Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Leaving Certificate Arabic

Contents

1. Introduction

This paper sets out the background and context for the proposed review of Leaving Certificate Arabic.

The paper begins with an overview of the historical context for Arabic in the curriculum. It then offers a summary of recent developments in language education and policy in Ireland, followed by a brief insight into Arabic in the curriculum in a range of jurisdictions internationally. The paper concludes with a brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Arabic that will guide the work of the development group in drafting a revised specification for Leaving Certificate Arabic.

2. Background

A Leaving Certificate Arabic syllabus was introduced in Ireland for the first time in 1995 and examined in 1997 at Ordinary and Higher level. The introduction of this subject arose out of an inter-governmental agreement between the Irish and Libyan governments whereby Libyan students were given the opportunity to follow the Leaving Certificate curriculum and to sit corresponding examinations. The purpose of the agreement was to facilitate Libyan students who chose to study medicine in Irish universities, and the Royal College of Surgeons in particular, and aimed to make their transition into Irish Universities more straightforward in this context.

Initially Leaving Certificate Arabic was taken by a very small number of students. As the demand grew, a new interim Leaving Certificate Arabic syllabus was introduced in 2002. A key feature of the 2002 syllabus was the addition to the syllabus of set texts from modern Arabic literature. This reflected the increasing variety of students taking the subject. However, since the majority of these were expected to remain first language Arabic speakers, the syllabus introduced in 2002 continued to emphasise reading and writing skills and no oral and aural assessment was included as part the Leaving Certificate Arabic assessment.

When the Leaving Certificate Arabic Interim Syllabus was being developed, it was suggested that a number of schools in Ireland might like to offer Arabic as a curricular option to students who were not first language speakers of Arabic. It was envisaged that a syllabus incorporating all elements of a modern language syllabus should be put in place for Arabic (to replace the Leaving Certificate Interim Syllabus). This was to take place in due course with a view to it being offered to a wider cohort of students, hence the title Leaving Certificate Arabic Interim Syllabus; however, this did not happen.

In recent years NCCA received feedback from teachers of Arabic raising concerns about the accessibility, inclusivity and relevance of the current Leaving Certificate Arabic Interim Syllabus. Key among the issues raised was the pitching of the current syllabus. It was suggested that whilst Leaving Certificate Arabic is currently more suited to those for whom Arabic is a first language, this is not reflective of the changing profile of Arabic speakers and learners in Ireland. A desire for the Leaving Certificate Arabic Interim Syllabus to be reviewed and for the pitch of the provision to be re-evaluated and potentially re-oriented to second language learner level, comparable with other Modern Foreign Languages at Leaving Certificate level, was expressed. Feedback also suggested that the literature lists, which currently consist of poetry, novels and extracts from the Qur'ān, should be updated and modernised; and the view was expressed that a perceived over-emphasis on grammar and the lack of an oral component in assessment should be addressed.

Feedback was also received from other stakeholders querying why the Arabic Interim Syllabus required all students to answer examination questions on the Qur'ān.

In the context of this significant feedback, in 2020, NCCA committed to a full review of the Leaving Certificate Arabic Interim Syllabus to consider broad issues of access, inclusion and relevance, with a view to creating an updated curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Arabic. In the meantime, in 2019, a short-term amendment, outlined below, was made to the LC Arabic Interim syllabus.

It is notable that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of Arabic speakers living in Ireland.

Year of Census Data	Arabic Speakers (aged 5-18 years)	Total number of Arabic speakers
2011	6,084	11,834
2016	8,620	16,072
Increase	+ 42%	+ 35%

Table 1: Census Data, CSO, 2011-2016

As outlined in the table above, over the five-year period between the Census of 2011 and that of 2016 there was a 35% increase in the Arabic speaking population in Ireland, and significantly, a 42% increase in the number of young people (aged between 5 and 18 years) who speak Arabic. This may be indicative of the potential increase in the numbers of students who might be interested in studying a relevant, modernised Arabic curriculum.

2.1 Arabic Interim syllabus amendment 2019

In 2019, a short-term amendment was made to the LC Arabic Interim Syllabus. To maximise student choice in the examination, a section of the 2002 syllabus was amended to remove the compulsory nature of the question on the Qur'ān and provide students with the option to answer on any two of the following three areas:

- Qur'ān

- Classical Arabic Poetry

- Modern Arabic Literature.

The full review of Leaving Certificate Arabic, informed by this background paper, will consider broader issues of access, inclusion and relevance with a view to creating an updated curriculum specification for Arabic.

2.2 Number of students studying Leaving Certificate Arabic

As outlined in the table below, the highest candidature for Leaving Certificate Arabic was in 2019 with 192 students presenting for assessment while the lowest number was in 2002 when 90 took the examination. The average number since Arabic was first examined is 134. Consistently, the majority of students (90%) choose to sit the Higher-Level paper. While the number of students presenting for assessment in Arabic has increased in recent years, this number is still smaller than was hoped when the subject was introduced.

The table below sets out the total candidature for Leaving Certificate Arabic from 2014-2019.

Year	Total	Higher Level Candidates	Ordinary Level Candidates
2001	132	123	9
2002	90	86	4
2003	134	123	11
2004	143	136	7
2005	132	126	6
2006	117	110	7
2007	130	117	13
2008	126	119	7
2009	143	120	23
2010	139	121	18
2011	141	131	10
2012	159	149	10
2013	136	124	12
2014	127	108	19

2015	122	94	28
2016	120	110	10
2017	118	99	19
2018	148	133	15
2019	192	168	24
Average	127	114	23
Average as percentage		90%	10%

Table 2: Total candidates for Leaving Certificate Arabic 2001 – 2019 incl.

Although most second-level schools do not offer Arabic on the curriculum, there are a small number of private schools where students can study Arabic. Students of Arabic generally access the syllabus via Saturday schools and/or other tuition.

3. Language Developments in Ireland

Ireland's *Language Education Policy Profile (2005)* published jointly by the Council of Europe and the then Department of Education and Science, identifies Ireland's main challenge in language learning as

> *to move away from 'an official but lame bilingualism' to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and throughout lifelong education. (p34)*

Knowledge of at least one foreign language can enrich a person's life experiences, and the *European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (European Commission, 2007) recognises the ability to communicate in a foreign language as one of the key competences needed for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

3.1 Languages in the Irish Curriculum

As articulated in recent NCCA Leaving Certificate language specifications, language education begins in the home, is embedded in the primary school curriculum and further developed in junior cycle. This provides continuity and progression for senior cycle subjects.

3.1.1 Early Learning and Primary Education

Language learning for most children begins in the home and community. The home languages of Irish children may be one (or more) of up to two hundred languages. Language is central to the theme of Communicating in Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009). This encourages and enables children to share their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways in a range of languages. Most children have experience of learning at least two languages in the Primary School Curriculum – Irish and English. The primary curriculum acknowledges and encourages children's use of other languages with a focus on socio-cultural knowledge, and intercultural as well as language awareness. Children and parents are encouraged to maintain and develop their home languages.

3.1.2 Languages at Junior Cycle

Most students continue to study Irish and English in the post-primary phase of their education and junior cycle students are given the opportunity to learn a third or subsequent language. Junior Cycle language specifications aim to equip students with the skills and strategies to underpin further language learning. Students are encouraged to reflect on their language learning journey, to compare

their target language with other languages they know, and to reflect on and become more aware of their own and other cultural identities.

Currently there is provision for German, French, Spanish and Italian at Junior Cycle level as part of the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) specification. This introduction of a common language specification at junior cycle is consistent with the broad approach being taken to the development of language curricula in Ireland i.e. having a specification that will serve all learners irrespective of the languages they are learning. As outlined later in this paper, a framework approach to language specifications has since been extended to Leaving Certificate languages.

In addition to the four modern foreign languages available at junior cycle, students can follow short courses in a variety of languages including Chinese Language and Culture, Polish and Lithuanian.

3.1.3 Leaving Certificate Curricular Provisions

At Leaving Certificate level, the range of curricular languages available to students expands to include Japanese, Russian and Arabic (in addition to French, German, Spanish and Italian). In 2020 this was further extended to include Lithuanian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish and Portuguese. The current syllabi or specifications are offered for students of a range of abilities and levels and the examinations (offered at both Ordinary and Higher level) assess students' reading, written, aural and oral competencies, the exception being Arabic. Students can also study Leaving Certificate Ancient Greek and Latin, which are currently being reviewed with a view to redeveloping classical languages subject specifications.

3.1.4 Leaving Certificate Non-Curricular Provisions

Students from European countries may also opt to sit state examinations for one non-curricular language (NCL) based on the First Foreign Language final written paper of the European Baccalaureate in accordance with commitments under Article 149 of the Treaty of Nice, specifically that

> *Community action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States.*

These languages are not available as part of the school curriculum, but students may opt to be examined in them if they meet certain criteria. As outlined on the SEC website, chief among these are the requirements that candidates for these examinations:

- be from a member state of the European Union

- speak the language they opt to be examined in as a mother tongue

- have followed a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate

- are taking Leaving Certificate English.

For 2019, examinations were conducted in the following NCLs: Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Slovenian, Modern Greek, Finnish, Polish, Estonian, Slovakian, Swedish, Czech, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, Croatian, Maltese.

In their present format, non-curricular examinations are offered only at Higher level and assess only the skills of reading and writing. There are no oral or aural components as part of these examinations.

In 2020, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese ceased to be available as non-curricular languages for 5th year students, since the introduction of Leaving Certificate curricular specifications. The new curricular specifications will be assessed for the first time in 2022.

3.2 Most Recent Developments in languages

Since Arabic was introduced as a curricular Leaving Certificate subject in 1997, Ireland and Europe's understanding of and commitment to language learning has evolved.

3.2.1 The Common European Framework of Reference for languages

In 2001 the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was introduced. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a framework of reference that provides tools, guidelines and resources for the development of language curricula, textbooks and assessment tools and programmes to support the teaching and learning of languages. The CEFR Companion Volume was published in 2018.

The original purpose of the CEFR, as outlined by the Council of Europe was

> *to provide a shared basis for reflection and communication among the different partners in the field, including those involved in teacher education and in the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, textbooks, examinations, etc., across the member states of the Council of Europe.*

Furthermore, according to Uses and Objectives section of this document, the CEFR specifies

> *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 Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.*

3.2.2 Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages

In December 2017 *Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* and the accompanying *Implementation Plan 2017-2026* were published by the Department of Education and Skills. The Strategy sets out a vision that Ireland's education system will promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy.

Four key goals are identified in Languages Connect:

- Improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment

- Diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish

- Increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages

- Enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages.

A number of targeted aims arising from these goals are then articulated. The most relevant in the context of this review are:

- Increase the uptake in key languages from their present Leaving Certificate examination uptakes: German (13%), Spanish (11%), Italian (0.9%), Russian (0.6%), Japanese (0.6%), Arabic (0.2%), Mandarin Chinese (N/A), Portuguese (0.2% - non-curricular)

- Increase the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages and increase the number of students sitting two languages for state examinations by 25%

- Improve learners' attitude to foreign language learning

- Adopt the CEFR in education and by employers and increase the proportion of graduates leaving HE who reach the Independent User standard.

3.2.3 A Framework Approach to new Leaving Certificate Languages

Following on from Languages Connect, in 2018/2019, a framework approach to languages was developed by NCCA as part of broader developments in creating specifications for the four new foreign languages introduced in 2020, namely Mandarin Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

This framework takes a common approach across each specification in formulating the introduction, aims, expectations for learners and assessment approaches for foreign language learning in Leaving Certificate. An important feature of this framework is the development of learners' ability to use language across the four modes of communication (reception, production, interaction and mediation). It also aims to develop learners' plurilingual and pluricultural competence through language awareness by encouraging language learning strategies and fostering an understanding of how languages – in particular the target language – work. The framework recognises that the connections between languages can assist the process of language learning.

The Leaving Certificate foreign language specifications for the new curricular languages are intended for learners from all language backgrounds. This includes, but is not limited to, learners from heritage language backgrounds. The specifications aim to develop communicative capacity and linguistic and intercultural awareness in a wide range of real-life and authentic contexts.

As outlined above, the expectations for learners in the new specifications are broadly aligned with the CEFR and at a similar level to the current Leaving Certificate languages of French, German, Spanish and Italian i.e. A2/B1 levels of the CEFR. This is notable because until this point, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese were non-curricular languages and as such were broadly aligned with the B2 level of the CEFR because, as stated above, they were based on the First Foreign Language final written paper of the European Baccalaureate and were intended for native speakers of the language, as outlined on the SEC website which states that "candidates of these examinations… must "*speak the language in which they opt to be examined as a mother tongue*". In view of the changing profile of speakers of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese, the decision was taken to align the curricular specifications for the above languages with the other MFL languages (French, German, Spanish and Italian) i.e. A2/B1.

As outlined in the table below, there are 11 Leaving Certificate languages curriculum syllabi and specifications, pitched at a range of abilities and levels. The majority are pitched at A2/B1 level, with the exception of Russian and Arabic which are still pitched at B2 level as they were originally intended for native speakers. Japanese and Mandarin Chinese are pitched at *ab initio* level and broadly aligned with Pre-A1/A1 level of the CEFR, for many reasons, including the inherent complexities involved in learning the language including the non-roman character systems.

Below is a list of the languages now offered at Leaving Certificate Level. The table outlines when the existing syllabus was developed for each language, the types of assessment offered and the pitch, as broadly aligned with the CEFR. Whilst the CEFR Companion Volume is not generally used in relation to Japanese or Chinese, for transparency and consistency with the ab initio pitch, these specifications are broadly aligned with Pre-A1/A1 levels of the CEFR.

Language	Date of current Syllabus	Final Assessment components			Pitch (broadly aligned with CEFR)
		Reading/ Writing	Oral	Aural	
French	1995	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
German	1995	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Spanish	1995	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Italian	1995	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Russian	2001	✓	✓	✓	B2
Arabic	2002	✓	X	X	B2

Japanese	2002	✓	✓	✓	Pre-A1/A1
Polish	2020	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Lithuanian	2020	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Portuguese	2020	✓	✓	✓	A2/B1
Mandarin Chinese	2020	✓	✓	✓	Pre-A1/A1

Table 3: Leaving Certificate Curricular Languages

In all of these languages, students have opportunities to display their learning and achievement via examinations at both Ordinary and Higher level which assess students' reading, written, aural and oral competencies. The exception is Arabic which has no aural or oral components. These languages were developed for different cohorts of students at different times and, as a result, differences emerged in how languages were learned and assessed. In recent times, informed by the understanding about how languages are learned, and also by developments at European level and the CEFR, there has been a movement toward standardisation across languages. One example of this standardisation is the Junior Cycle MFL Specification which has one common specifications for the four languages offered at junior cycle, while another is the framework that has been devised for the four new foreign languages specifications at Leaving Certificate.

4. International Perspectives

Arabic is offered in secondary schools in a wide range of countries internationally including, but not limited to, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Singapore, the USA, UAE and Wales.

In looking at other jurisdictions, the aim was to establish in each case:

- who the Arabic syllabus is for and the pitch or difficulty level

- the overall structure of the syllabus

- how language learning in Arabic is assessed.

The information below offers brief insights into how Arabic is incorporated in the curriculum in the upper secondary (senior cycle) phase of education in a number of jurisdictions including Australia: Queensland; Canada: Ontario; France and Singapore. Further research into Arabic in the curriculum in other jurisdictions is available and will inform the work of the development group, where relevant, in reviewing and redeveloping LC Arabic. The research, Senior Cycle Arabic in International Jurisdictions (NCCA, 2020) can be accessed on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie

4.1 Australia: Queensland

In upper secondary (senior cycle) education in Queensland, the syllabus for Arabic is framed for students who wish to study an additional language and who have previously studied Arabic at lower secondary level. However, the syllabus also states that those with 'less formal language learning experience may also be able to meet the requirements of the syllabus successfully' and is pitched at a level that is similar to most Leaving Certificate foreign languages (i.e. A2/B1 level of CEFR).

The syllabus is expressed in terms of receptive (listening and reading skills) and productive (speaking and writing skills). The language studied and assessed is Modern Standard Arabic, although dialects of Arabic are accepted in the oral examination. Examination of the Arabic syllabus consists of an oral and a written component.

4.2 Ontario, Canada

Arabic is one of the languages offered by the Ontario Ministry of Education under the Classical Studies and International Languages curriculum framework for senior high school education. All languages, including Arabic, are available at three different levels (Academic, Open and University Preparation).

The curriculum expectations are organised in four interrelated strands - listening, speaking, reading and writing. The final grade is determined by a student's teacher(s) whereby 70% of the grade is based on evaluations conducted throughout the course and 30% of the grade is based on a final evaluation in the form of an examination, performance, essay, and/or other method of evaluation.

4.3 France

Arabic is available as one of the foreign language options for the senior secondary *Baccalauréat* course. It is available to all students, irrespective of the *Baccalauréat* programme they are following and is taught in line with the programme of study for the final 2 years of senior secondary education for (all) modern languages. This is based on the CEFR.

The programme of study is also organised around a number of themes, e.g. identity and globalisation; public and private spaces; citizenship and the virtual world; fiction and reality; diversity and inclusion.

Assessment focuses on receptive skills (reading and listening); production skills (speaking and writing); interaction skills (oral and written communication skills) and mediation skills (transmitting information or interpreting it, facilitating cooperation and communication, leading a collaborative project, developing a multicultural understanding). Attainment is set out in the programme of study for senior secondary languages (including Arabic) according to CEFR descriptors and is available at all levels, i.e. from pre-A1 (basic user) to C2 (proficient user).

The assessment taken by individual students depends on how the subject fits within their Baccalauréat options. All students must do an examination which includes a comprehension task and a writing task (dictionaries are permitted).

Continuous assessment is currently being introduced to the *Baccalauréat* and will count for 40% of the final *Baccalauréat* result. The remaining 60% of the result will come from the final examination.

While there is no oral examination in the final examination, students are assessed on their oral competency as part of continuous assessment. This takes place in the first year of the two-year course. This webpage provides a link to examples of the continuous assessments.

4.4. Singapore

Arabic is not available as an upper secondary subject to school students aged 16/17+, but is available to private students in Singapore at a standard that is similar to current Leaving Certificate languages i.e. is pitched at A2/B1 level (French, German, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish).

The syllabus states that its aims are the same for all students, which include being able to:

- develop the ability to understand the language from a variety of registers

- enable students to communicate confidently and clearly in the language

- encourage positive attitudes to language learning and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations

- understand and respond to texts written in the language, drawn from a variety of sources such as magazines, newspapers, reports, books and other forms of extended writing

- manipulate the language accurately in spoken and written forms, choosing appropriate examples of lexis and structures.

There are 2 examinations, both written. There are no oral or aural examinations.

The first examination, weighted at 70% of the final grade, assesses reading and writing whereby students answer specific and general comprehension questions on the two passages provided. The passages will have been written during the last 20 years and reflect the international scene. The paper aims to test vocabulary recognition and grammatical manipulation, comprehension, and the quality of the language used. The second examination, an essay paper, is weighted at 30% of the final grade and the set topics focus on contemporary issues.

Summary of International Perspectives

Outlined in the table below is a summary of the teaching, learning and assessment of Arabic in other selected jurisdictions.

Jurisdiction	Inclusivity and Pitch	Assessment
Queensland, Australia	Available as an additional language having studied it at lower secondary. The specification is pitched at a level that appears similar to the majority of Leaving Certificate languages (i.e. A2/B1 level of the CEFR).	Oral, reading, listening and written skills are assessed. The entire grade derives from a final examination of all these skills.
Ontario, Canada	Available as a second language for all upper secondary students. Available at three different levels.	Oral, reading, listening and writing skills are assessed. 70% of grade is allocated to coursework. 30% is awarded to the final examination.
France	Available as a foreign language option for all students in upper secondary doing the *Baccalauréat.* Available at a number of levels.	Reading, writing and listening skills are assessed. 40% of grade is obtained from continuous assessment. 60% is awarded to the final examination.
Singapore	Only available to private school students at upper secondary level. The specification is pitched at a level that appears similar to the majority of Leaving Certificate languages (i.e. A2/B1 level of the CEFR).	Reading and writing skills are assessed. The final grade is obtained from two terminal examinations.

Table 4: Summary of International Perspectives

5. Observations and Conclusions

The following observations and conclusions are drawn from consideration of themes discussed in preceding chapters.

- The evolution in Ireland and Europe's understanding of and commitment to language learning represents an exciting opportunity for a reimagining of a modernised, updated Arabic curriculum specification.

- Comprehensive and carefully considered curriculum revisions that have occurred in the area of foreign languages at junior and senior cycle levels take into account current approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. These changes signal an innovative approach to language study from which all languages, including Arabic, may benefit.

- A framework approach to curriculum design has been adopted in the common Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages specification and recent senior cycle specifications (Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese). These changes, and the rationale for them, provides a direction for the proposed revision of the Arabic specification at Leaving Certificate level.

- The increased uptake of Arabic at post-primary level in Ireland since the introduction of the subject in the 1990s, from 90 students in 2002 to 192 in 2019, highlights ongoing commitment to learning the Arabic language.

- The significant growth in the Arabic-speaking population in Ireland represents an enormous opportunity for a greater number of young people to benefit from a wider, more inclusive, modernised Arabic specification.

- The experience of other jurisdictions is very useful in considering ways to redevelop and reinvigorate the learning, teaching and assessment of Arabic through innovative curriculum and assessment design.

6. Subject specifications in senior cycle

All senior cycle specifications for subjects offered within the Leaving Certificate Established programme will have a number of features in common. They will:

- be outcomes-based

- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression

- include a focus on all five key skills and literacy and numeracy

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

The specification for each subject will include the following: Introduction; Rationale; Aim; Objectives; Structure; Assessment.

Introduction to senior cycle	This will be common to all specifications and will summarise the main features of senior cycle education.
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.
Aim	A concise aim for the subject will be presented.
Objectives	A broad outline of the skills, values and knowledge, consistent with the aim, that the students will develop during the course.
Structure	An overview of the subject will illustrate how it is organised and will set out the learning involved in strands and learning outcomes.
Assessment	This section outlines the assessment component/s through which students will present evidence of learning for assessment for certification.

Table 5: Leaving Certificate specification – template outline

In general terms, the specification should be aligned with levels 4/5 of the National Framework of Qualifications. Some specifications may have distinct characteristics due to specific learning areas within the subject. The specification will be designed for a minimum of 180 hours of class contact time and there will be an Ordinary and Higher level.

7. Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Arabic

- The review of Leaving Certificate Arabic will involve the development of a revised Leaving Certificate Arabic specification. The template used will be in line with the template for specifications for all senior cycle subjects.

- The key skills of senior cycle and the skills of literacy and numeracy, as appropriate, will be embedded in the learning outcomes of the specification, which will also be designed to ensure appropriate progression and continuity from junior cycle languages and consistency with the most recent Leaving Certificate foreign language curriculum developments.

- It is intended that the updated Arabic specification will be pitched similarly to other recent LC languages specifications i.e. broadly aligned with A2/B1 of the CEFR. However, the development group will have opportunities to discuss the appropriateness of aligning the Arabic specification at this level.

- The approach taken in developing the foreign languages framework will be student-centred, outcomes-based, and follow the format of most recent senior cycle language specifications, encompassing all aspects of language learning including communicative language competence as well as plurilingual and pluricultural competence. The learning outcomes, with respect to communicative language competence, will focus on the four modes of communication; reception; interaction; production and mediation.

- It will address assessment requirements, ensuring that assessment methods are in line with ongoing developments in assessment at senior cycle, where the emphasis on the demonstration of skills is promoted and integrated into specifications, mindful of appropriately assessing both oral and aural skills which, heretofore, have not been assessed in Arabic.

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

- extract information and derive enjoyment from a variety of sources and texts

- become reflective and autonomous language learners and become actively involved in monitoring and assessing their own progress

- foster an appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity

- appreciate the value of using their linguistic repertoire to better understand the cultural and social dimensions of the societies and cultures in which the target language was spoken

- appreciate how the target language functioned as a means of communication, spoken, heard and written by people in the past

- develop the capacity to pronounce, listen to, and produce phrases and sentences in the target language using appropriate structures and vocabulary

- develop an awareness of how languages, in general, work and relate to one another

- build on current linguistic knowledge and skills in order to develop transferable skills to further lifelong language learning and learning in general

- enjoy a language-learning experience that will intrinsically motivate them to continue learning languages in the future.

The development of the specification will also consider:

- the use of a language portfolio in the Arabic classroom

- how to encourage student agency and an associated capacity for lifelong learning

- how to differentiate on conceptual depth to meet the needs of a diverse range of students

- the identification of supports necessary for successful enactment

- how students will be assessed, including via a coursework assessment component.

- The work of the Leaving Certificate Arabic subject development group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of its work and discussions, refinements of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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