competencies which are intended to replace key skills and to be integrated into the template for subject and module specifications for more robust learning pathways. Competencies include cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and learner agency to enable students to meaningfully participate in society beyond the curriculum.
- Broader assessment beyond reliance on examinations to capture a wider range of student learning. This includes a multi-modal approach to assessment to reflect the aims and rationale of revised specifications.
- An additional assessment component accompanied by descriptors of quality that describe high, moderate and low levels of achievement.

An overview of primary objectives of the redevelopment of senior cycle are presented in Appendix A.

However, several challenges are associated with this redevelopment. Key issues include aligning changes at the Senior Cycle with redevelopments at the Junior Cycle level and in further education, ensuring progression across the broader cross-sectoral educational continuum. Additionally, the professional development of teachers presents a critical challenge, as effective implementation of these developments requires comprehensive support and training.

The redevelopment of Irish at Senior Cycle level poses specific challenges. To address these, the process has been temporarily paused to facilitate further research, discussion, and consultation, ensuring that the revised curriculum meets the diverse needs of all learners.

NCCA Consultation Process: Leaving Certificate Irish Specification

In 2018, the NCCA initiated the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Irish specifications for both L1 speakers in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, and L2 speakers in English-medium schools.² This model was developed in alignment with a range of governmental policies pertaining to the Irish language, including *The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and educational policies such as the *Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*. Draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish for both L1 and L2 speakers were approved for public consultation by the end of 2020. The consultation, which began in

² L1 is the language medium of the school (English in English-medium schools; Irish in Irish-medium schools). L2 is the second language (Irish in English-medium schools; English in Irish-medium schools) (Junior Cycle Irish).

February 2021, continued through November 2021 (NCCA, 2023). The process generated substantial discussion and received rigorous feedback from stakeholders.

Analyses of data collected through the use of surveys and written submissions (Mac Gearailt et al., 2023) and additional tools, including one-to-one interviews, focus group meetings and bilateral meetings (NCCA, 2023) as part of the consultation on the draft L1 and L2 specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish identified recurring concerns, challenges, and significant difficulties. The feedback nonetheless provided valuable insights which are instrumental in guiding the future development of the Leaving Certificate Irish curriculum.

Dissatisfaction with the current system

There is widespread consensus among stakeholders that the current Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus is inadequate and requires redevelopment (NCCA, 2023; Mac Gearailt et al., 2023; Ó Laoire, 2018). The existing syllabus fails to meet the needs of both Irish-medium and English-medium students, with criticism focused on the overemphasis on rote learning and literature at the expense of practical communication skills, especially speaking.

While stakeholders agree on the need for a new model and have long advocated for a differentiated L1/L2 curriculum (Little, 2003), the proposed L1/L2 distinction for native and second-language speakers raised concerns. Stakeholders worry about potential disadvantages for Gaeltacht areas, particularly a decline in Irish language use if incentives for selecting the L1 specification are not provided.

Feedback also highlighted a lack of clarity in the draft specifications regarding learning outcomes, assessment methods, and literary text selection, which undermined confidence in the proposed changes. Additionally, concerns were raised about alignment with Junior Cycle developments, the broader Senior Cycle Redevelopment, and national Irish language policy.

A recurring theme in the consultation was the possibility of aligning the Leaving Certificate Irish specification with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). Stakeholders believed this would clarify expectations at each level (A1-C2), enhance linguistic development, and improve transparency across the education system. However, concerns were raised about applying a foreign language framework to native speakers and the need for adaptation to the Irish context.

Next Steps: The Need for a Shared Vision

This paper aims to explore the potential alignment of the Leaving Certificate Irish specification with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020) and present perspectives on the possible implications for teachers in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. It will focus on the redevelopment of Irish

(teaching, learning, and assessment), while also considering these changes in the context of the broader Senior Cycle Redevelopment.

The NCCA acknowledges the complexity of the feedback and the need for further research, deliberation, and stakeholder engagement to establish a shared vision that addresses the concerns and aspirations of all involved. This includes ensuring the revised specifications cater to the diverse needs of all learners of Irish and to align with the broader vision and key competencies of the redeveloped Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2022).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) is a descriptive framework that outlines language proficiency across a continuum, ranging from level A1 (basic user) to level C2 (proficient user). Developed by the Council of Europe and first published in 2001, its central aim is to promote plurilingualism and foster high-quality language education (Council of Europe, 2020).

The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis (Council of Europe, 2001:1).

Over time, the framework has undergone significant revisions and is now widely regarded as an influential tool in global language education, used for learning, teaching, and assessing language skills.

Although the term "assessment" appears in the subtitle—*CEFR: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*—the CEFR is not primarily focused on assessment. Key concepts embedded within the CEFR to promote plurilingualism and language education, include an action-oriented approach, communicative language learning activities linked to real-world tasks, and the promotion of plurilingualism and mediation.

In 2020, the Council of Europe released the *CEFR Companion Volume*, an updated and more accessible version of the framework. The Companion Volume simplifies the core concepts of the CEFR and introduces new illustrative descriptors that specify the learner's expected achievements across various language skills at each proficiency level.

New descriptors in the Companion Volume address the following areas:

- **Online Interaction:** Recognizing the increasing importance of digital communication.
- **Mediation:** Defining mediation and offering guidance on its integration into language instruction.
- **Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence:** Advocating for a more inclusive approach to language education.

- **Phonological Competence:** Introducing a new scale focused on sound articulation.

Additionally, the Companion Volume strengthens the action-oriented approach, which positions learners as active social agents who engage in meaningful communication. This approach encourages a shift away from traditional grammar-centred curricula towards the development of programs based on real-world tasks and needs analyses of real-world communicative needs of learners. In other words, the language that users will need to be able to function, purposefully communicate and meet their specific requirements within the language.

Literature on the CEFR acknowledges the challenges of its effective implementation, including the need for increased teacher awareness, the adaptation of the framework to various educational contexts, and concerns over an excessive focus on assessment as a central feature (Abbate, E., 2022; North et al. 2022; Uri et al. 2018).

In sum, the CEFR is recognized as a powerful tool for enhancing language education and fostering intercultural awareness (Alderson, 2007; Schneider, 2020). It prioritizes a learner-centred approach, offering opportunities to move beyond traditional pedagogies toward integrated methods that recognize the interconnections among different language skills (Council of Europe, 2020). However, for the framework to be truly effective, it must be acknowledged that the CEFR is intended to be adapted to local contexts which should be carefully considered during implementation.

Methodology

In order to address and answer the research question, ‘what are the perspectives on the opportunities/possibilities and challenges associated with the use of the CEFR CV in the context of the redevelopment of Irish at Senior Cycle level, documents were identified using a systematic search and analyzed to gather various perspectives.

Resources were searched and selected relating to:

- The development of curriculum as part of Senior Cycle redevelopment
- L1 and L2 Specifications for Leaving Cert Irish as part of development and consultation
- CEFR documentation
- CEFR and its alignment with curriculum and minority languages

A systematic screening was carried out on the literature selecting resources that were relevant to the discussion paper based on the above selection criteria. This ensured that various perspectives were included in the analysis and the discussion thereafter.

Once the resources were identified, they were analyzed using the Braun and Clarke 6 step model of data analysis (2016), which revealed themes relating to the opportunities and challenges offered through various perspectives.

The following section will be structured according to the emerged themes to offer critical and objective insights into the opportunities and challenges identified with aligning Senior Cycle Irish with the CEFR (CV).

Perspectives on CEFR CV Alignment in Leaving Certificate Irish: Navigating Opportunities and Complexities

The draft L1 and L2 specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish and the CEFR (CV) were previously discussed in this paper as separate entities. In this section, however, the two will be examined in relation to each other to highlight perspectives on aligning Senior Cycle Irish with the CEFR (CV). During the consultation process, many stakeholders expressed support for such alignment, and this paper aims to critically evaluate the feasibility of this approach. The inherent complexity of the proposed alignment will be explored through an analysis of the opportunities and challenges, providing valuable insights into the suitability and potential effectiveness of applying the framework within the unique context of the Irish language.

The analysis of opportunities and possibilities highlights how alignment could enhance the quality of provision in line with the key competencies of the Senior Cycle Redevelopment and improve the overall experience for language learners. However, concerns have also been raised regarding the appropriateness of the framework for Irish, particularly in relation to the complex sociolinguistic issues it entails, which will also be recognised and explored.

Opportunity 1: Promoting Transparency, Flexibility and Continuity Across the Education System

The CEFR is globally recognized as a descriptive scheme for describing language proficiency levels. One of its primary functions is offer a positive formulation of proficiency levels to gauge progress in language learning, ensuring that levels are transparently and holistically applied throughout the education continuum—from preschool to higher education.

One of the main principles of the CEFR is the promotion of the positive formulation of educational aims and outcomes at all levels. Its “can do” definition of aspects of proficiency provides a clear, shared roadmap for learning, and a far more nuanced instrument to gauge progress than an exclusive focus on scores in tests and examinations. This principle is based on the CEFR view of language as a vehicle for opportunity and success in social, educational and professional domains (Council of Europe, 2020: 27).

The consultation on the draft specifications for Senior Cycle Irish highlighted the importance of maintaining continuity between the Junior Cycle, which is broadly aligned with the CEFR³, and the Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2023). This alignment would support a cohesive and transparent progression across the education system. Such transparency benefits students, teachers, parents, and policymakers by fostering a shared understanding of learning objectives and progression pathways. This would allow stakeholders to have a unified view

³ L1 Junior Certificate Specification for Irish is broadly aligned with CEFR level B2. L2 Junior Certificate Specification for Irish is broadly aligned with CEFR level A2/B1.

of what is expected of the learner at each proficiency level and how they can progress through the framework.

In the context of the Leaving Certificate Irish specifications, transparent descriptors could provide much-needed clarity for both teachers and students, guiding assessment in a standardized and continuous manner. Some criticisms have been raised during a public consultation on the draft specifications L1 and L2 for Senior Cycle Irish, regarding the broad and ambiguous nature of the draft learning objectives for Senior Cycle Irish (NCCA, 2023). The CEFR, with its "can-do" descriptors, offers a solution to this issue by providing specific, measurable expectations for learners at each level. The framework, with its broad range of descriptors, offers flexibility in curriculum design and assessment, which can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners based on their abilities and backgrounds. These principles align well with the overarching goals of the redeveloped Senior Cycle, which seeks to create diverse learning pathways and promote inclusive education (NCCA, 2022). Therefore, aligning Leaving Certificate Irish with the CEFR could effectively address the needs of learners with varying linguistic abilities. The focus of the CEFR to map progress through language learning experiences rather than through test scores and examinations, aligns strongly with the Senior Cycle Redevelopment to design broader assessment methods that move flexibly beyond examinations.

Moreover, the CEFR is internationally recognized, ensuring a global understanding of proficiency levels. This recognition is particularly advantageous for language users seeking higher education or employment opportunities abroad (Wenicke & Bournot-Trites, 2011; Schneider, 2020). The CEFR serves as an international framework for Irish language learners, potentially increasing the value placed on the language and fostering a more positive perception of Irish language proficiency.

Opportunity 2: Evolving Pedagogical Perspectives

It has been suggested that the communicative needs of Irish language learners, as a minority language, differ from those of foreign language learners because their needs do not always extend beyond the classroom or school setting (Little, 2003; Ó Laoire XXXX). For example, teaching practical communication skills like ordering a meal in a restaurant may feel unauthentic and irrelevant to Irish learners if such real-life opportunities are not available to them. The action-oriented approach proposed by the CEFR builds on, and extends beyond, the communicative approach that has shaped language education since the 1970s (Hymes, XXXX). While the communicative approach views language primarily as a tool for communication, the action-oriented approach emphasizes learners as 'social agents' who use language to complete functional tasks in real-world contexts, moving beyond merely using language for communication purposes (Piccardo, 2014).

Action-oriented tasks can build on established communicative practices, offering Irish learners opportunities to collaborate on activities that emphasize action. Through such tasks, learners co-construct meaning. For instance, a practical example of an action-oriented task would be for learners to use their L2 to share meal recipes or provide written or oral cooking instructions (Hunter & Ortiz, 2025), instead of the more typical foreign language learning task of ordering a meal in a restaurant to achieve a communicative goal. Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) could further support Irish learners by facilitating real-world, action-oriented tasks such as shared blog writing, wikis, podcast creation, voiceover technology or movie-making (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chlochasaigh, 2019).

Additionally, the action-oriented approach could offer meaningful opportunities for functional grammar learning, where grammar is integrated into tasks and taught to support the completion of the task, rather than driving the task itself. In this context, grammar becomes a tool to enable learners to successfully carry out the task, an approach that could benefit the teaching and learning of Irish where grammar can often be the focus of the lesson with little emphasis on the language function of the grammar rule or language awareness (Ó Laoire, 2017).

The CEFR's focus on action-orientated activities and real-world tasks aligns seamlessly with the Senior Cycle Redevelopment's goal of transitioning away from rote memorization and exam-centric instruction toward more engaging, practical, and meaningful learning experiences. The need for this shift is underscored in discussions surrounding the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate (NCCA, 2022, 2023). Innovative assessment methods, including multi-modal assessments, could be enhanced by aligning them with action-oriented approaches to learning Irish. However, research highlights the importance of embedding assessment literacy into instruction, especially when offering multi-modal assessments or providing students with a choice of assessment formats as part of a learner-centred or universal design approach to teaching, learning, and assessment (O'Brien & Reale, 2021; Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2023).

Furthermore, there is a clear link between possibilities offered through the action-orientated approach of the CEFR and key competencies of the Senior Cycle Redevelopment, for example, to enable learners to become active participants in society resonates strongly with building learner's capacity as social agents. Through alignment with the CEFR, the Irish language curriculum could provide an opportunity to motivate learners to engage with the language authentically and digitally, fostering creative language use and facilitating relevant, real-world communication. These learning experiences would be grounded in the learners' needs as defined by the targeted proficiency levels of the CEFR.

Opportunity 3: Plurilingualism and the CEFR

Concepts central to the CEFR, such as plurilingual and pluricultural competence, are pertinent and applicable to all language users in a globalized context, including native speakers.

The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (Council of Europe, 2020: 123).

The CEFR plays a crucial role in raising awareness of plurilingualism, including minority language settings where global and foreign languages are often spoken alongside the minority language (Lotti, 2007), as is the case with Irish.

Recent developments, such as the inclusion of plurilingualism in the proposed Primary Language Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages (2024) and Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education (2017-2026), indicate a shift towards fostering dynamic

linguistic repertoires and interconnected language learning practices (Westhoff, 2007; Lotti, 2007; Little, 2003). These trends signal a transition from simply building proficiency across multiple languages to cultivating the capacity to use language and knowledge about language in more integrated ways (North et al., 2022; Little, 2003).

The draft specifications for Senior Cycle Irish acknowledge plurilingualism in several ways, particularly through the differentiation between the L1 and L2 specifications. However, feedback from the consultation process reveals dissatisfaction with the proposed differentiation approach, highlighting concerns over the increased difficulty without corresponding benefits in the L1 syllabus, lack of clarity regarding the compulsory study of the L1/L2 specifications, and insufficient resources and incomplete language courses for effective syllabus implementation (Gaeloideachas, 2021). *Gaeloideachas* advocates for a more nuanced differentiation within the Irish language syllabus that better meets the needs of all learners. This approach aligns with the CEFR's philosophy and the Council of Europe's principles, which emphasize identifying and addressing the specific needs and abilities of learners in a meaningful way.

Opportunity 4: Recognizing and Valuing the Diversity of Learner Profiles and Contexts

The CEFR (CV) is a framework for language learning to support inclusion and democracy and aims to protect national languages, such as Irish:

For the Council of Europe, language education must be inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural. It must foster democracy. This means that language education must be accessible to all learners throughout their lives, not only in formal schooling, it must recognise and value each learner's individual linguistic and cultural identity, and it must draw on these identities as a rich resource for learning, enabling each learner to develop a fluid and integrated linguistic and cultural repertoire, appropriate to that learner's individual needs and context. It is a repertoire open to all languages: home languages, sign languages, the language of schooling, neighbouring languages, second and foreign languages (Council of Europe, 2022:19).

The flexibility and inclusive nature of the CEFR Companion Volume (CV) allows for the creation of proficiency profiles tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of L1 (native), L2 (second language), and LX (learners whose first language is neither Irish nor English) speakers. This adaptability is crucial in the context of Senior Cycle Irish, as it addresses the diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning trajectories of students. The flexibility of the CEFR ensures that curriculum and assessment practices can be inclusive and responsive to the individual needs of students, facilitating their engagement with the language at a level appropriate to their proficiency. To effectively motivate students to learn and use Irish, it is essential that they are both enabled and assessed at the level they are studying (Ní Dhonnchadha et al., 2024; Ní Chlochasaigh, 2013). *Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge* (TEG) offers assessments and qualifications for adult learners of Irish, measuring proficiency across various levels, from beginner to advanced. This system allows learners to demonstrate their linguistic abilities and be assessed on a continuous and transparent learning trajectory (www.teg.ie).

The philosophy underlying the Council of Europe's framework, which emphasizes assessing skills within the learner's current abilities rather than focusing on gaps in knowledge, could play a crucial role in fostering motivation to learn Irish. Motivation is a key predictor of success in language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Ní Dhonnchadha, 2019; Ní Chlochasaigh, 2020; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012; Ní Dhonnchadha et al., 2024; Barnes et al., 2024), whereby learners who have a clear understanding of individual strengths and weaknesses and an associated road map for language learning, demonstrate higher levels of motivation and achieve greater competency levels in the language (Ní Chlochasaigh, 2013; Ní Dhonnchadha et al., 2024; Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2024).

The suitability of the L1/L2 specifications for Senior Cycle Irish and their alignment with the CEFR is a subject of ongoing debate. Critics argue that aligning a native language curriculum with a framework designed for foreign language acquisition raises concerns, as much of the evidence supporting the CEFR's effectiveness stems from foreign language contexts (Council of Europe, 2005; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). However, other perspectives suggest that the CEFR is a versatile and powerful tool that can accommodate various linguistic profiles, including both L1 and L2 learners (Mac Gearailt et al., 2023). While the CEFR is traditionally used to teach second languages, it was not originally designed for mother-tongue instruction (Lotti, 2007).

Nonetheless, there is evidence indicating that the framework can be adapted to suit the needs of native speakers, as demonstrated in minority language contexts such as Friulian, Frisian, and Basque (*ibid*). In Ireland, under the guidance of the Department of Education and in line with the Policy on Gaeltacht Education, the CEFR has been successfully adapted and broadly aligned to educational programs that include native Irish speakers (Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2024; Ní Dhonnchadha et al., 2024). TEG, which is widely utilized as a measure of linguistic proficiency for entry requirements to educational programs, assesses both L1 and L2 speakers. Thus, there is some evidence, albeit limited, suggesting that the CEFR can be adapted and effectively applied to various speaker profiles, including native Irish speakers. Thus, highlighting the CEFR's flexibility and potential for adaptation to diverse linguistic needs and contexts.

Opportunity 5: Develop the 4 modes of communication

The CEFR (CV) has introduced developments that move away from traditional models focused on the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), which have increasingly been criticized for inadequately capturing the complexities of real-world communication (Council of Europe, 2020). Critics argue that the traditional four-skills model does not effectively represent language functions or language use at the macro level, that is, in real-life interactions (North et al., 2022). This model is seen as an abstract division of language skills, whereas real-life communication involves the integration of skills and modes (*ibid*). In response to these criticisms, the CEFR adopts a model centred on interaction, where meaning is co-constructed. Accordingly, CEFR activities are structured around four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, and mediation. Learners develop skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) through language use across the 4 modes of communication.

Within this framework, reading and listening are categorized as receptive modes of communication, while speaking and writing are associated with production—concepts familiar to language educators. However, all four modes are interrelated, with interaction

sometimes mistakenly identified as a fifth skill in addition to the traditional four (North et al., 2022). Reception, production, and interaction also relate to the fourth mode of communication, "mediation," which focuses on facilitating understanding and communication between individuals and groups (Council of Europe, 2020).

The shift from the traditional four skills to the four modes of communication in the CEFR presents an opportunity for the teaching of Irish at Senior Cycle level to offer holistic, integrated, and socially relevant learning experiences. Such opportunities would reflect the key competencies of Senior Cycle Redevelopment, encompassing whole-person education, holistic development and ways of participating in society at local and global citizenship levels. This shift is particularly pertinent in addressing the challenges of low proficiency in communication and speaking Irish (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002; Ó Laoire, 2005; An Roinn Oideachais, 2022). The CEFR model acknowledges the complexities of communication and emphasises the importance of teaching learners how language skills are interconnected to promote meaningful interactions and effective communication (Council of Europe, 2020).

Opportunity 6: Integration with policy

Stakeholders argue that a comprehensive policy for Irish should be developed across the entire education system, from early years to tertiary level, incorporating policies such as *The Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* and *The Policy for Irish-medium Education Outside the Gaeltacht* (Department of Education) (NCCA, 2023). It is suggested that the education continuum be aligned with the CEFR, across teaching, learning and assessment (Mac Gearailt et al., 2023). An integrated approach, aligned with the CEFR across the education continuum, alongside a cohesive education policy for Irish, would offer potential pathways to building linguistic capacity in a way that is aligned with language policies, learning goals and assessment practices across the education system.

Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 outlines proficiency requirements for post-primary foreign language teachers according to the CEFR. Although Irish is not included in this policy, it may be beneficial that the Irish language curriculum be considered within the broader framework of language learning policies to ensure continuity and transparency in language education (NCCA, 2023). If Senior Cycle Irish is not broadly aligned with the CEFR, in line with foreign languages in the curriculum and Junior Cycle Irish, it could undermine its status and potentially have a negative impact on the language. As such, there is a pressing need for strategic planning regarding Irish in the education system—planning that takes into account best-practice language pedagogy at a European level, the official status of Irish in Europe, and the unique national status of Irish in Ireland.

Although Junior Cycle Irish has seen broad alignment with the CEFR, consultations have highlighted criticisms regarding the lack of evaluation or research on its impact or effectiveness (NCCA, 2023). Research on immersion teacher education as part of the implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* has demonstrated the effects and impact of aligning teacher linguistic proficiency with the CEFR and national policy objectives of the state (Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2024). While this model for learning Irish is designed for teacher education (Ní Dhonnchadha et al., 2024), it offers valuable experience and evidence relevant to discussions surrounding the potential alignment of Leaving Cert Irish specifications with the CEFR, as well as the use and adaptation of current

native models. It must be noted however, that such an adaptation would call for significant planning and preparation, which will be discussed further below under potential challenges.

Opportunity 7: Integration with content learning

Further evidence supports the possibility of integrating CEFR aligned language acquisition with content learning, to drive both language and content learning simultaneously (Tardieu & Dolitsky, 2012; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chlochasaigh, 2019; Kaur & Zhi Jian, 2022; Redlich & Pattison, 2024). There is some misconception that the CEFR is concerned solely with linguistic capacity; however, the framework places a broader emphasis on proficiency related to broader knowledge (North & Goodier, 2018). The consultation process revealed criticisms that the current curriculum places excessive emphasis on literature and rote learning, with insufficient focus on communication and authentic language use (NCCA, 2023). An evidence-based practice to integrate the principles and practices of the CEFR with CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), particularly through the *4 C's framework* (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture), could facilitate content learning within the Senior Cycle Irish language curriculum while simultaneously and systematically targeting communicative competence and cultural awareness (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chlochasaigh, 2019; Redlich & Pattison, 2024).

Opportunity 8: Building Linguistic Proficiency in Irish

Significant difficulties and challenges related to poor linguistic proficiency in Irish within schools have been reported (An Roinn Oideachais, 2022). Although there are learners who successfully acquire Irish through the education system, they remain in the minority (Ní Chlochasaigh, 2020; Ní Longaigh, 2016). NCCA consultation reports highlight a strong call from stakeholders for language planning across the education system to focus on building linguistic capacity in Irish. Perspectives shared indicate a strong possibility of achieving this goal through CEFR alignment, which provides transparent learning goals and an active approach to support the development of learners' confidence, motivation, and linguistic ability. The CEFR could assist teachers and curriculum designers in identifying specific goals and evaluating progress toward achieving these goals (Kaur & Zhi Jian, 2022).

Research on fostering linguistic proficiency in Irish through the CEFR demonstrates that Irish language learners can make significant progress in both content and language acquisition, provided the appropriate conditions are in place. These conditions include scaffolds such as language consultation and targeted supports, written corrective feedback, progress evaluation, and assessment rubrics based on CEFR descriptors (Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2024). Building linguistic proficiency in any language, particularly in a minority language, requires a systematic and rigorous learning design that builds capacity in a meaningful, interactive and learner-centred approach, as are central to the core principles of the CEFR.

Opportunity 9: Mapping linguistic competency through a purposeful portfolio

Varying perspectives were shared on the use of a language portfolio during the consultation process, with feedback revealing concerns about the lack of information and guidelines regarding its function and structure, as well as a shortage of exemplars and pedagogical

guidelines (NCCA, 2023). Questions were raised regarding the portfolio's practical role in facilitating language acquisition, and there were concerns about its successful implementation in light of time constraints, workload, its connection to the oral Irish exam, and the continued emphasis on rote learning.

On the other hand, perspectives highlighting the advantages of the portfolio viewed it as a powerful tool for promoting self-directed learning, measuring language development, and fostering language awareness and reflection (Mac Gearailt et al., 2023).

Student Language Portfolio Guidelines would be developed and published separately to the specifications, in the event of further development of the draft specifications for Senior Cycle Irish (NCCA, 2023). Alignment with the CEFR and the work of the Council of Europe, particularly the European Language Portfolio (ELP), could provide an evidence-based model to guide portfolio use in the Irish context. While adapting the ELP for the learning of Irish would be crucial, including considerations of the challenges raised during the consultation, there is a wealth of resources available as a companion to the ELP that could support this development (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>). Evidence suggests that the language portfolio is a best-practice approach in language learning, proven to be effective in promoting self-directed learning, language learning literacy, and recording and identifying language abilities (Council of Europe, 2011; Little, 2003, 2009, 2019).

Since the portfolio complements the CEFR framework (Dillon, 2016), exploring the possibility of integrating an adapted version of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) with learning, teaching, and assessment in the Senior Cycle Irish curriculum should be prioritized. Furthermore, exploring opportunities to use digital tools in the portfolio process could offer a dynamic and proactive instrument adaptable to diverse educational settings (Perez Cavana, 2012).

The following section will take a critical look at perspectives that acknowledge the challenges identified with aligning the CEFR (CV) with senior cycle Irish.

Challenge 1: Teachers knowledge of the CEFR and its implementation

As mentioned above, there would undoubtedly be significant advantages to implementing a transparent and continuous approach to the Senior Cycle Irish curriculum, similar to the one presented in the CEFR. However, this would require considerable effort, including careful planning, professional learning opportunities, and ongoing evaluation. The consultation recommends that an evaluation of the impact and challenges of CEFR alignment in the Junior Cycle be conducted before its implementation in the Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2023).

Teacher perceptions, as reported in sources analysed for this paper, suggest that the CEFR can be difficult to follow. Teachers have acknowledged gaps in their knowledge and awareness of CEFR principles and practices, as well as a lack of training on its implementation (Uri et al., 2018; Chong & Yamat, 2021; Arepin et al., 2022; Kaur & Zhi Jian, 2022; Levy & Figueras, 2022). There is a risk of misunderstandings and inconsistent practices in CEFR implementation, and therefore teachers may be reluctant to embrace changes or to align the curriculum with the CEFR. Concerns have also been raised regarding the lack of resources and expertise to develop appropriate materials, as well as practical

challenges such as teacher workload and the allocation of time for professional development (*ibid*).

For successful alignment of a curriculum with the CEFR, teacher knowledge is crucial. Challenges teachers might face in the implementation process should be thoroughly considered (Piccardo, 2010). To overcome these barriers, teachers need access to high-quality, ongoing professional learning opportunities that go beyond basic knowledge of the CEFR and provide practical guidance on how to effectively apply its principles in diverse teaching contexts. Teachers should be actively involved in the implementation and evaluation processes, developing skills for the flexible application of the framework, in order to minimize associated anxiety and improve overall success.

Challenge 2: Evolving teaching methodologies and approaches

Addressing new teaching methodologies can be challenging when more traditional methods have been established and embedded in practice, for example, transitioning from teacher-centred methodologies to learner-centred methodologies that are centred around real-life tasks. One might ask what the differences are between a communicative approach to language teaching that emphasises communicative competency and the action-orientated approach as defined by the CEFR that builds on the communicative approach (see Appendix B for key differences). Therefore, teachers may find it difficult to become familiar with a new approach under a different framework and to develop resources aligned with the framework's descriptors. This difficulty is particularly evident in the case of less commonly accessible languages or in contexts where resources and support materials are more limited, as could be said to be the case with the Irish language, although significant efforts have been made to make resources available through channels such as An Tairseach COGG, SNAS, Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge.

Developing high-quality, contextually relevant resources, including assessment tools, is essential for the successful implementation of the CEFR in the context of Senior Cycle Irish. Reliance on generic CEFR resources or materials designed for other languages may not effectively address the unique features and challenges of teaching and learning Irish. Therefore, a resource bank should be specifically developed under expert guidance, focusing on the application of the CEFR to the Irish language Senior Cycle curriculum.

It is also important to note that the Senior Cycle Irish syllabus is not solely a language program but also incorporates content and subject-specific requirements. Consequently, resources must be developed in an integrated manner that respond to both the language and content needs of the curriculum (Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2024). This task requires specific expertise, which can be fostered through professional learning opportunities focused on the CEFR and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Teachers must be adequately supported for satisfactory achievement in the transition to CEFR-based practices in the context of Senior Cycle Irish.

Moreover, CEFR alignment is more commonly seen in language programs and less frequently applied to content or literature programs. Since few descriptors are specifically tailored to the study of literature, a flexible approach to adapting them for the Senior Cycle Irish context will be essential.

Challenge 3: Advancing plurilingualism and applying the CEFR to unique sociolinguistic contexts

For meaningful alignment with the CEFR and key concepts such as plurilingualism, significant changes in pedagogical practices, curriculum design, resource development, and teacher education are essential (North et al., 2022). For example, a recent study conducted by SEALBHÚ, in primary schools, demonstrates the advantages of an inductive plurilingual approach to promoting language awareness and intercultural communication. The study provides useful examples and insights for teaching Irish grammar through a plurilingual approach which facilitates understandings and practices of plurilingual language education (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2024).

However, there are common misconceptions about plurilingualism that need to be addressed. It is important to differentiate between ‘multilingualism’ and ‘plurilingualism.’ Multilingualism refers to the coexistence of different languages at a social or individual level with minimal interaction between them. In contrast, plurilingualism is defined as the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual learner or user (Piccardo, 2021). Other misconceptions include the belief that plurilingualism is a relatively new concept, applies only to highly skilled language learners with multiple competencies, and poses a threat to native languages (North et al., 2022).

There are various tools available to support the transition to aligning the curriculum with the CEFR and plurilingualism, including the CEFR toolkit, the European Language Portfolio (ELP), the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches, and examples from bilingual world contexts where curricula have been successfully aligned with the CEFR (British Council, UKALTA, EALTA and ALTE, 2022). The CEFR framework was first introduced in Europe in both majority and minority language contexts and has since been widely adopted across nearly all Council of Europe and European Union member states (Council of Europe, 2020: 27). It has also been extended beyond Europe, adapted for the sociolinguistic contexts of countries like Japan, China, Korea, and Malaysia, and has been implemented across all levels of education (Uri et al., 2018). In Canada, the CEFR has supported a thriving multilingual society, enhancing accessibility to languages and promoting plurilingual approaches (Wernicke & Bournot-Trites, 2011).

Studies on aligning curricula with the CEFR emphasize the importance of adapting the framework to the sociolinguistic context of each language, particularly in the case of minority languages (Lotti, 2007; Ó Ciardúbháin & Nic Giolla Mhichíl, 2014). Despite the extensive global development of the CEFR, challenges persist, particularly in countries such as Malaysia, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where teacher knowledge of the framework remains a key issue (Uri et al., 2018) (as discussed under Challenge 1).

Challenge 4: The role of mediation and translanguaging in language education

A potential challenge in the context of Senior Cycle Irish could arise in the adoption of new concepts associated with the CEFR, particularly the concept of mediation. Mediation, as defined by the CEFR, involves the language user acting as an intermediary to facilitate communication and understanding between individuals or groups, either within a single

language or across different languages. This process reflects real-world social interactions (Schneider, 2020; Council of Europe, 2020). METLA (2023: 16) define cross-linguistic mediation as ‘the process of relaying or transferring information from one language to another for a given communicative purpose’. Inter-linguistic mediation on the other hand is where the mediator facilitates communication within the same language ‘in order to bridge communication gaps’ (*ibid*, 11).

Mediation extends beyond mere translation; it encompasses the creation of opportunities for interaction that enable the construction of new knowledge and mutual understanding between individuals (*ibid*).

In terms of Irish language education, there has been a general acceptance of best practices in immersion education across both first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) contexts, where it is strongly encouraged to teach Irish exclusively through the medium of Irish. However, this preferred approach may be at odds with the realities of practice in some educational settings, where the role of English in the teaching of Irish, or through Irish, remains a largely evident yet underexplored challenge (DES, 2000 in Little, 2003; Ní Chonchúir, 2025). There is a lack of consensus regarding the use and appropriateness of translanguaging in Irish language contexts, especially given that authentic Irish language use is largely confined to the classroom for the majority of language learners (Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Broin, 2018). Advancements on the research agenda in areas such as cross-linguistic mediation and translanguaging should be considered in teacher education and professional learning to support the practical implications and advance discussions on the role of English in the teaching of Irish/through Irish.

Challenge 5: Integration with policy

While aligning the teaching and learning of Irish with national language policies for all learners would offer significant benefits in ensuring consistency and achieving learning outcomes across the system, the practical implementation of such an alignment may present considerable challenges. Schools are already engaged in the complex task of addressing policy implementation and meeting various policy objectives. Therefore, should the Senior Irish curriculum be aligned with a framework like the CEFR through state policy, it is essential that this alignment be clearly articulated, transparent, and comprehensive to facilitate effective integration.

Challenge 6: Integration with content learning

One potential benefit of aligning language learning with content learning is the opportunity to scaffold both language and content acquisition simultaneously. Research on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) highlights the substantial challenges involved in integrating language, content, and literacy (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016; Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2018; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Successful implementation of such an approach requires high-quality teacher preparation and ongoing professional development (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011; Lyster & Tedick, 2014).

If the Senior Cycle Irish language curriculum is to be aligned with the CEFR to address both language proficiency and content knowledge across the curriculum, it is crucial that teachers

receive targeted support in teaching language within the context of content and in teaching content through language instruction in a meaningful way. Achieving this goal would require a substantial investment in professional development pathways and initial teacher education programs to equip educators with the necessary skills and strategies.

Challenge 7: Emphasis on assessment

While the CEFR promotes a holistic approach to language learning, there is a risk that its implementation could lead to an overemphasis on assessment, where assessment preparation would take focus over quality teaching and learning, particularly in the context of examinations. This risk is particularly pronounced in Ireland, where the national education system already faces significant criticism regarding the overreliance on exams (NCCA, 2023). North et al. (2022) caution against linking language proficiency solely to exam performance, advocating instead for the exploration of innovative methods of assessing proficiency in accordance with the CEFR descriptors. Innovative methods could include portfolio work, blog writing, wiki editing, podcast persuasions, multimodal presentations, posters, movie making based on curriculum content and language learning.

The use of CEFR descriptors to measure language proficiency requires careful strategic planning, comprehensive professional development, and the development of assessment exemplars that demonstrate how to align the descriptors with assessment practices beyond traditional examinations. This approach aligns with the broader vision for the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate, which emphasizes the progression of learning pathways through more varied and dynamic assessment methods (NCCA, 2022).

Challenge 8: Developing and Mapping linguistic competency through a purposeful portfolio

Research on cultivating language capacity in Irish and utilizing a portfolio to scaffold language acquisition has shown that a language portfolio can serve as a meaningful and purposeful tool, particularly when integrated with the CEFR and digital-mediated learning (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chlochasaigh, 2020; Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023; Dillon, 2016). There is some evidence in this model that is guided by the work of the Council of Europe, that the portfolio is not just effective in language development but as a tool for mapping linguistic progress. It enables learners to identify their learning needs, document challenges and common errors, and receive corrective feedback, while fostering reflective learning practices.

To maximize the effectiveness of this model, a structured approach or template for portfolio design is essential. Both teachers and students need to be proficient in using the portfolio effectively. This requires clear alignment with learning outcomes and assessment criteria, as well as the inclusion of multimodal element, ensuring that the portfolio does not rely excessively on written content as a comfort mode. One area that could benefit from further development is the integration of oral language skills into the portfolio, specifically by linking speaking practice to evidence of progress, which could be aligned with the oral examination. This suggestion was highlighted as an area of concern during consultation process, where a stronger link and more allocated marks between the oral exam and the portfolio has been suggested (NCCA, 2023). Other areas of concern about the language portfolio included teachers' and students' experiences of engaging with a portfolio in Junior

Cycle L1 and L2 specifications as part of CBA 1 (Continuous-Based Assessment) that have been criticised as a wasted effort. A lack of information about the execution of a language portfolio and also a general concern of the value of the portfolio are also of concern to stakeholders (*ibid*).

For the language portfolio to be a meaningful tool, teachers would require professional support and guidance in its implementation, alongside a clear set of guidelines as discussed above under Opportunity 8. Without such support, there is a risk that the portfolio could be perceived as a "soft" formative assessment tool, undermining its potential effectiveness.

Conclusion

This paper examines the opportunities and challenges associated with the potential alignment of the CEFR with the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Irish. A critical analysis of the perspectives presented in both public documents and relevant literature reveals significant opportunities, alongside notable challenges, in this alignment process. While substantial challenges are identified, the opportunities for enhancing language education through such an alignment appear to outweigh these obstacles, and several strategies are proposed to mitigate the challenges.

Based on the evidence presented, it is noted as a worthwhile exercise to further consider the alignment of Senior Cycle Irish with the CEFR (CV), with a concerted focus on addressing the challenges identified. This can be achieved through targeted investments in further research, the design of professional learning pathways, and the development of resources.

Ultimately, this paper provides evidence that can inform and guide future planning for the development of Senior Cycle Irish, supporting an effective and meaningful alignment with the CEFR. Such alignment holds the potential to address ongoing challenges in the teaching and learning of Irish within the Irish education system.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Primary objectives of the Redevelopment of the senior cycle

Objective	Description
Holistic Development	Refocus on the development of students in all aspects—knowledge, skills, and values/dispositions—to help them become enriched, engaged, and competent learners.
Whole-Person Education	Ensure that the senior cycle continues to educate the entire person, addressing academic, personal, and social growth.
Enrichment, Engagement, and Competence	Help every student become more enriched, engaged, and competent in their learning journey.
Collective and Individual Purposes	Serve both collective purposes (school/community) and individual student needs.
Access to Diverse Futures and Civic Participation	Enable students to access various career paths and participate in civic society and adult life.
Flexible Learning Pathways	Provide more flexible pathways in senior cycle education to suit diverse student needs and aspirations.
Integration of Knowledge, Skills, and Values	Emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge, skills, and values/dispositions in the curriculum and teaching.
Building on Junior Cycle Skills	Build on key skills developed in the junior cycle, ensuring continuity in learning and development.
Curriculum Coherence	Create a coherent curriculum with connections across subjects and curriculum components, extending to pedagogy, inspections, professional development, and teacher education.
Clarity in Learning Outcomes	Provide clarity in learning outcomes, specifying what students should know, understand, and be able to do while maintaining balance between structure and flexibility.
Balance between Scaffolding and Flexibility	Achieve a balance between providing scaffolding for learning outcomes and allowing flexibility to avoid overly rigid structures.
Incorporation of Key Competencies	Replace the existing key skills with key competencies, promoting a more integrated approach to knowledge, skills, and values/dispositions.
Inclusive Curriculum	Ensure the curriculum is inclusive, respecting diversity and valuing the contributions of every student while offering enjoyable experiences and meaningful outcomes.
Valued Senior Cycle	Make the senior cycle valued not just as a means to future goals but also in its own right, improving the overall student experience during their final years of schooling.
Active Participation in Society	Develop students' ability to participate actively and meaningfully in society at local, national, and global levels.

Appendix B

Communicative Approach and Action-Oriented Approach: Key Differences Summarized

Feature	Communicative Approach	Action-Oriented Approach
Focus	Communication as the main goal; developing communicative competence for future use.	Language as a tool for action; learning to use language in the present to accomplish tasks; developing agency.
Learner Role	User of language; limited responsibility and choices.	Social agent; active participant; decision-maker; responsible for their own learning; co-constructor of meaning.
Syllabus Design	Based on analysis of real-life needs, notions, and functions; may follow a linear progression with focus on grammar.	Based on needs analysis and real-life tasks; organized around purposefully selected notions and functions; utilizes “can do” descriptors.
Classroom Activities	Practice of language through pre-scripted dialogues and scenarios; may separate skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	Collaborative and purposeful tasks with real-world outcomes; tasks integrate all modes of communication (reception, production, interaction, mediation).
Language Use	Information transfer; practicing language for future use.	Languaging and plurilanguaging, co-construction of meaning in the present, articulation of thought, and development of strategies.
Assessment	Emphasis on accuracy; may use assessment tasks that encourage memorization such as traditional essays and oral exams.	Focus on communicative ability in real-life contexts and the ability to perform tasks using a variety of competences and strategies.
Underlying Theories	Early research in second language acquisition; focus on communication.	Socio-constructivist, sociocultural; focus on agency and social action.

Appendix C

Key opportunities and challenges: Implications for education in the Irish context

Opportunity	Summary	Challenge	Summary
Promoting Transparency, Flexibility, and Continuity Across the Education System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Alignment with the CEFR can provide clarity in learning objectives across all education levels, enhancing transparency for students, teachers, and policymakers. -CEFR's descriptors can address criticism of vague objectives for Senior Cycle Irish and offer flexibility to design curricula that accommodate diverse learner abilities. -It also provides international recognition, potentially increasing the perceived value and motivation for learning Irish. 	Teachers' Knowledge of the CEFR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited understanding and awareness of CEFR principles among teachers. - Insufficient training and professional development opportunities for CEFR implementation. - Reluctance to embrace change due to workload, lack of resources, and concerns about standard practices. - Need for teacher involvement in implementation and evaluation to build confidence.
Evolving Pedagogical Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CEFR's Action-Oriented Approach builds on classroom-based communicative tasks to real-world engagement. - Encourages learners to act as "social agents" rather than just communicators. - Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) supports digital collaboration through blogs, wikis, and media creation. - Functional grammar is embedded in tasks rather than being the primary focus of lessons. - Aligns with Senior Cycle Redevelopment by promoting engaging, practical, and meaningful learning experiences. - Supports innovative assessment 	Evolving teaching methods and approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges in transitioning to CEFR's action-oriented approach from traditional methodologies. - Difficulty in developing Irish-specific resources aligned with CEFR descriptors. - Need for expertise and professional learning opportunities in CEFR and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). - Adaptation required to address literature and content-focused aspects of the Leaving Cert syllabus.

	<p>methods, such as multi-modal assessments and universal design approaches.</p>	
Plurilingualism and the CEFR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -CEFR emphasizes Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence, recognizing interconnected language learning that can be applied to all language learners, including native speakers. - Irish as a minority language, exists in a multilingual environment alongside global and foreign languages - a plurilingual approach may be fitting. - Senior Cycle Redevelopment acknowledges differentiation between L1 and L2 specifications but faces criticism for lack of clarity and resources. - Calls for a more nuanced differentiation in Irish language syllabi to meet learners' diverse needs. - Aligns with European language policies promoting meaningful and integrated language learning. 	<p>Advancing plurilingualism in sociolinguistic contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Misconceptions about plurilingualism and its differentiation from multilingualism. - Lack of tailored terminology and understanding of plurilingual approaches. - Need to adapt the CEFR to the unique sociolinguistic and minority language context of Irish. - Lessons from global CEFR adaptations could guide its implementation in Ireland.
Recognizing and Valuing Learner Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CEFR (CV) promotes inclusion, democracy, and the protection of national languages like Irish. - Language education should be inclusive, plurilingual, and intercultural, valuing learners' linguistic and cultural identities. - The CEFR allows for tailored proficiency profiles for L1 (native), L2 (second language), and LX (learners whose first language is neither Irish nor English) speakers. - This adaptability ensures curriculum and assessment practices are inclusive and responsive to diverse linguistic backgrounds. - Motivation is a key predictor of success in language learning, with clear learning pathways improving engagement. - Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) provides a structured system for Irish proficiency assessment. - Successful CEFR adaptations in minority language contexts (Friulian, Frisian, Basque) indicate its flexibility. - The CEFR has been adapted for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debate continues over the suitability of aligning native language education with CEFR, originally designed for foreign languages.

	Gaeltacht Education policies in Ireland, with TEG widely used to assess both L1 and L2 speakers.		
Developing the 4 Modes of Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transitioning from traditional four-skill language models to CEFR's four communication modes (reception, production, interaction, and mediation) enables holistic and integrated learning experiences. This approach addresses challenges with Irish language proficiency and supports real-life communication skills, fostering social and interactive learning environments that better align with students' needs and the CEFR framework. 	Mediation and translanguaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistance to adopting new concepts like mediation in the CEFR. - Divergence between idealized immersion practices and the realities of classroom settings. - Debate over the use of translanguaging and English in Irish language education. - Need for research-informed professional learning to address resistance and align with educational redevelopments.
Integration with Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholders advocate for a comprehensive Irish language policy spanning early years to tertiary education. - CEFR alignment across the education continuum and policy could provide coherence in teaching, learning, and assessment. - Junior Cycle Irish is broadly CEFR-aligned, but lacks evaluation of its impact or effectiveness. - Research on immersion teacher education and Gaeltacht Education Policy suggests benefits of CEFR alignment in Irish language instruction. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alignment with state policy requires clear articulation and transparency to ensure effective integration.
Integration with Content Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CEFR is not just about linguistic capacity but also broader knowledge and cultural awareness. - Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) with the 4C's framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture) could strengthen both content and language learning. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges in implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to address both language and content acquisition. - Teacher preparation and professional development to support CLIL practices requires significant planning and investment.
Linguistic Proficiency and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports indicate significant challenges with linguistic proficiency in Irish schools, with successful language acquisition remaining limited. - Stakeholders emphasize the need for strategic language planning to strengthen linguistic capacity. - CEFR alignment could provide clear learning goals and an active approach to cultivate confidence 	Emphasis on Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk of overemphasizing assessment, especially in exam-driven systems. - Need for strategic planning and innovative assessment practices aligned with CEFR descriptors. - Development of assessment exemplars to demonstrate diverse methods of evaluating proficiency.

and motivation.

- Transparent progress tracking through CEFR-based rubrics, corrective feedback, and consultation supports learner development.
- Minority language acquisition requires a systematic, interactive, and learner-centered approach, in line with CEFR principles.

Portfolio Development and Linguistic Competency

- Mixed feedback on language portfolio use due to unclear guidelines and concerns about implementation.
- Portfolio seen as a tool for self-directed learning, language awareness, and tracking language development.
- The European Language Portfolio (ELP) offers an evidence-based model adaptable to Irish language learning.
- Research supports portfolios as effective tools for measuring progress and fostering metacognition.
- Digital tools could enhance portfolio use, making it a more dynamic instrument for learning and assessment.

- Challenges identified include time constraints, workload, and its connection to oral Irish exams and rote learning.
- Importance of structured portfolio design aligned with CEFR and digital learning.
- Risk of overreliance on written elements and neglecting oral language skills.
- Teachers require support and guidance to implement portfolios effectively and avoid perceptions of it being a "soft" assessment tool.