



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Scoil an Oideachais
School of Education



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Analysis of the surveys and the written submissions on the Draft
Specification for Leaving Certificate Irish (L1 and L2): Report
prepared for the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment.



Breandán Mac Gearailt, Emer Davitt, Dr. Clóna Murray, Greta Westerwald.

School of Education, University of Galway

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Notes:

The full report on the public consultation and accompanying recommendations can be found at <https://ncca.ie/en/publications-and-research/>

This document was translated from the Irish version of the original document by a third party.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 METHODOLOGY

1.1.1 THE ONLINE SURVEYS

The survey, which was designed by the NCCA, was available on a commercial survey website, via a link embedded in the advertisements and the consultation documents. The structure of the survey was the same for the L1 and L2 draft specifications. Respondents had the choice of taking the surveys in Irish or English. Section 1 of the survey sought brief information on participant demographics (ie, “parent”, “student”, “teacher” or “other”; what was meant by “other”, if selected; and the type of school to which they belonged, if any). In the sections thereafter, the participants were asked to comment on various parts of the draft specifications by answering closed-ended questions using Likert scales (e.g., “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Agree”, and “Strongly agree”) or binary choice items (e.g., “Yes” and “No”). There were open-ended questions in each section (apart from sections 1 and 2) to give respondents an opportunity to provide additional opinions. There was a maximum of 500 characters available for responses to open-ended questions.

The surveys (L1 draft specification and L2 draft specification) were analysed independently of each other but the same methodology was used. Both versions of each survey (i.e., Irish version and English version) were analysed together and bilingual researchers undertook the analysis so that no meaning would be lost through the translation of answers. *R* software was used for the statistical analysis of the quantitative data from the surveys (i.e., the responses to closed-ended questions). Descriptive statistics and graphs were used to investigate trends in the quantitative data set. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data (i.e., the responses to the open-ended questions in the surveys) was conducted. *Nvivo 20* software was used to support the analysis. The responses to each of the open-ended questions in the survey were treated as separate units of analysis ($n=19$) and the analysis was undertaken through an inductive categorisation approach. The data was coded line-by-line, relevant codes were collected under topical categories and emergent themes were developed from the codes and from the categories. This was carried out for each open-ended question individually first to give an overview of the perspectives relating to each of the various areas in the survey. Finally, frequency rates for the codes across all the open-ended questions were collated to give an overview of the strongest themes that emerged from the qualitative parts of the survey as a whole.

The findings reveal that the same categories and themes emerged from many of the questions. This is due to the nature of the responses, as respondents did not always focus on the subject of the questions but used the open text boxes to make broader points. A decision was made not to eliminate such responses to ensure that all perspectives were included and also because perspectives on the subject of the question were often intertwined with perspectives on other topics in any particular text excerpt. In reporting these reiterated perspectives, they are described the first time they are raised. Thereafter, they are mentioned but not described in detail unless a significant new point is raised.

1.1.2 THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

The written submissions were analysed independently from the survey responses. *Nvivo 20* software was used to support the analysis. Though the submissions ranged from 5 words to 65 pages, each submission was dealt with as an individual analytical unit instead of weighting or clustering them. An objective of the inductive approach to the analysis, wherein line-by-line coding was carried out, was to find as many minor differences and diversity of answers as possible, while simultaneously finding areas where there was significant consensus or shared perspectives. 85% of the submissions were provided in Irish and the other 15% in English. Bilingual members of the team conducted the analysis of the submissions to ensure that the source data, rather than translations, were analysed. The data was coded line-by-line, relevant codes were collected under topical categories and themes that emerged from the codes and from the categories were developed. The researchers had regular meetings to discuss emerging themes.

1.2 PARTICIPANTS

1.2.1 PARTICIPANTS IN THE ONLINE SURVEYS

In the surveys participants were asked to choose from a list in order to finish the sentence “*I am responding as a...*” and to say what type of school they were affiliated with. Different categories were used in the surveys to capture understandings of the different contexts (Gaeltacht L1/Irish-medium L1/L2 etc.) The survey responses should be interpreted with care because they do not form a representative sample. This is typical in open surveys involving self-selecting respondents. Tables 1 to 4 below show the accurate composition of the final sample for both surveys, broken down according to stakeholder and school context. It should also be noted that the composition of each survey’s respondents was not the same (i.e., someone could respond to one or both surveys) and there is no record of the number of respondents who completed both surveys.

Respondent	Number	Percentage
Director/practitioner in an early childhood care setting	1	0.3
Parent/guardian (primary)	61	15.8
Primary teacher	14	3.6
Principal/deputy principal (primary)	11	2.8
Parent/guardian (post-primary)	75	19.4
Post-primary student	22	5.7
Post-primary Irish teacher working in a Gaeltacht setting	47	12.1
Post-primary Irish teacher working in an Irish-medium setting	53	13.7
Principal/deputy principal (post-primary)	8	2.1
Pre-service teacher	2	0.5
Teacher educator	11	2.8
3rd level student	13	3.4
3rd level lecturer/researcher	6	1.6
Other	63	16.3
Total	387	100%

Table 1: Frequencies in participant categories in the L1 survey

School type	Number	Percentage
Community school	18	4.7
Community college	2	0.5
Comprehensive school	4	1.0
English-medium school (all subjects other than language taught through English)	7	1.8
Education and Training Board (ETB)	10	2.6
Gaeltacht L1 school	61	15.8
Irish-medium L1 school	135	34.9
School with a sruth/aonad (stream/unit)	13	3.4
Voluntary secondary school	20	5.2
Other	117	30.2
Total	387	100%

Table 2: Frequencies in types of school in the L1 survey

Respondent	Number	Percentage
Director/practitioner in an early childhood care setting	0	0
Parent/guardian (primary)	11	3.1
Primary teacher	5	1.4
Principal/deputy principal (primary)	1	0.3
Parent/guardian (post-primary)	10	2.8
Post-primary student	9	2.5
Post-primary Irish teacher	280	79.3
Pre-service teacher	2	0.6
Teacher educator	4	1.1
3rd level student	4	1.1
3rd level lecturer/researcher	6	1.7
Other	21	5.9
Total	353	100%

Table 3: Frequencies in participant categories in the L2 survey

School type	Number	Percentage
Community school	63	17.8
Community college	38	10.8
Comprehensive school	10	2.8
Education and Training Board (ETB)	23	6.5
Educate Together	0	0
Voluntary secondary school	150	42.5
Other	67	19.0
Total	353	100%

Table 4: Frequencies in types of school in the L2 survey.

1.2.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

The NCCA received 234 written submissions as part of the public consultation that was carried out on the Leaving Certificate draft specifications. 77 submissions came from teachers, 20 from parents, 8 from students, 6 from principals, 13 from schools, 63 from individuals, 11 from language planners and 36 from various organisations. A breakdown of the various groups is available in Chart 1 below. A breakdown of the submissions is available in Appendix 1.

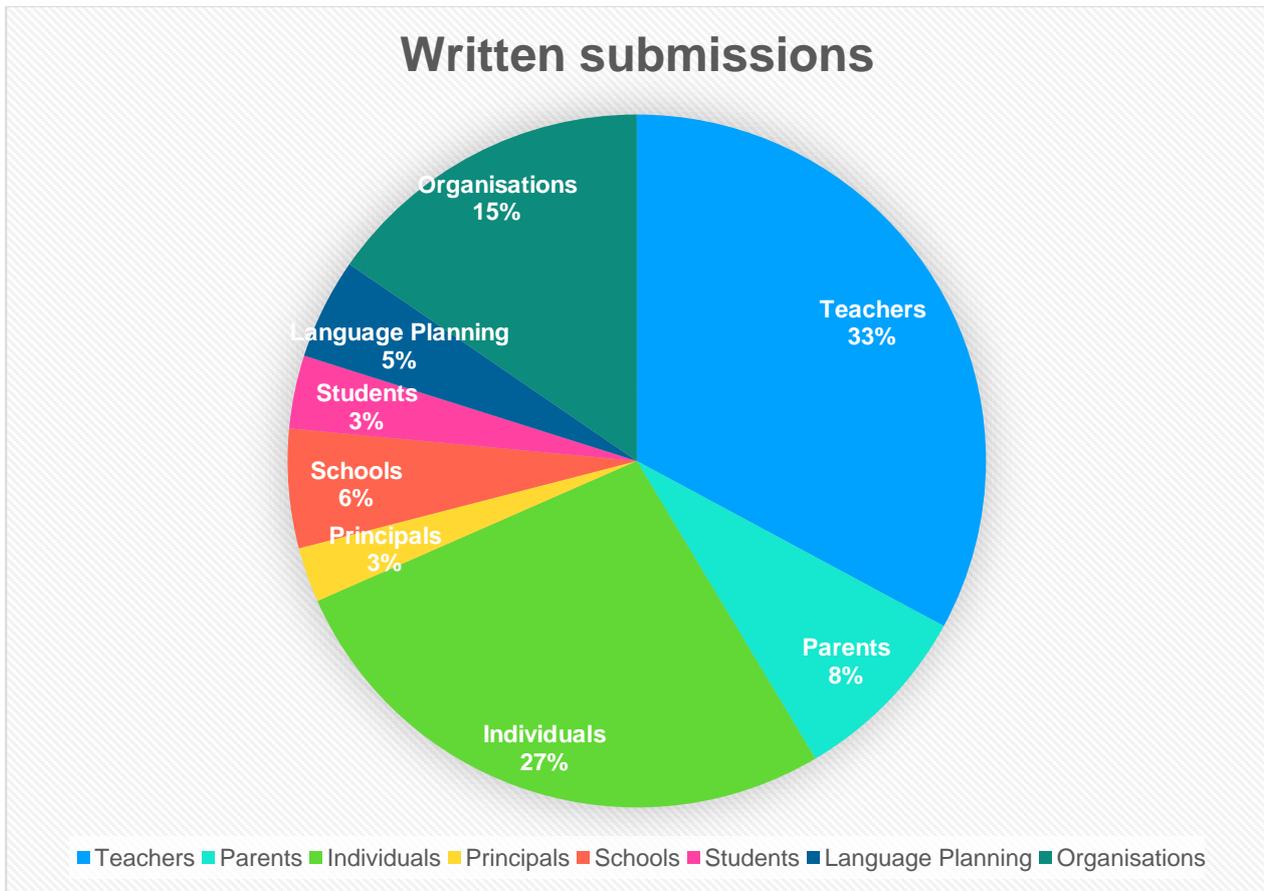


Chart 1: Breakdown of the written submissions.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEYS AND SUBMISSIONS

1.3.1 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEYS

There were 387 valid responses to the survey on the L1 draft specification, 209 who answered the Irish version and 178 who answered the English version. There were 353 valid responses to the survey on the L2 draft specification, 237 who answered the Irish version and 116 who answered the English version.

Very strong sentiments were expressed in nine particular questions, wherein more than 80% of the respondents disagreed¹ with the question’s statement. No statement had such a large percentage of respondents in favour. **93.2%** disagreed with the statement *“this [L2] draft specification will*

¹ These ‘disagrees’ include the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” options. These ‘agrees’ include the “agree” and “strongly agree” options.

encourage students to enjoy Irish” (77.8% disagreed with the same statement in relation to the L1 draft specification). **91.8%** disagreed with the statement “*the learning experience set out in this [L2] draft specification will support students to use the language effectively in the community and/or in an Irish-medium learning setting/workplace*”. **90.7%** disagreed with the statement “*the [L2] draft specification will enable students to use Irish for communication purposes (in a wide range of real-life contexts)*”. **89%** of respondents suggested there should be less texts on the L2 draft specification at Ordinary Level and **88.5%** were of the same opinion regarding texts at higher level. In relation to the question “*will the assessment components as contained in this draft specification support the type of learning required by the Aim and Rationale?*”, **84.4%** of respondents in the L2 survey and **81.6%** of the respondents in the L1 survey said they would not support the type of learning required by the Aim and Rationale. **83.9%** disagreed with the statement “*this [L2] draft specification will build on the language skills and competency developed by students during the junior cycle*” (70.2% disagreed with the same statement in relation to the L1 draft specification). **83.9%** disagreed with the statement “*the [L2] draft specification will help students develop language learning strategies that will be transferable to other languages*”. Finally, **81.1%** of respondents said that the learning outcomes in the L2 draft specification were unsuitable for Irish-language L2 students.

Of the 387 responses to the L1 survey, there was an average response rate of 11% for the open-ended questions. Of the 353 responses to the L2 survey, there was an average response rate of 14% for the open-ended questions. The strongest themes that emerged from the open-ended questions were as follows: the balance between the emphasis on spoken language and literature in both draft specifications was incorrect, especially in L2; the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered to 35%; the L1/L2 model was not fair and the L1 course should include compensation; a need to wait for a review of the Junior Cycle before changing the Senior Cycle; and the documents themselves did not contain sufficient detail, especially with regard to the learning outcomes approach and the assessment structure. More detail on these themes is available in Section 2.13.

1.3.2 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Various key themes emerged from the analysis of the written submissions. The primary themes that emerged were respondents’ opinions about the context and the strong emotions participants expressed in relation to the content of the draft specifications themselves; including the structure, learning outcomes, literature and assessment. As a result of the open nature of the analysis of the written submissions, most of the other themes emerged were not always focused on the draft specifications alone. They focused on the broader context of Irish-language education. Opinions in relation to the

L1 and L2 model, the changes at Junior Cycle level, proposals in relation to the Senior Cycle curriculum along with proposals in relation to the general teaching of Irish were voiced. These themes are discussed in section 3–5.

With due regard to the scope of this report as much detailed information as possible was included in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the individuals' and the organisations' views on the various themes. Excerpts from submissions that were in Irish have been translated to English for the English version of the report.

1.4 REPORT STRUCTURE

Section 2 displays the results of the L1 and L2 draft specifications surveys. The results are presented according to the survey sections. The descriptive statistics for the unit questions are presented as percentage of the number of respondents for that question. The responses to the open-ended questions are presented on a thematic basis. The response rates for the open-ended questions are presented according to question. The results of the analysis for each question are presented systematically with the categories in order of frequency. 5% was selected as the inclusion cut-off point for the codes (i.e., the number of individual references to the code had to be greater than or equal to 5% of the responses to that question). At the end of Section 2, the most common themes raised among the open-ended questions in both surveys are described.

Section 3–5 shows the results of the submissions. This part is laid out in three different sections. Section 3 presents opinions relating to the content of the draft specifications. Section 4 relates to opinions regarding the application of the draft specifications. Section 5 relates to the other systemic issues which emerged from the submissions.

SECTION 2: SURVEYS ON THE L1 AND L2 DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS

2.1 SECTION 1 OF THE SURVEY – PARTICIPANTS

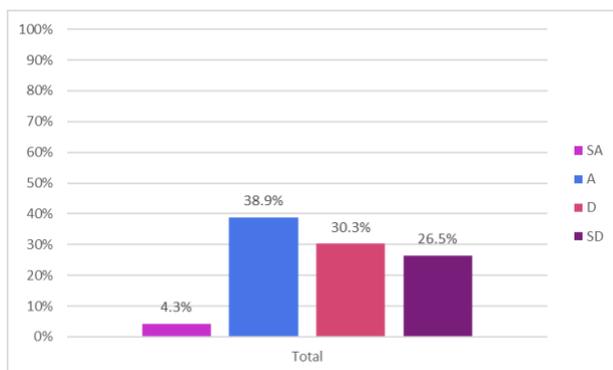
In Section 1 of the survey, respondents were asked to give information about themselves. The responses to these questions are shown in Section 1 above.

2.2 SECTION 2 OF THE SURVEY – GENERAL INFORMATION

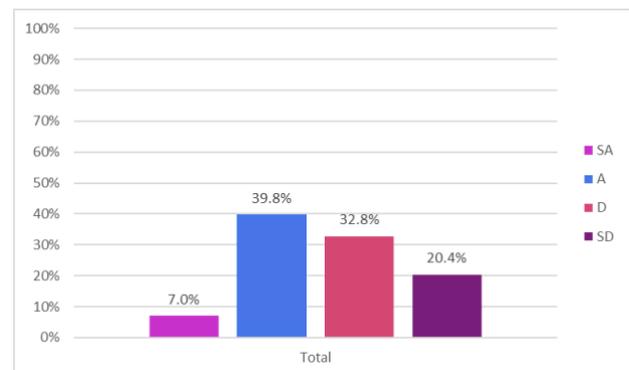
Participants were asked to express an opinion in relation to the draft specifications as a whole. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on various statements ($n=11$).

38.9% of L1 survey respondents agreed with the statement “*The layout of the draft specification is clear*” and 4.3% strongly agreed. 30.3% of participants disagreed with that statement and 26.5% strongly disagreed.

39.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that same statement and 7.0% strongly agreed. 32.8% of participants disagreed with that statement and 20.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



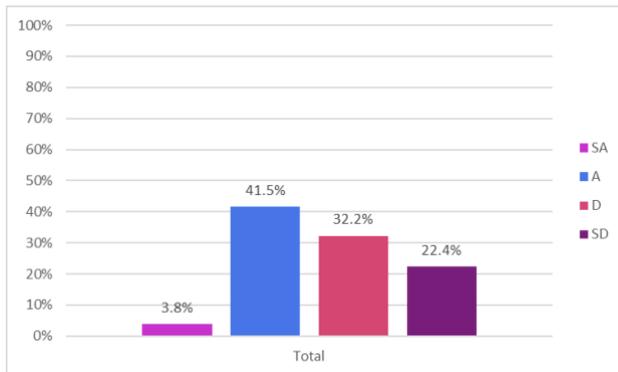
L2 Survey

Figure² 1: Frequencies for the statement “The layout of the draft specification is clear”.

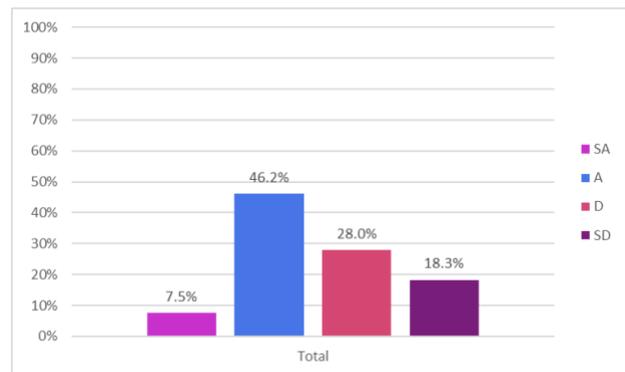
² Legend: SA = “Strongly agrees”, A = “Agrees”, D = “Disagrees”, SD = “Strongly disagrees”. This legend is used for all of the charts.

41.5% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*the draft specification is legible, and it is easy to understand the language of the specification*” and 3.8% strongly agreed. 32.2% disagreed with that statement and 22.4 strongly disagreed.

46.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that same statement and 7.5% strongly agreed with it. 28.0% disagreed with the statement and 18.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

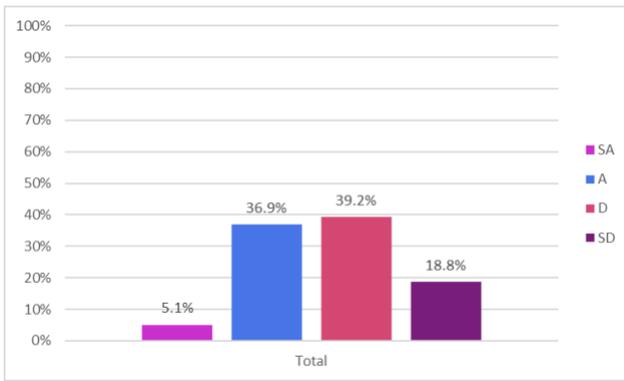


L2 Survey

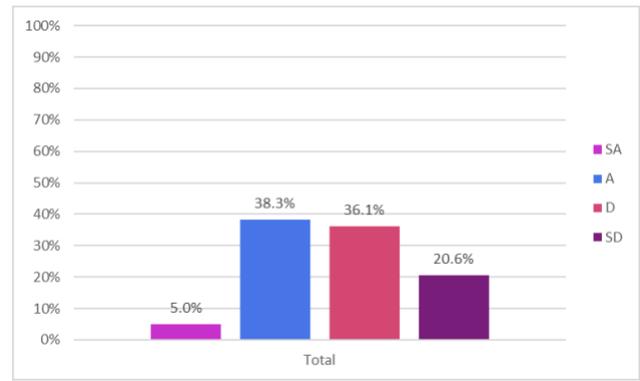
Figure 2: Frequencies for the statement “The draft specification is legible, and it is easy to understand the language of the specification”.

36.9% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*This draft specification reflects the values and principles of the Senior Cycle (p.7 in the draft specification)*” and 5.1% strongly agreed. 39.2% disagreed with that statement and 18.8% strongly disagreed.

38.3% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.0% strongly agreed with it. 36.1% disagreed with that statement and 20.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

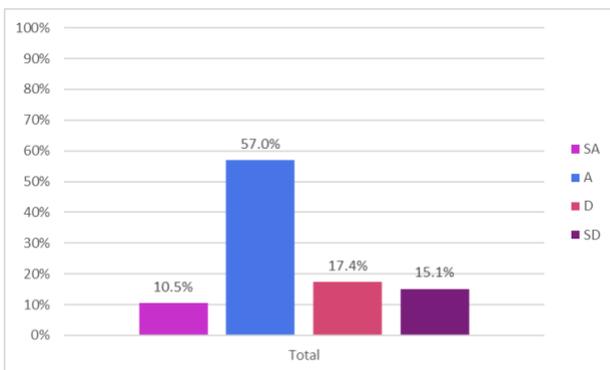


L2 Survey

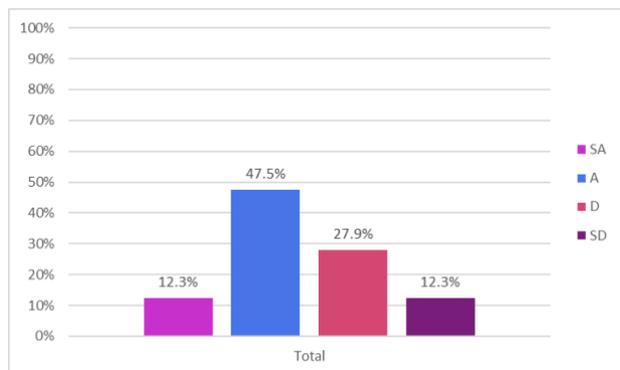
Figure 3: Frequencies for the statement “This draft specification reflects the values and principles of the Senior Cycle”.

57.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “I understand the group of students which the draft specification focuses on from the section ‘Who is this specification for’ (p.10 of the draft specification)” and 10.5% strongly agreed with it. 17.4% disagreed with that statement and 15.1% strongly disagreed.

47.5% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 12.3% strongly agreed with it. 27.9% disagreed with that statement and 12.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

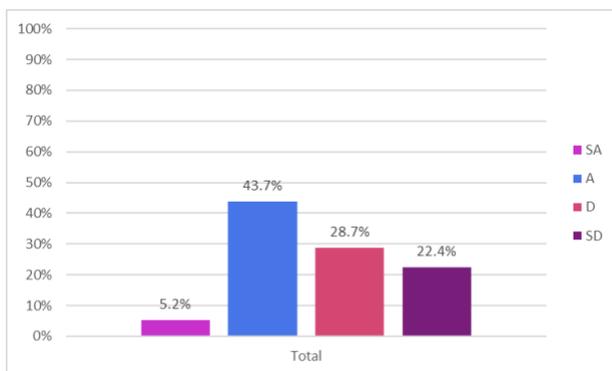


L2 Survey

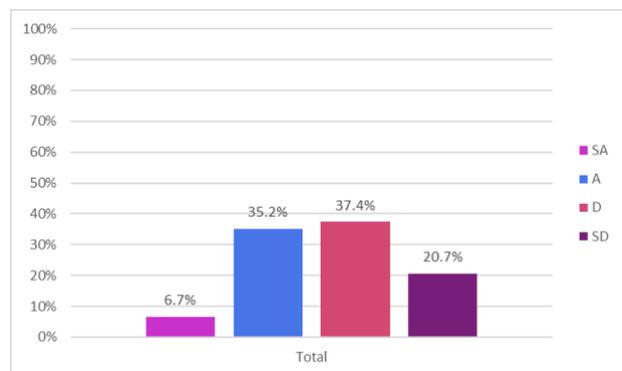
Figure 4: Frequencies for the statement “I understand the group of students which the draft specification focuses on”.

43.7% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The Rationale (p.13 of the draft specification) provides a clear explanation of the vision of the draft specification*” and 5.2% strongly agreed. 28.7% disagreed with that statement and 22.4% strongly disagreed.

35.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 6.7% strongly agreed. 37.4% disagreed with that statement and 20.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

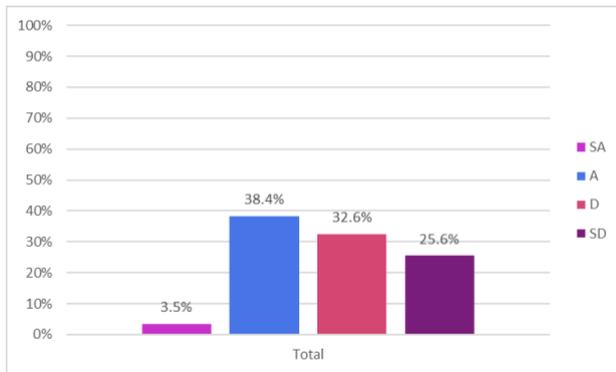


L2 Survey

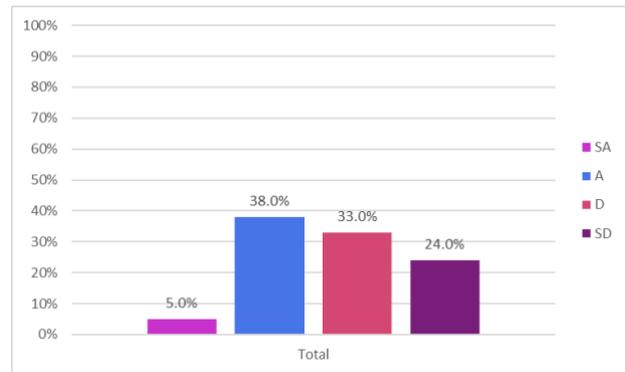
Figure 5: Frequencies for the statement “The Rationale provides a clear explanation of the vision of the draft specification”.

38.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The Aim (p.14 of the draft specification) gives a clear account of the knowledge, skills and values that this draft specification aims to develop*” and 3.5% strongly agreed. 32.6% disagreed with that statement and 25.6% strongly disagreed.

38.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.0% strongly agreed. 33.0% disagreed with that statement and 24.0% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

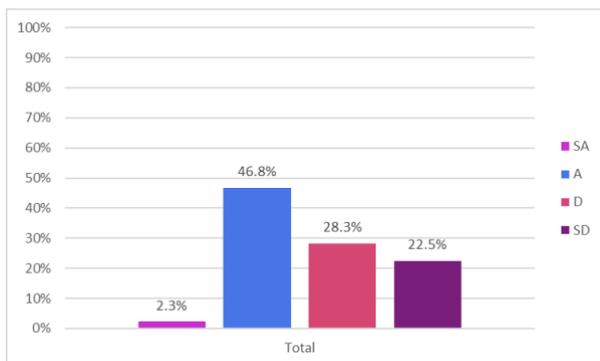


L2 Survey

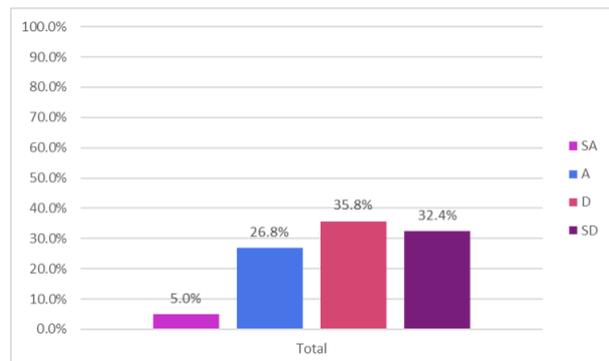
Figure 6: Frequencies for the statement “The Aim gives a clear account of the knowledge, skills and values that this draft specification aims to develop”.

46.8% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The ‘Related learning’ section (p.16 of the draft specification) illustrates students’ Irish language learning journey from early years to Senior Cycle and how this experience prepares them to undertake lifelong learning” and 2.3% strongly agreed. 28.3% disagreed with that statement and 22.5% strongly disagreed.

26.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.0% strongly agreed. 35.8% disagreed with that statement and 32.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

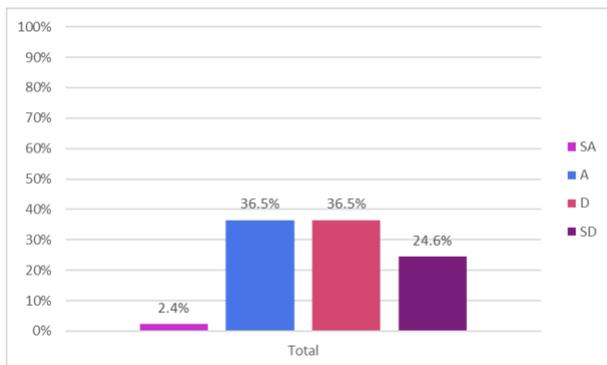


L2 Survey

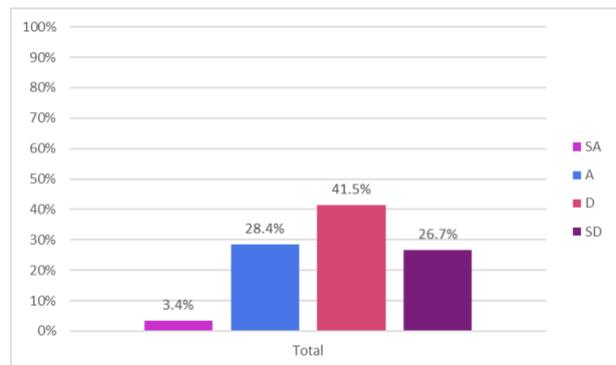
Figure 7: Frequencies for the statement “The ‘Related learning’ section illustrates students’ Irish language learning journey from early years to Senior Cycle and how this experience prepares them to undertake lifelong learning”.

36.5% of L1 survey participants agreed with that statement “*The ‘Learning and Teaching’ section gives a clear understanding of the expectations for students’ language acquisition*” and 2.4% strongly agreed. 36.5% disagreed with that statement and 24.6% strongly disagreed.

28.4% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.4% strongly agreed. 41.5% disagreed with that statement and 26.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

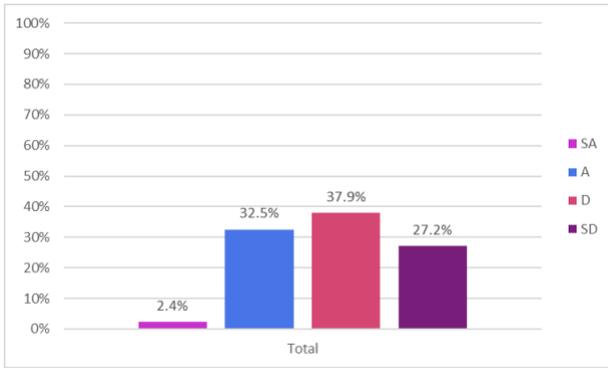


L2 Survey

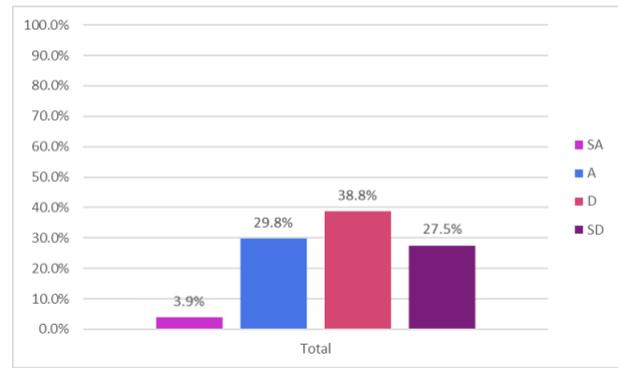
Figure 8: Frequencies for the statement “*The ‘Learning and Teaching’ section gives a clear understanding of the expectations for student language acquisition*”.

32.5% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The ‘Course Overview’ section (p.27 of the draft specification) gives an overview of the type of learning experience that students will have as a result of engaging with this draft specification*” and 2.4% strongly agreed. 37.9% disagreed with that statement and 27.2% strongly disagreed.

29.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.9% strongly agreed. 38.8% disagreed with that statement and 27.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

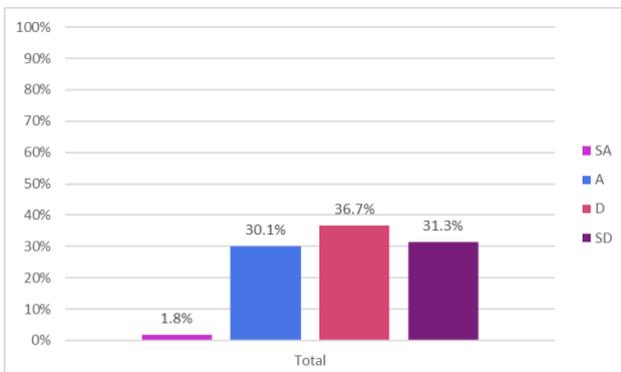


L2 Survey

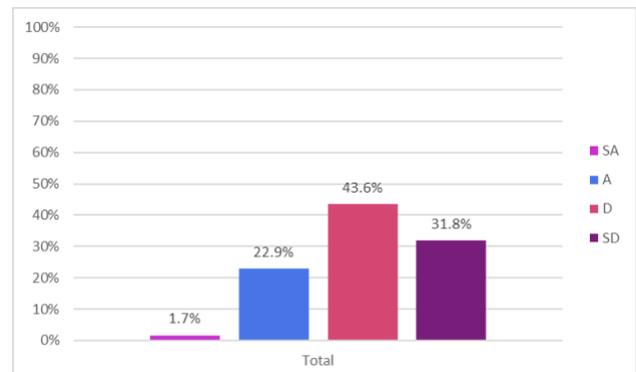
Figure 9: Frequencies for the statement “The ‘Course Overview’ section gives an overview of the type of learning experience that students will have as a result of engaging with this draft specification”.

30.1% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The strands provide a clear structure for the learning and teaching of Senior Cycle Irish (L1)” and 1.8% strongly agreed. 36.7% disagreed with that statement and 31.3% strongly disagreed.

22.9% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “The strands provide a clear structure for the learning and teaching of Senior Cycle Irish (L2)” and 1.7% strongly agreed. 43.6% disagreed with that statement and 31.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

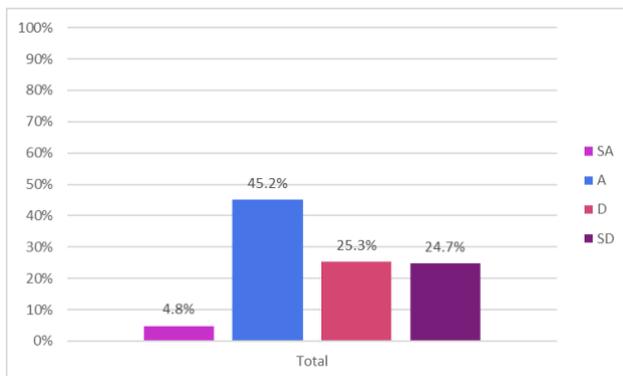


L2 Survey

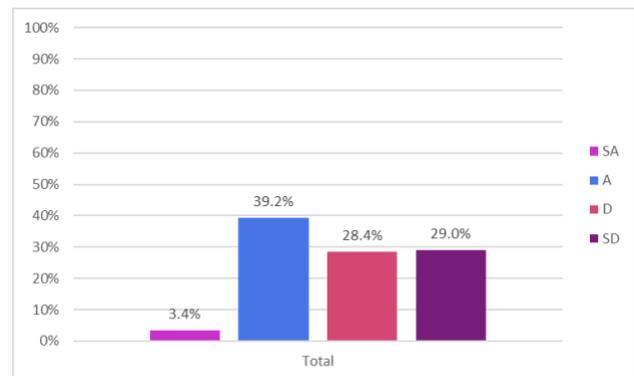
Figure 10: Frequencies for the statement “The strands provide a clear structure for the learning and teaching of Senior Cycle Irish (L1/L2)”.

45.2% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “Assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process. The ‘Assessment’ section (p.36 of the draft specification) describes the role of formative and summative assessment in students’ learning experiences” and 4.8% strongly agreed. 25.3% disagreed with that statement and 24.7% strongly disagreed.

39.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.4% strongly agreed. 28.4% disagreed with that statement and 29.0% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

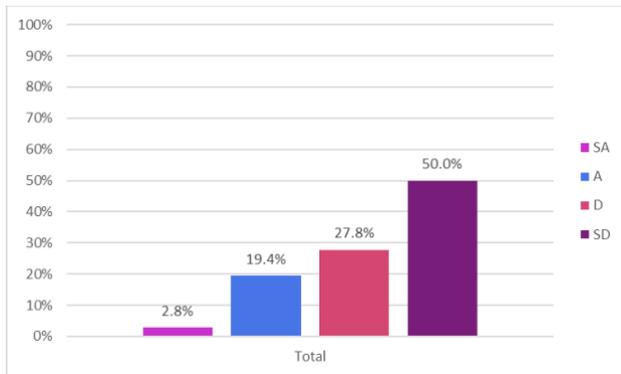
Figure 11: Frequencies for the statement “The ‘Assessment’ section describes the role of formative and summative assessment in students’ learning experiences”.

2.3 SECTION 3 OF THE SURVEY – RATIONALE, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

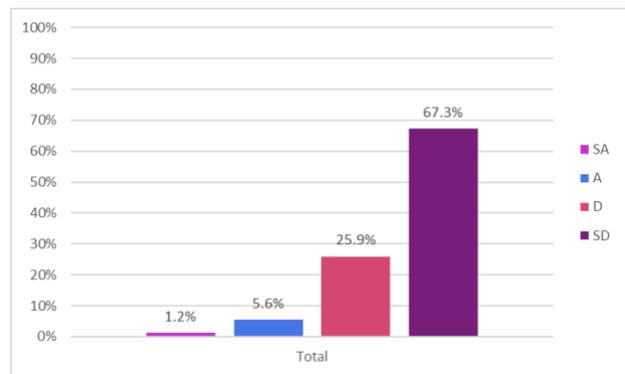
In this section participants were asked to express opinions on the rationale, aim and objectives of the L1 draft specification. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on various statements ($n=7$).

19.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “This draft specification will encourage students to enjoy Irish” and 2.8% strongly agreed. 27.8% disagreed with that statement and 50.0% strongly disagreed.

5.6% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 1.2% strongly agreed. 25.9% disagreed with that statement and 67.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

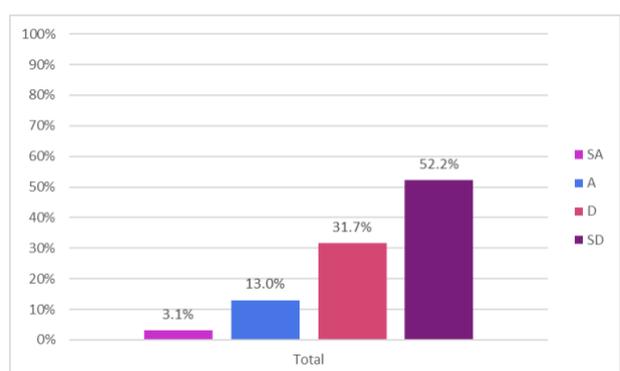
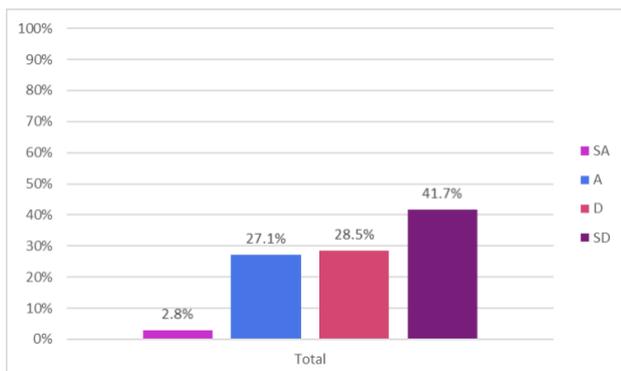


L2 Survey

Figure 12: Frequencies for the statement “This draft specification will encourage students to enjoy Irish”.

27.1% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “This draft specification will build on the language skills and competency developed by students during the junior cycle” and 2.8% strongly agreed. 28.5% disagreed with that statement and 41.7% strongly disagreed.

13.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.1% strongly agreed. 31.7% disagreed with that statement and 52.2% strongly disagreed.



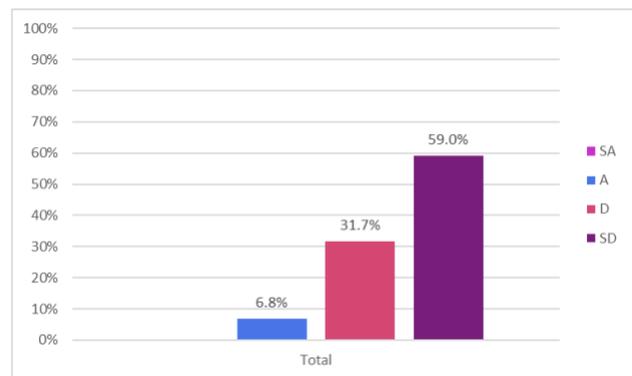
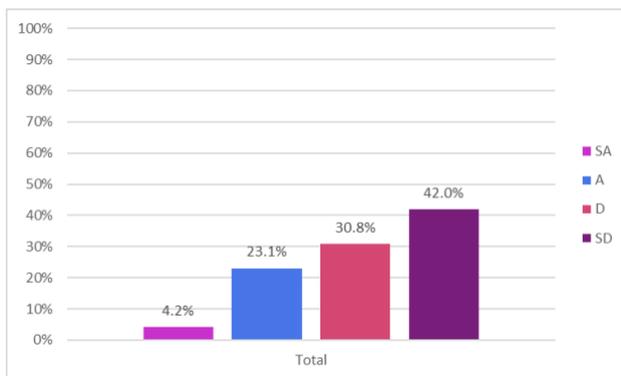
L1 Survey

L2 Survey

Figure 13: Frequencies for the statement “This draft specification will build on the language skills and competency developed by students during the junior cycle”.

23.1% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “This draft specification will enable students to use Irish for communication purposes (in a wide range of real-life contexts)” and 4.2% strongly agreed. 30.8% disagreed with that statement and 42.0% strongly disagreed.

6.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and no respondents strongly agreed. 31.7% disagreed with that statement and 59.0% strongly disagreed.



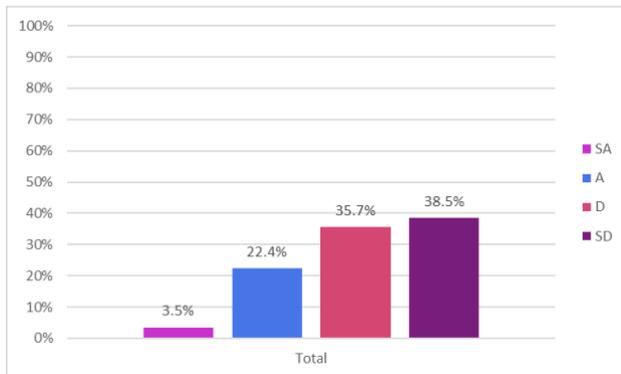
L1 Survey

L2 Survey

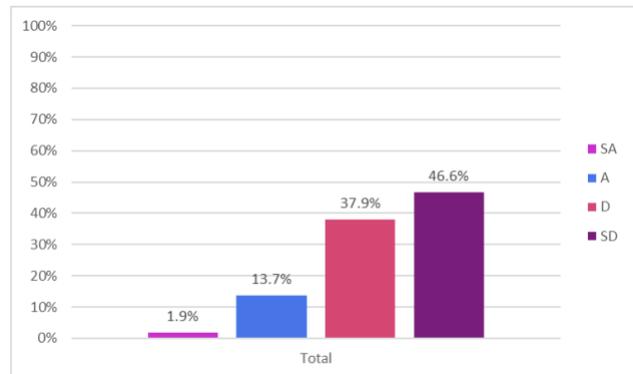
Figure 14: Frequencies for the statement “The specification will enable students to use Irish for communication purposes (in a wide range of real-life contexts)”.

22.4% of L1 survey respondents agreed with the statement “The draft specification will enable students to increase their knowledge of the wealth and wisdom of Irish (in their local areas)” and 3.5% strongly agreed. 35.7% disagreed with that statement and 38.5% strongly disagreed.

13.7% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The specification will enable students to increase their knowledge of the wealth and wisdom of Irish*” and 1.9% strongly agreed. 37.9% disagreed with that statement and 46.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 15: Frequencies for the statement “*The draft specification will enable students to increase their knowledge of the wealth and wisdom of Irish [in their local areas]*”.

22.2% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The learning experience of the draft specification will encourage students to think creatively and critically through Irish*” and 4.2% strongly agreed. 31.9% disagreed with that statement and 41.7% strongly disagreed.

9.4% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.1% strongly agreed. 33.1% disagreed with that statement and 54.4% strongly disagreed.

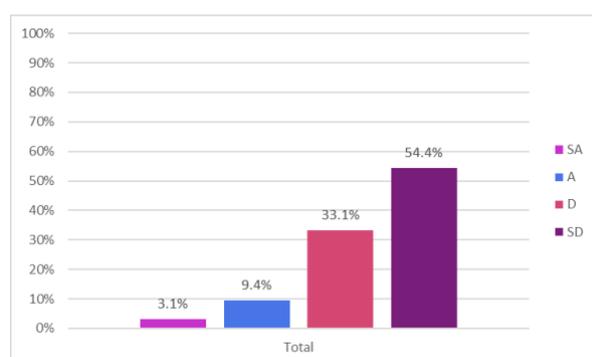
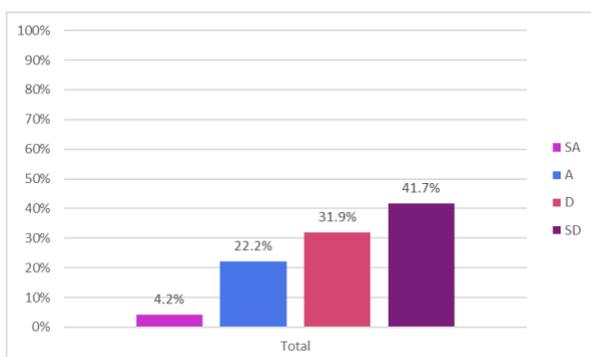
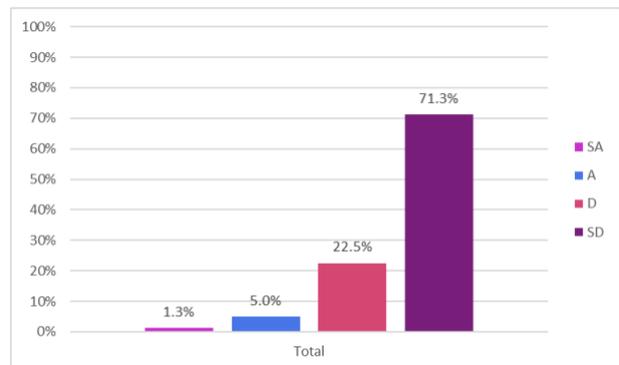
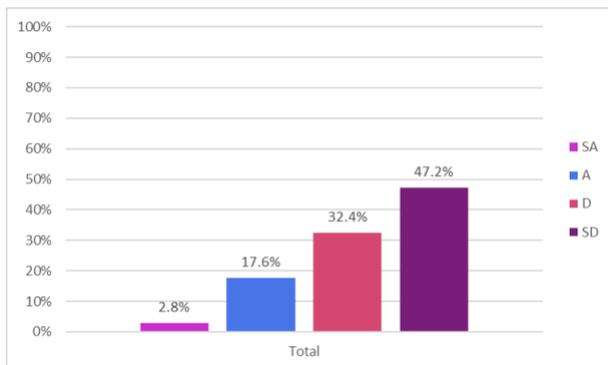


Figure 16: Frequencies for the statement “The learning experience of the specification will encourage students to think creatively and critically through Irish”.

17.6% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The specification will encourage students to use Irish outside of the classroom (in their language communities)” and 2.8% strongly agreed. 32.4% disagreed with that statement and 47.2% strongly disagreed.

5.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “The draft specification will encourage students to use Irish outside of the classroom” and 1.3% strongly agreed. 22.5% disagreed with that statement and 71.3% strongly disagreed.



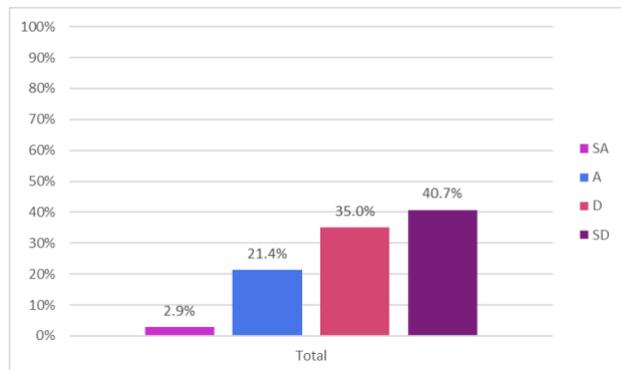
L1 Survey

L2 Survey

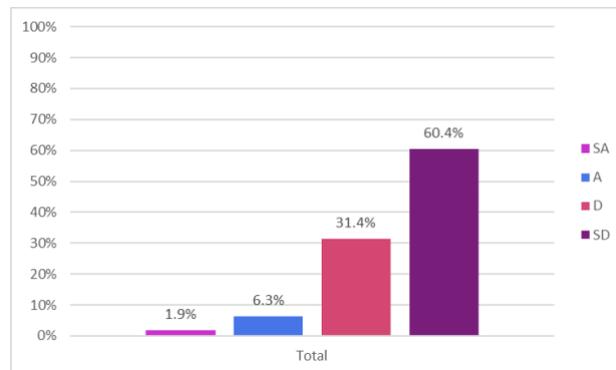
Figure 17: Frequencies for the statement “The specification will encourage students to use Irish outside of the classroom [in their language communities]”.

21.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The learning experience set out in this draft specification will support students to use the language effectively in the community and/or in an Irish-medium learning setting/workplace” and 2.9% strongly agreed. 35.0% disagreed with that statement and 40.7% strongly disagreed.

6.3% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 1.9% strongly agreed. 31.4% disagreed with that statement and 60.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 18: Frequencies for the statement “The learning experience set out in this draft specification will support students to use the language effectively in the community and/or in an Irish-medium learning setting/workplace”.

Other Opinions on Rationale, Aim and Objectives of the Draft Specifications

At the end of section 3 of the survey respondents were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the rationale, aim and objectives of the draft specifications. As mentioned in the introduction, the responses did not always focus on the subject of the question itself.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 19% ($n=73$). Below, in order of frequency, are the other opinions that were expressed.

L1/L2 System

In order of frequency, the points respondents raised with regard to the L1/L2 model were: 1) the L1 draft specification would have an adverse effect on Gaelcholáistí as numbers would decline because of the course being more difficult than that of L2; 2) compensation was required for students in the L1 system; 3) the L1/L2 system was unfair and discriminatory; 4) there would be long-term implications for the language because students would turn away from L1 schools; 5) students and

schools should have choice in relation to undertaking L1 or L2; 6) the L1 draft specification did not demonstrate an understanding of the differences between schools within the Gaeltacht and those outside it.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the draft specifications did not contain substantial information, that the balance between the emphasis on spoken language and literature was incorrect (i.e., that more emphasis should be placed on the spoken language), and that the specification was not sufficiently compelling for teenagers.

Junior Cycle

It was stated that the process of reform should be paused until a review of the Junior Cycle is completed, especially in light of what is said about the L1 system in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education.

Resources

It was stated that there was a lack of qualified teachers with sufficient Irish language proficiency to implement the draft specifications.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L2 survey was 24% ($n=86$). Below, in order of frequency, are the other opinions that were expressed.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there is too much emphasis on literature and more emphasis should be placed on the spoken language in order to achieve the aims and objectives; 2) draft specifications are not sufficiently compelling or enjoyable and; 3) more detailed information is required to evaluate the draft specifications; 4) the learning outcome approach is too abstract; 5) the specifications will not foster the use of Irish outside school context; 6) the vision is too ambitious for L2 contexts.

Junior Cycle

Respondents made comparisons with the negative experience for teachers and students at Junior Cycle level, and they said that there was a need to wait for a review of the L1 and L2 specifications at that level before undertaking this change, especially because Junior Certificate examinations did not take place during the pandemic. These same opinions were raised in almost every section of the survey.

Assessment

It was claimed that the weighting of marks for oral examination was too low at 35%.

Additional proposals

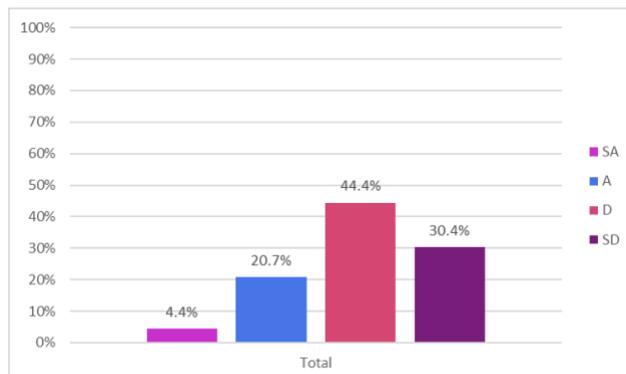
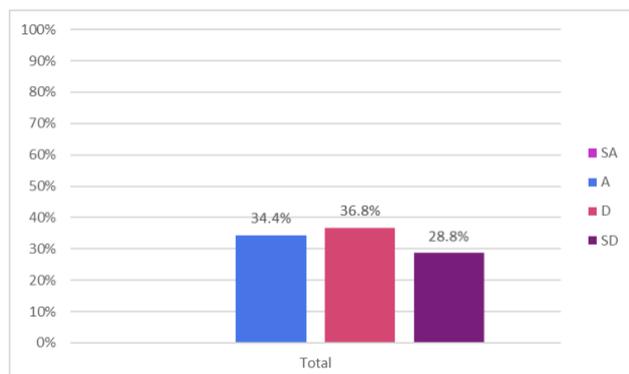
Use of the Modern Foreign Languages approach was proposed because it would be more realistic in L2 contexts.

2.4 SECTION 4 OF THE SURVEY - LEARNING AND TEACHING

In section 4 of the survey, participants were asked to express their opinions about learning and teaching as is set out in the draft specifications. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on various statements ($n=11$).

34.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*This section gives a clear understanding of how the learning and teaching approaches are embedded in the strands of the specification*”, while no participants strongly agreed. 36.8% disagreed with that statement and 28.8% strongly disagreed.

20.7% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 4.4% strongly agreed. 44.4% disagreed with that statement and 30.4% strongly disagreed.



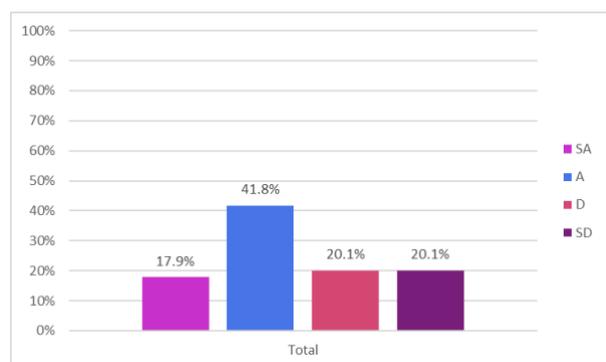
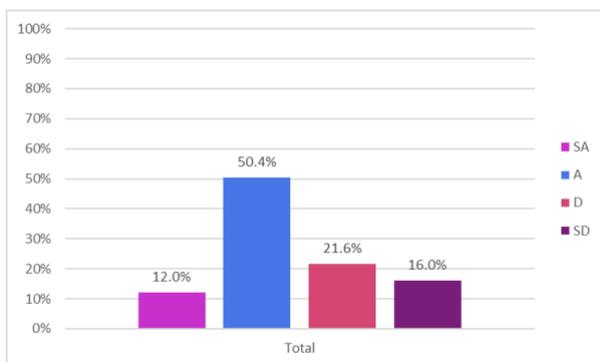
L1 Survey

L2 Survey

Figure 19: Frequencies for the statement “This section gives a clear understanding of how the learning and teaching approaches are embedded in the strands of the specification”.

50.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The teacher helps to provide students with rich language input as part of the learning and teaching process” and 12.0% strongly agreed. 21.6% disagreed with that statement and 16.0% strongly disagreed.

41.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 17.9% strongly agreed. 20.1% disagreed with that statement and 20.1% strongly disagreed.



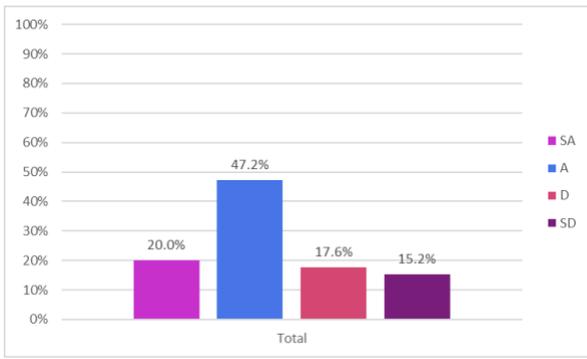
L1 Survey

L2 Survey

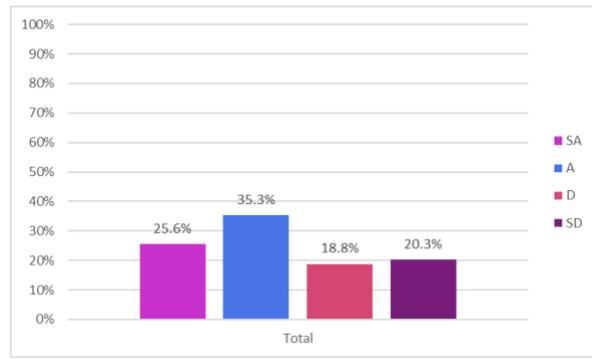
Figure 20: Frequencies for the statement “The teacher helps to provide students with rich language input as part of the learning and teaching process”.

47.2% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “Language use opportunities (outputs) in the language community are of considerable importance as part of the language acquisition process” and 20.0% strongly agreed. 17.6% disagreed with that statement and 15.2% strongly disagreed.

35.3% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 25.6% strongly agreed. 18.8% disagreed with that statement and 20.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

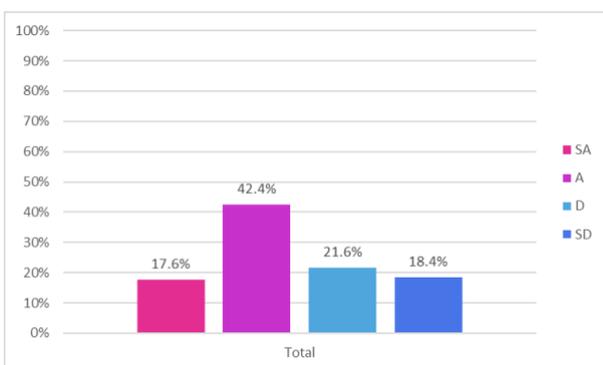


L2 Survey

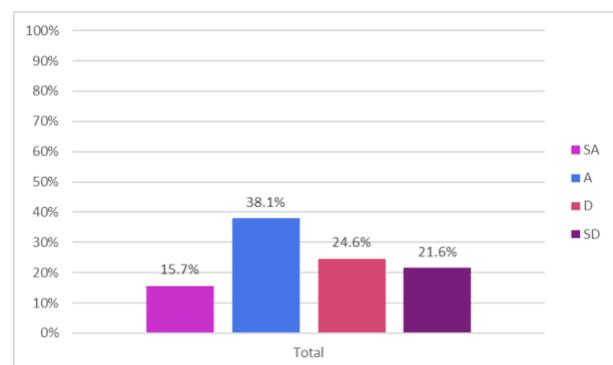
Figure 21: Frequencies for the statement “Language use opportunities (outputs) in the language community are of considerable importance as part of the language acquisition process”.

42.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “Developing students’ literacy skills is of considerable importance if they are to become effective language users and successfully acquire the Irish language” and 17.6% strongly agreed. 21.6% disagreed with that statement and 18.4% strongly disagreed.

38.1% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “Developing students’ literacy skills is of considerable importance if they are to become effective language users” and 15.7% strongly agreed. 24.6% disagreed with that statement and 21.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

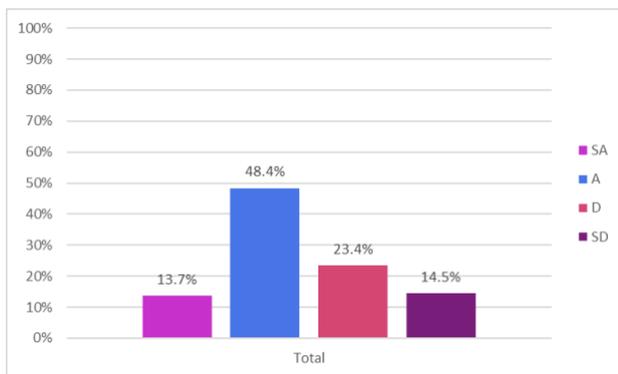


L2 Survey

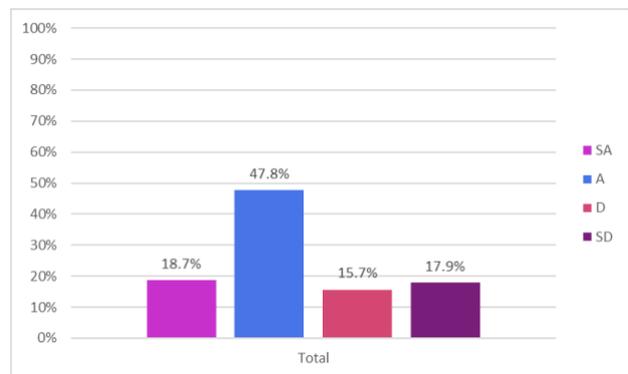
Figure 22: Frequencies for the statement “Developing students’ literacy skills is of considerable importance if they are to become effective language users and successfully acquire the Irish language”.

48.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*Self-awareness as a language learner is one of the most important tools students have to make progress*” and 13.7% strongly agreed. 23.4% disagreed with that statement and 14.5% strongly disagreed.

47.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 18.7% strongly agreed. 15.7% disagreed with that statement and 17.9% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

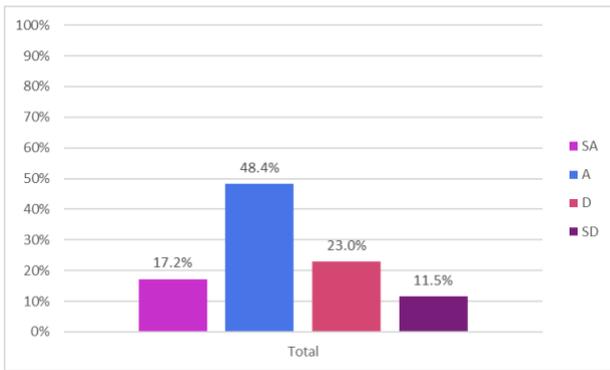


L2 Survey

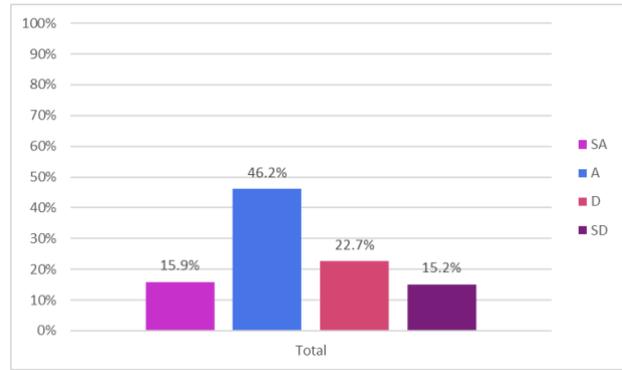
Figure 23: Frequencies for the statement “Self-awareness as a language learner is one of the most important tools students have to make progress”.

48.4% of L1 survey respondents agreed with the statement “*Language awareness and cultural awareness support students to understand the importance of the language community, participate in it and identify with it*” and 17.2% strongly agreed. 23.0% disagreed with that statement and 11.5% strongly disagreed.

46.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 15.9% strongly agreed. 22.7% disagreed with that statement and 15.2% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

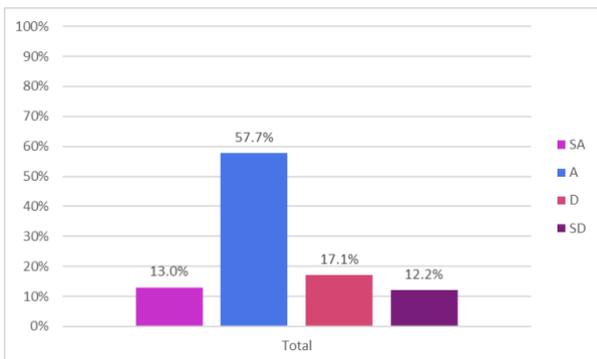


L2 Survey

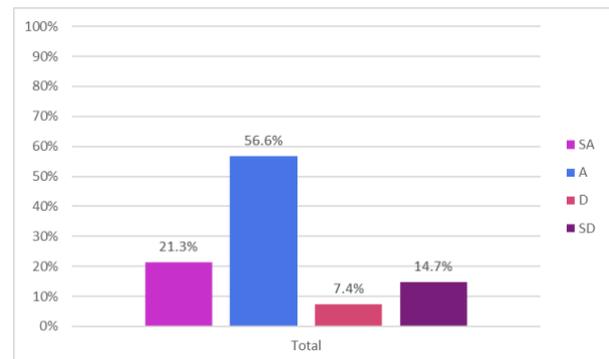
Figure 24: Frequencies for the statement “Language awareness and cultural awareness support students to understand the importance of the language community, participate in it and identify with it”.

57.7% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “Assessment plays a role in supporting learning as well as assessing achievement” and 13.0% strongly agreed. 17.1% disagreed with that statement and 12.2% strongly disagreed.

56.6% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 21.3% strongly agreed. 7.4% disagreed with that statement and 14.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

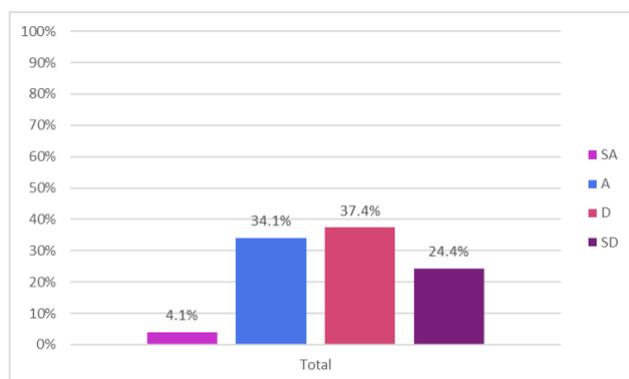


L2 Survey

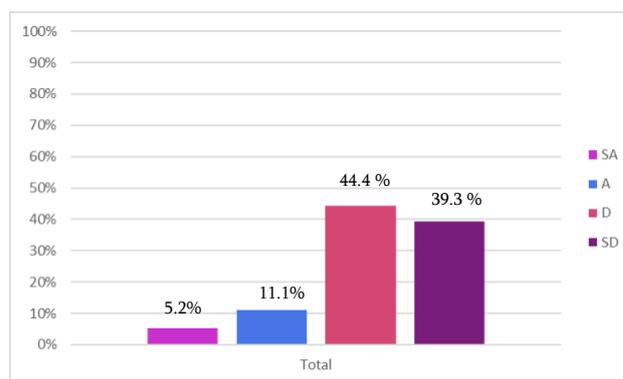
Figure 25: Frequencies for the statement “Assessment plays a role in supporting learning as well as assessing achievement”.

34.1% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The draft specification will help students develop language learning strategies that will be transferable to other languages*” and 4.1% strongly agreed. 37.4% disagreed with that statement and 24.4% strongly disagreed.

11.1% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.2% strongly agreed. 44.4% disagreed with that statement and 39.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

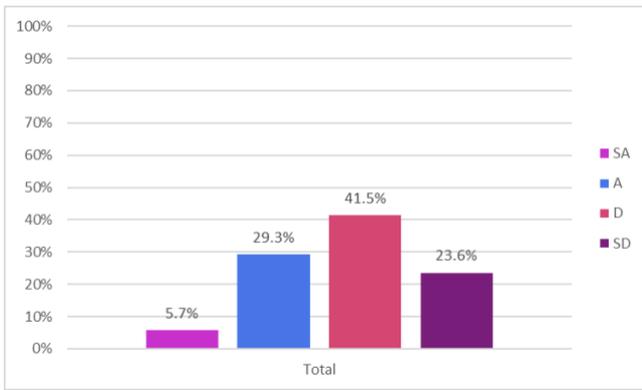


L2 Survey

Figure 26: Frequencies for the statement “The specification will help students develop language learning strategies that will be transferable to other languages”.

29.3% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*Language learning (as set out in this draft specification) will help students to undertake other subjects of the curriculum through Irish*” and 5.7% strongly agreed. 41.5% disagreed with that statement and 23.6% strongly disagreed.

This question was not on the L2 draft specification survey.

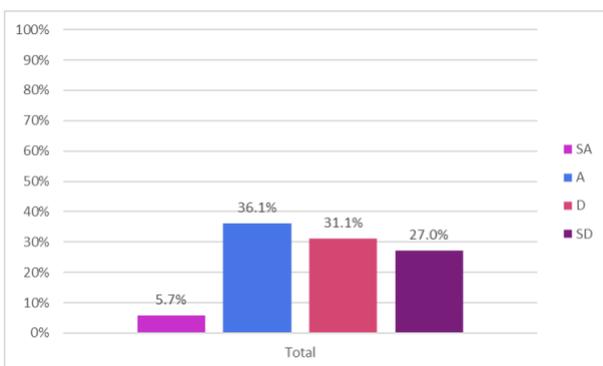


L1 Survey

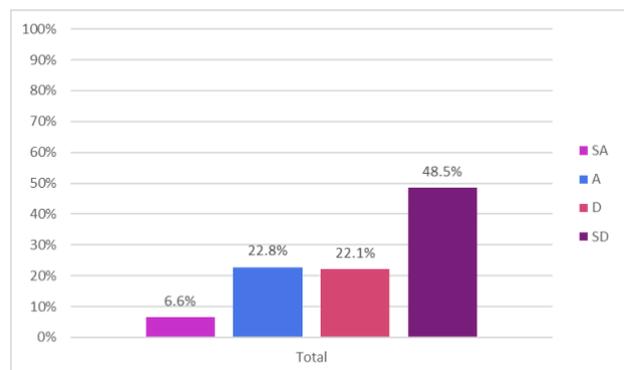
Figure 27: Frequencies for the statement “Language learning (as set out in this draft specification) will help students to undertake other subjects of the curriculum through Irish”.

36.1% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The language portfolio is an important tool for learning and for formative assessment” and 5.7% strongly agreed. 31.1% disagreed with that statement and 27.0% strongly disagreed.

22.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 6.6% strongly agreed. 22.1% disagreed with that statement and 48.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

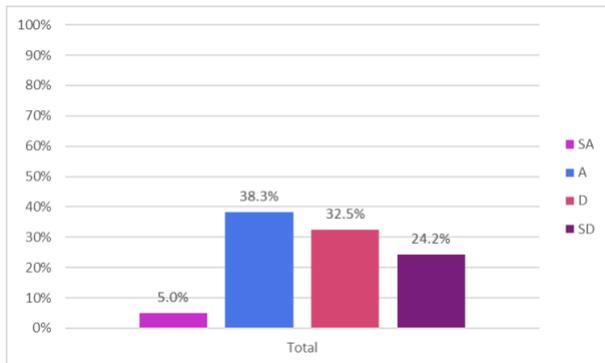


L2 Survey

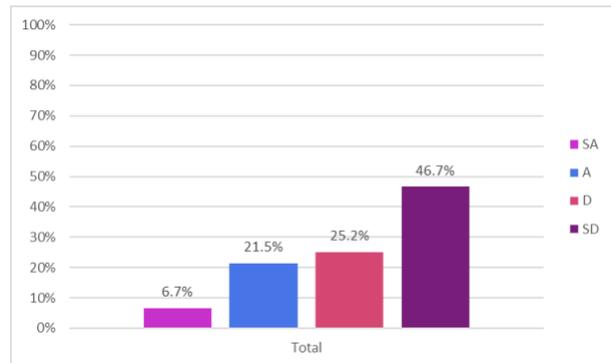
Figure 28: Frequencies for the statement “The language portfolio is an important tool for learning and for formative assessment”.

38.3% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The language portfolio is an effective tool to support students in developing their self-directed learning and reflection skills*” and 5.0% strongly agreed. 32.5% disagreed with that statement and 24.2% strongly disagreed.

21.5% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 6.7% strongly agreed. 25.2% disagreed with that statement and 46.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 29: Frequencies for the statement “The language portfolio is an effective tool to support students in developing their self-directed learning and reflection skills”.

Other Opinions On ‘Learning and Teaching’ Section

At the end of section 4 of the survey respondents were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the ‘Learning and Teaching’ section of the draft specifications.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 14% ($n=53$). The following were the most common points in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the information in the draft specifications was not detailed enough. In addition, respondents questioned the merit of the language portfolio and sought additional clarity in relation to it. The respondents also claimed that the balance between the emphasis on spoken language and literature was incorrect.

L1/L2 Model

Opinions were expressed in relation to the effect of changes on Gaelcholáistí, about an unfair system and about long-term implications for the language.

Junior Cycle

The point that was previously raised about waiting for review.

Resources

The point that was previously raised about a lack of qualified teachers.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 17% ($n=61$). The following were the most common points in the responses.

The language portfolio

The majority of respondents were not in favour of the language portfolio and this was often based on the respondent's experience with it at Junior Cycle. It was stated that reflection through the medium of Irish was too challenging for L2 students, that there was no detailed information about the approach to be taken and that time constraints would be an issue. A small number of respondents were favourably disposed to the concept of a language portfolio, on the condition it was deployed effectively.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) too much emphasis on literature; 2) a lack of detailed information; 3) content not being sufficiently compelling or enjoyable; 4) how a link with a language community can be created in an L2 context; 5) too ambitious a vision for an L2 context.

Assessment

Respondents raised concern about the weighting of marks for the oral examination and it was stated that a specific weighting was needed for the language portfolio.

Junior Cycle

Points, as mentioned before, about conducting a review.

Levels

It was stated that the specifications do not accommodate students that struggle with the language and that a Foundation level specification was required.

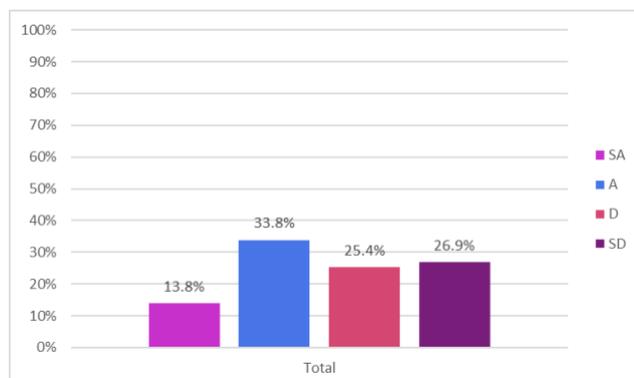
2.5 SECTION 4A OF THE SURVEY - TEXTS

In section 4a of the survey, participants were asked to express their opinions with regard to the role of the texts in the draft specifications. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on various statements ($n=7$).

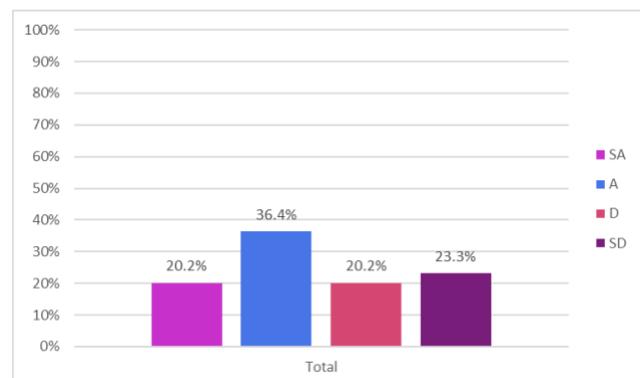
33.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The reading and exploration of Irish texts (literary and non-literary) support the development of the five communication skills (listening, reading, speaking, spoken production, writing).*” and 13.8% strongly agreed. 25.4% disagreed with that statement and 26.9% strongly disagreed.

36.4% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement “*There is an emphasis in this draft specification on the key role of texts (literary and non-literary) in students’ language acquisition journey.*” and 20.2% strongly agreed. 20.2% disagreed with that statement and 23.3% strongly disagreed.

Neither of these statements appeared on the L1 draft specification survey.



L2 Survey (a)

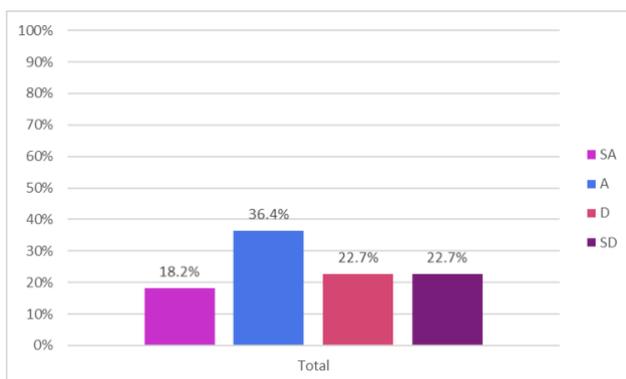


L2 Survey (b)

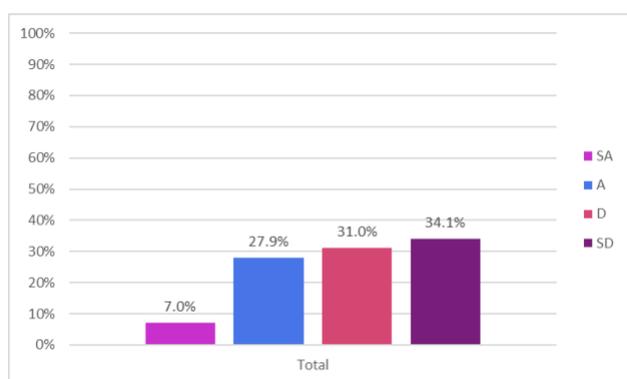
Figure 30: Frequencies for statements (a) “The reading and exploration of Irish texts (literary and non-literary) support the development of the five communication skills” and (b) “There is an emphasis in this draft specification on the key role of texts (literary and non-literary) in students’ language acquisition journey”.

36.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “By reading a wide range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students are enabled to deepen communication, thinking and critical skills” and 18.2% strongly agreed. 22.7% disagreed with that statement and 22.7% strongly disagreed.

27.9% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 7.0% strongly agreed. 31.0% disagreed with that statement and 34.1% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

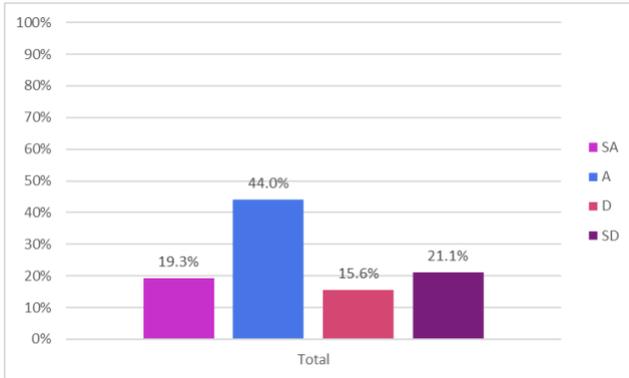


L2 Survey

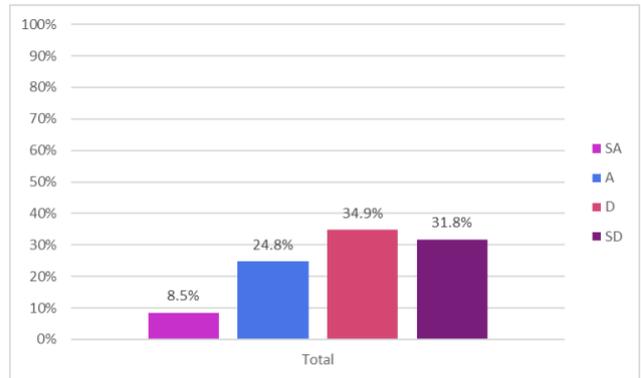
Figure 31: Frequencies for the statement “By reading a wide range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students are enabled to deepen communication, thinking and critical skills”.

44.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “By reading a range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain insights into ways to use the language creatively” and 19.3% strongly agreed. 15.6% disagreed with that statement and 21.1% strongly disagreed.

24.8% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 8.5% strongly agreed. 34.9% disagreed with that statement and 31.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

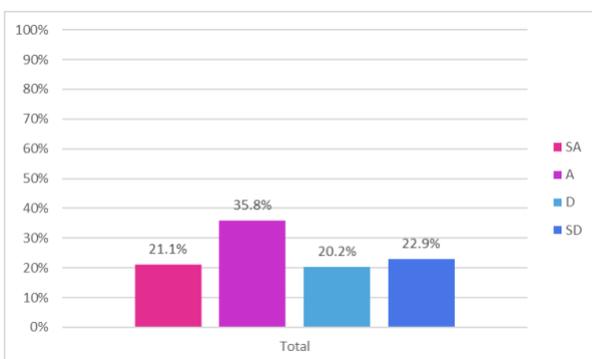


L2 Survey

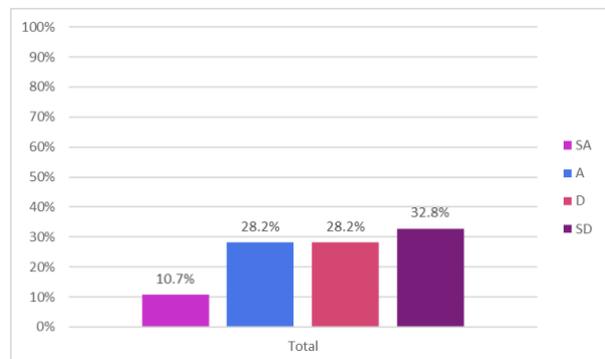
Figure 32: Frequencies for the statement “By reading a range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain insights into ways to use the language creatively”.

35.8% of L1 survey respondents agreed with the statement “By reading a range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain an insight into ways in which the language can be used and will help to explore topics, ideas and concepts in other subjects of the curriculum” and 21.1% strongly agreed. 20.2% disagreed with that statement and 22.9% strongly disagreed.

28.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 10.7% strongly agreed. 28.2% disagreed with that statement and 32.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

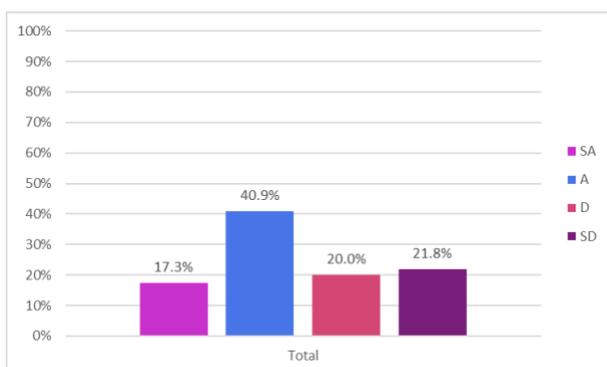


L2 Survey

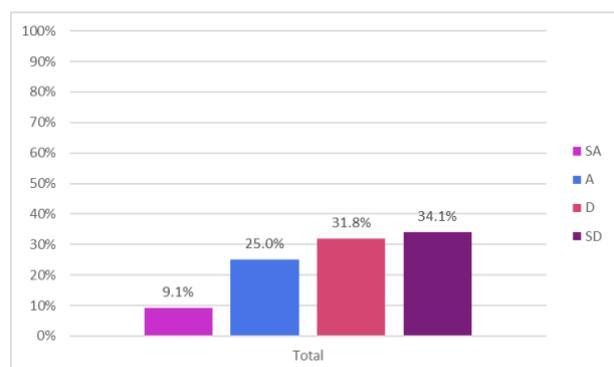
Figure 33: Frequencies for the statement “By reading a range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain an insight into ways in which the language can be used and will help to explore topics, ideas and concepts in other subjects of the curriculum”.

40.9% of L1 survey respondents agreed with the statement “By reading a wide range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain an insight into the culture and language of their local area and other areas” and 17.3% strongly agreed. 20.0% disagreed with that statement and 21.8% strongly disagreed.

25.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 9.1% strongly agreed. 31.8% disagreed with that statement and 34.1% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

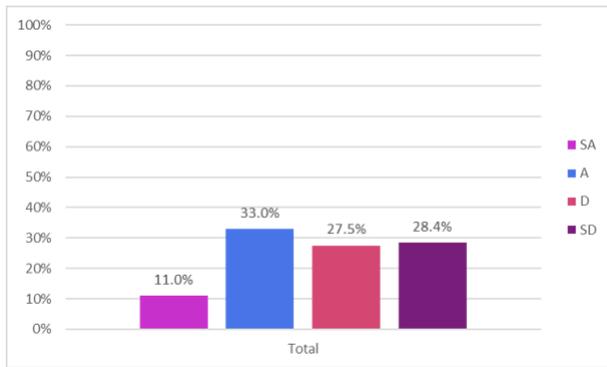


L2 Survey

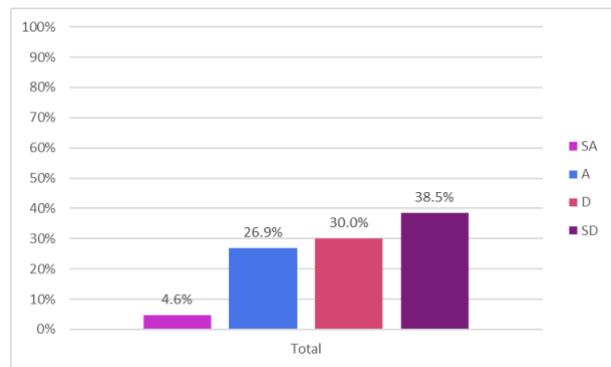
Figure 34: Frequencies for the statement “By reading a wide range of literary and non-literary Irish texts, students gain an insight into the culture and language of their local area and other areas”.

33.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The range of texts and the choice between certain genres gives scope to select texts suitable for students’ experiences, contexts and needs” and 11.0% strongly agreed. 27.5% disagreed with that statement and 28.4% strongly disagreed.

26.9% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 4.6% strongly agreed. 30.0% disagreed with that statement and 38.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

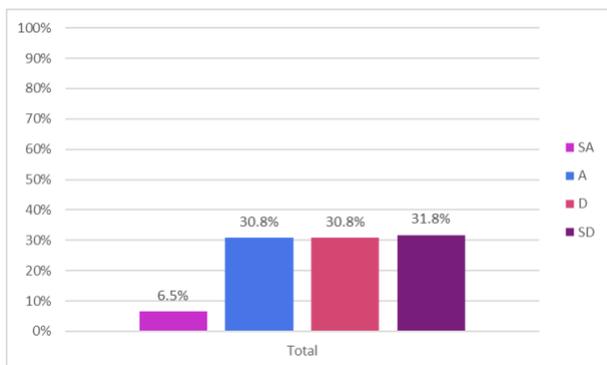


L2 Survey

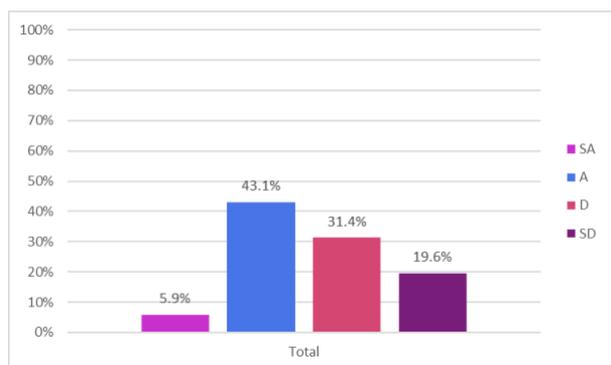
Figure 35: Frequencies for the statement “The range of texts and the choice between certain genres gives scope to select texts suitable for students’ experiences, contexts and needs”.

30.8% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “Students are given an opportunity to engage with a suitable range of texts from the canon of Irish language literature” and 6.5% strongly agreed. 30.8% disagreed with that statement and 31.8% strongly disagreed.

43.1% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.9% strongly agreed. 31.4% disagreed with that statement and 19.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



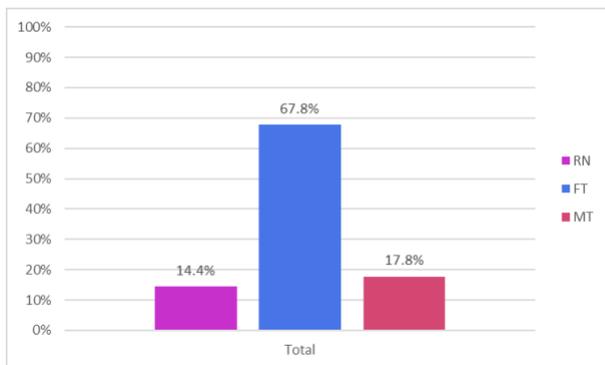
L2 Survey

Figure 36: Frequencies for the statement “Students are given an opportunity to engage with a suitable range of texts from the canon of Irish language literature”.

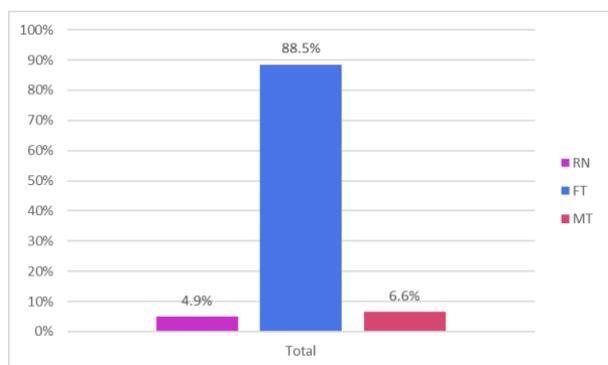
Participants were asked to express their opinions with regard to the proposed number of literary texts for higher level in the draft specifications. There were three options for the answer: that the number of texts is in or around the right number, that there should be fewer texts or that there should be more texts.

14.4% of L1 survey participants said that the number of texts was almost right, 67.8% said they believed that there should be fewer texts and 17.8% said they believed that there should be more texts.

4.9% of L2 survey participants said that the number of texts was almost right, 88.5% said they believed that there should be fewer texts and 6.6% said they believed that there should be more texts.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure³ 37: Frequencies for opinions on the recommended number of texts for higher level.

Other opinions

Participants had the opportunity to explain their selection.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 15% ($n=59$). These were the most common points in the responses.

³ Legend: RN=“Right number of texts”, FT = “Fewer texts”, MT = “More texts”

Literature in the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was too much emphasis on literature; 2) there was not enough information given about the texts; 3) the choice of literature was too limited and different types of texts should be brought in; 4) the teaching of literature would be too time-consuming; 5) the literature should relate to the life of a teenager; 6) literature is important for language acquisition.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding Gaelcholáistí and long-term implications for the language were raised again. It was also claimed that the choice of texts would have implications for the Gaeltacht and that they would be too challenging for some students even if they were native speakers.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that there was a need for more emphasis on the spoken language.

Junior Cycle

Point regarding waiting for a review.

L2 Survey

The response rate for the same open-ended question in the L2 survey was 25% ($n=87$). These were the most common points in the responses.

Literature in the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) literature has a negative impact on students' attitude towards the language; 2) too many texts were mentioned in the draft specifications; 3) the literature should relate to the students' lives; 4) the literature would be too time-consuming; 5) they were happy with the number of texts; 6) an answer could not be provided without seeing the list of texts; 7) the draft specifications would result in teachers teaching through English because it would be too difficult to teach all the texts through the medium of Irish.

General content of the draft specification

Again, it was stated that there was too much emphasis on literature and that there was a need for greater emphasis on the spoken language. In addition, it was stated that the vision of the L2 draft specification was too ambitious.

Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

Other proposals

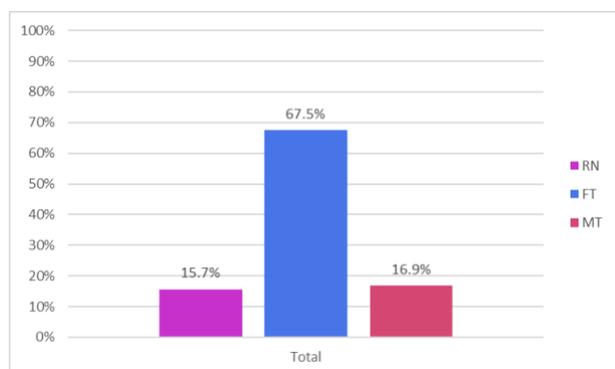
The provision of an additional optional course for literature was suggested, with an emphasis on communication in the mandatory course.

Number of Texts - Opinions

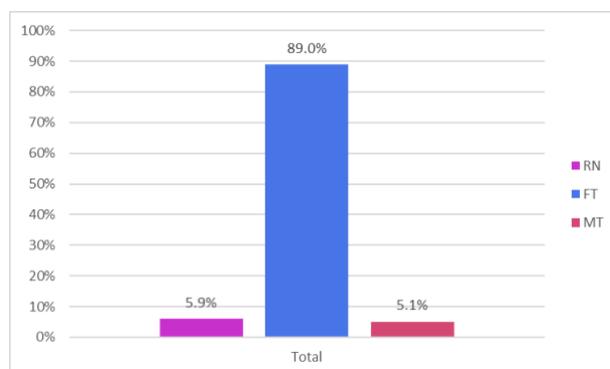
Participants were then asked to express their opinions about the proposed number of literary texts for Ordinary level in the draft specifications.

15.7% of L1 survey participants said that the number of texts is in or around the right number, 67.5% said they believed that there should be fewer texts and 16.9% said they believed that there should be more texts.

5.9% of L2 survey participants said that the number of texts was almost right, 89.0% said they believed that there should be fewer texts and 5.1% said they believed that there should be more texts.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 38: Frequencies for opinions on the recommended number of texts for Ordinary level.

L1 Survey

The response rate for the open-ended question asking participants to explain their selection was 9% ($n=35$) in the L1 survey. These were the most common opinions in the responses.

Literature in the draft specification

It was stated that there was a need for more information on the texts, that the selection of literature was too difficult for ordinary level students and that there was no understanding of the needs of ordinary level students in an L1 setting, that literature had a negative effect on the attitude towards the language and that the selection of literature was too limited.

L1/L2 System

Opinions about an unfair system.

General content of the draft specification

Point about the emphasis on the spoken language

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L2 survey was 19% ($n=68$). These were the most common opinions in the responses.

Literature in the draft specification

It was stated that literature in general was too challenging for ordinary level L2 students, that literature had a negative impact on these students' attitudes towards the language, that there were too many texts and that there was a need for a broader selection of texts that would relate to students' lives.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that there should be an emphasis on the spoken language rather than on literature at ordinary level.

Levels

There were questions about how to accommodate weak ordinary level students when the foundation level option would be removed.

Additional information regarding texts.

At the end of section 4a of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the 'Texts' section of draft specifications.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 11% ($n=43$). Below are the opinions raised in the responses in order of frequency.

Literature in the draft specifications

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was a lack of information about the texts; 2) there was too much emphasis on literature; 3) literature was important for language acquisition; 4) the selection of literature was too limited; 5) the literature would be too time-consuming; 6) there was a need for a connection to teenagers' lives.

Junior Cycle

Opinion regarding waiting for a review.

L1/L2 System

Opinion regarding an unfair system. It was also stated that the draft specification does not meet the needs of native speakers.

Additional proposals

The provision of an additional course for literature was proposed, with the mandatory course being based solely on communication.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 18% ($n=65$). Below are the opinions raised in the responses in order of frequency.

Literature in the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) the list of texts was required; 2) too many texts were mentioned, especially for ordinary level; 3) literature had a negative impact on students' attitudes towards the language; 4) the literature needed to be related to teenagers' lives; 5) dealing with literature was too challenging for ordinary level students; 6) a wider range of texts was needed.

General content of the draft specification

As was stated before, respondents thought that there was too much emphasis on literature and that there should be more emphasis on the spoken language.

Junior Cycle

Point regarding a review.

Additional proposals

The use of the Modern Foreign Languages approach was proposed, with an emphasis on communication.

Assessment

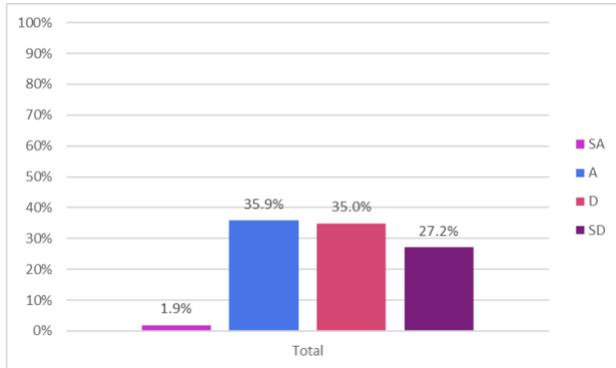
Questions were raised again with regard to the weighting of marks for the oral examination.

2.6 SECTION 5 OF THE SURVEY - OVERVIEW: STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIFICATION

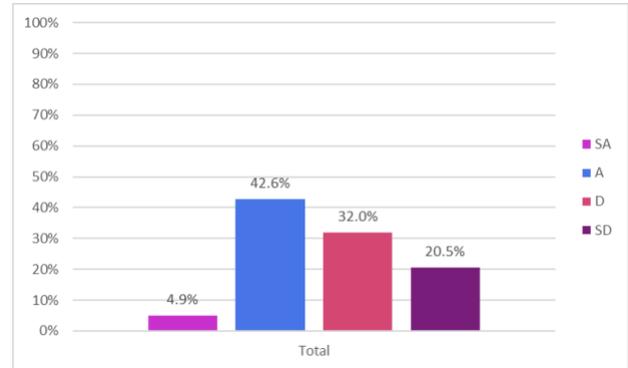
In section 5 of the survey participants were asked to express their opinions on statements regarding the structure of the draft specifications. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on the various statements ($n=7$).

35.9% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement "*The 'Overview' gives a very clear description of the structure of the draft specification.*" and 1.9% strongly agreed. 35.0% disagreed with that statement and 27.2% strongly disagreed.

42.6% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 4.9% strongly agreed. 32.0% disagreed with that statement and 20.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

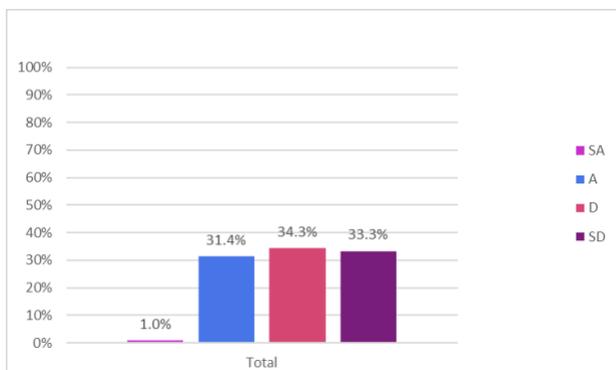


L2 Survey

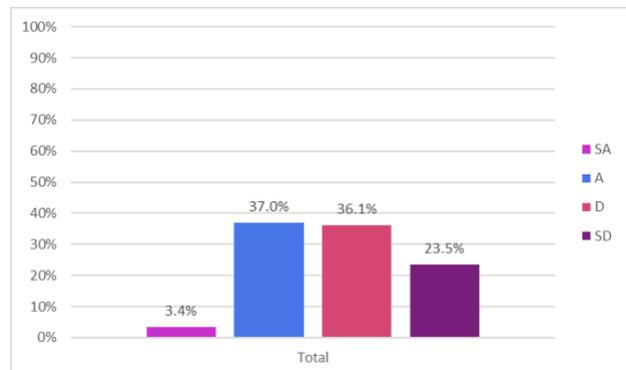
Figure 39: Frequencies for the statement “The ‘Overview’ gives a very clear description of the structure of the specification”.

31.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The structure very clearly reflects the interdependence of the strands and how they support the integration of the key language skills” and 1.0% strongly agreed. 34.3% disagreed with that statement and 33.3% strongly disagreed.

37.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.4% strongly agreed. 36.1% disagreed with that statement and 23.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

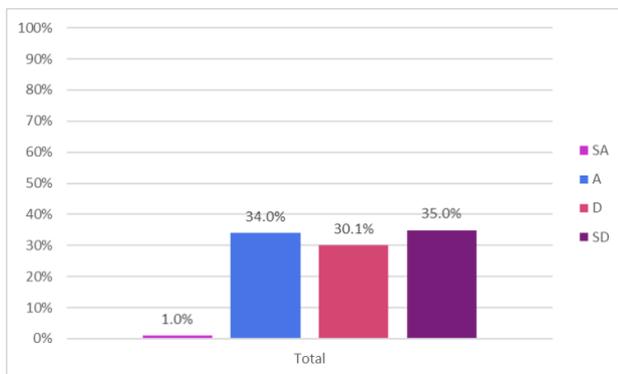


L2 Survey

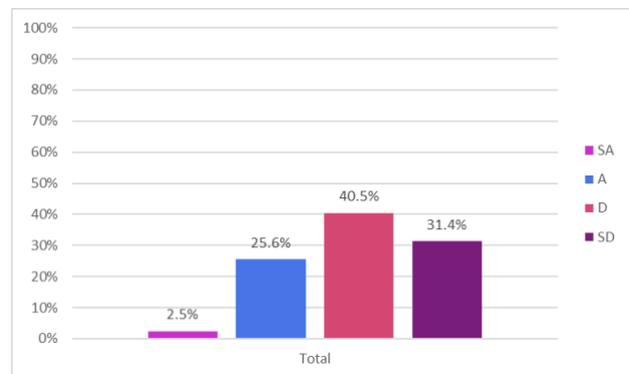
Figure 40: Frequencies for the statement “The structure very clearly reflects the interdependence of the strands and how they support the integration of the key language skills”.

34.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “The strands are very effective at highlighting the skills and competencies that are most important for learning and teaching” and 1.0% strongly agreed. 30.1% disagreed with that statement and 35.0% strongly disagreed.

25.6% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 2.5% strongly agreed. 40.5% disagreed with that statement and 31.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

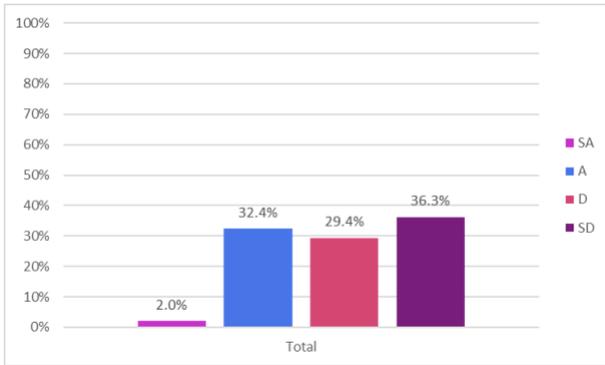


L2 Survey

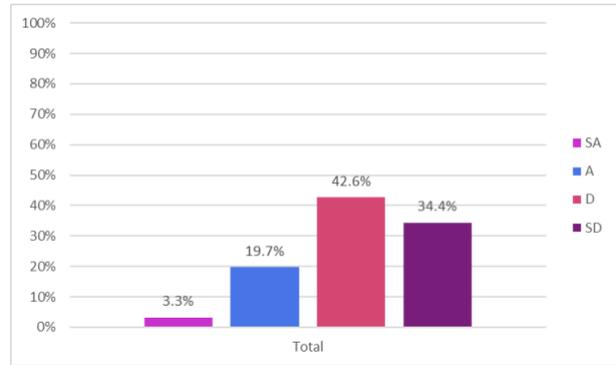
Figure 41: Frequencies for the statement “The strands are very effective at highlighting the skills and competencies that are most important for learning and teaching”.

32.4% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of key language skills and competencies across the strands” and 2.0% strongly agreed. 29.4% disagreed with that statement and 36.3% strongly disagreed.

19.7% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.3% strongly agreed. 42.6% disagreed with that statement and 34.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

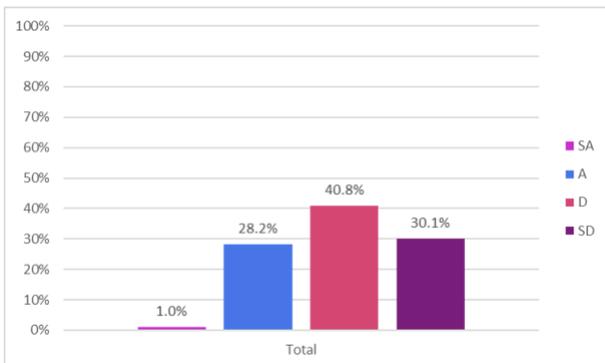


L2 Survey

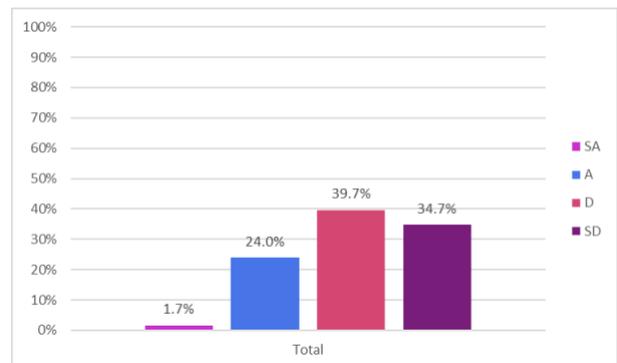
Figure 42: Frequencies for the statement “There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of key language skills and competencies across the strands”.

28.2% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of the students’ creative competencies in the strands” and 1.0% strongly agreed. 40.8% disagreed with that statement and 30.1% strongly disagreed.

24.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 1.7% strongly agreed. 39.7% disagreed with that statement and 34.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

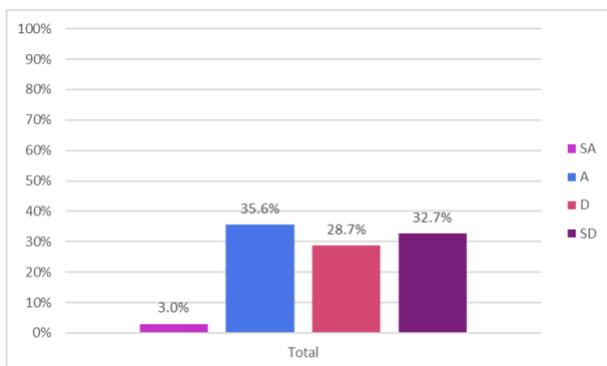


L2 Survey

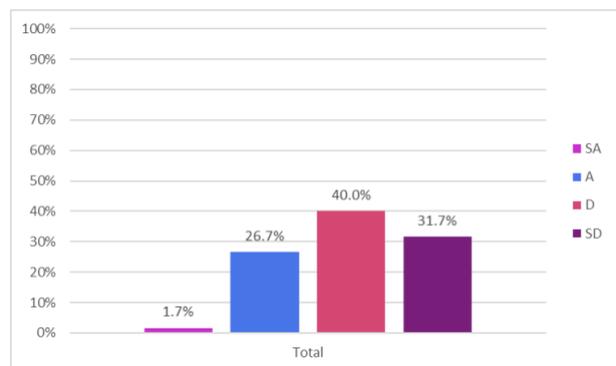
Figure 43: Frequencies for the statement “There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of the students’ creative competencies in the strands”.

35.6% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of the students’ awareness in the strands (language awareness, self-awareness and cultural awareness)*” and 3.0% strongly agreed. 28.7% disagreed with that statement and 32.7% strongly disagreed.

26.7% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 1.7% strongly agreed. 40.0% disagreed with that statement and 31.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

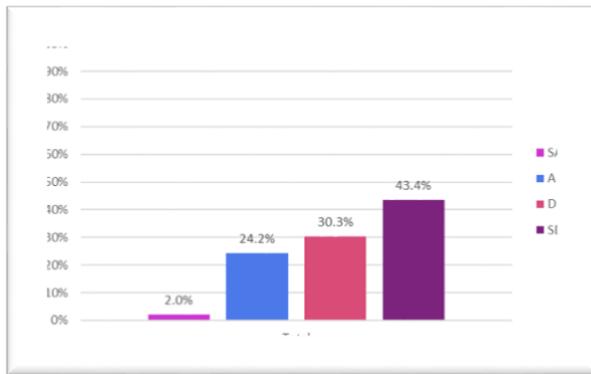


L2 Survey

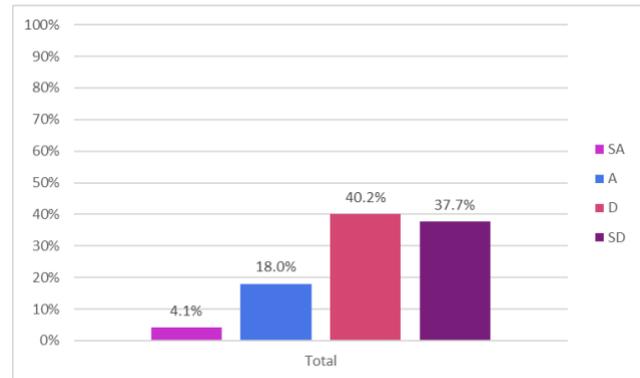
Figure 44: Frequencies for the statement “*There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of the students’ awareness in the strands (language awareness, self-awareness and cultural awareness)*”.

24.2% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The time allocation (at least 180 hours of class time) over two years of senior cycle is sufficient for students to achieve the aims of the draft specification*” and 2.0% strongly agreed. 30.3% disagreed with that statement and 43.4% strongly disagreed.

18.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 4.1% strongly agreed. 40.2% disagreed with that statement and 37.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 45: Frequencies for the statement “The time allocation over two years of senior cycle is sufficient for students to achieve the aims of the specification”.

Additional Opinions on the Specification Overview and Structure

At the end of section 5 of the survey, participants had the opportunity to give additional opinions on the specification overview and structure.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 13% ($n=49$). The following were the most common categories in the responses, in order of frequency.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that 180 hours was not sufficient to achieve the aims of the draft specifications, that the vision was unrealistic and that the information in the draft specifications was not detailed enough.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding an unfair and discriminatory system and the impact of the more difficult course for Gaelcholáistí were raised. It was also said stated there is a distinct difference between Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáistí and that it was clear that those who designed the draft specifications did not understand this.

Assessment

It was stated that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered and that more information on assessment was needed.

Junior Cycle

Point regarding waiting for a review.

Consultation

Questions were raised about the validity of the consultation process, and it was claimed that a decision had already been taken regarding the draft specifications.

The draft specifications' strands

The strand approach was criticised.

Literature in the draft specifications

It was stated that the literature would be too time-consuming.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 13% ($n=44$). The following were the most common categories in the responses, in order of frequency.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the draft specifications were too ambitious for the 180 hours that have been set out as a time frame, that the learning outcomes were too abstract and that more detailed information was needed with regard to the intended approach. It was suggested that more emphasis should be placed on using the living language in a modern way. It was also recommended that the course remain unchanged, and it was claimed that the new specifications were change for the sake of change.

Assessment

Questions were raised again regarding the weighting of marks for the oral examination.

Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

The Strands

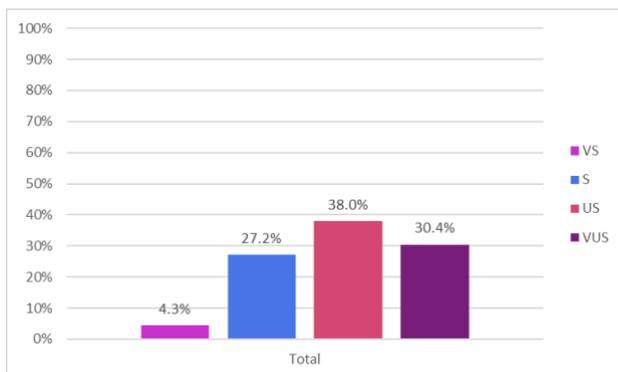
Respondents were unconvinced of this approach as it would be too abstract.

2.7 SECTION 6 OF THE SURVEY - LEARNING OUTCOMES

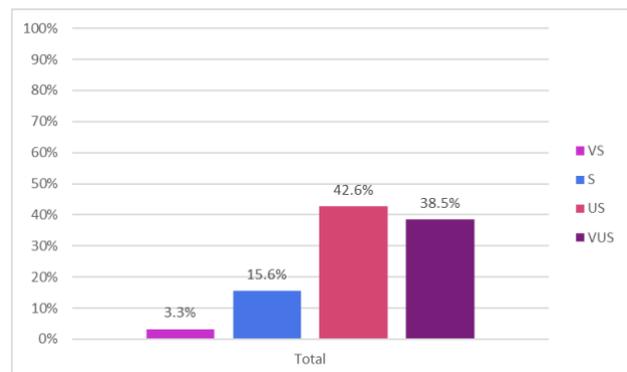
In the first question in section 6 of the survey, participants' opinions on the suitability of the learning outcomes for Irish L1/L2 students were sought. A 4-point Likert scale was used with the options "very suitable", "suitable", "unsuitable" and "very unsuitable".

In the L1 survey, 4.3% of respondents were of the opinion that the learning outcomes were very suitable, 27.2% that they were suitable, 38.0% that they were unsuitable and 30.4% that they were very unsuitable.

In the L2 survey, 3.3% of respondents were of the opinion that the learning outcomes were very suitable, 15.6% that they were suitable, 42.6% that they were unsuitable and 38.5% that they were very unsuitable.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure⁴ 46: Frequencies in responses about the appropriateness of learning outcomes for an L1/L2 student.

⁴ Legend: VS = "very suitable", S = "suitable", US = "unsuitable" and VUS = "very unsuitable"

L1 Survey

Participants had the opportunity to provide further opinions. The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 12% ($n=48$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

L1/L2 System

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there would be a need for compensation in the form of bonus CAO points or another form; 2) the more difficult course would have a negative impact on Gaelcholáistí; 3) the system was unfair; 4) Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáistí are not the same in terms of language skills; 5) the L1 draft specification does not meet the needs of native speakers; 6) further investigation is required on how a CLIL approach could be promoted throughout the curriculum as a method to achieve the learning outcomes.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too general and abstract and that the draft specifications did not contain detailed information.

Resources

A point regarding a lack of qualified teachers.

Strands in the draft specifications

The strand approach was criticised.

L2 Survey

The response rate for the open-ended question in the L2 survey was 15% ($n=52$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) the learning outcome approach is too abstract; 2) the vision is too ambitious and does not show an understanding of the standard of language of students in L2 settings; 3) there is too much emphasis on literature; 4) the drafts are

deficient; 5) more emphasis needs to be placed on the spoken language; 6) there is not enough detailed information available; 7) the draft specifications are not sufficiently compelling or enjoyable.

Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

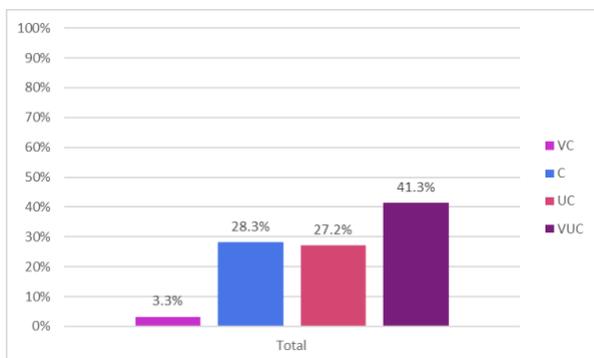
Levels

It was asked how every student could be accommodated when Foundation level was gone.

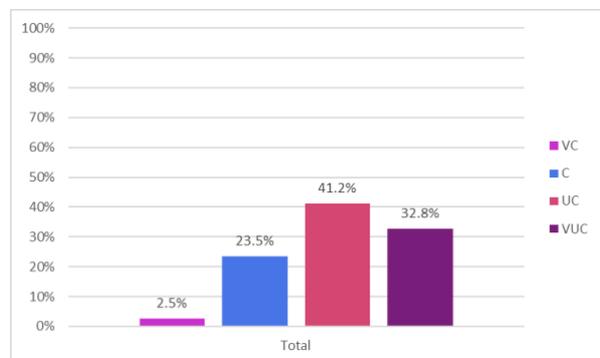
In the second question of this part, participants' opinions were sought about the clarity and comprehensibility of the learning outcomes for the purposes of planning for learning and teaching. A 4-point Likert scale was used.

3.3% of L1 survey respondents believed the learning outcomes were “very clear and very understandable”, 28.3% that they were “clear and understandable”, 27.2% that they were “unclear and incomprehensible” and 41.3% that they were “very unclear and very incomprehensible”.

In the L2 survey, 2.5% of respondents were of the opinion that the learning outcomes were “very clear and very understandable”, 23.5% that they were “clear and understandable”, 41.2% that they were “unclear and incomprehensible” and 32.8% that they were “very unclear and very incomprehensible”.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure⁵ 47: Frequencies for the responses regarding clarity and understandability of the learning outcomes.

Additional Opinions on Clarity and Understandability of the Learning Outcomes

Again, participants had the opportunity to give further opinions.

L1 Survey

In the L1 survey, the response rate for this question was 9% ($n=35$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract and too general, that there was a need for more substantial information, that the vision was unrealistic and too ambitious and that it was difficult to differentiate L1 and L2 learning outcomes.

L1/L2 System

Points regarding an unfair system and the need for compensation.

Assessment

It was stated that there was a lack of information about the assessment structure and approach.

L2 Survey

In the L2 survey, the response rate for this question was 11% ($n=40$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) the learning outcomes are too abstract; 2) the learning outcomes are too ambitious for L2 students; 3) there is no merit to the proposed approach; 4) substantial information is not available; 5) there is not enough emphasis on the spoken

⁵ Legend: VC = “very clear and very understandable”, C = “clear and understandable”, UC = “unclear and incomprehensible”, VUC = “very unclear and very incomprehensible”.

language; 6) the learning outcomes are unrealistic in the Leaving Certificate context while the emphasis is on summative assessment/the race for CAO points.

Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

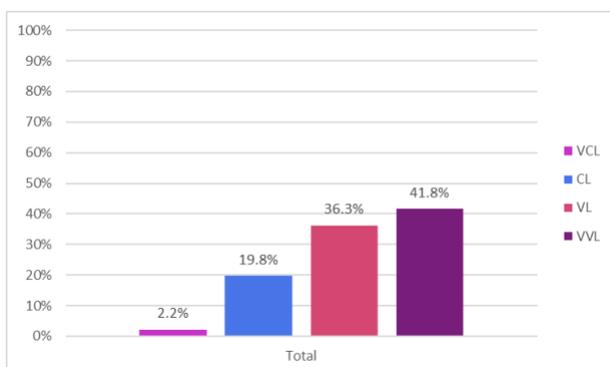
L1/L2 System

Criticism of the differentiated system as a concept.

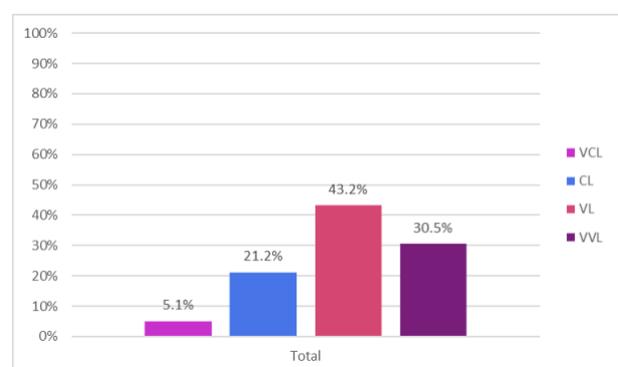
In the third question, participants were asked if the learning outcomes were clearly linked with the requirements of the assessment. A 4-point Likert scale was used again.

In the L1 survey, 2.2% of the respondents believed the learning outcomes were “very clearly linked with the requirements of the assessment”, 19.8% that they were “clearly linked” with them, 36.3% that they were “vaguely linked” with them and 41.8% that they were “very vaguely linked” with them.

5.1% of L2 survey respondents were of the opinion that the learning outcomes were “very clearly linked with the requirements of the assessment”, 21.2% that they were “clearly linked” with them, 43.2% that they were “vaguely linked” with them and 30.5% that they were “very vaguely linked” with them.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure⁶ 48: Frequencies for the responses regarding the link between the learning outcomes and the requirements of the assessment.

Additional Opinions

Participants had the opportunity to provide further opinions.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 8% ($n=30$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

A point with regard to a lack of information about assessment.

General content of the draft specification

A point with regard to learning outcomes being too general and too abstract.

L1/L2 System

Point regarding an unfair system.

L2 Survey

In the L2 survey, the response rate for this question was 10% ($n=34$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) the learning outcome approach is too abstract; 2) the learning outcomes do not reflect the Leaving Certificate context; 3) the draft specifications do not contain substantial information; 4) there is too much emphasis on literature; 5) the vision is too ambitious; 6) the draft specifications are not satisfactory.

⁶ Legend: VCL = “very clearly linked”, CL = “clearly linked”, VL = “vaguely linked”, VVL = “very vaguely linked”

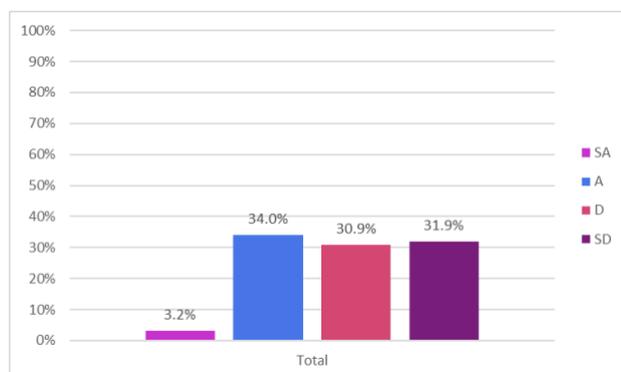
Assessment

It was stated that the link between the content of the draft specifications and the assessment was unclear because the learning outcomes were too broad and because there was a lack of information about assessment in the documents. It was stated that the lowering of the weighting for the oral examination would not help to achieve the learning outcomes.

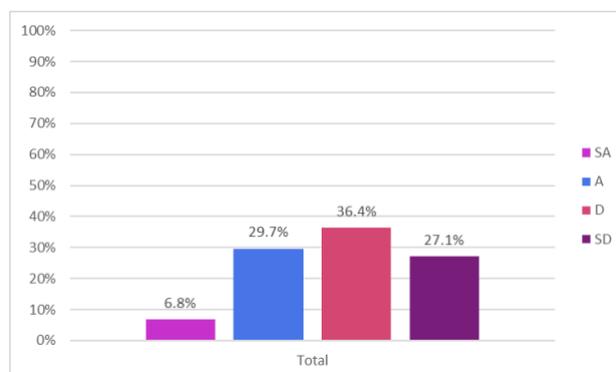
Participants were then asked to express their opinions on the learning outcomes as they relate to the various strands in the draft specification. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on 3 different statements, one per strand.

34.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The learning outcomes are clearly and appropriately divided in the ‘Communication’ strand between the five skills (listening, reading, speaking, spoken interaction, writing)*” and 3.2% strongly agreed. 30.9% disagreed with that statement and 31.9% strongly disagreed.

29.7% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 6.8% strongly agreed. 36.4% disagreed with that statement and 27.1% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

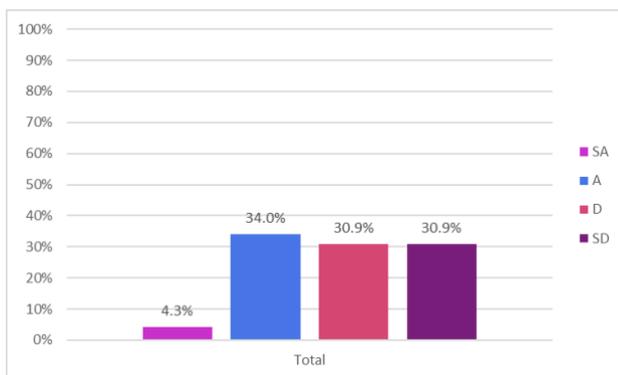


L2 Survey

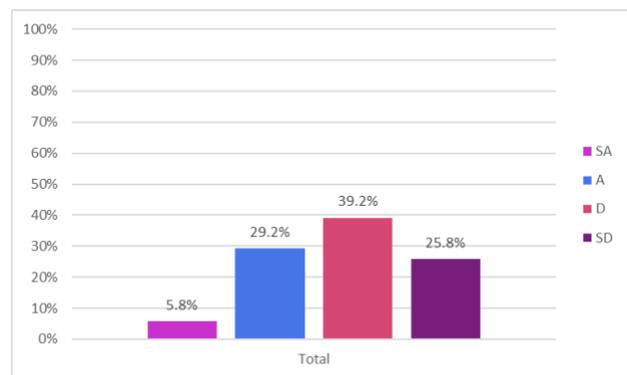
Figure 49: Frequencies for the statement “*The learning outcomes are clearly and appropriately divided in the ‘Communication’ strand between the five skills (listening, reading, speaking, spoken interaction, writing)*”

34.0% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The learning outcomes are clearly and appropriately divided in the ‘Awareness’ strand between the three elements (language awareness, self-awareness and cultural awareness)*” and 4.3% strongly agreed. 30.9% disagreed with that statement and 30.9% strongly disagreed.

29.2% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.8% strongly agreed. 39.2% disagreed with that statement and 25.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

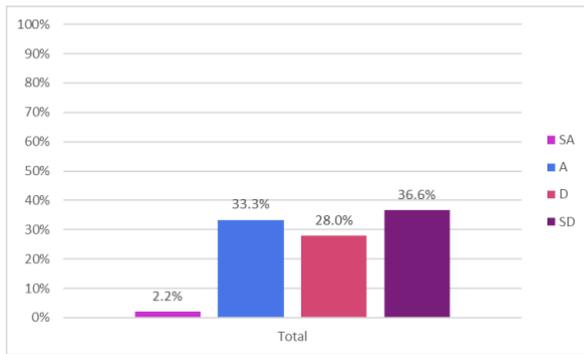


L2 Survey

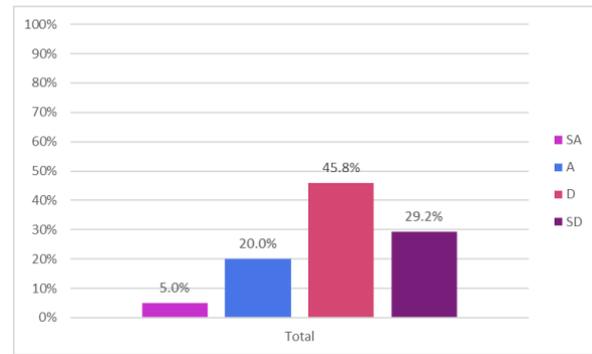
Figure 50: Frequencies for the statement “The learning outcomes are clearly and appropriately divided in the ‘Awareness’ strand between the three elements (language awareness, self-awareness and cultural awareness)”.

33.3% of L1 survey participants agreed with the statement “*The learning outcomes are clear and suitable for the ‘Language Creativity’ strand*” and 2.2% strongly agreed. 28.0% disagreed with that statement and 36.6% strongly disagreed.

20.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 5.0% strongly agreed. 45.8% disagreed with that statement and 29.2% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 51: Frequencies for the statement “The learning outcomes are clear and suitable for the ‘Language Creativity’ strand.”.

Additional Opinions

At the end of section 6, participants were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the learning outcomes within this draft specification.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 8% ($n=31$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract, too general, and too ambitious, and that the draft specifications did not contain substantial information.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding the impact of the more difficult course on Gaelcholáistí, an unfair system and the need for compensation were raised.

Assessment

It was stated that there was a lack of information about assessment and that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered.

The draft specifications' strands

The use of strands as an approach in the design of a curriculum was criticised.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 10% ($n=35$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract, that there was a need for more emphasis on the spoken language, that the draft specifications would not inspire the students to use Irish as a living language and that they did not include substantial information.

Assessment

It was stated that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered to 35%.

Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

Levels

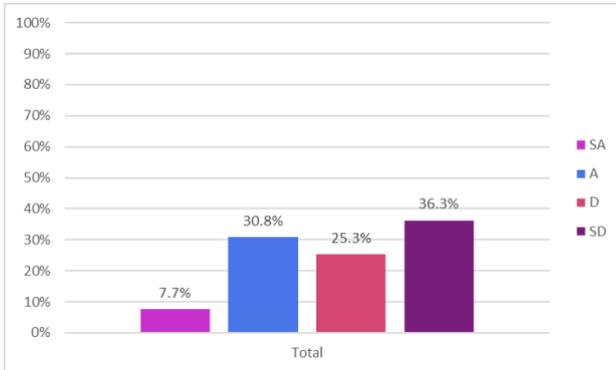
It was stated that in the absence of a foundation level option it would be difficult to accommodate students of different levels of ability.

2.8 SECTION 6A OF THE SURVEY - COMMUNICATION

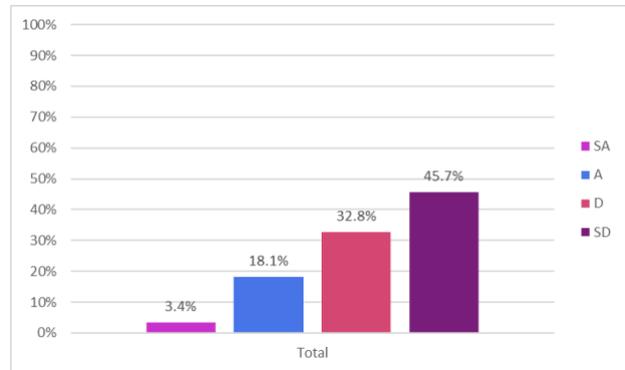
Section 6a of the survey focused on the 'Communication' strand. Participants were asked if they agreed with various statements regarding the learning outcomes in the strand. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on the statements ($n=5$).

30.8% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support the students to "*function confidently and effectively in interpersonal communication situations in the language community*" and 7.7 strongly agreed with it. 25.3% disagreed with the statement and 36.3% strongly disagreed.

18.1% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.4% strongly agreed with that same statement. 32.8% disagreed with the statement and 45.7% strongly disagreed.



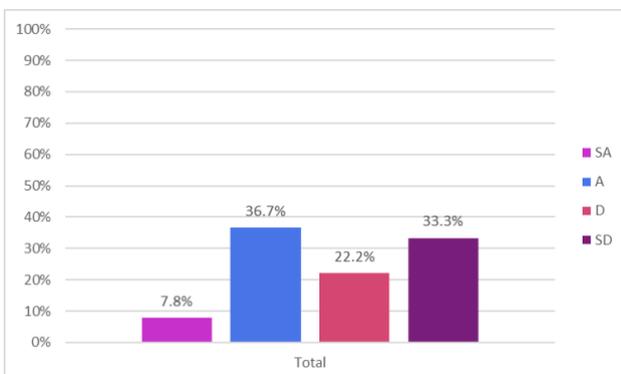
L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 52: Frequencies for the statement that the communication learning outcomes would support the students to “function confidently and effectively in interpersonal communication situations in the language community”.

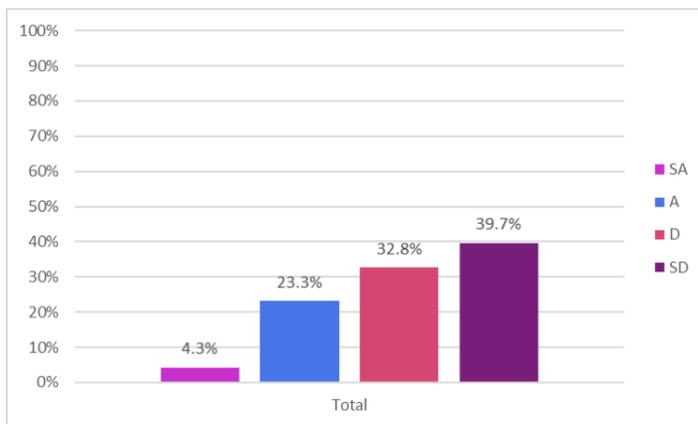
36.7% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “understand and use everyday language of their native-language community, and other language users at normal speed”, and 7.8% strongly agreed with that same statement. 22.2% disagreed with the statement and 33.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

Figure 53: Frequencies for the statement that the communication learning outcomes would support students to “understand and use the everyday language at normal speed of their native-language community, and other language users”.

23.3% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “understand and use the everyday language at normal speed of the language community, and of other language users” and 4.3% strongly agreed with that same statement. 32.8% disagreed with the statement and 39.7% strongly disagreed.

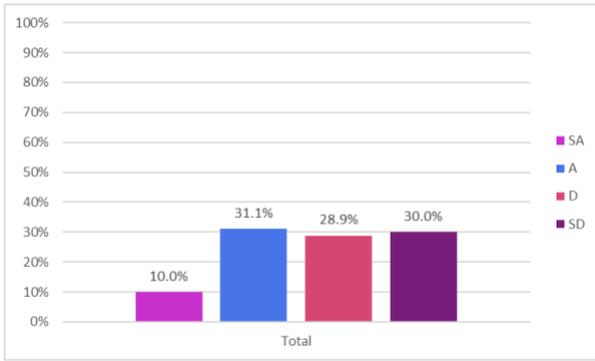


L2 Survey

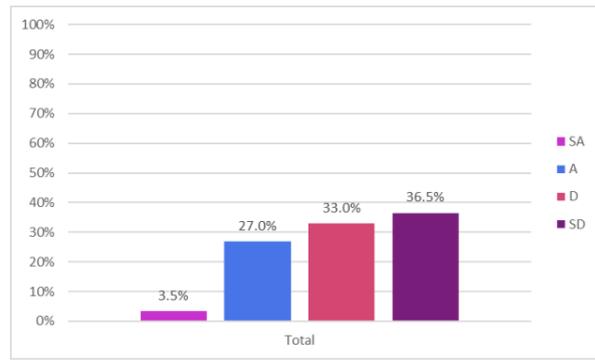
Figure 54: Frequencies for the statement that the communication learning outcomes would support students to “notice and use accurate and rich language in spoken and written Irish” and other language users”.

31.1% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “notice and use accurate and rich language in spoken and written Irish” and 10.0% strongly agreed with that same statement. 28.9% disagreed with the statement and 30.0% strongly disagreed.

27.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement and 3.5% strongly agreed with that same statement. 33.0% disagreed with the statement and 36.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

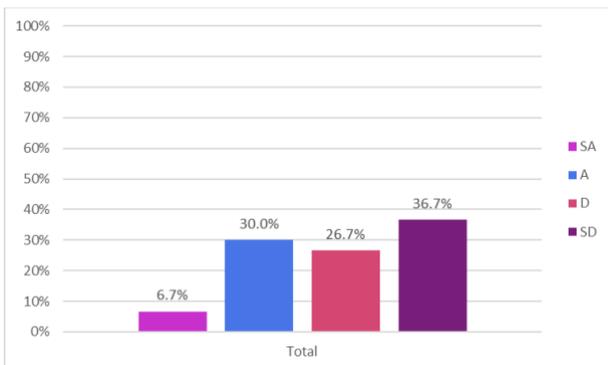


L2 Survey

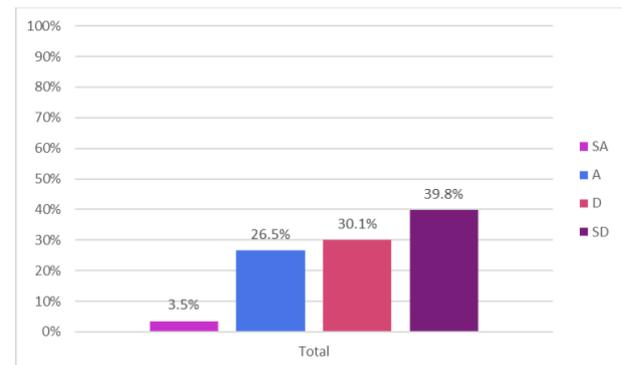
Figure 55: Frequencies for the statement that the communication learning outcomes would support students to “notice and use accurate and rich language in spoken and written Irish”.

30.0% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “read a wide range of texts, including literary and non-literary texts, that are used in the language community demonstrating a critical understanding of the subject matter” and 6.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 26.7% disagreed with the statement and 36.7% strongly disagreed.

26.5% of L2 survey participants agreed with that statement and 3.5% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.1% disagreed with the statement and 39.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

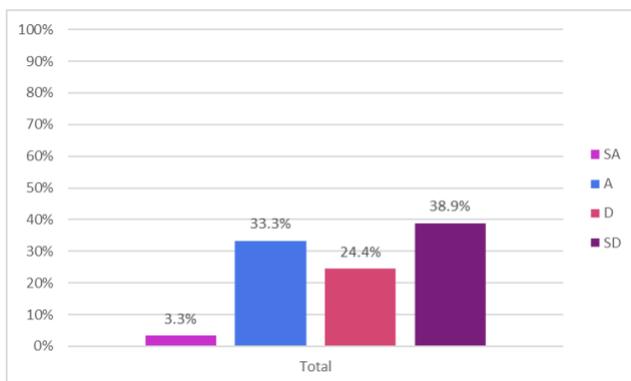


L2 Survey

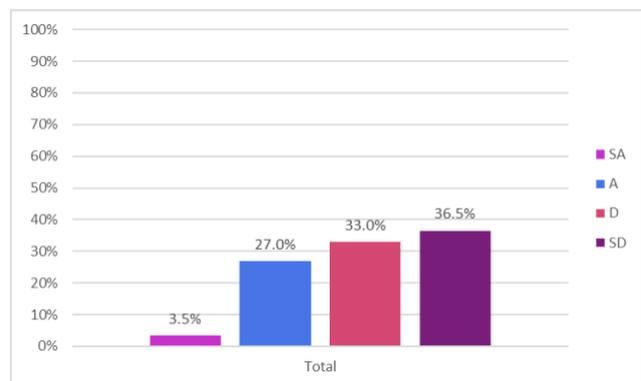
Figure 56: Frequencies for the statement that the communication learning outcomes would support students to “read a wide range of texts, including literary and non-literary texts, that are used in the language community demonstrating a critical understanding of the subject matter”.

33.3% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “compose texts on areas of interest to them for communication purposes” and 3.3% strongly agreed with that same statement. 24.4% disagreed with the statement and 38.9% strongly disagreed.

27.0% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement and 3.5% strongly agreed with that same statement. 33.0% disagreed with the statement and 36.5% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 57: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “compose texts on areas of interest to them for communication purposes”.

Additional Opinions

At the end of section 6a of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the learning outcomes in relation to the ‘communication’ strand.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 10% ($n=39$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract and too general, that the vision was unrealistic and that the ratio between literature and spoken language in the draft specifications was wrong.

Assessment

The change in the weighting of marks for the oral examination was criticised.

Other proposals

Use of the CEFR model was recommended.

L1/L2 System

Points were raised with regard to the impact of the more difficult course on Gaelcholáistí and in relation to the unfair system.

Junior Cycle

The point with regard to waiting for a review was raised.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 11% ($n=39$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was a need for more emphasis on the spoken language and there was too much emphasis on literature; 2) the new specification would not inspire students to use Irish outside the classroom; 3) the vision was too ambitious in the context of L2 language skills; 4) the learning outcomes approach was too abstract; 5) the draft specifications are insufficiently enjoyable and compelling 6) the learning outcomes were unrealistic in the context of the Leaving Certificate 7) there was a lack of substantial information.

Other proposals

The use of the CEFR or Modern Foreign Languages approach was suggested.

Assessment

The reduction in the weighting of marks for the oral examination was criticised.

The Strands

It was stated that the ‘Communication’ strand was unrealistic and very challenging.

Resources

It was stated that there is an acute shortage of qualified teachers with the appropriate language skills.

Junior Cycle

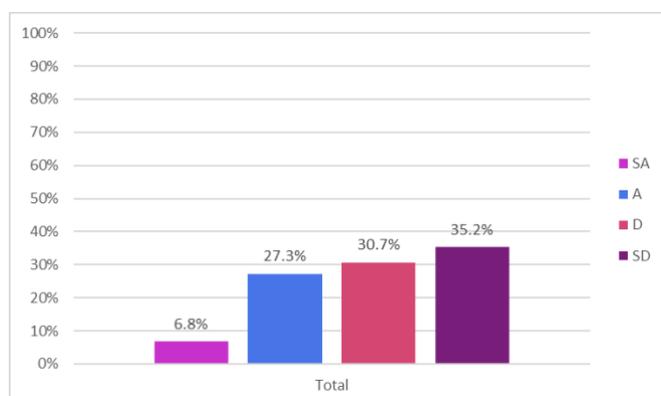
Points with regard to waiting for a review.

2.9 SECTION 6B OF THE SURVEY - AWARENESS

Section 6b of the survey focused on the ‘Awareness’ strand. Participants were asked if they agreed with various statements regarding the learning outcomes in the strand. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on the statements ($n=8$).

27.3% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “*be more effective and more confident as independent and capable language users*” and 6.8% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.7% disagreed with the statement and 35.2% strongly disagreed.

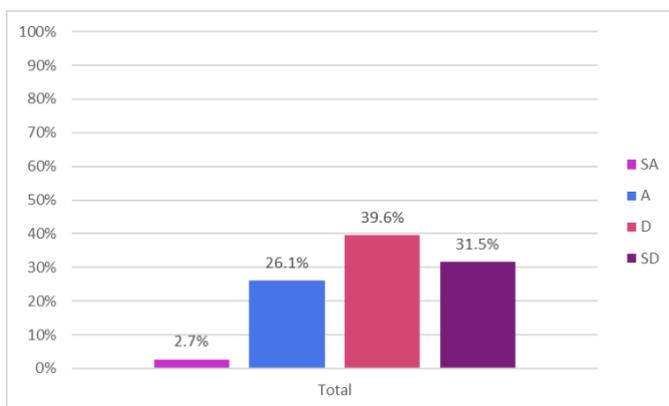
There was different wording for this question in the L2 draft specification survey (see below).



L1 Survey

Figure 58: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “be more effective and more confident as independent and capable language users”.

26.1% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “reflect on the progress they have made and the progress they need to make to become independent users of language” and 2.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 39.6% disagreed with the statement and 31.5% strongly disagreed.

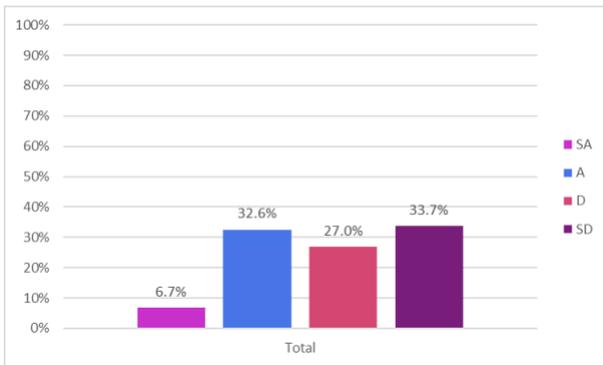


L2 Survey

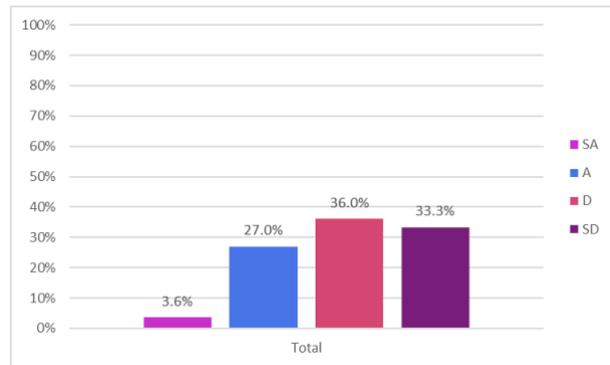
Figure 59: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “reflect on the progress they have made and the progress they need to make to become independent users of language”.

32.6% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “use the appropriate language in various contexts” and 6.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 27.0% disagreed with the statement and 33.7% strongly disagreed.

27.0% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “use the appropriate language in various contexts” and 3.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 36.0% disagreed with the statement and 33.3% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

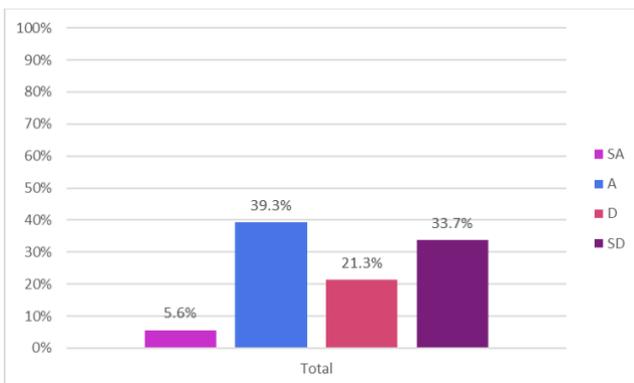


L2 Survey

Figure 60: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to use the appropriate language in various contexts”.

39.3% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “add to their knowledge and understanding of the systems and natural flow of Irish” and 5.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 21.3% disagreed with the statement and 33.7% strongly disagreed.

This question was not on the L2 draft specification survey.

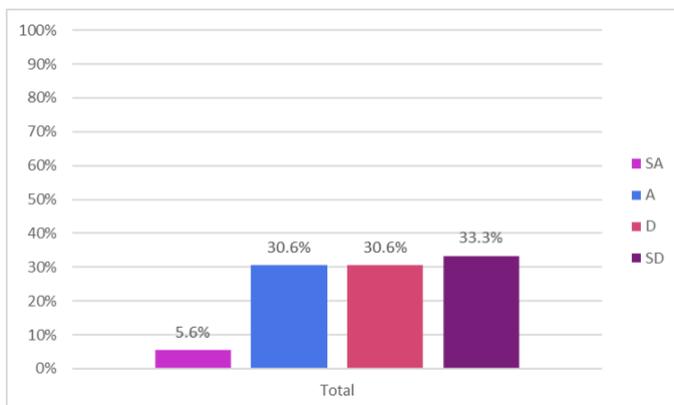


L1 Survey

Figure 61: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “add to their knowledge and understanding of the systems and natural flow of Irish”.

30.6% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “*be accurate in the use of Irish*” and 5.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.6% disagreed with the statement and 33.3% strongly disagreed.

This question was not on the L2 draft specification survey.

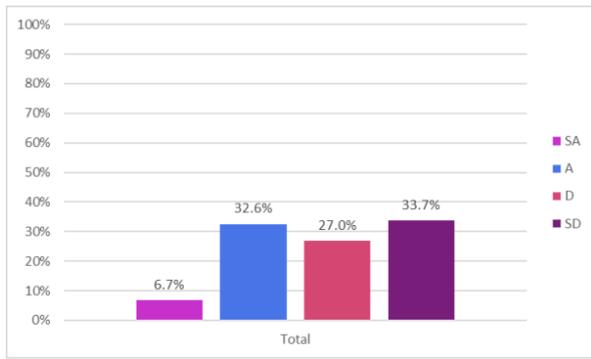


L2 Survey

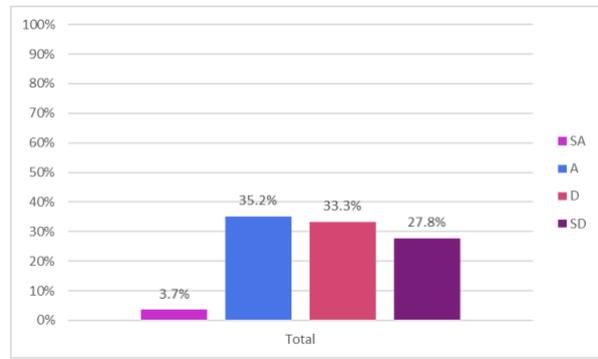
Figure 62: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “*be accurate in the use of Irish*”.

32.6% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “*demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the richness of Irish dialects*” and 6.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 27.0% disagreed with the statement and 33.7% strongly disagreed.

35.2% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “*demonstrate an understanding of the main Irish dialects*” and 3.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 33.3% disagreed with the statement and 27.8% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

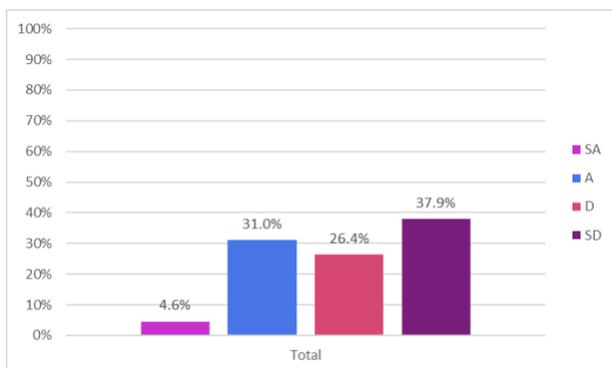


L2 Survey

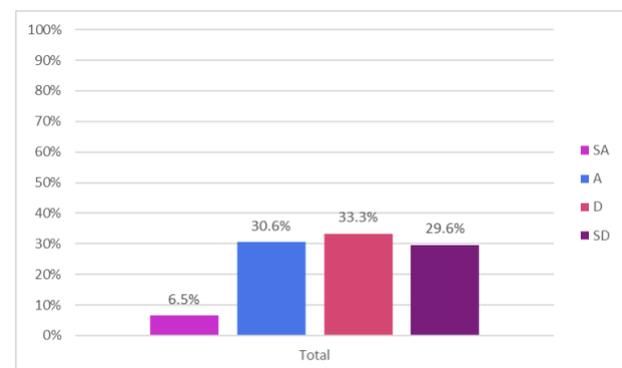
Figure 63: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the dialectical richness of Irish/of the richness of the main Irish dialects”.

31.0% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “make effective use of feedback and self-reflection as part of the language acquisition process” and 4.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 26.4% disagreed with the statement and 37.9% strongly disagreed.

30.6% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “make effective use of feedback” and 6.5% strongly agreed with that same statement. 33.3% disagreed with the statement and 29.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

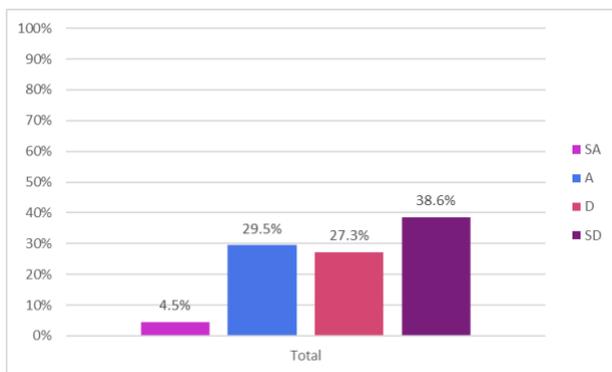


L2 Survey

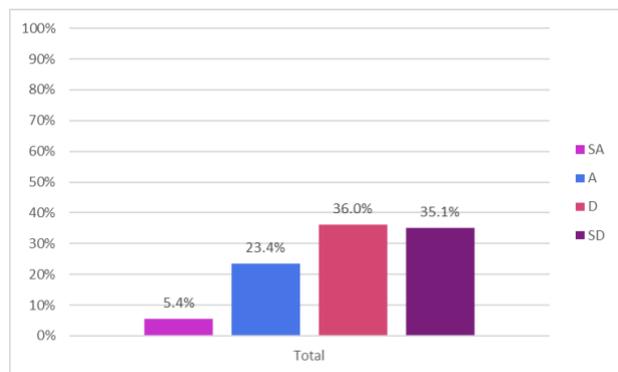
Figure 64: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students “To make effective use of feedback and self-reflection as part of the language acquisition process”.

29.5% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “take ownership of self-directing their own language learning activities” and 4.5% strongly agreed with that same statement. 27.3% disagreed with the statement and 38.6% strongly disagreed.

23.4% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement and 5.4% strongly agreed with that same statement. 36.0% disagreed with the statement and 35.1% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

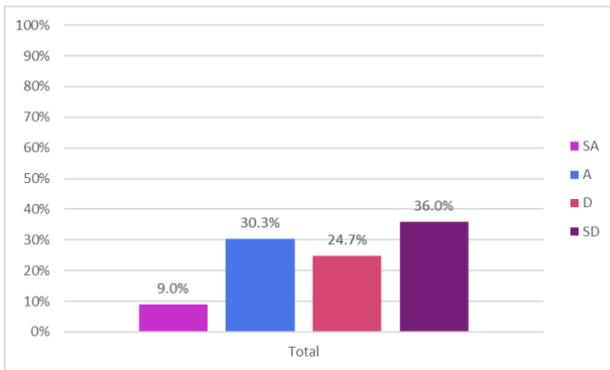


L2 Survey

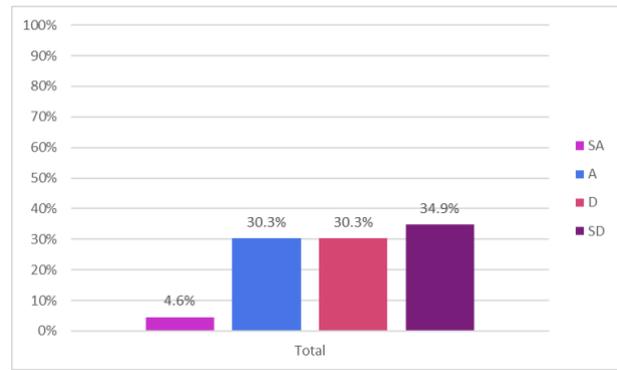
Figure 65: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “take ownership of self-directing their own language learning activities”.

30.3% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “reflect on and study elements of Irish language culture and heritage” and 9.0% strongly agreed with that same statement. 24.7% disagreed with the statement and 36.0% strongly disagreed.

30.3% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement and 4.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.3% disagreed with the statement and 34.9% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

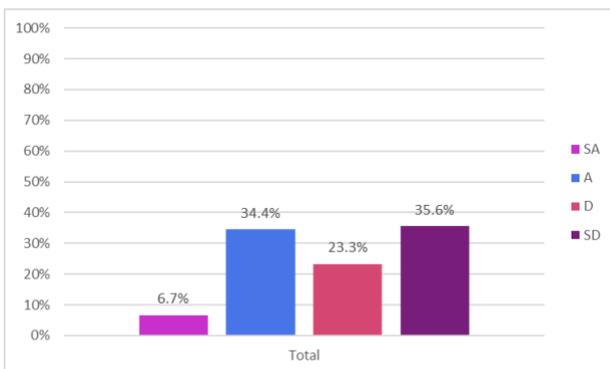


L2 Survey

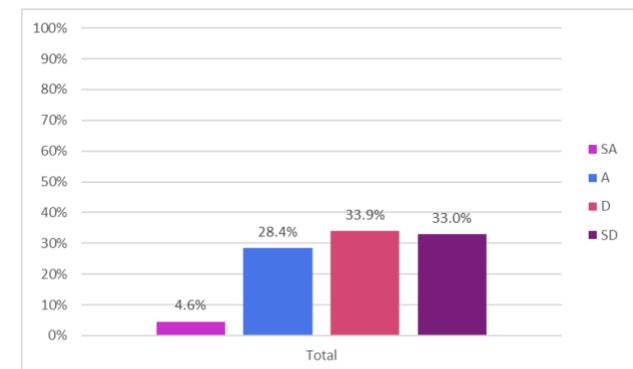
Figure 66: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the Awareness strand would support students to “reflect on and study elements of Irish language culture and heritage”.

34.4% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “reflect on their own culture, Irish language community culture, multilingual society, and other cultures” and 6.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 23.3% disagreed with the statement and 35.6% strongly disagreed.

28.4% of L2 survey participants agreed with the statement and 4.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 33.9% disagreed with the statement and 33.0% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 67: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in the ‘Awareness’ strand would support students to “reflect on their own culture, Irish language community culture, multilingual society, and other cultures”.

Other Opinions

At the end of section 6b of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the learning outcomes in relation to the 'Awareness' strand.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 10% ($n=38$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract and too general, that there was a need for more substantial information. It was stated that the vision was too ambitious and that an accurate understanding of L1 contexts and the language skills of the majority of students was not displayed.

The draft specifications' strands

It was claimed that this strand was too subjective for 'high-stakes' summative assessment such as the Leaving Certificate and that there was too much emphasis on reflection in general and that the students would be sick of it.

L1/L2 System

Point about an unfair system.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 9% ($n=33$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the learning outcomes were too abstract, that there was a need to look at how to increase the relevance of the language for students from other backgrounds and cultures, and that there was a need for more substantial information about the approach.

The Strands

Respondents thought the ‘Awareness’ strand was too challenging for students in L2 settings and that they would revert to English to achieve the learning outcomes in this strand.

Junior Cycle

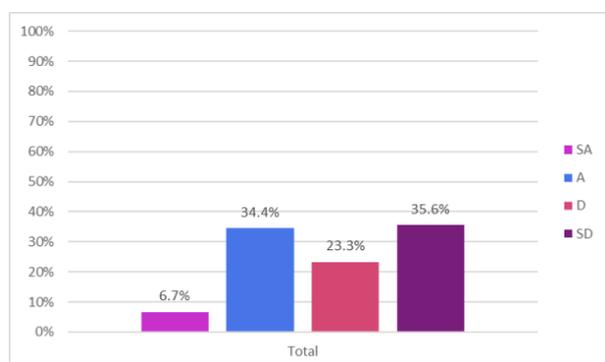
A negative comparison was made with the ‘Awareness’ strand in the Junior Cycle and it was stated that there was a need to wait for what would be said about it in the review.

2.10 SECTION 6C OF THE SURVEY - LANGUAGE CREATIVITY

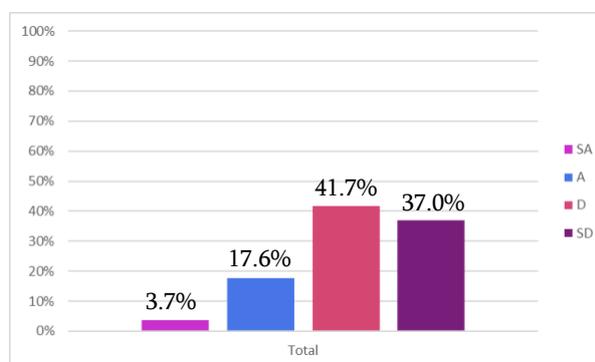
Section 6c of the survey focused on the ‘Language Creativity’ strand. Participants were asked if they agreed with various statements regarding the learning outcomes in the strand. A 4-point Likert scale was used, and participants were asked to express their opinion on the statements. There were different statements for this section in each survey (L1 $n=5$; L2 $n=4$)

22.7% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “*develop as critical and creative thinkers*” and 5.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 34.1% disagreed with the statement and 37.5% strongly disagreed.

17.6% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “*develop as confident critical and creative thinkers*” and 3.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 41.7% disagreed with the statement and 37.0% strongly disagreed.



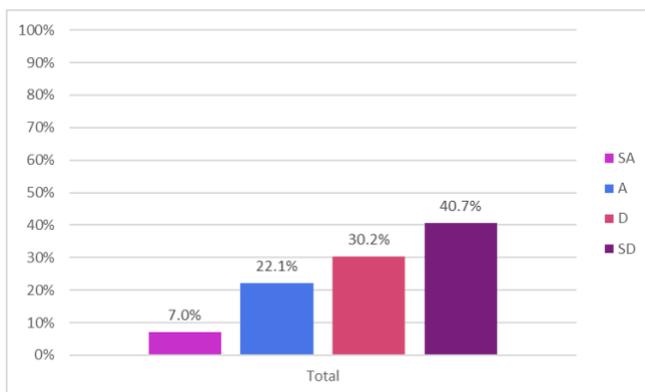
L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 68: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “develop as critical and creative [confident] thinkers”.

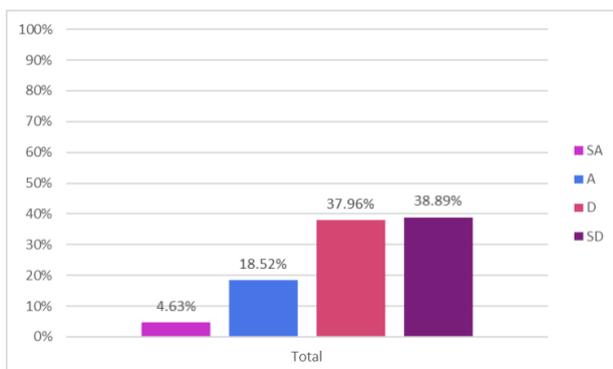
22.1% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “be innovative so that they can enjoy and progress their language acquisition” and 7.0% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.2% disagreed with the statement and 40.7% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

Figure 69: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ ability to “be innovative so that they can enjoy and progress their language acquisition”.

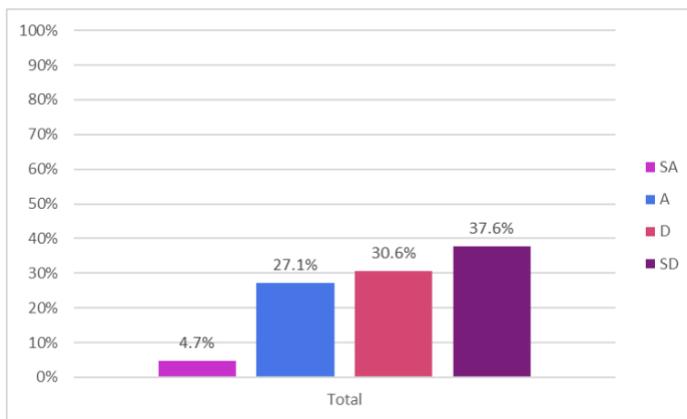
18.5% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “present and perform the language in new and creative ways” and 4.6% strongly agreed with that same statement. 38.0% disagreed with the statement and 38.9% strongly disagreed.



L2 Survey

Figure 70: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students' capacity to "present and perform the language in new and creative ways".

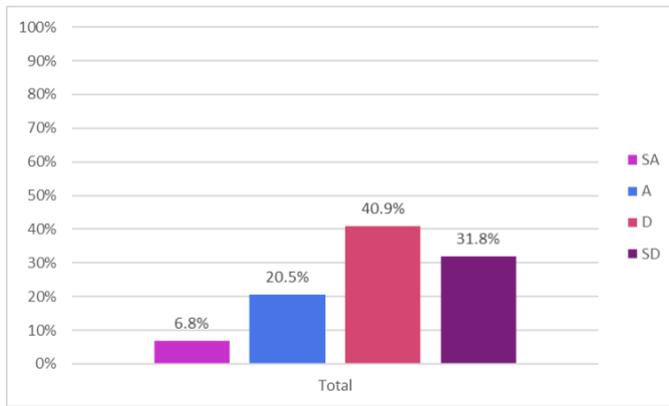
27.1% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students' capacity to "to explore and use their choice of illustrative methods" and 4.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.6% disagreed with the statement and 37.6% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

Figure 71: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to "creatively and imaginatively undertake learning opportunities on their own or cooperatively".

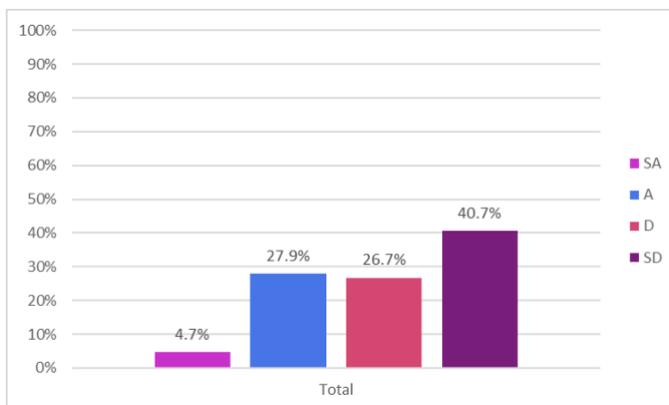
20.5% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students' capacity to "creatively and imaginatively undertake learning opportunities on their own or cooperatively" and 6.8% strongly agreed with that same statement. 40.9% disagreed with the statement and 31.8% strongly disagreed.



L2 Survey

Figure 72: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “creatively and imaginatively undertake learning opportunities on their own or cooperatively”.

27.9% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “take a chance and analyse various solutions to questions” and 4.7% strongly agreed with that same statement. 26.7% disagreed with the statement and 40.7% strongly disagreed.

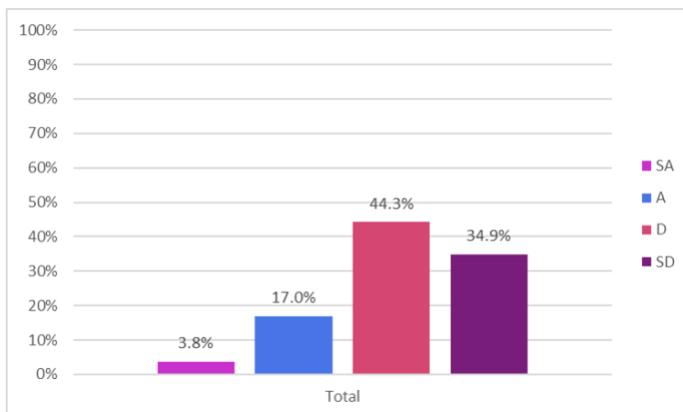


L1 Survey

Figure 73: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “take a chance and analyse various solutions to questions”.

17.0% of L2 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “take risks when using the language, to develop, analyse critically and re-assess

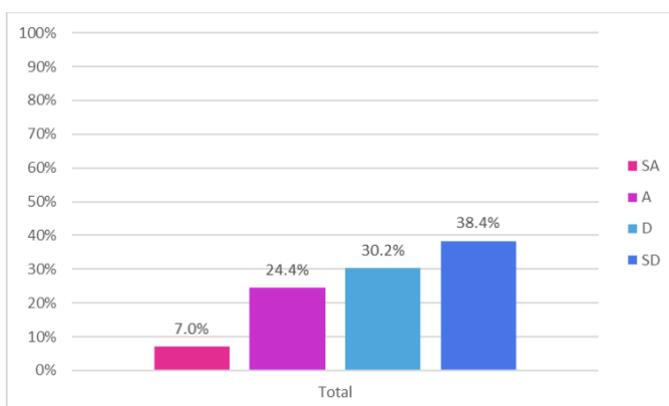
various ideas” and 3.8% strongly agreed with that same statement. 44.3% disagreed with the statement and 34.9% strongly disagreed.



L2 Survey

Figure 74: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes of this strand would support the students’ capacity to “take risks when using the language, to develop, analyse critically and re-assess various ideas”.

24.4% of L1 survey participants agreed that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students’ capacity to “use language in a creative, imaginative and playful way” and 7.0% strongly agreed with that same statement. 30.2% disagreed with the statement and 38.4% strongly disagreed.



L1 Survey

Figure 75: Frequencies for the statement that the learning outcomes in this strand would support students to “use language in a creative, imaginative and playful way”.

Other Opinions

At the end of section 6c of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to express any further opinions on the learning outcomes in relation to the 'Language Creativity' strand.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 11% ($n=42$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents expressed were: 1) learning outcomes too abstract and too general; 2) unrealistic vision; 3) a lack of substantial information; 4) difficult to differentiate between L1 and L2 specifications; 5) too time-consuming.

The draft specifications' strands

It was stated that the creativity strand was too idealistic for the system that is currently in place and that this strand was unsuitable for summative assessment.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding the need for compensation and an unfair system were raised.

Resources

It was stated that teachers would require training to effectively implement the creativity strand.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 9% ($n=33$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents expressed were: 1) a lack of substantial information; 2) too ambitious a vision; 3) learning outcome approach too abstract; 4) a lack of enthusiasm when creativity is based on texts.

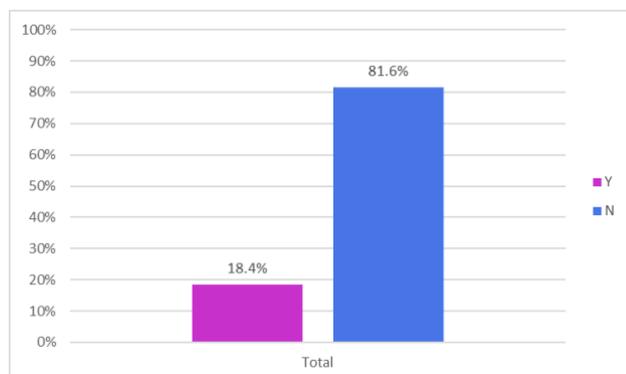
The Strands

It was stated that the ‘Language Creativity’ strand was too challenging for L2 students and that they would be unable to engage with it when they did not possess the basic language skills.

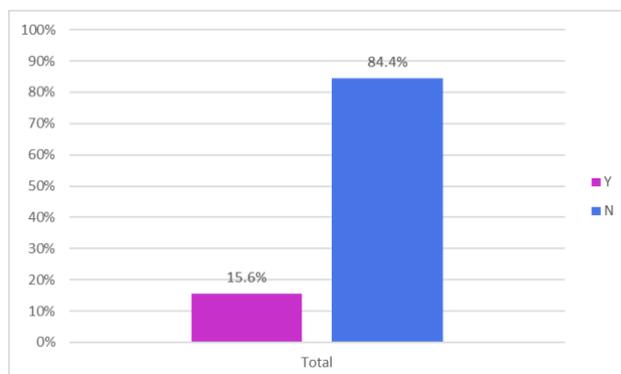
2.11 SECTION 7 OF THE SURVEY - ASSESSMENT

Section 7 of the survey focused on assessment. Participants were asked “*will the assessment components as contained in this draft specification support the type of learning required by the Aim and Rationale?*”. The answer was a binary choice (yes / no).

In the L1 survey, 18.4% of respondents were of the opinion that they would and 81.6% were of the opinion that they would not. In the L2 survey, 15.6% of respondents were of the opinion that they would and 84.4% were of the opinion that they would not.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure⁷ 76: Frequencies for the question “*will the assessment components as contained in this draft specification support the type of learning required by the Aim and Rationale?*”.

Other opinions

⁷ Legend: Y = “Yes”, N=“No”

Participants had the opportunity to explain their choice of answer.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 10% ($n=39$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the vision and the aims were unrealistic without any proper understanding of the context of an L1 classroom, that there was a need for more time for the spoken language, and that the course should remain unchanged, but the assessment methods should be changed.

Assessment

It was stated that there was a lack of information on assessment, that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered and that the 'race for CAO points' would have a large influence on the type of learning.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding the impact of the more difficult course on Gaelcholáistí, the unfair system and the need for compensation were raised.

Resources

A point made previously regarding a lack of qualified teachers.

Junior Cycle

A point made previously regarding the need to wait for review.

Additional proposals

A point previously made regarding the CEFR model.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L2 survey was 11% ($n=37$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

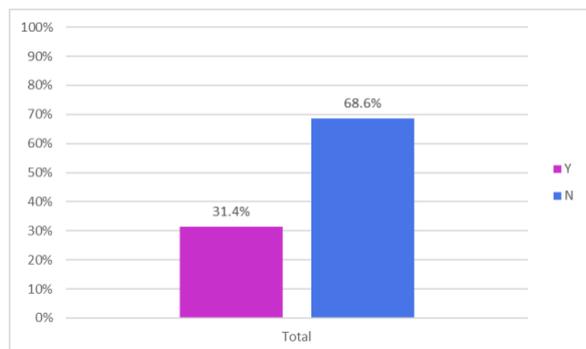
Assessment

It was stated that the question could not be satisfactorily answered because of a lack of information on assessment. Raising the weighting of marks for the oral examination and the aural comprehension was proposed.

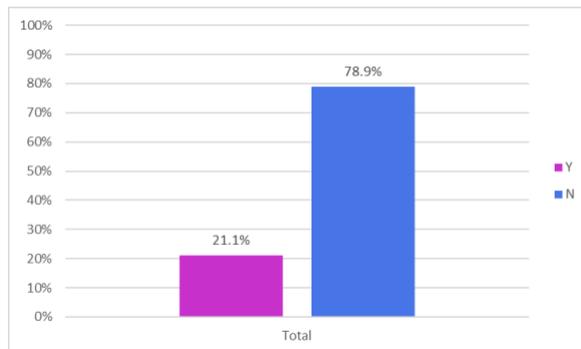
General content of the draft specification

The structure and vision of the draft specifications were criticised.

In the second question participants were asked “*will the Language Portfolio support students to strengthen their self-directed learning and reflection skills while on their language acquisition journey?*”. 31.4% of L1 survey respondents believed it would and 68.6% were of the opinion that it would not. 21.1% of L2 survey respondents were of the opinion that it would and 78.9% were of the opinion that it would not.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 77: Frequencies for the question “Will the Language Portfolio support students to strengthen their self-directed learning and reflection skills while on their language acquisition journey?”.

Other opinions

Participants had the opportunity to explain their choice of answer.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 9% ($n=36$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was a lack of substantial information regarding the Portfolio; 2) the Portfolio could have merit but that it needed to be used correctly; 3) the Portfolio had no merit whatsoever; 4) the Portfolio would not contain the students' own work but that of teachers/parents; 5) the Portfolio would create additional pressure.

Assessment

It was claimed that there was a need for a specific weighting for the Portfolio in the summative assessment.

Resources

It was stated that there was a lack of qualified teachers with the appropriate language skills to use the Portfolio correctly.

Additional proposals

A point previously made regarding the CEFR model.

L1/L2 System

A point previously raised regarding an unfair system.

L2 Survey

In the L2 survey, the response rate for this question was 13% ($n=46$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

The Portfolio

Of the references made to the Language Portfolio, half of them expressed opposition to the concept. Among the other references, it was stated that there was a need for a weighting for the Portfolio in the assessment, that there was a lack of information about the Portfolio approach, that the concept itself was positive but that there was doubt regarding the approach; that the Portfolio was a positive learning resource, and that its use would be too time-consuming.

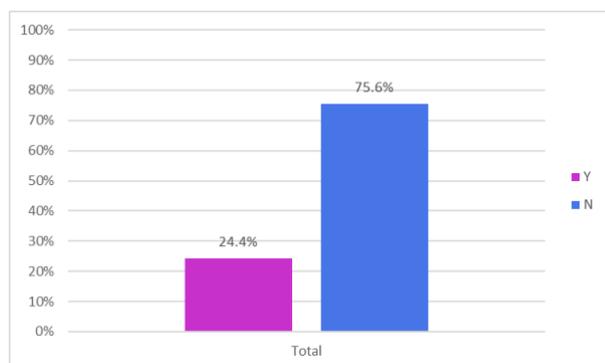
Junior Cycle

Points regarding review.

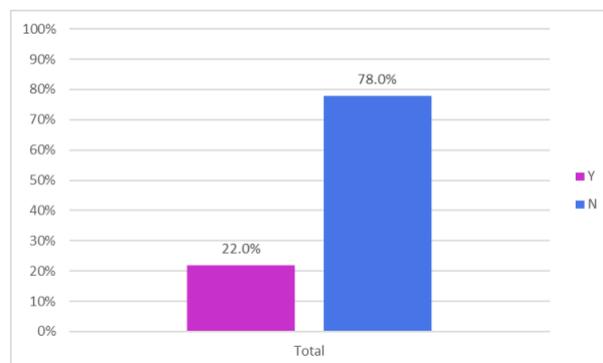
Additional proposals

Following the CEFR model was proposed.

In the third question participants were asked “*will the assessment as set out in the draft specification support the development of all major language skills, listening, reading, speaking, spoken interaction and writing?*”. 24.4% of L1 survey respondents were of the opinion that it would and 75.6% were of the opinion that it would not. 22.0% of L2 survey respondents were of the opinion that it would and 78.0% were of the opinion that it would not.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 78: Frequencies for the question “will the assessment as set out in the draft specification support the development of all major language skills, listening, reading, speaking, spoken interaction and writing?”.

Other opinions

Participants had the opportunity to explain their choice of answer.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 9% ($n=36$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

It was stated that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered if the focus is to be on the development of communication skills. Respondents also believed that there was a lack of detailed information on assessment, and that students would engage in rote learning rather than in development of language skills.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that there was a lack of detailed information in the documents and that there was a need for more emphasis on the spoken language throughout the draft specifications.

L1/L2 System

The point raised above about an unfair system.

Additional proposals

The point raised above with regard to the CEFR model.

Resources

Respondents stated that teachers who do not have the appropriate skills to implement the draft specifications would require additional CPD.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L2 was 11% ($n=38$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

Respondents believed that the information on the assessment structure and approach was not detailed enough in order to answer the question. In addition, it was stated that the oral examination and listening comprehension needed a higher weighting.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that the main skills would not be developed without a greater emphasis on the spoken language and less emphasis on the literature.

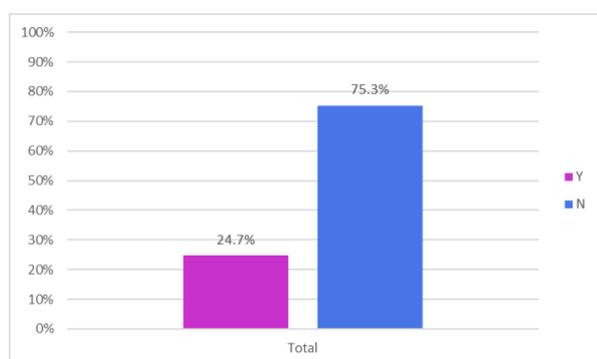
Levels

A point previously raised regarding Foundation level.

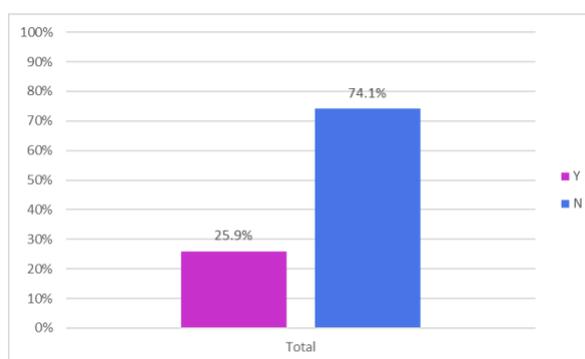
Additional proposals

A point previously raised regarding CEFR.

In the fourth question about assessment, participants were asked “*Will this draft specification support the use of a wide and suitable range of assessment methods on a formative and summative basis?*”. 24.7% of L1 survey respondents were of the opinion that it would and 75.3% were of the opinion that it would not. 25.9% of L2 survey respondents were of the opinion that it would and 74.1% were of the opinion that it would not.



L1 Survey



L2 Survey

Figure 79: Frequencies for the question “Will this specification support the use of a wide and suitable range of assessment methods on a formative and summative basis?”.

Other opinions

Participants had the opportunity to explain their choice of answer.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question in the L1 survey was 9% ($n=35$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

General content of the draft specification

The points regarding a lack of substantial information and an unrealistic vision were raised again.

Assessment

The points regarding the weighting of marks for the oral examinations, a lack of information on assessment and rote learning with teachers' notes were raised again.

L1/L2 System

Points made above regarding the need for compensation and an unfair system.

Additional proposals

The point regarding the CEFR model was raised again.

Junior Cycle

Point regarding waiting for a review.

Strands

It was stated that there was too much reflection involved in summative assessment.

Resources

Respondents stated that teachers who do not have the appropriate skills to implement the draft specifications would require additional CPD.

The response rate for this question in the L2 survey was 7% ($n=26$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was a lack of information on assessment; 2) they agreed to a point but that it depends on the teacher’s approach; 3) doubt was expressed about the assessment approach in the context of the Leaving Certificate; 4) they were not satisfied with the weighting of marks for the oral examination.

Additional proposals

A point previously raised regarding CEFR.

In the next subsection of section 7, participants were asked to use a 5-point scale to rate the effectiveness of the assessment components in the draft specification. The scale went from “very ineffective” (1 on the scale) to “very effective” (5 on the scale).

In the L1 survey, 31.8% thought that the oral examination would be very ineffective, 14.1% that it would be ineffective, 18.8% were neutral, 16.5% thought that it would be effective and 18.8% that it would be very effective.

In the L2 survey, 28.0% thought that the oral examination would be very ineffective, 14.0% that it would be ineffective, 16.8% were neutral, 11.2% thought that it would be effective and 29.9% that it would be very effective.

Response	Count	Pct
1	27	31.8%
2	12	14.1%
3	16	18.8%
4	14	16.5%
5	16	18.8%
Total Responses	85	100%

L1 Survey

Response	Count	Pct
1	30	28.0%
2	15	14.0%
3	18	16.8%
4	12	11.2%
5	32	29.9%
Total Responses	107	100%

L2 Survey

Figure 80: Frequencies for the ratings on the effectiveness of the oral examination.

In the L1 survey, 27.1% thought that the aural examination would be very ineffective, 14.1% that it would be ineffective, 22.4% were neutral, 14.1% thought that it would be effective and 22.4% that it would be very effective.

In the L2 survey, 14.2% thought that the aural examination would be very ineffective, 18.9% that it would be ineffective, 23.6% were neutral, 20.8% thought that it would be effective and 22.6% that it would be very effective.

Response	Count	Pct
1	23	27.1%
2	12	14.1%
3	19	22.4%
4	12	14.1%
5	19	22.4%
Total Responses	85	100%

L1 Survey

Response	Count	Pct
1	15	14.2%
2	20	18.9%
3	25	23.6%
4	22	20.8%
5	24	22.6%
Total Responses	106	100%

L2 Survey

Figure 81: Frequencies for the ratings on the effectiveness of the aural examination.

In the L1 survey, 30.6% thought that the written examination would be very ineffective, 20.0% that it would be ineffective, 22.4% were neutral, 14.1% thought that it would be effective and 12.9% that it would be very effective.

In the L2 survey, 31.1% thought that the written examination would be very ineffective, 23.6% that it would be ineffective, 19.8% were neutral, 17.9% thought that it would be effective and 7.5% that it would be very effective.

Response	Count	Pct
1	26	30.6%
2	17	20.0%
3	19	22.4%
4	12	14.1%
5	11	12.9%
Total Responses	85	100%

L1 Survey

Response	Count	Pct
1	33	31.1%
2	25	23.6%
3	21	19.8%
4	19	17.9%
5	8	7.5%
Total Responses	106	100%

L2 Survey

Figure 82: Frequencies for the ratings on the effectiveness of the written examination.

Other opinions

There was an opportunity at the end of section 7 to express further opinions on the ‘Assessment’ section.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 10% ($n=40$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

The points regarding a lack of information on assessment and the weighting of marks for the oral examination were raised.

L1/L2 System

The points regarding an unfair system, the impact of the more difficult course on Gaelcholáistí, and the need for compensation were raised.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that there was a need for more emphasis on the spoken language and that there was a lack of substantial information.

Additional proposals

Following the CEFR model was proposed.

The consultation

Questions were raised regarding the validity of the consultation process.

Junior Cycle

A point previously mentioned regarding waiting for a review.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 13% ($n=45$). The following were the most common categories in the responses.

Assessment

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) the weighting for the oral examination should not be lowered; 2) there was a lack of information on assessment; 3) there should be a weighting for the literature at ordinary level because it would be difficult to encourage students without it; 4) the practice of rote learning had to cease but these draft specifications would not achieve this aim; 5) there was a need for a greater weighting for the aural comprehension.

General content of the draft specification

Negative opinions were shared, and it was stated that there was too much emphasis on literature.

Additional proposals

The CEFR model and the model of an additional literature course model were proposed.

Levels

A point previously raised regarding Foundation level being gone.

2.12 SECTION 8 OF THE SURVEY - SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In section 8, participants were asked if any particular area of the draft specifications should be reviewed. The choice was a binary one. 94.3% in the L1 survey said yes and 5.7% said no. In the L2 survey 98.2% said yes and 1.8% said no.

Participants were then asked to name those areas, to explain why these changes should be made and to propose improvements to that area of the draft specification.

L1 Survey

The response rate for this question was 19% ($n=75$). The following were the most common points in the responses. Please note that these points were previously raised in the responses to other parts of the survey.

L1/L2 System

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was a need for compensation for the more challenging course; 2) the system was unfair and discriminatory; 3) it should not be mandatory to take L1; 4) a more difficult course would have a negative impact on Gaelcholáistí; 5) the more difficult course would have an impact on children without Irish in Gaeltacht schools and that it is not apparent that they were taken into consideration; 6) the L1/L2 terminology itself was being used incorrectly; 7) the draft specifications did not display an understanding of the different contexts of schools in the Gaeltacht and outside of the Gaeltacht.

General content of the draft specification

It was stated that there was a need for more detailed information, that the draft specifications were not sufficiently compelling. In addition, it was claimed that the proposed changes would lead to an increase in the number of students seeking an exemption from the study of Irish.

Assessment

It was stated that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered and that the Leaving Certificate would still consist of 'rote learning'.

Junior Cycle

It was suggested these draft specifications be discarded and that there is a need to wait for the Junior Cycle review before proceeding with reform.

The consultation

The validity of the process was questioned, and certain respondents requested that those views of the stakeholders be listened to.

Literature

It was stated that there was too much emphasis on literature and that the list of texts was needed.

Additional proposals

It was proposed the CEFR model be followed and also that an additional literature course be provided.

Levels

Respondents queried how students with various educational needs could be accommodated without the option of foundation level.

Resources

It was stated that there was a need for CPD for teachers and that there was a lack of qualified teachers with advanced language skills to teach Irish in L1 settings.

L2 Survey

The response rate for this question was 25% ($n=87$). The following were the most common points in the responses. Again, these points were previously raised in the responses to other parts of the survey.

General content of the draft specification

In order of frequency, the opinions respondents raised were: 1) there was too much emphasis on literature in the draft specification; 2) there should be more emphasis on the spoken language; 3) the vision was unrealistic; 4) the draft specifications in general were deficient; 5) there was a need for more detailed information.

Assessment

As previously mentioned, the lowering of the weighting of marks for the oral examination was strongly criticised and it was also suggested the weighting of marks for the aural comprehension be raised.

Junior Cycle

Points previously made regarding a negative experience and a need to wait for review.

Additional proposals

A point previously made regarding Modern Foreign Languages.

L1/L2 System

The differentiated system was criticised, a point discussed previously.

Levels

It was stated again that it was difficult to differentiate between HL and OL.

Literature

It was stated again that there were too many texts.

The consultation

The validity of the consultation was questioned, and respondents requested that voice of teachers be listened to.

2.13 THE MOST COMMON THEMES IN THE RESPONSES ACROSS THE 19 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

This section presents the most common themes across the 19 open-ended questions in the L1 and L2 draft specifications surveys. Even though the questions in the survey were almost identical, other than the occasional phrase/term, different themes emerged from the responses to both surveys. Therefore, the themes for the L1 survey are illustrated in Table 5 and the themes for the L2 survey in Table 6.

The frequency is given as a percentage of the individual code references. The themes are illustrated with excerpts from the responses. The participant group to which the respondent belongs is mentioned with each excerpt (e.g., teacher, parent, student). If respondents selected “other” as their participant group and they gave additional information with regard to background, the respondent’s own words are used.

There were 978 individual code references in the L1 survey and 3% was chosen as an inclusion cut-off point for the most common themes, i.e., there were at least 29 individual relevant references to that theme.

There were 1,327 individual code references in the L2 survey. Again, 3% was chosen as an inclusion cut-off point, in this case that meant that there would be at least 40 individual relevant references to that theme.

L1 Survey

Table 5: L1 draft specification - The most common themes across the 19 open-ended questions (% > 3)

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>A lack of detailed information in the draft specifications</i></p> <p>It was stated that it would be difficult to give an opinion on its value without additional information on aspects such as texts, assessment structure, the portfolio approach and clearer learning outcomes. The vagueness and abstract nature of the learning outcomes were criticised specifically and it was claimed that more guidance would be needed before implementing the specification.</p>	73	7.5%	<p>“There is a lack of information available regarding the subject matter that is to be taught by teachers and learned by students” (ST1_181, Principal/Deputy principal in an L1 Irish-medium post-primary school)</p> <p>“Though I agree with some of these general statements, there is not enough information in the consultation document for me to say that the specifications are good enough.” (ST1_247, Parent/guardian in an L1 Irish-medium post-primary school)</p> <p>“Hard to get a reading or understanding of this without a literature list and the learning outcomes are very broad and unclear” (ST1_384, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</p>
<p><i>An unfair and discriminatory L1/L2 system</i></p> <p>Questions were raised about the fairness of the L1/L2 model and it was claimed that L1 students were being discriminated against in Irish because they were to take a more difficult course without having a choice and without any compensation for the additional work and challenge. The L1 students’ case was put in the context of the anti-discrimination legislation as pertains to language background. Comparison was</p>	72	7.4%	<p>“All children should sit the same paper. If my child has to sit a more difficult Irish paper, then she should have an easier English paper. It is discrimination for Gaeltacht people again. Why should she have a harder Irish paper” (ST1_174, Parent/guardian in an L1 Gaeltacht post-primary school)</p> <p>“Enforced separate examination for candidates of a specified language or ethnic background should be dismissed. The comparative standard-setting process would be academically flawed and in breach of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The aim should be to encourage more candidates to adopt the language. The forced separate examination would dissuade candidates not from fluent families from attending schooling through the language.” (ST1_99, Parent/guardian in an L1</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>made with native speakers of other languages taught in Irish schools who do not have to follow a specific specification. It was claimed that there would be cause for a legal challenge.</p>			<p>Irish-medium post-primary school & teacher educator)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Negative impact on Gaelcholáistí</i></p> <p>Respondents were of the opinion that the draft specification would have a negative effect on Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht due to the L1 course being more challenging than the L2 course. It was mentioned that the vision in the draft specifications was too ambitious and that they did not contain a proper understanding of the standard of Irish in L1 settings outside the Gaeltacht. It was stated that the numbers in Gaelcholáistí would fall if they had to do a more difficult Leaving Certificate course without compensation, because the advantage in Irish is one of the reasons those schools are currently chosen.</p>	56	5.7%	<p><i>“I am very concerned about giving L1 status to schools outside the Gaeltacht. Our students will be at a disadvantage. Parents send their children to the school to gain an advantage with regard to Irish. It gives the weakest of students an opportunity to achieve a good mark at higher level. Now that that opportunity has been lost, we will lose students.”</i> (ST1_382, Post-primary teacher in an L1 Irish-medium school)</p> <p><i>“This new L1 L2 will discourage students in Gaelcholaistes like me to enjoy Irish! I feel cheated that I have to do the same exam as somebody in the Gaeltacht. My level of Irish is not nearly as good as theirs would be, I wouldn’t even call myself fluent! I’m in fact so upset about this that if this goes ahead, I’ll transfer to an English medium school for my Leaving Cert, and I love my school so that’s something I really don’t want to do. I love Irish but this will turn us off the language”</i> (ST1_168, Post-primary Student in an L1 Irish-medium school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>The learning outcomes approach</i></p> <p>It was stated that the learning outcomes themselves were too vague, too abstract and too general to guide teachers. It was claimed that the approach based on learning outcomes was not suitable for the Leaving Certificate context, i.e. ‘high stakes’ summative assessment, because it was too open to interpretation. It was advised to wait for a review of the approach at Junior Cycle level before implementing it for the Senior Cycle.</p>	54	5.5%	<p><i>“These outcomes are too vague and ambiguously specify goals that cannot be reasonably measured. If the curriculum aims to teach and examine the learning outcomes, these outcomes should be singular and unambiguous, with clear measurable quantities”</i> (ST1_76, Post-primary student in an L1 Gaeltacht school)</p> <p><i>“The learning outcomes are only the bare bones. It is an ambitious, abstract list, kind of a ‘wish list’. There is little difference between the ones for L1 and L2 which raises major questions about their value to the teacher.”</i> (ST1_368, Member of the Board of Directors of Gaeloideachas)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>A need for compensation</i></p> <p>It was recommended that there should be compensation in the form of bonus CAO points or other compensation for students who take the L1 course. This opinion was expressed frequently by respondents who were in favour of the L1/L2 model in principle, along with respondents who expressed general dissatisfaction with the L1/L2 model. It was stated that there was precedent in this with the bonus points awarded for higher level Maths and that they had a positive effect on the number of students taking the higher level course. It was claimed here again that there would be cause for a legal challenge if compensation was not provided.</p>	53	5.4%	<p><i>“I completely agree with the availability of a high-quality Irish programme. BUT, if the level is much higher than in L2 schools, a target & acknowledgement should be given to L1 students – e.g., additional leaving cert points AND a particular target to attract teachers towards such a subject”.</i> (ST1_251, Parent/guardian in an L1 Gaeltacht post-primary school)</p> <p><i>“I am very dissatisfied with the way in which this is presented to parents and students. I think it is discriminatory towards Irish speaking students who may have other academic challenges. I think a reward system like that offered for students taken higher maths (extra 25 points for passing it) might be a possible solution. No reward will discourage students to attend an Irish speaking school for the leaving certificate.”</i> (ST1_66, Post-primary parent/guardian in an L1 Irish-medium school)</p> <p><i>“The main failing of the proposed draft L1 curriculum specification for Irish-medium schools is not addressing how the L1 curriculum will be allocated points via the CAO for a more demanding and higher standard course than required of students attending an English-medium school. The simple principle of fairness for all students is very much in question with this draft model, I suspect it will lead to legal challenge as it opens the door for unfairly discriminating against Irish-medium students”</i> (ST1_7, Post-primary parent/guardian & Member of the Board of Management in an L1 Irish-medium school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>Junior Cycle</p> <p>It was stated that there was a need to wait for a review of the L1 specification at Junior Cycle level before proceeding with the changes at Leaving Certificate level. It was implied that there was dissatisfaction with the Junior Cycle, that teachers and students had a negative experience with its approach and therefore, that the Senior Cycle specification should not be developed based on the same model. The legislative context was mentioned in that it is set out as part of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education that this review of the L1 model in the Junior Cycle would be conducted.</p>	50	5.1%	<p><i>“The vision in these areas is good but without researching the impact that the junior cert will have, it will be difficult to measure how effective all these areas will be”</i> (ST1_292, Principal/deputy principal in an English-medium primary school)</p> <p><i>“Without proper scientific review of the new L1 and L2 Irish junior cycle, before moving on to the senior cycle, there is a big chance that the mistakes and the problems that are currently present in the new junior cycle will be continued and that any new specification for the leaving certificate will, therefore, be defective from the beginning”</i> (ST1_309, Post-primary parent/guardian in an L1 Gaeltacht school & manager of a summer college)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Weighting of marks for the oral examination</i></p> <p>Respondents were of the opinion that the weighting of marks for the oral examination should not be lowered to 35%. It was claimed that the 40% for the oral examination was one of the reasons students chose to take higher level and that more people would choose ordinary level if the marks were reduced. It was also stated that there was no alignment between this proposal and the aims in the draft specifications regarding communication and promoting the living language.</p>	49	5.0%	<p><i>“There is a reduction in the % of marks going for the oral examination. There is a danger that there will be a reduction in the number of students who choose the higher level course if the percentage of marks for the spoken work is reduced. The number of students undertaking the higher level course had increased as a result of 40% being allocated to the oral examination.” (ST1_232, Post-primary teacher in an L1 Irish-medium school)</i></p> <p><i>“I believe the oral aspect of the assessment should carry a heavier %. Focusing more on written aspects such as suggested will push the students into rote learning for short term results.” (ST1_112, Primary and post-primary school parent in L1 Irish-medium schools)</i></p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Lack of information about assessment</i></p> <p>It was stated that there was a lack of information about the assessment structure and approach in the draft specifications. Respondents sought more detailed information with regard to assessment components and it was stated that there was a need to provide sample papers so that the draft specifications may be properly assessed.</p>	44	4.5%	<p><i>“It is too difficult to give an opinion on this draft specification without the entire course being set out in it and without major pieces of information with regard to assessment being discussed either” (ST1_231, Post-primary teacher in an L1 Irish-medium school)</i></p> <p><i>“There is not enough information about assessment in the draft specification. I sometimes think we change a syllabus when we really should keep the syllabus the same, and change the method of assessment. Method of assessment has an enormous impact on teacher behaviour in the classroom. Teachers will “cover” the syllabus but they teach to prepare students for the paper. What will the new papers: aural, written etc look like? Will the examination papers assess the learning outcomes outlined.” (ST1_23, Post-primary teacher and parent/guardian in an L1 Irish-medium school & teacher educator)</i></p>
<p><i>The list of texts</i></p> <p>There was dissatisfaction among respondents with regard to the lack of information on texts in the draft specifications. Respondents had difficulty giving an opinion on the literature in the draft specifications without the list of texts being published so that they could evaluate the standard and challenge they posed. Questions were raised about the suitability and the</p>	35	3.6%	<p><i>“The statements above are true with regard to the study of both literary and non-literary texts; but because there is no proposed list or examples of the texts available, their benefit in achieving the specified aims cannot be evaluated.” (ST1_233, Published novelist for young readers and adult readers)</i></p> <p><i>“It has to be taken into account that not every student who attends an L1 school is fluent, and that Irish may not be the student’s mother tongue. It is very difficult to evaluate the suitability of the learning outcomes without a list of texts.” (ST1_225, Post-primary principal/deputy principal and parent/guardian in an L1 Irish-medium school)</i></p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>choice of texts in the context of Gaeltacht schools and more information was sought on the types of texts permitted, with some respondents suggesting that folklore and songs be included in the list.</p>			

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>CEFR model</p> <p>The CEFR model was recommended for the draft specifications because it would offer a more useful and clearer structure than the learning outcomes. The emphasis on literature in the draft specifications was compared to the emphasis on communication in CEFR. It was claimed that the CEFR model would be more suitable for the development of communication skills.</p>	34	3.5%	<p><i>“Having taught up to level B2 in MFL, and as a lover of literature, it pains me to object to the amount of literature at all levels (current and proposed). Literature should not be examined pre C level on the CEFR. Student should be exposed to poems and extracts of Irish literature for sure, but the new Junior Cert is killing the spoken language, and just does not engage the majority of teenagers. The students are learning off notes they barely understand - implement the TEG not this syllabus!”</i> (ST1_82, Post-primary parent/guardian in an L1 post-primary school & modern foreign languages teacher)</p> <p><i>“The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is not mentioned in these learning outcomes – despite it being used in international qualifications like Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) and even for primary teachers’ qualification in Ireland – and this is a missed opportunity; the main goal of TEG and other courses is to enable learners as language users to use Irish effectively in their own lives, not just in order to prepare for one examination.”</i> (ST1_184, Former student in an L1 Irish-medium school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Literature in the draft specifications</i></p> <p>It was claimed that there was too much emphasis on literature in the draft specifications and that there should be more emphasis on the spoken language. Respondents were of the opinion that literature had a negative effect on students' attitude towards Irish because it was too challenging, and that literature is not relevant to the lives of teenagers. Respondents, for the most part, were in favour of teaching a certain amount of literature to add to the richness of students' language, but it was felt that priority should be given to speaking and communication.</p>	32	3.3%	<p><i>“Students do not enjoy or do they engage in an overload of literature. They should be given more of an opportunity to be develop their spoken language skills.” (ST1_161, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</i></p> <p><i>“Students today do not read in English not to mention in Irish! Reading is a personal thing... it is to be enjoyed. The reading of a vast number of texts against your will not foster good will towards a language. We should first focus more on the enjoyment and on the speaking of the language” (ST1_369, Post-primary teacher and parent/guardian in an L1 Gaeltacht school)</i></p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>Resources (human and other)</p> <p>Questions were raised about the resources that would be required to fulfil the vision of the L1 draft specification. It was claimed that there was a lack of qualified teachers with the appropriate language and pedagogical skills to achieve the aims. It was mentioned that CPD would be needed for teachers, especially with regard to the Awareness and Language Creativity strands. Respondents were doubtful that there would be a sufficient number of teachers with the requisite language proficiency to teach the L1 course, especially outside the Gaeltacht, and that it would foster inequality between schools. There were also questions about the teaching and learning resources that would be required, about the workload this would create and about the role of the publishing companies in the interpretation of learning outcomes.</p>	29	3.0%	<p><i>“Well written academic document. Unfortunately, it does not reflect reality. In many schools, students aren't taught by people with rich language skills. Dearth of Irish speaking teachers. So the quality of language acquisition is neither equal nor adequate for these children to be assessed on L1 basis outside Gaeltacht areas. Inadequate learning materials.”</i> (ST1_116, Post-primary teacher/guardian in an L1 Irish-medium school & primary school teacher)</p> <p><i>“Teachers are not available at present in secondary schools or in primary schools to teach Irish. We must go back to training colleges to achieve a better standard with the students. If the teachers do not have Irish, there is no chance that the children will have Irish.”</i> (ST1_224, Principal/deputy principal in an Irish-medium primary school & parent/guardian)</p>

L2 Survey

Table 6: L2 draft specification - The most common themes across the 19 open-ended questions (% > 3)

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>The oral examination</p> <p>Respondents were of the opinion that the weighting of marks for the oral examination in the draft specification was too low. The proposal to lower the weighting from the current 40% to 35% was strongly criticised. It was stated that this gave the wrong message about the importance of the spoken language and that was contrary to the aims specified in the draft specification. It was claimed that the weighting of the oral examination currently played a role in students' choice to take higher level and that there would be an increase in the number of students taking ordinary level if the marks were reduced to 35%.</p>	125	9.4%	<p><i>“Learning the language and using the language outside of the classroom is mentioned in the specification, but no emphasis is put on this with regards to the final grade. Reducing the oral to 35% shows that speaking the language is not important and introducing more texts adds to it. Students want to learn and be able to use the language in a fun and effective way, but this draft specification does not reflect this”</i> (ST2_84, Teacher educator)</p> <p><i>“The NCCA intends to lower the mark for the oral examination itself to 35%. That change will damage the great work that has been done in schools to encourage students to choose higher level. We are taking marks from the examination that is most important for keeping the language alive. It does not make any sense”</i> (ST2_177, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>“I stress again not to de-value the worth of the oral examination, if anything it should be increased, and students would place more emphasis in speaking the language. I have never heard someone who has left school say I wish we did more Irish Literature, the general consensus, I wish I could speak the language (especially outside the Gaeltacht). I feel that if we follow the trend of the Junior Cycle, it will be the final death nail in the coffin of the Irish language”</i> (ST2_57, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Literature in the draft specifications</i></p> <p>Questions were raised regarding the value of literature in L2 settings and comparison was made with the modern foreign languages approach, where no literature is included. It was claimed that there was far too much emphasis on literature in the L2 draft specification and that this would have a negative impact on the students' motivation and enjoyment. Respondents acknowledged that literature was important in language enrichment and development, but they felt that there was a need to develop the learners' basic language skills before pursuing literature. It was claimed that teachers would rely on English or rote-learning in order to engage with texts as the students would not possess strong enough communication skills to engage with the challenge the literature would pose.</p>	120	9.0%	<p><i>“The emphasis on literature is killing the enjoyment of the subject. In the Junior Cycle, students are making informed choices not to do Higher level because of the large amount of literature it contains. [...] I have now heard numerous arguments about the importance/role of literature in relation to language acquisition (I agree to a point), but why is there not the same need in the ‘modern’ foreign languages? Killing it!”</i> (ST2_226, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>“The draft curriculum focuses mainly on texts and literacy. This doesn't work when it comes to Gaeilge. Gaeilge needs to be treated exactly as MFLs are treated not seen as similar to the English curriculum. The course should focus on oral, listening and comprehension. Learning through texts doesn't work. This has been proven by the JC. Students dislike and don't understand the texts on the course”</i> (ST2_49, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</p> <p><i>“Having sat the current Leaving Cert exam as a student and now teaching it to both higher and ordinary level students I feel I am in a good position to judge it from both perspectives. I feel if anything the marks going for literature should be reduced not increased or ideally that literature/texts should be removed entirely but could be made into an optional additional subject which students could opt to study should they wish to. It serves no purpose only leads to rote learning”</i> (ST2_8, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Learning outcomes</i></p> <p>The learning outcomes were strongly criticised. It was stated that the aims, targets and learning outcomes approach were too abstract and too open. Respondents were of the opinion that the guidance for teachers in the learning outcomes was not clear enough, and that they would not be confident dealing with them. More detailed information was sought on the objectives and the content that would need to be taught. It was claimed that the learning outcomes approach was not appropriate in the context of the Leaving Certificate summative assessment.</p>	81	6.1%	<p><i>“The learning outcomes are too broad and too ambitious. They are not substantial enough. Clear guidance is needed. More information should be given on the content, themes and topics that will emerge from the learning outcomes. There is a vagueness to the proposed learning outcomes. This is not enough to guide teachers and students. Such an approach will foster a lack of confidence in the new course”</i> (ST2_145, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>“The learning outcomes are too broad, too open and unclear. They do not provide us (teachers or students) enough information on the destination to be reached. We cannot be confident and capable as teachers with such an unclear specification, not to mention the lack of training and having not seen any sample paper at all”</i> (ST2_120, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>The spoken language</i></p> <p>The importance of the spoken language for the sustainability of Irish was often mentioned. Respondents were of the opinion that there was a need for greater emphasis on the spoken language in the draft specifications. Especially in the L2 context, it was felt that priority should be given to the spoken language above any other aspect of the language so that the students would be capable of actively using the language. It was claimed that aims of the draft specifications' around the use of the language outside of school would not be achieved without increasing the emphasis on the spoken language. Of course, there is a connection between this theme and the first theme (the oral examination), but the emphasis on the spoken language in the classroom itself was often mentioned, without reference to the assessment or to the examination.</p>	74	5.6%	<p><i>“Not enough emphasis is placed on oral communication. The language will never be used outside of the school by learners if they lack the necessary experience of having conversations in Irish and if the language is associated in their minds with being forced to read dry texts” (ST2_85, Third level student)</i></p> <p><i>“There should be more emphasis on the spoken language (to encourage the students to ‘use Irish outside the classroom’) and less emphasis on literature. I personally believe that Irish literature is important for the culture and richness of the language, but less literature would be better for L2 students to ‘enjoy Irish” (ST2_227, Post-primary teacher)</i></p> <p><i>“Students want to learn how to communicate and speak the language not how to learn off answers on specific texts. We have a great opportunity here to make Gaeilge an enjoyable and worthwhile subject” (ST2_49, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</i></p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p>Junior Cycle</p> <p>A comparison was made between the proposals of the draft specifications and the negative experiences at Junior Cycle level. These comparisons were very common as pertained to literature. It was claimed that the emphasis on literature in the Junior Cycle had a negative effect on students' ability in the spoken language. The NCCA were implored to take teachers' voices, with regard to their experiences at Junior Cycle level, into account in the consultation on the draft specifications.</p>	59	4.4%	<p><i>"I see great weaknesses in my own students because of the new Junior Certificate. I agree that it is important to read literature with the students to inspire an interest in reading itself and to add to their wealth of Irish, but the new Junior Certificate does not benefit the spoken ability of the student."</i> (ST2_177, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>"The junior cycle has decimated the standards of spoken Irish in schools. All of my students can write brilliant answers on poems etc but their spoken Irish is far below the required standard. This is because of the ridiculous literature requirements. Bringing this in at senior cycle as well as lowering the percentage for the oral will be to the detriment of spoken Irish, the key element of communication"</i> (ST2_235, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</p> <p><i>"Please, please listen to teachers. We have been saying this for years and even more so now that we (and our students) have been subjected to the tortuous (not an exaggeration) Junior Cycle curriculum. I have never felt so disheartened as a teacher to yet again see so much literature and see the oral reduced in importance. We are already struggling to find Irish teachers- people will not want to teach it into the future if texts are to be so prominent yet again"</i> (ST2_4, Post-primary teacher)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Substantive information</i></p> <p>More detailed information in the draft specifications was sought, for example, on the Portfolio approach, the list of texts, the assessment structure and the clarity of the learning outcomes. It was claimed that the differentiation between the levels was not clear enough and that there should be more information in the draft specifications on the difference in the standard at higher and ordinary level.</p>	57	4.3%	<p><i>“The structure of the draft specification is not clear. There is not enough information available with regard to the approach to the oral assessment, the portfolio approach, the written tasks approach or the listening comprehension approach. A literature list is not available. Sample papers are not available. The learning outcomes are not clear. There is no information available on the themes, the topics or the content”</i> (ST2_347, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>“Clear directed guidelines are required. There can be significant difference between HL and OL students (and also the best and weakest at both levels) but yet no acknowledgement of that in the specifications. There is no clear understanding of what we need to cover. I believe a lot of the specification is too open and loose to interpret as what exactly the course will look like. It lacks clear guidance and a clear vision of what is achievable.”</i> (ST2_58, Post-primary teacher in an ETB school)</p>

<p><i>The vision in the draft specifications</i></p> <p>It was claimed that the draft specifications did not display a proper understanding of L2 settings and that the proposals were not rooted in a realistic context. It was stated that the vision in the draft specifications was too idealistic and too ambitious for the real standard of language in L2 contexts. This opinion was very strong as pertained to the draft specification for ordinary level.</p>	56	4.2%	<p><i>“You cannot run before you can walk. How can students who can barely speak Irish be expected to do so much literature. I genuinely think those making decisions about the future of the teaching of Irish are entirely deluded about the level of ability of students. I want my students to be able to have conversations and enjoy the language and so do they. Literature may have a small part to play, but it is disproportionate and destroying the enjoyment of classes and therefore the future of Irish” (ST2_3, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</i></p> <p><i>“There is too much to be covered in the 3 strands. I believe that it will be impossible to undertake the teaching and learning of Irish at the level that is being proposed. The students do not have a satisfactory enough standard, especially OL students, to undertake independent reading or to expect them to compare texts. This will be impossible even for HL students. The specification is not realistic at all in terms of time and in terms of the students’ standard” (ST2_315, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</i></p> <p><i>“From my experience, Ordinary Level students can never relate to or enjoy the literature on the curriculum. There needs to be a lot less literature on the final exam for OL and more of an emphasis on oral, aural, reading comprehension and composition. We are trying to teach students a language that can be used outside of the classroom. Students at OL don't even see the value of using Irish outside of the classroom and forcing them to do literature they hate will not help this at all” (ST2_65, post-primary teacher in a community school)</i></p>
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Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Students' attitudes towards Irish</i></p> <p>In this theme, the lack of understanding of L2 students' attitude towards the language in the draft specifications was criticised. It was claimed that it was already difficult enough to encourage students to learn the language and that this situation would deteriorate if the draft specifications were implemented. It was stated that too much literature and texts had a negative impact on L2 students' attitude towards the language. Questions with regard to alignment between the aims and content of the draft specifications were raised as it was felt that the proposed course would not aid teachers in enabling students to enjoy and use the language.</p>	53	4.0%	<p><i>“A lot of time is spent on literature and I don't see that it helps in any way with developing the students' respect, interest or ability with regard to Irish. Literature sparks worry and anger among the students. It takes a lot of time to study them. This is time that would be much better spent speaking, listening, doing reading comprehensions and writing informally in the language.”</i> (ST2_134, Post-primary teacher in a voluntary secondary school)</p> <p><i>“Emphasis should be solely on oral language development and promoting the use of Irish in the community. The language will continue to fail in English medium schools when it is confined to the classroom. From experience, books and literature in general are off putting and they promote a culture of rote learning”</i> (ST2_15, Primary teacher)</p> <p><i>“In areas above where I disagree with the statement, it is because the enjoyment, future use outside the classroom setting, etc. cannot be predicted based on this curriculum specification. That is closely linked with curriculum implementation and is dependent on appropriate and inspiring learning resources, proper and comprehensive training for teachers and continuing support. As laid out, this section is text heavy and would not, I imagine, engage students.”</i> (ST2_61, Third level researcher/lecturer)</p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Information on assessment</i></p> <p>Of the respondents who opted to answer the open-ended questions on assessment, the majority said that there was a lack of information in the draft specifications on the assessment structure and approach. In the absence of this information, it was claimed that it was impossible to give an informed opinion on the alignment of the assessment with the learning outcomes, or on the suitability of the assessment for the development of language skills. Sample papers and marking schemes were sought to give a better understanding on the assessment. Questions were raised about the Portfolio and how it would be assessed.</p>	48	3.6%	<p><i>“Impossible to say [if assessment will support key language skills] due to lack of details and sample testing materials” (ST2_5, Post-primary parent/guardian in a community school)</i></p> <p><i>“Very difficult to answer any question about assessment without seeing any examination. There is huge lack of information in these areas in the draft. The examinations must also be made available. (ST2_349, Post-primary teacher in a community school)</i></p> <p><i>“How can this question be answered when I have no understanding of what the assessment will look like. There is no clear understanding given of what needs to be covered for assessment. There is no clear understanding of what the assessments will look like as no sample has been included with the draft specification.” (ST2_58, Post-primary teacher in an ETB school)</i></p> <p><i>“The students will have no interest in creating the language portfolio if it has no assessment value attached to it. if they are to spend a considerable amount of time producing the portfolio then there should be some marks allocated to it.” (ST2_53, post-primary teacher)</i></p>

Theme	The number of individual references	Frequency (%)	Sample quotes
<p><i>Junior Cycle Review</i></p> <p>It was stated that there was a need to wait for a review of the Irish specifications at Junior Cycle level before undertaking changes at Leaving Certificate level. It was suggested that there was dissatisfaction with the Junior Cycle, that teachers and students had a negative experience of the approach and therefore that the Senior Cycle specification should not be developed based on the same model. The context of the pandemic and the implications it had for the Junior Cycle over the past two years were also mentioned. As a result of this respondents stated that a proper understanding of the effect of the Junior Cycle model could not be achieved.</p>	42	3.1%	<p><i>“in the absence of an official review there is no evidence yet that the junior cycle is functioning well in schools, but the opposite, therefore the senior cycle should not be discussed yet” (ST2_127, Former student in a Gaelcholáiste)</i></p> <p><i>“Stop now and review JC properly. Allow the programme to run for five cohorts without pandemics etc., and then review with students and teachers. Learn from that what we should do better. Don't replicate at LC what is not satisfactory at JC” (ST2_79, Post-primary teacher in a comprehensive school)</i></p>

SECTION 3 – THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS – ISSUES REGARDING THE L1 AND L2 DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS

The remaining sections of this report describe the main themes that emerged from the written submissions. The methodologies in relation to this section of the report and the participants who sent submissions are described in section 1 of this report. Section 3 deals with themes that mainly relate to the content of the L1 and L2 draft specifications. Section 4 deals with the opinions in the submissions that relate to the implementation of the draft specifications. Section 5 deals with opinions in the submissions that relate to other systematic questions.

3.1 – THE MAIN THEMES RELATING TO THE L1 AND L2 DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS

Various major themes emerged from the analysis of the written submissions. In this part, the prominent themes that emerged in the submissions are described. Opinions were expressed in relation to the context in which these specifications are being developed in addition to opinions on the structure, learning outcomes, literature, and assessment elements of the specifications. A noticeable aspect of numerous submissions was the strong emotions/sentiments expressed by respondents in relation to the proposed changes.

3.2 NEED FOR CHANGE

There was significant consensus among all the written submissions with regard to the inadequacy of the current Leaving Certificate Irish course. Among the points raised in this regard were: a lack of focus on spoken Irish, the strong emphasis on Irish literature and the emphasis that is placed on rote learning in the current course. The opportunity that the public consultation process created to present worries and questions about the current Senior Cycle Irish course was welcomed. There was a strong sentiment expressed around the need for change. It was also suggested, however, that the course cannot be reformed without simultaneously looking at the context of Irish language learning throughout the education system. Among the opinions presented was that there was a need to review both specifications that are in place for the Junior Cycle Irish course, along with reviewing the L1/L2 model that is in place at that level, before moving forward with changes at Senior Cycle level. Opinions regarding the Irish language education context in general are also discussed. As mentioned previously, certain submissions welcomed the draft specifications as the need for reform of the Senior Cycle Irish course was acknowledged.

I welcome consideration of possible changes with regard to positive approaches to the Irish language in the Irish system. There are many noble objectives within the specification and thus support the 20-year Strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030. (AS 87, An Individual).

[Third level students association] believes that every student in the country has a right to education in the national language, Irish. It is apparent to us that the second level system is not currently meeting the various needs of the students in terms of Irish, as it should. Therefore, we welcome the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's ongoing review of the senior course. (AS 120, Third Level Students Society).

Particular emphasis was placed on inclusive education – that all students should be able to study Irish at a level of difficulty appropriate to their ability. The opinion that the current system is not fulfilling that requirement was expressed in many submissions.

[Gaeltacht post-primary school] welcomes the development of a new draft specification for the subject of Irish for the Leaving certificate. [Gaeltacht post-primary school] is hoping that a specification will be developed that will acknowledge, challenge, and reward the school's fluent students, along with giving Irish language learners and students with learning difficulties the opportunity to achieve a good standard in the subject. (AS 55, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

We believe that every student in the country has the right to access comprehensive education for Irish. We do not believe that the second level system is currently fulfilling this requirement and, therefore, we welcome the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's ongoing review of the senior course. (AS 117, Irish Language Organisation).

A large number of respondents, who have links with Irish-medium education, were of the opinion that the current course was not catering for the needs of the students in that sector. It was argued that there is a particular need for a system to be put in place that would accommodate those students.

The committee understands that the draft specification for the Leaving Certificate Irish curriculum for Irish-medium schools (LI) is being planned to appropriately accommodate the personal, language and literary development of the young people of the Gaeltacht and of the country who are being raised with Irish or who speak Irish well. (AS 84, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

In that same submission, the importance of the availability of appropriate Irish-medium education for students and for the future of the language was mentioned.

Young people are needed in the Gaeltacht and in the country that have a high standard of Irish and an understanding of the importance of ensuring that the language will live for another generation and that there will be an understanding of its importance in the society. The language is as fragile and valuable as any other aspect of our natural environment. We should take great care of it, especially among native speakers & other Irish speakers. There is currently a shortage of people with a high standard of Irish language skills available to education, media, public service and many other sectors ... · Without proper development of the L1 speaker 's language ability, the art of Irish language compositions including literature, poetry, prose, plays, novels, films, songs etc. will not flourish (AS 84, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

One State Agency mentioned that it was important, at this point, to provide a course that would focus on the learning needs of students in Irish-medium settings in order to support the Irish speaking community, especially in the Gaeltacht.

It is also acknowledged that the Leaving Certificate course that focuses on the language development requirements of L1 Irish speakers would greatly benefit Irish as a community language in the Gaeltacht. (AS 103, State Agency).

Organisations and individuals expressed strong sentiments in relation to the written, spoken, creative, and even personal and social skills, of students which are not being developed sufficiently in Irish-medium settings.

I am an Irish and French teacher and I acknowledge that the current curriculum has many faults – students often have a better standard in French than in Irish even though they began learning Irish eight years earlier. Certainly, there are problems and changes are needed but I do not think this is the solution to the problems. (AS 133, Irish Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

Currently, this young generation are following a course that was laid out for L2 learners. We as parents notice the oppression being imposed upon them: · their language ability, both written and spoken, is not being developed as it could be and as it should be · they do not have an understanding of Irish literature, poetry, drama or songs although they easily could in their native language · they do not have an insight or understanding, although they easily could, of the background or history of Irish - their native language - and, as a result, of their culture and heritage · the creativity in Irish - their native language, is not blossoming as it could, if only it was better fostered in them. This has long term implications, not only for the young generation but for the country's society: · Young peoples' identity, confidence and personal development are suffering because of it. (AS 84, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

It was also mentioned that there was a need for a new course to provide a suitable level of challenge for Gaeltacht students in order to develop their understanding of the richness and scholarship of the Irish language.

The dampening of the Irish syllabus has long been remarked upon, and it is clear that the current programme does not benefit the capable speaker of Irish. They are not challenged and the opportunities to round off the students' ability in Irish or to add to their knowledge on richness or on the mastery of literature are scarce nor is there inspiration to understand the importance of the traditional local Irish in terms of folklore, vocabulary, or specific local linguistic traits. (AS 99, Language Planning).

A daughter of mine has recently completed the Leaving Certificate, and I have no doubt that the education system neglected her. In order for her to have basic knowledge of her own language's literature I had to teach her that subject at home myself. Neither I nor my brothers and sisters had to do that, nor any other generation since the founding of this state, and that is a matter of shame for this country's education system. (AS 111, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaeltacht Post-primary School).

Submissions that related to English-medium settings also maintained that there is a need for change. These opinions were based on the learning experience of Irish that students currently have.

We recognise the need to reform the current system to strengthen students' Irish language ability and experience in relation to Irish. Teachers are in favour of changes that will strengthen the Irish language ability of the community and that will foster love, respect, confidence, interest, and fluency in the language. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

It was acknowledged that there is a problem with the current course and its emphasis on rote learning, an aspect which has a negative impact on the speaking of the language in the classroom. It was also stated that there are difficulties with regard to the particular emphasis on literature and the resulting lack of communication that occurs because of it. Many submissions noted that these practices foster a disinterest in, and disrespect for, the language.

Rote learning of text-heavy notes which have been expertly designed to maximise marks in the essay and literary text analysis sections defeats the purpose of being in an Irish language classroom. (AS 209, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

If the students do not understand what they are reading, how can we help improve their language skills or foster a love for the language? Is this not what is most important? This is one of the main problems with the current course. (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I hate Irish!” “Not another three page essay to know off by heart” “Twenty ‘sraith pictiúr’s to learn?” “I can’t string a sentence together by myself”... echo in Irish classrooms across the country. As a current Leaving Certificate student, I understand the failings of the current Irish syllabus. In the classroom, the subject of Irish and rote learning is inseparable, rendering the subject entirely ineffective in achieving its aims. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

A number of respondents were troubled about the current status of Irish due to the low number of applicants who sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2021 when they had the option.

There is a very broad question with regard to the status of Irish in the country when only 58% chose to do the Irish paper in the Leaving Certificate in 2021. (AS 14, Group of Teachers in a Gaelcholáiste).

3.2 STRONG EMOTIONS

Respondents repeatedly emphasised their worry and concern in relation to the two draft specifications in their present format. The words ‘concern,’ ‘worry,’ ‘dissatisfaction,’ and ‘disappointment’ were often used when sharing opinions on the draft specifications.

[Schools organisation] thanks the NCCA for the work they have done to date on this subject. Though there are positive points to be acknowledged, it must be said that the majority of schools and teachers are worried and concerned about what is proposed in the L2 draft specification. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

This approach is causing great concern for the Gaeltacht schools’ communities, and it is fostering a lack of confidence at a time when the same schools are proactive in a voluntary process under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme as part of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. The controversy in relation to L1/L2 is not helping those efforts. (AS 230, Schools Organisation).

A large number of submissions also referred to the haste at which the NCCA were progressing with the draft specifications, especially during a pandemic. The NCCA were urged to listen to the suggestions made through this consultation process.

Any change made to the Leaving Cert Irish course will have strong implications for the future of Irish. Therefore, there is a need to make decisions and changes carefully – decisions should not be made hastily. (AS 128, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

That being said, the uncertainty and haste relating to the draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish is a cause for concern to us in this Gaeltacht community. (AS 135, Language Planning).

This Consultation is being done during a pandemic. Consultation should not be conducted at a time when people are too busy to properly engage with it. This creates doubt with regard to it and it does not foster good will. (AS 65 Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Concern and worry were also expressed in relation to the divide that a L1/L2 system would foster at this level, especially in Gaeltacht areas.

[Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht] is concerned that this will create a divide in the Gaeltacht community, if it has not already been created... Who will heal this wound the divide if the case goes further? [Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht] is concerned that it will be left to the people of the Gaeltacht themselves, the schools and the community and language organisations. This burden cannot be placed on us. This is the Department of Education's and the NCCA's burden. It is not right at all. It would be immoral and dishonest. (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

We wholly believe that this is a complete injustice for the people/students of the Gaeltacht. No invitation was given to the Gaeltacht schools or Gaelscoileanna to be part of the planning for this new specification. As we were not properly informed and not given the opportunity to share our opinions or indeed our input, not only for the language but for the Gaeltacht and all the people of the Gaeltacht and Gaelscoileanna. (AS 16, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

One submission illustrated the legal difficulties that would result from a differentiated system as is proposed in the L1/L2 system.

The enforcement of separate assessment for some candidates would also conflict with equality before the law with regard to the IRISH CONSTITUTION. (AS 17, An Individual).

In the case that the NCCA continue with this destruction of Irish in the Post-primary curriculum, the organisation is leaving itself open to a case being taken against you in relation to a language rights violation at the Gaeltacht Community level but especially for the native/fluent speaker with additional learning needs. (AS 33, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

3.3 CONTENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS – GENERAL LACK OF INFORMATION

One of the strongest opinions that emerged was that there was a lack of clarity and information available in the draft specifications. Due to this deficiency, it was argued that it was impossible to develop opinions about them. Concern was expressed with regard to the lack of information on the learning outcomes, the assessment and the literature. As a consequence, comments were made about the challenges teachers would face in properly understanding what would have to be taught, learned and assessed.

The draft specifications for consultation were published without basic information that is essential if the stakeholders are to give proper feedback on them. (AS 31, Director of an Aonad Gaeilge (Irish Unit)).

Apart from that, it is not enough that a comprehensive description of the proposed curriculum has not been provided. Teaching goals and abstract statements are not enough. Teachers need structure and description. (AS 15, Political Party).

...The most significant problem for us here is the vagueness of the draft specifications. They cannot be evaluated pedagogically in their present format due to a lack of required information and a lack of clarity in the information that is presented in the draft specifications. (AS 48, Language Planning).

There was a concern that a lack of understanding was demonstrated in regard to the sociolinguistic background of the students who would be taking the L1 specification.

It is not apparent to me that deep enough examination had been done on the various profiles and on the range of those profiles, and aspects of the specification will fail if that is not focused on. More thought is required: What is a native speaker? What is the importance of the sociolinguistic and sociological background of every student? Where does the fluent Irish speaker / native Irish speaker that is not literate stand? Where is the promotion of that learner's identity in this specification - they are often the heart of the Gaeltacht community and they must be included as an important part of the community on which the specification is focused. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

The uncertainty that exists with regard to the difference between each of the levels and between the learning outcomes in the L1 and L2 specifications was mentioned. It was claimed that this would create a lack of confidence in these specifications among teachers.

Both draft specifications, as they have been set out, are bare and narrow with regard to the subject matter to be taught. There is little difference between the learning outcomes for L1 and L2, for example. More information is needed with regard to the standard that is to be achieved at the various levels. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

3.4 LAYOUT, STRUCTURE, RATIONALE AND AIM

A small number of submissions made reference to the vision and the rationale and generally positive opinions were revealed. It was stated that the vision and the rationale were clear in both draft specifications. However, it was claimed that there is a need for refinement and greater detail. In a small number of written submissions, it was acknowledged that the layout of the draft specifications was clear for the most part, and that there was continuity throughout.

The vision set out in the draft L1 and L2 specifications is clear. A clear rationale for each is provided which can be further refined when final drafts are being prepared. The role of the L1 specification in supporting students' learning through Irish in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools and supporting the development of students as active citizens in their communities is clearly articulated. (AS 231, Government Department).

The draft specifications are clear from the perspective of language and the setting out of the context; the aims and objectives are just as I would expect them to be; and it is clear that it follows the vision and approach present in the Junior Cycle L1 specification. (AS 14, L1 Teacher outside the Gaeltacht).

Innovative and contemporary core principles and values are at the heart of the specification and every effort has been made to place the student at the heart of learning. The young learner should be competent to empathise with those values (AS 14, Group of Teachers in a Gaelcholáiste).

With regard to the draft specifications for the Leaving Certificate, the theoretical format, educational philosophy, aims and targets and learning outcomes mentioned are to be praised. (AS 53, Irish College).

It was also mentioned that there was inconsistency between the L1 draft specification and the current English specification.

Having said that, there is a complete disconnect between those high aims and the sample format of the course itself – especially if the higher level (L1 it must be remembered) is compared with the higher level course in English (that is also being examined at L1 level for every student, even for native Irish speakers). (AS 52, Irish Colleges Organisation).

It was also acknowledged that both draft specifications offer scope to adapt the teaching of Irish for different students in a creative, critical and interesting way,

In the case of these draft specifications, it is worth acknowledging that the effort to meet the various needs of L1 and L2 Irish speakers is positive. (AS 89, Gaeltacht Primary School).

The specifications also highlight the need to provide students with appropriately challenging learning experiences for all students and also acknowledge that all students should enjoy using Irish and to do so creatively and critically. The knowledge, skills and values that the draft specifications aim to develop, deepen and enhance are clear. Particularly welcome is the emphasis placed in the aims on developing the student as an effective language user who takes ownership of his language learning journey as part of a lifelong learning process. (AS 231, Government Department).

It was claimed that the proposed model is treating every L1 student as a language learner and, consequently, that the L1 draft specification will not ensure that native speakers will understand the wealth and scholarship of the Irish Language. It was claimed that the L1 draft specification is not ambitious enough, for students in the Gaeltacht in particular. It was claimed that the aims of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2016)* would not be achieved if the L1 specification was implemented in its current format.

It is long understood that the richness and diversity of the educational input is the foundation of a relevant and enticing curriculum. Not only does this proposed curriculum not demonstrate the richness of the scholarship of the Gaeil (even in the L1 draft specifications), but it will also not encourage the students' ambition to improve their understanding of the Gaelic culture. These are curriculum amendments by a state that does not care about the community and culture of a language that is in great societal danger. Based on the understandings in these draft specifications, it seems that the abilities of those who speak Irish at home will move towards L2 acquisition and ability, that is, despite the NCCA's claim, all that will be achieved among Leaving Certificate students in future will be Irish ability comparable to L2 acquisition no matter how or where they are raised. It is also clear that the draft specifications are not meeting the aims of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 in that they disregard the aims of the state with regard to an L1 Irish curriculum. (AS 116, An Individual).

The L1 draft specification for Irish was compared to the current English syllabus, with claims that it is not sufficient for the fluent/native speaker.

In the specifications proposed for Leaving Certificate Irish the planned standard of learning is much lower than of the standards that are in place for the current specifications for English, especially in the case of literature, and with regard to the literature itself there is little difference between the L1 and L2 specifications proposed for Irish. (AS 51, An Individual).

Positive opinions were expressed about the layout of the draft specifications while referring to the strands, communication and language awareness particularly. It was acknowledged that communication was at the heart of the draft specifications and that there would be a particular emphasis on the learners' self-awareness within both courses.

[Irish language organisation] agrees with the three strands described under the insights on the L1 and L2 courses in the draft specifications and it is accepted that communication is a main strand that encompasses the essential skills (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, spoken interaction and writing) for the learner so that they may function as a daily user of Irish. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

The merits of the L1 draft specification for Leaving Certificate Irish? I think that the authors have earned great praise and that great work has been put into the draft specification. Great emphasis is placed on self-awareness and on the learner accepting responsibility for their own learning – until that happens no language learner will reach their full potential. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

One respondent was of the opinion that there should not be 3 strands in the draft specifications and that this model created a lack of continuity in the system. It was proposed that there be one strand – a strand to develop language skills and that there should be a strong emphasis on these language skills throughout the draft specifications.

We are of the view that 3 strands are not required and that one Strand with five language skills would be sufficient to underpin the language acquisition process and key skills of the Senior Cycle or continue from the Primary Language Curriculum, Oral Language, Reading and Writing as strands. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

Reference was also made to the central position the language community had in the L1 draft specification. It was mentioned that the centrality of the language community in the learning process would be positive development and would add to the development of the language in general.

We especially support the importance of the school community and the links that schools have with the wider community. This is very important in Gaeltacht communities as well as school communities (Irish - medium and English - medium schools) for the future of the Irish language and for the promotion of the language in communities throughout the island. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

This specification is looking outward instead of inward at itself and that is a very positive step forward. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

3.5 LEARNING OUTCOMES

One submission mentioned that the learning outcomes were suitable for the various learning contexts and that there was suitable challenge for every learner. However, it was claimed that there would be a need to refine these learning outcomes because of the consultation process.

It is acknowledged that any revision of the draft specifications that might result from the consultation process will necessitate a revision of learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are generally appropriate for L1 and L2 settings. They indicate a key challenge in achieving an appropriate balance between providing students in L1 and L2 contexts with an appropriately challenging learning experience while not creating a disadvantage for any particular group where progression to third level is concerned. (AS 231, Government Department).

In contrast with that, many respondents expressed dissatisfaction in regard to the lack of clarity in relation to the learning outcomes. Terms like ‘too broad,’ ‘too ambitious,’ ‘not substantial,’ ‘unclear,’ and ‘too abstract’ were used to describe them.

The learning outcomes as proposed are too abstract, too broad and too ambitious. They are not substantial enough. Clear guidance is needed. More information should be given on the content, themes and topics and the writing style that will emerge from the learning outcomes. There is a vagueness to the proposed learning outcomes. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

I do not think that the learning outcomes are understandable and clear enough. There is a need for more information/additional examples with regard to evaluating the learning outcomes especially. (AS 219, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

It was apparent that there are strong opinions that these learning outcomes are not suitable for teachers and that they would foster a lack of confidence in this course.

It was suggested that there was a need for more information detailing the content, themes and topics relevant to this course.

We think that a set of learning outcomes is not enough to guide teachers who are about to undertake such an important course and that we should have a comprehensive and clear course set for us. (AS 22, Gaelcholáiste).

More information should be given on the subject matter, themes and topics and the writing style that will emerge from the learning outcomes. There is a vagueness to the learning outcomes proposed by the NCCA. This is not enough to guide teachers and students. Such an approach will foster a lack of confidence in the specifications. This approach is not satisfactory for an examination as important as the Leaving Cycle. The destination should be clear to every stakeholder. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

As this lack of clarity was being discussed the importance of the Leaving Certificate examinations was stressed. It is unknown at this stage how the State Examinations Commission will interpret these learning outcomes and what the final examination will look like.

It is said on p. 37 of the L1 specification and on p. 36 of the L2 specification: 'Assessment for certification in Leaving Certificate Irish is based on the aims, objectives and learning outcomes of this specification.' A lot of development would have to be done on the above learning outcomes before being able to base any assessment on them, which is not satisfactory or appropriate when a standard state examination is to be based on these specifications. Therefore, there is a disconnect between the very general approach relating to these learning outcomes and this aim to base assessment for certification on them. If the draft specifications' learning outcomes are only vague targets, bare bones, as above, it is likely that it will be up to the State Examinations Commission and those who write the textbooks to read what they will into the specifications and to fill ~~out~~ the gaps. Therefore, it is now difficult to carry out an appropriate consultation based on these specifications, when we do not know how the SEC will interpret them and what the course will look like because of it. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

In expressing their opinions on the learning outcomes, some teachers mentioned their experience of working with learning outcomes at Junior Cycle level. It was often reported that there were gaps in teachers' understanding with regard to the use of learning outcomes and that this had an impact on their ability to acknowledge the appropriate standard of learning. It was suggested that more information be provided on the topics and themes that are to be taught using these learning outcomes.

I do not think that the learning outcomes are understandable or clear enough. There should not be any gap in understanding here. There is a need for more information/additional examples with regard to evaluating the learning outcomes especially. Do not get rid of all the 'content' as happened with the Junior Cycle - it is not working. A satisfactory standard cannot be reached in the country if the same thing is not being taught throughout the country. There is still a need for the common topics etc. (AS 221, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.5.1 LACK OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE L1/L2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

The lack of clarity that exists with regard to the difference between the learning outcomes in both specifications was often referred to, with many respondents expressing dissatisfaction. In one submission a comparison was made between the learning outcomes under the Communication strand in both draft specifications.

There is little difference between the learning outcomes set out for the main 'communication' strand in both specifications... and it is difficult to understand what the rationale is for the small differences that exist, or how those differences would suitably and satisfactorily meet the specific requirements of both groups of students on whom these specifications are focused. It is noteworthy that there is no difference between the learning outcomes set out in the two specifications for 'Speaking', although this is the main area in which differences between the ability profiles of the two groups would be imagined. Differences between the two specifications are most apparent in the learning outcomes of 'Reading', but we see many of these differences (e.g. 'understanding the reliability of sources of information' or 'evaluating') with cognitive abilities (skills higher on Bloom's taxonomy) rather than with language abilities. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

Emphasis was also placed on the similarity between the learning outcomes at ordinary and higher level in both specifications. It was stated that it was not clear to teachers how they could differentiate between the learning outcomes at the different levels.

As well as that, clear differentiation is not made in the draft specifications between the learning outcomes for both specifications (L1 and L2) at each level (ordinary level and higher level). For example, what are the different learning outcomes to be achieved by a student undertaking the L1 specification at ordinary level vs. L1 at higher level, or an L1 student at ordinary level vs. an L2 student at higher level? (AS 103, State Agency).

3.6 CREATIVITY

In a small number of submissions Strand 3 – Language Creativity – was mentioned. In one submission from an Irish organisation, this Strand was welcomed as it would support communication. It was acknowledged that there is a need to place particular emphasis on developing a person's imagination.

The emphasis that is put on the language creativity and on the awareness (the learners' language awareness, cultural awareness and self-awareness) to support the main strand of the specifications, that is, communication, is praised. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

The specification focuses on the development of the learner as a citizen and emphasis is placed on the promotion of social integration and on sustainability in every aspect of development. Great emphasis is placed on encouraging the learners' Creativity and Imagination. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

A lack of clarity on the content of this strand, Language Creativity, was raised in quite a number of submissions. It was reported that it was very difficult to evaluate this aspect without proper clarity.

There is a new strand, Strand 3 Language Creativity. The opportunities for students to achieve and evaluate these learning outcomes are not clear. What would be involved here? (AS 226, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

A small number of respondents suggested weaving this strand into the learning outcomes of the other two strands.

It is suggested language awareness (Strand 2) is strengthened through the above skills and that creativity (Strand 3) is woven through the language skills as an element. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

3.7 CONTENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS - THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Spoken language was referenced in a large number of submissions. It was acknowledged that the speaking of the language is important to encourage students' interest in the language and to create a more positive experience for students in the classroom.

In my opinion, spoken language is the most important aspect of language learning. (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Most students enjoy speaking the language and the oral examination. Therefore, [teachers organisation] asks the NCCA that this aspect be a central part of the specification that will benefit students. Additionally, in areas that are not strong with regard to Irish, we must focus on creating a positive experience for students. With an excess of literature and a reduction in the marks for the oral examination, the opportunity to create a positive experience for them will be lost. The living Irish is what will encourage the students and there is a need in this specification to provide those opportunities for students, especially those who only encounter Irish at school. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

There is an opportunity here to place emphasis on spoken Irish. As a long-time teacher, all I want is for the students to have fine spoken ability when they leave me and an interest in bringing it with them out into the world. But, to be taking from what the oral examination marks are worth is a big step backwards. They will not

stay in the higher level class and worse still, they will not speak it. (AS 159, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Many respondents were of the opinion that communication and the speaking of Irish are the most important aspect of language learning and that there is not enough emphasis on these skills in the classroom. According to one principal, this came to light when the students had an opportunity to make a choice whether or not to take the oral examination.

The problem is that there is not nearly enough emphasis on spoken Irish. This is clearly reflected in the fact that small numbers opted for the oral exam in this year's Leaving Cert. That should cause great alarm. What this is saying is that there is no confidence in most young people speaking even a few sentences. (AS 170, Principal in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Immersive learning of the language, where Irish is the predominant language of communication, is not as prevalent in Irish language classes as should be the case. (AS 192, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Great concern was expressed with regard to the emphasis on literature and the effect that would have on speaking the language (more on this in section 3 below).

Sufficient time will not be available to use spoken language in the class. Even though it would be great if every student came out with this ability, having a high level of spoken fluency, as I said before, it is completely unrealistic. In the draft, it is said that there is a need ~~to~~ "to give life to the Irish language outside the classroom for the young people who study it in the formal education system," but how can this be done if the students are learning from texts most of the time? (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The importance of speaking Irish for the future of the language was also referenced.

There is also strong support for reforming the education system to ensure that every student has a capable level of spoken Irish when they finish their education. ~~The~~ energy would be better spent fixing this than any lowering of the language status. (AS 77, An Individual).

It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on the spoken skills in both draft specifications. It is important that the spoken language is assessed in terms of Irish because it is a minority language and because students do not have enough opportunity to speak and practice the language outside of the classroom. This action would support the learners' long term spoken ability which would benefit the community in the Gaeltacht areas, Irish language networks, Gaeltacht service towns and elsewhere. (AS 107, Irish Organisation).

The importance of continuing professional development in equipping teachers with the skills to develop spoken Irish in the classroom and to encourage an interest in the language was emphasised.

I remember attending in-service several years ago when the marks for the oral were increased. We learned lots of ways to encourage the students to talk, to improve their vocabulary, to improve their confidence and to really enjoy Irish class. I used to come away from these training days feeling invigorated and looking forward to trying out the suggestions in the classroom. The new Senior Cycle is a great opportunity to continue moving in this direction. Please do not waste this opportunity. (AS 216, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.8 CONTENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS – THE LITERATURE

This section will focus on opinions that were revealed in the submissions relating to the literature. Various themes came to the fore: a lack of information, workload, interest, choice and literature at ordinary level. In some submissions the literature was welcomed as a tool to share the wealth and scholarship of Irish with students in the classroom.

...to enable learners to compare and contrast and to provide critical analysis on a wide range of texts - aspects that are praiseworthy. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

One submission mentioned that there is a good link between the literature mentioned in both draft specifications and the literature explored at Junior Cycle level. People were of the opinion that there should be an expanse and depth in relation to the amount and range of literature that is to be covered.

The emphasis on texts and the role of texts in supporting language learning is welcome. Teachers and students at this point in time will be familiar with a much more purposeful experience of engaging with a broad range of texts in all three years of junior cycle. The range of genres and the number of texts to be studied as set out in the draft specifications for Leaving Certificate merit expansion in the case of both specifications, and LI in particular, to ensure students build on and deepen their learning from junior cycle. (AS 231, Government Department).

3.8.1 LACK OF INFORMATION ON THE LITERATURE

The most common theme to be noted in the submissions was the lack of information available with regard to a suggested approach for the literature. As there was no literature list available, it was stated that an informed opinion could not be given on the standard or scope of the texts. It was admitted

that students had, and have, difficulties with regard to literature and respondents were of the opinion that there is an opportunity now to address this problem.

No literature has been provided either. Literature is an integral part of the specifications of the Irish language. So why not make the literature list available now to give everyone a fuller understanding of this topic? Everyone knows that there were always difficulties with regard to the literature being appropriate for the Leaving Certificate course. We now have an opportunity to tackle this problem and to solve it – if possible – but we need to engage in talks and consultation if we wish to find that solution. (AS 232, Teachers Organisation).

There are no draft literature lists available with the draft specifications published by the NCCA. Teachers should have the opportunity to evaluate the proposed texts. The draft specifications cannot be properly evaluated without this information being available. There is not enough information available on the style of question students will have to answer in future either. There is a dire need for such. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

3.8.2 THE LITERATURE - TIME BURDEN AND WORKLOAD

The emphasis on literature in the draft specifications was a cause for concern for many respondents. The statement “too much emphasis on the literature” was one of the most common statements in the submissions. The opinion was expressed that covering that number of texts in the space of two years would be too time-consuming and that that would greatly impact the development of spoken Irish in the classroom.

Literature. Literature. Literature. (AS 147, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Firstly, the biggest problem I have with the draft specifications is that the emphasis placed on ‘texts’ is entirely unrealistic for plenty of students. The course only lasts two years – how can you expect that students/teachers will finish that many texts with a good understanding and a strong ability to engage with the texts with a high level of fluency, along with every other aspect of the course? There will not be time to use the spoken language in the class. (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

There was a question in relation to the difference between the number of texts in both draft specifications. The basis for more literature on the L1 course was questioned.

What evidence exists that shows that a longer literature list than that of L2 will greatly contribute to the learning and use of Irish in the Gaeltacht areas? Until such a thing exists, a review is needed on this approach. (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

Conversely, it was stated that not enough texts were mentioned in either draft specifications and that there was a need for an additional challenge for Leaving Certificate students in order to appropriately develop students' literacy skills.

We welcome the rationale given in the specifications for the place of literature in the Leaving Certificate syllabuses, but we feel that there is a significant gap between the principles stated there and the very small number of literary texts mentioned in both specifications. There will be a need for more substantial reading material if the students' literacy skills are to be appropriately developed at Higher and Advanced Level. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

3.8.3 STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LITERATURE

Although it was often acknowledged that literature supports the development and enrichment of students' language, concern was expressed that the students would not have an interest in the particular texts that would be chosen. Furthermore, people were worried that the number of texts to be covered would have an impact on students' motivation. It was claimed that there will be more emphasis on translation and on rote learning through the literature and that this would have a negative impact on the students' interest in Irish. It was claimed yet again that the overemphasis on literature would have a negative impact on the development of spoken language.

The focus on texts and reading is completely unrealistic. This approach might work with a class of high achieving, hard-working students, but it won't work in the majority of classrooms. The teachers will end up translating a lot of the texts in order to get the work "covered." Class time is so limited - every hour spent reading and dissecting a text is an hour less speaking the language. I understand the rationale of texts as a "springboard" for other activities. I also understand that if we Irish are not reading and promoting Irish writing, then no one else will. I realise that not all the texts are written, but whether it's a novel, a play or a film, reading will be necessary. I understand that as a whole, we need to improve literacy. But please do not place this burden on Irish pupils and their teachers. Teachers struggle already to teach a language that is considered "hard" and "boring." Making students - many of whom barely read in English - trawl through page after page of text is not the way to change this. (AS 151, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

As well as that, again, literature disheartens students. That should be reduced. Two poems or songs / two stories or films / two folklore stories. You are creating a syllabus for people who are fluent in the language. A syllabus

like that of English. That is not appropriate or realistic at all. Are you trying to sell books/novels... or trying to teach a language? (AS 161, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

If the time spent studying texts was used to focus on the teaching of the language itself - vocab, grammar, sentence building etc., students may actually be able to converse in the language by the time they leave school. I truly believe this would be a much better use of both teachers' and students' time. It would obviously lead to a higher standard of Irish among students and it is only natural that if you are good at something and have a good understanding of it that you will be more inclined to like it. Which is surely what we all want? (AS 204, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Of course, I understand the importance of literature, and that it is an essential part of language learning and acquisition. I also understand the importance of improving and developing students' literacy skills. Also, I know that texts would not be read if it was not done in class, but is this really important? I personally enjoy this part of the course and believe that it is important for it to be available to students who wish to engage in this area of the language, but many students are not even interested in literature even in English, and as a result, it becomes a "chore" and people are forced to suffer through it. Many students find the texts extremely difficult to understand, and more often than not, students learn sample answers by heart to ensure that they pass the exam to get the points they need. If students do not understand what they are reading, how can it help improve their language skills, or foster a love of the language? Isn't this the most important thing? (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Students, apart from a very small number, have no interest whatsoever in literature in English not to mention Irish and it tortures them. All they want is translation. It is not worth it... I am also a French teacher and the students have the ability to speak it well after the Leaving Certificate. Why? Well... there is no literature pile getting in their way. The language is the focus. You cannot do both. It does not work. The world has changed and teenagers have less interest in literature, apart from a minority. (AS 159, Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.8.4 THE SELECTION OF LITERATURE

The selection of literature was broadly discussed, and both positive and negative points were mentioned in the submissions. People were of the opinion that it contained enough scope for the students who choose to do higher or ordinary level.

Having an extensive selection in terms of literature is a good thing, which accommodates students at higher level and ordinary level. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

Based on the Junior Cycle experience, concern was expressed about the selection of texts for Gaeltacht schools. It was claimed that the needs of those students were not considered when those lists were being selected.

The selection of texts on the current junior cycle literature list is another example of the ignorance with regard to the needs of Gaeltacht students. (AS 33, Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

The country's second level students, including Gaeltacht students, have the great English writers at the tip of their tongues, but the great writers and great works in Irish, their own language, are being denied and hidden from them by a system that is not suitable for them. Where is the equality between the two languages? Where is the advantage they say the Gaeltacht has? We do not have equality, much less an advantage. (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

Concerns were expressed about the selection of appropriate texts due to the scarcity of literature available that is contemporary and appropriate to the students' abilities and interests.

As well as that, efforts to create an additional expansion in terms of literature and the native arts in Gaeltacht areas is of great importance, and would add to the richness that is there already on a contemporary basis. This is an obstacle that emerged when appropriate literary choices were to be made for the Junior Cycle – a process that Irish teachers themselves were central in – the biggest challenges to overcome were suitability and availability of the works and that story is always the same. It would be a big help at this point if forward planning was done, on the basis of partnership, to ensure that this important issue is addressed. (AS 127, Education Organisation).

The Junior Cycle experience was referenced once again with teachers claiming that the texts were not easy to source and that this put pressure on teachers to copy and disseminate the texts. It was also stated that there was more emphasis on dialects in the list of texts than on the standard of the works.

There is too much literature on the course. Many of the texts do not have literary merit. They are not enjoyable for young people, (or for the teachers who are teaching them!) A lot of the material is not easily found. (It is clear that equality with regard to dialect and publishers was the objective in the selection of texts, rather than quality). The sources are too scattered, and a lot of time was spent seeking them. In terms of daily practices, it is not effective to be copying and handing out all the basic instructional material. That is fine for additional notes etc. Irish teachers should not have to do it. It is not so for English or other languages for which written texts are easily available in one book. (WS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Reference was made to the role students would have in the selection of texts, which would be positive yet challenging at the same time.

We welcome the opportunity for the learner to be central to the selection of texts, although we recognise that this can create difficulties for teachers in mixed ability and large classes. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

3.8.5 LITERATURE AND ORDINARY LEVEL

It was also mentioned that there would be a need for differentiation between the texts to be explored by higher and ordinary level students, or that higher level students would have additional texts to cover.

As for the literary texts themselves, the literary texts should be distinguished between higher level and ordinary level to properly meet the needs of each student. A higher level literature list and an ordinary list of literature is essential. It is a great weakness that there is no such approach in the current system... Another option would be that some of the same texts could be on the ordinary level list and on the higher level list at the beginning, while the higher level group would have to study more. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I would like to see a reduction in the literature to be done for OL – a couple of poems/short films/short stories, which are suitable for their level and related to a theme they are currently engaging with, would be enough. (AS 226, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Various opinions were expressed with regard to the literature at ordinary level and the weighting of marks in the examination. On the one hand, quite a number of submissions expressed concern that there would be no marks available for literature in the L2 ordinary level examination. Many consultation participants expressed the view that students accessing the subject at ordinary level should have their engagement with literature assessed in the final examination. It was feared that students might not fully engage with literary texts, for the purpose of language acquisition, if they are not assessed in the final examination, or that students will opt to undertake ordinary level if literature is not being considered for assessment.

If literature is on the Ordinary level course in L2 schools, it is recommended that it is assessed in some way with marks going for it. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

And worse still, ordinary level students will not have to answer questions on the literature course in the examination? Can you not see the long-term damage that that will cause? There will be a significant reduction

in the number of students who do higher level because it will be much easier to do ordinary level in Irish, so that they will then have plenty of time left to focus on various other subjects. You will without a doubt be doing permanent damage with this new course. (AS 153, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

Causes for concern to me from the Draft Specifications: ... That it is being proposed that there will be no assessment in the final examination for L2 Ordinary level students on the literary texts they would have to do during the course ➤ If the texts are worth putting on the L2 Ordinary level syllabus, why is it not worth assessing them? From my personal experience of teaching Junior Cycle L2 Ordinary level Irish (a course where there will not be proper assessment of the literary texts on the course either), I do not believe that teenagers would have much respect for the texts if no marks were awarded to them. In my opinion, it is well worth doing simple literature with Ordinary level students to encourage an interest, to inspire them towards the language and to give them life lessons, but a reward should be given, in the assessment, to the hard-working students who engage with this literature ➤ I do not see any fault with putting simple questions about the texts on the assessment and giving a fairly low percentage for this part of the paper. (AS 176, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

When talking about removing the literature from the ordinary level course – that would not be fair to the higher level group, are you trying to entice them to ordinary level? It is too challenging for them to properly discuss the literature. (AS 212, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Assessment of literature – the draft L2 specification indicates that while the student will engage with a number of texts the student taking L2 Ordinary Level will not be asked to respond to texts and therefore no marks are allocated to this component. In order to be true to the aims of the specification, an appropriate way in which students' learning in this area can be assessed needs to be identified. (AS 231, Government Department).

It was mentioned that a differentiated list could be provided for both levels, but that the students would then have an option to choose questions based on the literature they have read and to attempt exam questions at their own level of ability.

With regard to the literary texts themselves, there should be differentiation in the literary texts between higher and ordinary level to properly meet the needs of every student. A higher level literature list and an ordinary list of literature is essential. At the end of the consultation process, if it is decided to include literature questions at ordinary level, ordinary level students should have the option of answering questions on texts that are on the ordinary level list or on the higher level list. This will accommodate the students who change from higher level to ordinary level... Another option would be that some of the same texts could be on the ordinary level list and on the higher level list at the beginning, while the higher level group would have to study more. If there are literature questions at ordinary level, it is necessary to look at the purpose and objective behind any examination questions that are created, and to ensure that they are at a level that is suitable for the target group of students. (AS 228, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.8.6 LITERATURE AND THE JUNIOR CYCLE EXPERIENCE

Particular emphasis was placed on the experience people had with regard to literature at Junior Cycle level. It was suggested a review of the literature approach at this level be carried out before proceeding with the same at Senior Cycle level.

It would also be important to analyse how the literature approach is succeeding in the junior cycle Irish course first. One aim of the Junior Cycle course is that all learning will emerge from the literature. It would be important to research this comprehensively to see if that approach is succeeding on a practical level or if it is failing? It should also be known if it is planned to have the same system in place for the Senior Cycle literature. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

I do not agree with the huge emphasis that is being put on Irish literature rather than the speaking of Irish. I understand that literature has a central role but as seen in the Junior Cycle, the students are being drowned in literature because it is excessive.? (AS 3, Irish Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

3.8.7 PROPOSALS FOR LITERATURE

Reference was made to some changes that should be implemented regarding the literature. The submissions below state that literature should be used to promote the practice of reading along with using it as a source for the language's scholarship and culture.

We believe that the role of literature in the Leaving Certificate syllabus should be re-conceptualised and redefined, so that teachers and students will understand the function of practising reading at this level. Along with being demonstrators of the mastery and contemporary culture of the language, literary texts will help with the broadening of vocabulary, solidification of grammatical structures and with development of speaking and writing skills on a range of topics and themes. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

The literary content should be set in the context of Irish language and Gaeltacht culture in Ireland and abroad, and an insight on cultural/political phenomenon in the language, on the regional heritage and on Irish language performance platforms should be part of the teaching and learning objective of literature at Leaving Certificate level. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

While referencing the genres mentioned in both draft specifications, it was mentioned that there was a need for prescribed, traditional/ancient, and contemporary texts. Certain submissions mentioned particular texts and genres.

It is suggested that there be a range of topics in the literature within the genres with themes that are in keeping with the interests of the teenagers of the time. It is recommended that diversity be taken into account with a mixture of contemporary literature and literature that will bring cultural awareness to the student. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

In the new specification, along with the small number of prescribed works from older times, contemporary prescribed works must also be included, like videos, articles, songs, social media posts, advice columns, articles about celebrities, current affairs, relationships, entertainment etc. – things that are relevant to the life of teenagers, so that it is understood that Irish can be intertwined with the modern world. (AS 168, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I suggest that a Collection of Poetry/Songs would be another optional text out of which there would be 20 poems/songs to be studied. There are students who sing sean-nós who would particularly benefit from closely studying some of well-known songs, “An Bonnán Bui”, “Bean an Fhir Rua” or “An Caisideach Bán” for example. Along with some modern poets I would suggest some of the poets from the 17th and 18th centuries be in the collection. Poets like An Dall Mac Cuarta, Peadar Ó Doirín, Aodhán Ó Rathaile, Seán Clárach Mac Domhnall etc. (AS 25, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaeltacht Post-primary School).

Include series made by TG4 on the course. I would suggest “Grace Harte”. I would broaden the literary genres that can be studied so that history, journalism etc. may be studied. Following on from the above point, I would employ someone who is currently writing in Irish to write pieces about topics in which young people would have an interest... pieces of journalism about current affairs, sporting matters, historic stories, but for them to be fairly long. Challenging but interesting. An anthology as a text book containing a big selection. If any book is put on the course, “A Thig ná Tit Orm” for example, have the entire text rather than an extract from it. (AS 57, Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Of the genres that could be included there are: An tOireachtas, local festivals; the media (radio, television, print and online journalism, social media) and the Irish language multimedia, Ealaín na Gaeltachta, IMRAM, Reic; along with movements like An Dream Dearg, Aerach Aiteach Gaelach, Misneach, Teach Aniar; and digital projects like www.ainm.ie, www.logainm.ie, www.dúchas.ie. The experience of those who teach in the universities and the higher education institutes is that literature and aspects of the Irish language culture related to it are a central part of the students’ experience and learning experience. Those who teach in those institutes try to build on the information the students have about literature when they come into the university and to add to it. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

Overall, a strong opinion was expressed that the emphasis on literature should be reduced, especially in the L2 draft specification. Many submissions, particularly those responding to the L2 draft specification, suggested removing literature from the L2 specification entirely, especially for Ordinary level.

I would like not to have any Irish language literature or poetry taught in the country's English-medium secondary schools as part of the L2 subject today and that all the emphasis in the course focus on skills and communication methods in the language. (AS 173, An Individual).

We welcome reform of the Leaving Cert, but we recommend a substantial reduction of emphasis on traditional literature. (AS 168, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Also, I would prefer if there was less emphasis on literature (lower it to 0% in my opinion) instead of raising it to 20%. (AS 192, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.9 CONTENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS – LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

As part of the feedback on the content of the L1 and L2 draft specifications, the Language Portfolio was often referenced. Respondents stated that it offered possibilities with regard to developing the students' language skills and personal skills.

The portfolio focuses on developing the student's self-directed and self-reflection skills - very positive progress. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

[Irish Language Organisation] considers the language portfolio to be an interesting concept and would ideally be a great opportunity for the learner to pursue a specific subject that would interest them. The learner may also reflect on the learning process and the skills he/she has acquired (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

3.9.1 LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO – LACK OF INFORMATION

Quite a number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the lack of information in the draft specifications about the Portfolio. It was also mentioned that the merit of the Portfolio cannot be evaluated without providing more details. Some submissions requested that examples or exemplars of the portfolio be provided.

There is not enough information available on the portfolio approach. It is not clear what the student has to do for this part of the course. Also, not enough information is given on the conversation or the discussion that would happen with regard to the portfolio in the oral assessment. The merit of the portfolio cannot be evaluated without this information being available. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

There is little information about the language portfolio in the draft specifications and clarification on its use other than as a stimulus for the oral test. Additional guidance would be required for both the teacher and the learner as well as the examiner. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

It is mentioned in the draft specifications that every student will have an opportunity to develop a Language Portfolio as a formative assessment. This would be a great opportunity for students to reflect on the learning process and on the skills they have acquired on their language journey. However, there is only a short paragraph on this aspect of the assessment in the draft specifications themselves. There is no definitive guidance – for students or teachers – on what the portfolio will entail. (AS 100, Oireachtas Joint Committee).

The use of the language portfolio is an aspect that merits further development in order to ensure clarity on its role. (AS 231, Government Department).

3.9.2 LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO – ASSESSMENT AND WEIGHTING OF MARKS

Concern was expressed with regard to the value of the Language Portfolio if there were no marks for it in the final examination. Though its value as a tool for student reflection was acknowledged in some submissions, it was claimed that there is a need for more clarity with regard to the Portfolio's role in the final assessment. The possibilities relating to the Language Portfolio as a method for formative assessment were also discussed.

It is also proposed that there would be a minimum amount of content attributed to the portfolio (but a minimum that would still challenge the learner) so that 'rote learning' would not happen for the oral examination. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

The inclusion of a Language Portfolio in the draft T2 Leaving Certificate specification is highly welcome, however it must be acknowledged that failure to include this for assessment will only lead to it being sidelined and forgotten about completely in many cases. A hugely positive step would be the inclusion of the portfolio with a 10% weighting of marks, as a replacement to the response to literary texts. A viable alternative would be a compulsory response to a specified number of literary texts in the portfolio itself. The current draft, with no marks awarded for the portfolio, leaves the door wide open for Grinds Schools to thrive on the needs of students once the draft becomes adopted for use in the new Leaving Certificate, and will ensure the continued dread and anxiety of students will be tasked with learning reams of poetry and prose notes by heart. In conclusion, the Language Portfolio offers an opportunity to help students enjoy their learning experience of the Irish language, if used correctly and if enough importance is placed on it. (AS 209, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

It is a cause for concern that the language portfolio itself is not a central part of the assessment even though students will have an opportunity to mention it in the oral examination. Of course, a lot of preparation will go into the portfolio and therefore, students' efforts should be acknowledged. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

Allocate marks to the language portfolio! Without mark allocation, I believe the language portfolio will be thrown by the wayside as exam technique is prioritised. Rewarding students for individual expression would be a major departure from the current mode of examination and achieve the learning outcomes of the specification to a greater extent than without mark allocation. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

Acknowledgement & compensation (in the form of marks) should be available for the work the students do – e.g., the language portfolio. (AS 84, Parents Committee in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

It is proposed that great emphasis be placed on the importance of the portfolio. The worry we have is that it will be ignored because a definite value for it is not expressed in the Specification. It is proposed to reference it somewhere in the assessment (in the oral examination perhaps, where the student would have an opportunity to describe the portfolio itself or even to bring the portfolio in and that one piece be chosen from it. It is suggested that the portfolio be referenced in every presentation made in workshops and seminars. It is recommended that teachers be guided in how to enable students to make the best use of digital portfolios and of physical portfolios with a particular emphasis on formative assessment. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

Complete dissatisfaction with the Language Portfolio was also expressed in some submissions. The opinion was expressed that it would not have value and that it would create more work for the teacher.

Why is there a need for it? There is no mark going for it, but it must be done? Though students do homework, exhibitions, presentations etc. during the class, you are trying to create paperwork without any mark going for it? That does not make any sense, and again, it will reduce the opportunities to use the language during the class (AS 150, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

What good is a language portfolio at this level? ANOTHER BUZZWORD! Is it not the same as the collection of notes/projects/things in the folder/in the copybook/hanging on the walls? (AS 160, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.9.3 LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO AND THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Certain respondents proposed that the Portfolio should be linked to the oral examination and therefore that more marks should be allocated towards it. Yet again a lack of clarity with regard to the role of the Portfolio was mentioned.

Some new possibilities could be explored to add to the assessment of speech, e.g., use of the language portfolio. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

There is not enough information available on the portfolio approach. It is not clear what the student has to do for this part of the course. Also, not enough information is given on the conversation or the discussion that would happen with regard to the portfolio in the oral assessment. The merit of the portfolio cannot be evaluated without this information being available. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.9.4 LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO – EXPERIENCE AT JUNIOR CYCLE LEVEL

Some submissions referenced the experience teachers and students have had with the Language Portfolio at Junior Cycle level. It was mentioned that the Portfolio was wasted effort at this level because the approach is not correct and that it has only created additional pressure and stress.

We as a Department are very concerned about the Language Portfolio. It is clear to us and to other teachers around the country that this work is not worthwhile at Junior Cycle level. It is a waste of time for the students, and it puts a lot of pressure on them without having any marks going for it! (AS 214, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The language portfolio is a good idea... the approach was not right (at JC level) but the understanding that such a thing would help children (correcting and re-correcting etc.) was praiseworthy. (AS 57, Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

3.10. CONTENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS - ASSESSMENT

A small number of submissions expressed positive opinions with regard to the various types of assessment and the possibilities that they contain. The variation in assessment methods was commended in the written submissions as well as the alignment between assessment and the aims and rationales of the two draft specifications.

[It is recommended ... the various types of assessment to identify specific areas of difficulty or strength of the student ... [is to be praised]. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

The assessment components generally reflect the aims and rationale. The draft specifications offer the opportunity to use a wide and suitable range of assessment methods to support the student demonstrate his/her learning across a range of skills and competences as presented in the structure of the specifications. (AS 231, Government Department).

3.10.1 LACK OF INFORMATION ON ASSESSMENT

Significant emphasis was placed on the lack of information in the draft specifications on assessment. According to quite a number of respondents this vagueness created a lack of confidence in the draft specifications in general. Many participants commented that they found it difficult to provide feedback without further, more comprehensive information in relation to assessment. It was claimed that this lack of clarity was blindsiding the Irish language community.

Vagueness: The assessment component is insufficient. The content that will be on the course is also not included. No assessment component is presented which creates vagueness. This shows that these draft specifications have not been fully thought out, or even worse, that this has been done on purpose to blind-side the public. It is hard to express opinions on a specification or syllabus without the content and assessment system being included. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

It was acknowledged that the system of assessment has a particular impact on teaching and learning in the classroom. Therefore, the specifications should contain more information on assessment.

In light of the impact that assessment has on teaching at Leaving Certificate level, it is a cause for concern that the assessment was not very central in the design of these specifications, and that there is little information given on assessment in the specification apart from the weighting of marks given to the various parts of the exam. Again, it is very difficult to evaluate these specifications and to base appropriate consultation on them without comprehensive information on assessment being available. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

It is important that information is provided on assessments and samples of the type of assessments in question are available at the beginning of the process. That will help with embedding the changes and with changing attitudes and teaching strategies. (AS 106, An Individual).

In a large number of submissions particular emphasis was placed on the apparent lack of information in both specifications with regard to the various parts of the assessment. More information was requested on the Portfolio, the approach to the oral examination, sample papers and sample questions so that the draft specifications may be properly evaluated.

Information on the assessments and sample examination papers: There is not enough information available about the assessments. There is not enough information available on the oral exams approach, the portfolio approach, the writing tasks approach, the listening comprehension approach etc. This information is essential to be able to assess the draft specifications fully and accurately. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

It was acknowledged that there is a need for comprehensive resources so that teachers may plan appropriately. Reference was made to the timeline of assessments and the difficulty teachers would have if they do not receive a sample paper in a timely manner. Without appropriate guidance on the assessment, there would be a lack of continuity in teaching and learning. Furthermore, it was claimed that teachers have a duty to prepare students for assessment.

It is recommended that the teachers be clear on how the specification will be assessed before undertaking the course e.g., what will the exam papers/assessment look like? Because this is a cycle, all the information should be on hand for the teacher before undertaking planning. If it is accepted that no examination paper will be available until November when the students are in sixth year, it will be acknowledged that it is not a learning cycle but a complete summative assessment. By December in sixth year, most of the teaching and learning has been done by teachers and they are preparing the students for the examinations. Therefore, exam skills, time management and making choices in order of preference are very important for the students. These things do not happen by accident, these skills need to be developed slowly and specifically to give the students the best opportunity to show how much they have learned. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

Emphasis was placed on the NCCA's role in the design and layout of the assessment. It was claimed that this responsibility falls not only on the SEC and that the appropriate details should be clearly laid out in the draft specifications.

The primary objectives and function of the NCCA are set out in the Education Act (1998), where it says: "The object of the Council shall be to advise the Minister on matters relating to (a) the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, and (b) the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the Curriculum." Though the State Examinations Commission provides the examination papers and administrates the exams, the NCCA should give clearer guidance in the specifications with regard to the assessment. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

It is sometimes argued that responsibility for assessment lies with the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and not with the NCCA. It should however be noted that the Education Act of 1998 states that "The object of the (National) Council for Curriculum and Assessment shall be to advise the Minister on matters relating to the curriculum.... and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations in subjects that are part of the curriculum" (my italics). So while the SEC sets, marks and assesses the state examinations, the NCCA has a statutory responsibility to advise the Minister on assessment procedures. (AS 32, An Individual).

3.10.2 ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

It was acknowledged that assessment has a particular impact on students. The link between the examination and classroom practices was mentioned in some submissions.

Examination informs teaching. I know all too well that the portion of marks awarded to an assessment component defines how much class time it is allocated. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

The importance of alignment between the learning outcomes and assessment was also acknowledged.

The assessment system should be central in the design of the specifications to ensure that the assessment and the learning outcomes align, and to ensure that the assessment will have a positive impact on learning. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

Some participants suggested emphasising continuous assessment during fifth and sixth years to reduce the pressure on students.

Finally, I completely support the emphasis, in terms of assessment, on the work done systematically over the three-year period for the Senior Cycle. We have particular personal experience as a family on the negative impact the emphasis on stressful examinations has on young people's mental health. (AS 118, Principal in a Gaelscoil).

Teachers teach for the examinations – that is the job they have and have always had. And if there is an emphasis on literature in the examination and no emphasis on speaking, that is what they will teach. If they have a CBA to do, instead of an open conversation, memorising things off by heart for the presentation will be practiced rather than practising saying things openly. That is just common sense. And that does not result in fluency. (AS 146, An Individual).

Some submissions discussed the importance of formative assessment being central to the new model. It was claimed that the formative assessment guides learning and that it provides evidence of students' progression. It was stated that not introducing this aspect was a missed opportunity.

The application of formative assessment in schools, for the benefit of directing the learning and for the student and teacher to have evidence of progression, is also recommended. (AS 127, Education Organisation).

Formative assessment is of particular importance in the student's learning process, and it is a wasted opportunity not to properly acknowledge this aspect of the formative assessment. (AS 140, Irish Language Organisation).

Failure to provide any detail on assessment suggests that no consideration has been given to addressing current concerns about the overloaded examination in June of the students' final year nor has any creative thought been given to the format and timing of assessments. (AS 32, An Individual).

Questions were raised about the appropriateness of the specifications design for a context that has external examinations.

The format used by the NCCA to design the new specifications is the same format which they have used to design subject specifications at primary and junior cycle levels. While the design template may be suitable for a school-based programme which is not externally assessed, it is not at all suitable for a programme or course which is externally assessed such as the Leaving Certificate. (AS 32, An Individual).

3.10.3 ASSESSMENT AND WEIGHTING OF MARKS

As stated above, concern was expressed about the lack of clarity in relation to the approaches that will be in place in relation to the various assessments, the written examination, the Portfolio and the oral examination especially. In quite a number of the submissions, a different approach with regard to the weighting of marks throughout the entire assessment was suggested. Particular emphasis was placed on the oral examination in these marks. Reference was made to this particular weighting in quite a number of submissions:

Overall Weighting of Marks

A more improved model of mark weighting at higher level is illustrated in the table below:

<i>Oral Exam</i>	<i>50%</i>
<i>Aural Exam</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Language Portfolio</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Reading in context and language awareness</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Creative composition tasks</i>	<i>15%</i>

(WS 193, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

3.10.4 ASSESSMENT AND THE ORAL EXAMINATION

As mentioned in section 2.6, emphasis was often placed on the importance of the spoken language in the language learning process. It was claimed that the oral examination would have lower status and that this would have an impact on the teaching of Irish in the classroom, on the promotion of spoken Irish in particular.

I have clearly noted how the Oral component is a great opportunity for those who do not excel in written Irish to improve their grades communicatively. If anything the oral component in this new recommended reform needs to be increased to at least 50/60% and that is the views of both i and 93 other irish teachers from a number of T2 schools. (AS 158, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

If the government's aims with regard to Irish are to be achieved, raising the people of Ireland's spoken and aural comprehension ability in Irish will be of particular importance. If the percentage of marks for the Leaving Certificate oral examination is reduced, it is expected to have a significant impact on the emphasis placed by teachers and students on speaking Irish in the senior cycle and, as a result, fewer people will finish their school years with an active ability in the language. (AS 103, State Agency).

3.10.5 THE CURRENT ORAL EXAMINATION

It was acknowledged that the current structure of the oral examination has faults and that there is a need to amend this assessment component. It was mentioned that there is a particular emphasis on rote learning in the current system and that this should be changed because it has an impact on the validity of the examination. Respondents stated that the oral examination should be planned so that students' language fluency would be assessed and that this would raise the standard of the spoken language.

We understand that the NCCA did two pieces of research to look at the effect of these amendments and, though there was a rise in the number of students undertaking the examination at Higher level, that the research showed that many aspects of the oral examination were cause for concern, especially the impact the picture sequences have on teaching and learning, and that the oral examination as it is currently structured is not adding to the students' long term spoken ability. (AS 52, Irish College).

It is recommended that a review of the current oral examination is conducted. The examination should be focused on spoken ability and discussion ability: the ability to discuss a wide range of themes that would test the flow of speech, the vocabulary and the range of language, instead of learning content about limited themes off by heart as is currently the practice. (AS 99, Language Planning).

I do agree that a change needs to be made to the course, but it needs to be a meaningful one that will benefit students, lead to better standards of Irish, less rote learning and one that will result in students having a more positive attitude towards our native language. (AS 204, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

35% or 40% for the oral examination is a very high number of marks in any language examination and, therefore, the NCCA should take particular care of the validity of this assessment component in the draft specification, especially in light of the results of the research the NCCA themselves commissioned in 2017... that showed that many aspects of the current oral examination were cause for concern as they are not adding to the students' long term spoken ability. (AS 140, Irish Language Organisation).

3.10.6 WEIGHTING OF MARKS FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Much worry and concern were expressed regarding the reduction in the weighting of marks for the oral examination. There was a strong opinion that reducing these marks would have an important impact on classroom practice. According to a large number of respondents, there would be a reduction in the emphasis on spoken Irish and communication in the classroom if these marks were reduced and consequently the spoken ability of the student would decline.

I do not understand why the marks going towards the speaking of Irish (the oral examination) would be reduced from 40% to 35%. We as a country are trying to encourage Irish, therefore there should be at least 40% going for the oral examination. If there is a reduction in the marks, there will be a reduction in speech in the class room and we will be back to the beginning again with students studying Irish but not being able to have a conversation in the language. (AS 2, Irish Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

State policies regarding Irish were referenced in quite a number of submissions, noting that particular emphasis should be placed on communication if the targets of those policies are to be achieved.

Therefore, the lowering of status that has been given to the oral examination in terms of the weighting of marks in the new draft specifications (from 40% to 35%) is cause for concern for [state agency]. If the government's aims with regard to Irish are to be achieved, raising the people of Ireland's spoken and aural comprehension ability in Irish will be of particular importance. If the percentage of marks going for the oral examination in the Leaving Certificate is lowered, it is thought that it will have a big impact on the emphasis both teachers and students place on the speaking of Irish in the Senior Cycle and therefore, that less people will be concluding their school years with a functioning ability in the language. (AS 103, State Agency).

The link between the reduction in the weighting of marks for the oral exam and people's attitude towards Irish was also mentioned. It was reported that this reduction in status would have a negative impact on the public's attitude towards the importance of Irish, especially as it is a minority language.

Furthermore, it is our opinion that the lowering in status for the oral examination could damage the language ideology and identity of the young people of the Gaeltacht. High marks for the oral examination at Leaving Certificate level demonstrates to Gaeltacht students that their language has value – not only in terms of cultural

and heritage matters but that Irish and their Gaeltacht background gives them educational and economic advantages. (AS 103, State Agency).

The oral examination is of particular importance in terms of Irish as it is a minority language and many students do not have enough opportunity to use and practice the language outside the classroom. If the importance of the spoken language is not acknowledged in the weighting of marks for the oral examination, the time will not be spent developing these important communication skills that will add to the students' long term spoken ability. (AS 91, Education Organisation).

Respondents claimed that the language communication skills of students started to improve when the number of marks for the oral examination at Leaving Certificate was raised. It was also mentioned that there was a danger that the number of applicants undertaking higher level would fall if changes were made.

The percentage of marks available for the oral examination was raised from 25% to 40% in 2007 and this development was much welcomed at the time because of the emphasis it placed on the students' ability to communicate through the medium of Irish. Therefore, the lowering of status that has been given to the oral examination in terms of the weighting of marks in the new draft specifications (from 40% to 35%) is cause for concern for [state agency]. If the government's aims with regard to Irish are to be achieved, raising the people of Ireland's spoken and aural comprehension ability in Irish will be of particular importance. (AS 103, State Agency).

There has been a significant rise in the number of students in our school who are undertaking the higher level course since the 40% has been brought in for the Oral Examination. It is very positive that more students are now choosing the higher level examination. There is a danger that there will be a reduction in the number of students who take the higher level course if there is a reduction in the marks for the spoken work. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

It was also implied that the students who do not possess strong writing skills would be at a disadvantage if there is a reduction in the number of marks for the oral examination. A view was shared that the richness of Irish among young people in the Gaeltacht would also decline.

It is stated in the draft specification that there would be a reduction in the marks for the oral examination to 35%. The Board believes that this is not fair for fluent Irish speakers. Also, students who are not as good at writing, or academically, will be at a disadvantage as a result of the reduction in the marks. The marks for the oral examination should be left at 40%. Unfortunately, the richness of spoken Irish is declining among the young people of the Gaeltacht and the emphasis and acknowledgement that Spoken Irish deserves needs to be seen in the marks. (AS 55, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

I have clearly noted how the Oral component is a great opportunity for those who do not excel in written Irish to improve their grades communicatively. (AS 158, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

There was a strong opinion in the submissions that the marks for the oral examination should be increased to place more emphasis on spoken Irish in the classroom. It was claimed that this mark should be raised to between 50% and 75%.

Personally, I would prefer if the oral examination was raised (to 60% even) rather than lowered (to 35%). (AS 192, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The recommendation here is increase to 50% the number of overall marks awarded for the oral exam. (AS 193, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

If anything, the oral component in this new recommended reform needs to be increased to at least 50/60% and that is the views of both I and 93 other Irish teachers from a number of T2 schools. (AS 158, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I don't understand why the maximum emphasis has been placed on texts rather than placing emphasis on speech and the students' creativity through the medium of Irish. It frustrates me that the 40% for the oral examination is reduced to 35%. In my opinion and in my experience from teaching, more should be awarded for the oral examination, about 50-60% because it is a language and when a language is spoken that language is alive. (AS 155, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

At least 75% of marks at Leaving Cert level on the Ordinary level course should be for oral work. (AS 170, Principal in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

3.10.7 OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Various suggestions to develop the approach to the oral examination were made. It was suggested to allocate more time to the exam as 15 minutes is not long enough.

There should be 60% for the Oral Examination along with 30 minutes for an oral examination. (AS 154, An Individual).

Other possibilities for evaluating this skill were mentioned, including: preproduced recordings, role-play, conversation about literature and the history of Irish.

With regard to the oral examination and the 40%; Everything depends on 15 minutes. What about submitting a pre-recorded piece on a topic the student is interested in beforehand, and allocating 20% for it? Then do an interview. (AS 188, An Individual).

I would suggest sticking with 40% for the oral examination with less picture sequences... assess a role play and a picture sequence maybe. (AS 172, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

At the same time, the research shows that a review should be done on the spoken aspect of the course in order to find other ways to improve the learning and teaching approach for the oral examination, rather than the current emphasis on rote learning to answer a picture sequence. Questions should be asked about literature and the history of literature in the oral examination. A substantial mark for the oral examination would make sense in that type of system. The students should have an opportunity to express their emotions and to show their vocabulary in the oral examination. Innovative ideas and ways to examine their language ability must be found. (AS 52, Irish College).

The importance of the oral examination was discussed in quite a number of submissions and carrying out two oral examinations was also suggested, one in 5th year and one in 6th year.

For the Leaving Cert the emphasis should be on the spoken examination. More marks should be awarded for this. An additional examination should be done in 5th year. The amount of literature should be reduced. It should be made into two courses if necessary. Additional points for those who would like to study literature. (AS 183, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

With regard to the oral examination – there should be two. One at the end of 5th year and one near Easter in 6th year. This would put more emphasis on the speaking of the language in 5th year and in my opinion the standard of speech would improve between then and Easter in 6th year. Theoretically – students would be more fluent when leaving school. (AS 192, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Introduce two forms of oral assessment I propose that two oral assessments take place in sixth year: - An oral presentation during term 1 - A conversation with additional elements during term 2 Considering my suggestion to increase the mark for oral assessment, I believe that 50% of a student's grade depending on a short conversation is unfair. This offers an opportunity to assess the presentation skills of students, developing their use of Irish in a real-world scenario. Additional elements of the conversation should include discussion of the language portfolio, as outlined in the specification. The picture sequences, "sraith pictiúr", should be replaced with role plays, similar to those assessed in Leaving Certificate German. This would encourage educating students on how to use Irish during their day-to-day life as opposed to memorising notes on countless picture sequences. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

One submission suggested that the practice of conducting external oral examinations should be continued; a system that includes external examiners along with a moderation system.

It is essential that we continue with an oral examination under the direction of the State Examinations Commission as part of the assessment for Irish at Leaving Certificate, with external examiners and a moderated system. (AS 127, Education Organisation).

3.10.8 ASSESSMENT – PROPOSALS FOR THE EXAMINATION PAPERS

Some proposals were given in the submissions in regard to the examination papers. Some examples regarding the papers' questions were discussed, as were the language skills that could be evaluated. It was suggested that there would be an opportunity to pilot the examinations before they happen so that the suitability of the tasks may be evaluated.

There is a need to look at the suitability of the assessment tasks on the examination papers. It should be ensured for example that the assessment tasks would be properly differentiated between higher and ordinary level. It is necessary to look at the assessments on the examination papers and to look at the aims and goals behind them, and to create tasks that will foster interest in the language and are suitable for today's students. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The assessments on the examination papers should be looked at and the aims and goals behind them should be looked at and create tasks that will foster an interest in the language and that are suitable for today's students. It would also be worthwhile doing trials beforehand for any new examination proposed, with a random sample of students of every area and culture, to evaluate the suitability of the examinations. This would give an opportunity to identify any problems and to fix them beforehand. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

Reading

A recommendation was made that the reading comprehensions be changed, using shorter texts or unseen texts to evaluate the students' literacy in a more effective way. It was mentioned that unseen multimodal texts would be more effective to evaluate students' abilities.

Take the reading comprehension for example, it is too long... break it up or give us other multimodal texts. (AS 172, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The skills of analysis and reflection should be assessed through unseen texts in the written examinations. This would shift the focus in the classroom from administering a single viewpoint for students to learn off about a

text to educating students about literary devices and emphasising personal interpretation. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

Listening

Keeping an emphasis on listening as a central part of the final assessment was proposed. As part of this, different texts for the various levels and the use of young people's voices were suggested.

More emphasis should be placed on understanding for the listening comprehension – that is the functional language. (AS 172, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Reference was made to the need for various recordings and tasks for the different specifications and levels.

There is a need to look at the suitability of the assessment tasks on the examination papers. It should be ensured for example that the assessment tasks would be properly differentiated between higher and ordinary level. For example, should there be different listening comprehension recordings for the higher and ordinary level exams, so that every student would be listening to a recording at a suitable level for them? Should young people from the Gaeltacht also be heard on listening comprehension recordings to give the students a more realistic experience, rather than artificial recordings that seem dated as is in the current system? (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

Writing

It was suggested that shorter written texts be used to avoid rote learning as is done with Modern Foreign Languages.

Assess multiple shorter composition tasks The current required length of the composition, 500 - 600 words, is not fit-for-purpose and is the greatest perpetrator of memorisation. Setting multiple tasks that are more specific with a much smaller word count requirement would discourage rote learning and encourage students to actually learn the skills of composing and creativity. This suggestion is inspired by my experience with Leaving Certificate French, in which several short writing tasks are assessed. My ability to write better on-the-spot in French as opposed to Irish, which I've been learning for much longer, exemplifies the benefit of this mode of assessment. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

Language Accuracy

Language tests were also referenced in some submissions, and it was claimed that they should be a central part of the final paper in order to evaluate students' accuracy and to avoid rote learning.

Maybe a question like translation or language tests or another grammar question should also be put on the paper. You would be able to evaluate the student's language skills, rather than their skills in memorising things. (AS 221, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

What about adding grammar questions? (AS 225, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

SECTION 4 – WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS - OPINIONS REGARDING THE ENACTMENT OF THE DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS

In this section, the various general opinions on the implementation of the draft specifications will be discussed. The levels of assessment identified in the draft specifications, continuity of curriculum, the supports that will be needed and the impact of the changes on the stakeholders will be described.

4.1 LEVELS OF ASSESSMENT

The various levels in both draft specifications were discussed in quite a number of submissions. It was claimed that it is not clear what standard will be expected at the various levels.

...without a clear description of the standard that will be expected at the various levels... (AS 213, An Individual).

It was acknowledged that there was a need to ensure that students would be able to engage with Irish at a level appropriate to their ability and needs.

Students who have different levels of ability or various learning needs should be appropriately accommodated, through providing differentiated courses at various levels. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

Students want to develop a competence in the language and therefore, there is a need to investigate the various levels available to students. It is said that there is too big a gap between ordinary level and higher level. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

In one submission the opinion was expressed that research was needed on the various levels to provide evidence on the most appropriate approaches to meet the specific needs of various learners so that every student could engage with Irish at a level that meets their needs.

As part of this review, comprehensive research is needed on the questions/points below and the specifications and assessments should be based around the various needs: -specific needs of L1 students in terms of language learning, and -the way a specification and assessments should be developed to appropriately cater for those specific needs. -the specific needs of L2 students in terms of language learning, and -the way a specification and assessments should be developed to appropriately cater for those specific needs. -the way the specifications and assessments should be adapted for higher level students and ordinary level students. -the way differentiation should be approached to meet all students' needs. -will the draft specifications or assessments properly meet the various specific needs of all these students. -at present, it is not clear how the new proposed system will cater for the needs of those students who used to take the foundation level. -every student should have the opportunity to learn Irish at a level that is appropriate for them. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

4.1.1 HIGHER LEVEL – CHALLENGE

Some submissions posed questions regarding the level of challenge the L2 specification would present for students at higher level. Concern was expressed that there would not be enough challenge for the more capable students and that their fluency in Irish would suffer as a result; something which would impact their future study of Irish at third level.

Nothing is mentioned in the draft specifications about giving additional options with regard to the level of challenge to students in L2 schools or about how students will be enticed to take a more challenging course for the Leaving Certificate. (AS 210, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Also, it is understood in this approach that students who attend an English-medium school would not have the ability to achieve fluency on the same level as Gaeltacht or Gaelscoil students. I think that that understanding is deeply flawed. It is not true that students who have the ability to become fluent in the language only attend a Gaelscoil or a Gaeltacht school. The proposals, in their current form, are not appropriately accommodating students outside the Gaeltacht who have a high level of ability in the language. In the case where a student outside the Gaeltacht had an interest in undertaking a degree in Irish at third level, they would immediately be a few steps behind L1 students. (AS 229, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

To raise the standard of Irish, you can/need to accommodate those students who have a good standard in Irish (e.g., native speakers who have a good standard of Irish in the Gaeltacht or outside the Gaeltacht, and students in L1 and L2 schools outside the Gaeltacht who have a good standard of Irish). Let us not forget that students who were raised with Irish or students that attended Irish-medium primary schools also progress to L2

secondary schools – some of whom have a good standard that should be developed as well as possible. (AS 128, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

It was reported that there was concern that students in Irish-medium settings would choose to take ordinary level because the higher level course would be perceived to be too difficult.

We as Irish teachers are afraid that our students will choose the Ordinary level course, which would reduce the status of the language in a Gaeltacht school. (AS 10, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

In our opinion, it seems that this course will be academic (and it seems that there will be a high volume of literature in it). We think that this is wrong and that it creates elitism that has never been seen before. (AS 59, Gaelcholáiste).

4.1.2 REMOVAL OF FOUNDATION LEVEL

A strong voice was evident in the submissions with regard to the decision to remove the foundation level. Those who submitted submissions were worried that the two draft specifications would not meet the needs of those students who traditionally would opt for foundation level. Therefore, these students would not have an opportunity to learn Irish at their own level of ability. As a result of that, concern was expressed that the standard of the ordinary level would be reduced in order to meet the needs of all students appropriately.

We want a promise that Irish will be available at foundation level as it is at present. (AS 20, Gaelcholáiste).

Along with this, according to the specifications as they are currently laid out, it is proposed that there will no longer be a Foundation level. It is not clear how the needs of the students who used to take the foundation level examination until now will be met in any new system such as this. Everyone should be given the chance to learn Irish at a level that is appropriate for them. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

No reference was made to foundation level in the draft specification and nothing in relation to it is discussed either. This would mean that the needs of students with learning difficulties would not be met... or that the learning outcomes of ordinary level would be reduced, and as a result of that, the standard for ordinary level in general would decline. (AS 100, Oireachtas Joint Committee).

The removal of the option of Foundation Level disregards a clear need for differentiation. The proposed amendment to the oral is not conducive to the promotion of Irish as a living language and the reduction in percentage only further heightens this problem. (AS 203, An Individual).

The specifications allow for 4 syllabi but do not provide for a Foundation Level which had an important function for students undertaking the Leaving Certificate. (AS 24, Irish Language Organisation).

In Irish-medium settings, worry was expressed that students would go to other schools if they would not have access to foundation level at Leaving Certificate level.

We are unhappy that it is intended to end Foundation level in the Leaving Cert. Every student works at their own ability. There is a danger that the most vulnerable students in terms of the language will be neglected, or that certain students will be looking for an exemption from Irish. Or worse still, that these students would go to a secondary school outside the Gaeltacht as a result. (AS 119, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Great worry was expressed with regard to students with specific educational needs and it was believed that this particular group would not have access to Irish in the future. There is a risk, according to quite a number of respondents, that some students would decide not to do Irish at this level and that there would be a rise in the number of students seeking exemptions from Irish or that students would choose not to learn Irish at all.

There is a serious risk that there will be a big increase in the number of students seeking an exemption from Irish if the foundation level course were not there anymore. This could greatly damage Irish as a subject. There is a serious risk that the weakest students would not be appropriately catered for in future if there is no foundation level, which would be very wrong. It is essential that every student have the opportunity to learn Irish at a level appropriate to them, and a decision like this would be discriminating against weaker students. According to a survey carried out by An Gréasán in 2021, 87% of teachers believe that a Foundation level course should still be available for students. (AS30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

Furthermore, the wisdom of omitting foundation level should be questioned, seeing as this decision could have a negative impact on the number of exemptions in the future. (AS 127, Education Organisation).

Foundation level should not be removed. The result of this, in my opinion, would be that certain students would fail Irish (due to them choosing a level that is not appropriate for them), and worse still some of them would not bother doing Irish at all. I believe that we will be failing the country's students by not including this foundation level. (AS 187, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

One submission expressed the opinion that if the specifications were better aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) there would be no need for exemptions and every student would be able to learn Irish at their own level of ability.

With regard to the question of exemptions, Conradh na Gaeilge suggested that Senior Cycle Irish should have a stronger link with the CEFR system. As a result, there would be more flexibility. Students, who do not have very strong language acquisition skills, could try to achieve A1, the first step on CEFR. If they had difficulties with the writing of Irish, they could just do the oral examination. That would give them an opportunity to learn Irish, in a less challenging way, and they should be awarded the appropriate points for such. (AS 100, Oireachtas Joint Committee).

Foundation level has been removed from Junior Cycle and a number of submissions reflected on this change.

Foundation level is still a bone of contention for schools. It greatly bothers some teachers and students that there is no such thing at Junior Cycle level, and it will create more stress at Leaving Certificate level. Students should be enticed towards Irish at their own level of ability rather than discouraging them. The NCCA are asked to look closely at this point. (AS 201, Schools Organisation).

The foundation level should be maintained as an option. We can see at Junior Cycle the students with lower language ability have now the opportunity to sit a common paper. Previously, the ordinary level paper allowed the students taking this level to feel confident in attempting and achieving on a paper that suited their level. The common paper is sat by all students who in previous papers similar cohorts would have attained an A on the higher level as well as those who would have attained a D in the ordinary level. This style of merging should not be repeated at Leaving certificate. (AS 87, An Individual).

4.2 CURRICULUM CONTINUITY

Some submissions acknowledged that the implementation of these draft specifications would create continuity throughout the system with regard to the teaching and learning of Irish. This would be an important step in efforts to strengthen Irish across the country.

It is clear from the format of the L1 and L2 Irish draft specifications that a template is being followed for the design of all the new specifications for the Junior Cycle with an emphasis on the learning continuum from early childhood to the senior cycle level, and we would agree with that approach. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

In the first 30 pages of both specifications, the rationale, aim, objectives and structure of the specifications, the relationship between these specifications and the senior cycle key skills and their context as part of the learning continuum from early childhood to life after the senior cycle is described. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

Along with this, it is promised in the programme for government that there will be a policy for Irish in the education system from pre-school to third level, and this policy, when developed, should have a central input on the approach being followed by the new specifications for the Leaving Certificate. We must take the opportunity to find the proper way to strengthen the learning and teaching of Irish, and there should be widespread support from all stakeholders for any new model for it to succeed. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

On the other hand, it was claimed that the appropriate continuity has not yet been achieved and that comprehensive, integrated planning was not evident in either draft specification with regard to the plan for Irish. People were of the opinion that wider State policies should be further explored in order to bring about this continuity.

Any changes to Irish in the senior cycle should come as part of the Policy for Irish in the Education from Pre-school to Third Level. (AS 106, An Individual).

Any change to the leaving cert Irish specifications should be part of the policy for Irish in the education system from pre-school to third level. Too often we are putting out fires instead of comprehensively planning in an integrated manner for the long term for Irish in the education system... The policy would encompass Irish at every level in the education system and in every sector, with the following three core policies included in the policy: • The current Policy on Gaeltacht Education; • A Policy on Gaelscolaíocht (whose development was recently announced); and • A policy on English-medium education. Partial immersion learning, complete immersion learning, the curriculum, specifications, teacher training, establishment of gaelscoileanna, exemptions, assessment etc. would be included. It would make sense to have an integrated link in the system, for the student learning Irish, from the first day in pre-school to the Leaving Cert examination and on to third level. (AS 77, An Individual).

There is a need for comprehensive, integrated, and long-term planning for Irish in the education system up through the levels as an acknowledgement of its status and importance as one of Ireland's official languages. (AS 91, Education Organisation).

In some submissions time was blamed for this lack of continuity. The gap that exists between *The Primary Language Curriculum (2019)* and the Junior Cycle, due to the new curriculum at primary level not being introduced until 2019, was mentioned. People were of the opinion that there is also a gap between the learning outcomes at Junior Cycle level because they are not properly embedded yet

and that it will take a few more years to do so. Therefore, it is believed that there is a need to wait until a review is completed at Junior Cycle level to ensure that continuity.

There is no continuity from the Primary Language Curriculum to the Junior Cycle, even though this is mentioned in the Junior Cycle specification. This has to do with time. The specifications were released before the current version of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). In this context, it is worth mentioning that it took some years, along with feedback from teachers, to arrive at the current version of the Primary Language Curriculum. It is recommended that this is looked at before undertaking any changes at Senior Cycle... It is recommended that the Learning Outcomes from the Senior Cycle map/mirror the Learning Outcomes for the Junior Cycle e.g., that there would be progression with regard to LO 1.1 between the Junior and Senior Cycle and so on. That is how the learning outcomes are set out in the Primary Language Curriculum. There is progression and progress in the Learning Outcomes from the infants to sixth class (Stage 1 - Stage 4) and this is clearly shown for the teachers. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

4.3 SUPPORTS

The importance of the availability of the relevant resources to enable the effective implementation of the draft specifications in schools was often mentioned in submissions. Teaching, assessment and human resources were commented on.

4.3.1 TEACHING RESOURCES

It was recommended that a suitable supply of teaching and learning resources be available in a timely manner and that teachers would have an input in the composition of these resources. The importance of local sources, to add to student's linguistic repertoire and cultural enrichment, was emphasised in particular by participants from Gaeltacht communities. Emphasis was placed on the importance of easy access to the literature and perhaps even having it all in one textbook. The stakeholders' negative experience at Junior Cycle level was referenced. Worry was expressed that two specifications would put pressure on the supply of resources.

It is recommended that a range of support material be made available, along with videos of good practice on curriculumonline.ie as is the case with the Primary Language Curriculum. A document like the Progression Continuum would be very useful also as a support for teachers as they are engaging with the Learning Outcomes in their classrooms. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

I would also want to know, before the new Senior Cycle is launched, what are the resources That would be in place to help us and our students engage with the new specifications. When the Junior Specification was launched, the resources we needed as teachers were not in place for beforehand. There was no L1 textbook, until

COGG's revised book came on the scene when we were in the third year of the course. (AS 14, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

A catalogue of support material with a strong emphasis on local sources is needed and this needs to be created before any curriculum amendment is implemented. It is vitally important in the context of Language Planning [for a Gaeltacht area] because this is a central aspect with regard to raising awareness on the wealth of tradition and the specific Gaeltacht identity, which would be true in the case of every LPA [language planning area] in the country. (AS 99, Language Planning).

A book should be created that has all of the literature and poetry in it (like Soundings in English years ago) because it was very difficult to find the poetry and literature for the JC. Schools or teachers are not going to go out and buy books for the sake of one poem. The publication companies will choose a couple of poems and pieces of literature like they did for the JC and they will publish that book. (AS 171, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Currently there is a common specification for Irish in schools/units that function through Irish and schools/units that function through English, which means that every school can use the same textbooks and teaching resources. If these new specifications were brought in, it would be very important that high quality textbooks and teaching resources be developed and available for the schools before the specifications are implemented, to give teachers an opportunity to prepare for it. Recommendation: That a clear time-frame and approach be set out for the development and publication of textbooks and teaching resources for both specifications and that feedback be sought from teachers and from other stakeholders with regard to the proposed approach and with regard to the resources themselves. (AS 103, State Agency).

4.3.2 EXAMINATION RESOURCES

Resources associated with the state examinations (sample examination papers and marking schemes) being made available early in the process was also referenced. Teachers/schools made a link to the experience they had at Junior Cycle level.

We believe that sample examination papers and an extensive range of resources are desperately needed for this new course. This already created big problems in the case of the Junior Cycle. (AS 59, Gaelcholáiste).

It is very important that information is provided on assessments and samples of the type of assessments in question are available at the beginning of the process. That will help with embedding the changes and with changing attitudes and teaching strategies. According to a survey carried out by An Gréasán in 2021, 96% of teachers believe that a package of sample examinations and marking schemes should be published along with the specifications and with the draft specifications. (AS 106, An Individual).

As every teacher knows, you have to have a plan for teaching and learning, a clear map for the journey ahead. You have to know what educational destination you is ahead, how are going to approach getting to that destination and how you will know you have reached the end of your journey – success criteria, if you like. Without that vision, it is a very stressful chaotic journey – and that was the experience we had during the first 3 years of the new Junior Cycle. We did not even know what the final examination would look like until the Sample Papers were released in spring 2020, while our students were doing Mock Examinations. This should not happen again with the Senior Cycle. (AS 14, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

4.3.3 CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some submissions referred to the continuing professional development (CPD) that should be provided to Irish teachers before they implement the new specifications. It was argued that this CPD program should be comprehensive and continuous. Opinions on CPD were often linked to opinions on teaching and examination resources. Again and again, the stakeholders' experience at Junior Cycle level was referenced. It was also acknowledged that clarity on this matter could ease concerns.

A comprehensive plan should be provided with regard to the teachers' professional development and the support that will be available for schools while this is being implemented. (AS 110, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

It is not clear from the draft specification if a comprehensive plan is to be implemented with regard to teacher training before students engage with the new draft specification. There are lessons to be learned from the way training was provided at junior cycle level. With a comprehensive plan in place, it would put an end to dissatisfaction among teachers. (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

It is recommended that in-depth and continuous training be provided for EVERY teacher at least one full year before the start of the course, along with a guide to what the summative assessment will look like, the standard of language that will be required and the marking scheme. Of course, a seminar in itself is not enough, continuous school support must be provided as part of the change from Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate to the new Specification for the Senior Cycle. We do not want teachers to think that they would have to throw out their current practice or to ignore the methodologies that they were and are implementing, but, that it would be clear that this would be an extension of their current practice. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

There is a need for sample examinations and marking schemes to be provided before the new course begins, and teachers would need to have undertaken comprehensive training and support resources should be made available at least one full school year before the new course begins. There is a dire need to develop comprehensive plans for teachers to undertake this new challenge before the course begins. According to a survey carried out by An Gréasán in 2021, 99% of teachers believe that teachers should have undertaken comprehensive training and that support resources should be made available at least one full school year before the new course begins. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

There is a need for sample examinations and marking schemes to be provided before the new course begins, and that teachers would have undertaken comprehensive training and that support resources should be made available at least one full school year before the new course begins. There is a dire need to develop comprehensive plans for teachers to undertake this new challenge before the course begins. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

4.3.4 HUMAN RESOURCES

A small number of submissions referenced human resources, i.e., additional allocation of teachers. According to these respondents there would be a need for this in Gaeltacht schools that would endeavour to provide both specifications. It is clear that this is already happening at Junior Cycle level.

Will Gaeltacht schools be able to provide both specifications in the school and if so, will the schools be given resources so that the students will be in a particular class depending on the specification they are following?... If both specifications are offered in a Gaeltacht School, it would be important that a teacher would not have to teach both specifications with one class group, which would mean that there would be a danger that that teacher would be focusing on four different levels while preparing students for examinations – that is Higher and Ordinary at L1 and L2. This would not be right or fair and it would do more damage than good to the language. (AS 55, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

We have to do both courses in the one classroom. We are a small school and the allocation of teaching hours is limited, therefore we have no other option. (AS 88, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

4.4 IMPACT OF THE CHANGES

Strong views were expressed with regard to the impact the two specifications would have on students, learning, teachers and on the schools themselves. For the most part worry, concern and dissatisfaction were expressed with regard to the contents of both specifications.

4.4.1 IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Some of the submissions referred to the impact these changes could have on students in every educational context. The most common theme that emerged was the uncertainty about whether or not students would have the option to take either of the two specifications. Many of the submissions proposed that students would have an option on which specification to engage with.

Some submissions expressed the view that that it would be an unjust course of action if it were mandatory for students in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáistí to take a more challenging course

without any compensation available in the form of additional CAO points. It was mentioned in some submissions that such an action would be a violation of the students' rights. Opinions on this matter were often linked to the matter of bonus points; a matter that will be explored below.

How will it be decided who will take the L1/L2 specification? [Parents Organisation] recommends that it should be based on language ability rather than geographical matters. (AS 84, Parents Committee in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

The Board thinks that it would be important that the school be allowed to offer both specifications. It would be too challenging for Irish learners and students with learning difficulties to take the L1 specification and there would be a risk that these students would go to another school that offers the L2 specification. (AS 55, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Every student has to be given fair standing with regard to the opportunity to get points in the state examinations at Leaving Certificate level. It is very important that there be a level playing field for every student from the beginning. If students who are attending this country's Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools do not have any choice, and they have to take the L1 specification, there is a chance that the effect of that would be some of them would get less points. The public State examinations are the national standard in every subject. Every student is given the same opportunity without restriction, to choose the appropriate level for themselves and to take the Leaving Cert at that level. The same should be true in relation to the examination for Irish. (AS 230, Schools Organisation).

If students that attend a Gaeltacht school or a Gaelscoil have to undertake this without giving them a choice, we wholly believe that that would be a violation of the students' rights. That angers and concerns us that our students would be under more pressure and that they would be at a disadvantage because they are living in a Gaeltacht area where Irish is already under great threat. (AS 88, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

In the case that students would not have an option, reference was made to the uncertainty that would exist if students moved from a school that functions through English to a Gaeltacht school/Gaelcholáiste or vice versa.

What will happen if a student moves from an L1 school to an L2 school? (or vice versa). (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

Difficulties have already been created with regard to Enrolment Policies in schools because it would be very challenging for a student to transfer to an L1 school after first year. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

In relation to this, it was mentioned that the specifications were unclear on the matter.

One of the biggest and most complicated questions that has emerged since the publication of the draft specifications is the choice for schools between the L1 specification and the L2 specification. It is clear from the document published by the NCCA that the L2 specification is directed at English-medium schools and that the L1 specification is there for Irish-medium schools/units (i.e., Gaeltacht schools, Gaelcholáistí and Irish-medium units). That being said, it is said in the case of English-medium schools that there will 'also be an option to provide the L1 specification' (p. 38)². In the case of Irish-medium schools, reference is made in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education to the 'choice of L1 specification' and to encourage students to take that option. It is to be understood from that that schools and units that function through the medium of Irish will also be allowed to provide the L2 specification. (AS 103, State Agency).

Even if there was an option, the question was asked in one submission whether students in an English medium school would have access to the L1 course (or any such other new course).

Another basic question that is causing great concern [to the Irish college] is whether an Irish class at L1 level or at Advanced level will be available to every student in the country who wishes to make that choice, no matter where they come from. Many students, who do not attend a Gaeltacht secondary school or Gaelcholáiste, learn great Irish through attending an Irish College year after year and there are many of these students for whom Irish-medium education is not and will not ever be available due to geographical constraints. They and their parents are concerned that they could fall between two stools in the differentiation between L1 and L2 and due to that they will not be properly accommodated with an appropriate Irish course in their schools wherein the focus will be on the teaching of Irish at a suitable level. (AS 52, Irish College).

It was also mentioned that the L1 course might be too challenging for certain students, even if they are native/fluent speakers.

It will be too academic for native speakers who have other talents/skills that are not academic and there is a danger that they will be forgotten. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

4.4.2 IMPACT ON TEACHERS

Teachers in the various contexts, English-medium post-primary schools especially, expressed strong opinions on the impact these changes would have on their students and on themselves.

4.4.2.1 TEACHERS' VOICES

A significant number of respondents implored that teachers' opinions be listened to and that it be shown that their experience is valued.

.... [to] keep this subject alive and to get it to thrive you will need to listen to the teachers who know best what is required for their subject area, they are the foot soldiers they need to be listened to, i can assure you the recommendations will lead to the demise of the language. (AS 158, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Amendments to the Leaving Cert are absolutely needed but other amendments, not these ones. Listen to the Irish teachers. They are tormented. (AS 125, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

Listen to us, please. We are in the classrooms; we see the damage that the new Junior Cycle has done to the language. Please listen to us. (AS 183, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I hope that teachers' opinions will be to the fore this time. As the saying goes, there's no use crying over spilt milk. (AS 175, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

It is shameful that meetings with parents were organised before meetings with teachers, no doubt to get further support for the teacher-bashing. It is a demonstration of the level of disrespect for us and the contempt the NCCA has for us as teachers that they are not happy to properly consult us about this draft specification. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

4.4.2.2 TEACHERS' INDEPENDENCE

Certain submissions, especially from teachers in English-medium post-primary schools, mentioned the importance of teachers' independence and freedom with regard to adapting the subject matter and teaching approach to their own contexts.

Why can you not give us freedom to teach the language in a way that suits the class, that suits the students in front of us? There will be classes who will have an interest in literature, in poetry, or in drama, and that is a great opportunity for them to focus on particular texts. But there will also be classes that do not even read in English, who think that Irish is "difficult" and "boring". Of course, other activities would be suitable for such a class. Is there no confidence in this country's teachers? Can we not make a decision on the best way to foster a love for the language? (AS 165, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Can teachers not be given the freedom and flexibility to teach the language, and hopefully impart their love of it, through whatever means best fit their class? Why must the course be so prescribed? (AS 216, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

What I mean by giving us freedom to teach the language in a way that suits the class, that suits the students in front of us, is that everything is laid out for us in the class, and we have no chance to follow the interests and desires of the students. If the stories, novels, plays and poems were not mandatory, we would have the opportunity to do things in which the students have an interest. This might mean a novel, but it might not. Maybe, for example, a concert or YouTube video would encourage the students to speak and write in Irish. It depends on the class. (AS 151, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

4.4.2.3 TEACHERS LEAVING THE PROFESSION

A small number of teachers mentioned that the results of these changes would have implications for their future in the profession. There is a link here with the strong emotions discussed in section 1.3.2.

Having read the draft to say i am shocked is an understatement, i cannot believe that the percentage for the Orals is reduced, having spoken to a vast number of other Irish teachers in T2 schools they share the same opinion, i have even spoken to some teachers who are contemplating a career change if such a change takes place as it is clear that we are not being listened to. (AS 158, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I do not think that I (and maybe others like me) will be in the classroom much longer, if what is planned goes ahead. (AS 207, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

4.4.3 IMPACT ON GAELCHOLÁISTÍ AND GAELTACHT POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

A significant number of submissions mentioned that the L1/L2 specification system could have negative repercussions on the number of parents/students that would choose to attend Gaelcholáistí and Gaeltacht post-primary schools. These respondents were taking for granted that students would not have an option with regard to the specifications, that the L1 course would be more challenging than the L2 course and that compensation (in the form of CAO points or other) would not be available. From the perspective of Gaelcholáistí it was acknowledged that those settings are in areas in which English-medium post-primary school(s) are in competition with them in terms of student enrolment. From the perspective of the Gaeltacht post-primary schools, it was expressed that the enrolment of schools on the outskirts of the Gaeltacht areas could come under pressure.

Here, we believe that the demand for our school will be greatly reduced if students have to take the new specification. The school's parents are nervous about it already. Some of them are talking about sending their children to English-medium schools so that they would not have to engage with a more challenging course without any compensation in terms of additional points. Our students speak Irish as a school language but only a tiny number of our students speak it at home. (AS 90, Gaelcholáiste).

I for one will transfer my girls to an English medium school where they will be treated fairly by the exam system and afforded an equal opportunity to follow their chosen path through the points system, they are forced to compete in. (AS 109, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaelcholáiste).

Creating L1 and L2 papers as they stand, will most certainly foster negative attitudes towards Irish as, at a minimum, one could question why one cohort of students have a more demanding course (simply because they live in a Gaeltacht area or that they attend a Gaelcholáiste), with the opportunity to achieve the same points as those taking L2. In fact, it may be a disincentive to attend a Gaelcholáiste for those living in non-Gaeltacht areas. (AS 87, An Individual).

The Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools are concerned that they stand to lose a certain number of students as a consequence of the introduction of the T1 specifications. Widespread opinion suggests that students will move to English language settings (T2 schools), particularly in relation to the Senior Cycle. This sector will be negatively impacted/damaged as a result of there being two specifications. (AS 95, Principals Organisation).

Having fluent Irish is a punishment. This decision nullifies the simple fact that this will drive the Gaeil from the Gaelcholáistí. There is no encouragement here for the native Irish speaker nor for the learner of Irish. Instead of going to a Gaelcholáiste, doing a new obscure L1 course and getting fewer points in the Leaving Cert, native Irish speakers and learners alike will want to go to the English-medium school, and get higher points. (AS 70, Group of Students in a Gaelcholáiste).

Because students in Irish-medium schools will have a more difficult Irish course, parents (especially those who do not have Irish) will be hesitant in sending their children to an L1 school. In the case of the L1 post-primary schools outside the Gaeltacht, the schools who teach through the medium of English will be more enticing because an easier Irish course will be taught in them. (AS 128, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

I think the new L1 course will have two effects on Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna: They will lose a share of the most ambitious students. They will wait until they have completed the Junior Certificate and will leave or not come at all. Who would take it upon themselves when they could achieve H1 in the L2 course in another school? The effect of this will be that these schools will lose teachers accordingly and for the most part they will be the youngest and most energetic teachers.... Schools on the periphery of the Gaeltacht will come under pressure to move away from the Gaeltacht school system. It's happening in the primary schools on the edge of the Gaeltacht as it is. This will reinforce the shift towards English. They will choose to send their children to English schools, or the school community will come under pressure to change to an English school. Neither of these will help the Irish language. (AS 57, Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

It was also acknowledged that post-primary schools that are trying to attain recognition as Gaeltacht schools might be obligated to provide the L1 course, and only the L1 course, to their students.

[The Irish Language Organisation] is worried that parents or students will make a decision not to take the LI draft specification, and that that will have implications on their decision to attend a Gaeltacht school, because there will be an emphasis on the LI specification in Gaeltacht schools under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. The same danger would be present in the case of Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht, though the implications might not be as disastrous in the short term outside the Gaeltacht. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

In terms of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education, will the schools who are seeking recognition as Gaeltacht schools be obligated to implement the LI to qualify as a “Gaeltacht school”? The criteria on p. 11 of the policy (mentioned below) is not clear enough and guidance and clarification with regard to this is needed immediately. (AS 110, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

4.4.4 IMPACT ON THE GAELTACHT

Teachers, schools, those involved in language planning, and some organisations referred to the impact that these specifications could have on various aspects of the Gaeltacht.

4.4.5 IMPACT ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE

A significant number of the submissions referred to the impact the differentiated specifications could have on the vibrancy of the language in Gaeltacht areas. It was claimed that the education system has a central role with regard to the conservation and promotion of Irish in the Gaeltacht and that the education system (including the new specifications) would have to be mindful of that. Certain respondents were of the opinion that the planned developments would damage Irish and the Gaeltacht.

... it is vitally important to us as a committee that if any change is made to the curriculum that it will be to the benefit of the language and for the good of the Gaeltacht. (AS 132, Language Planning).

As a Language Planning Officer [for a Gaeltacht area] a strong Gaeltacht area, and as a person who has been working in community development matters in the Gaeltacht for years, I have a fair idea that the planned policy will damage the accurate acquisition and practice of Irish among the young generation. (AS 58, Language Planning).

One submission believed strongly that these new specifications ignore the specific needs of a minority language community.

It is clear from these proposed amendments that the NCCA is trying to design a curriculum that will meet all Irish needs through a unitary system; i.e., that it will only be an odd differentiation here and there to attend to the various linguistic needs on the continuum of monolingual native English speakers to fluent bilingual Irish and English speakers. In the overemphasis on the applicability of the Leaving Certificate points system, the educational and societal needs of fluent Irish speakers, particularly in the Gaeltacht, are overlooked in these draft specifications. These curriculum reforms have the appearance of reverse engineering – a system that suits the educational bureaucracy rather than the needs of students who want to benefit from it. It is in the disregard for the functional, cultural and intellectual needs of fluent Irish speakers that the NCCA's abuse of power in formulating the draft specifications is seen. Conversely, these NCCA reforms do not show that the social fragility of the Irish speaking community is on their agenda at all. They are reforms that will contribute to the erosion of Irish communities rather than coming to their aid in times of need. If these draft specifications are implemented, the NCCA will be one of the public bodies that can be included among those driving the language transition towards English in the Gaeltacht. (AS 116, An Individual).

Emerging from the theme discussed previously with regard to students leaving Gaeltacht post-primary schools to attend English-medium schools (outside the Gaeltacht) it was mentioned that this would have a negative impact on the status of Irish in the Gaeltacht.

If there is not an option between the L1 and L2 specifications in schools, students of Gaeltacht schools could leave to attend a school in which the L2 course is available. There is a risk here for [Language Planning in a Gaeltacht area] because L2 schools are not too far from the area and some of the area's youth could receive their education in an English-medium setting which would greatly disrupt the linguistic balance that is already fragile. (AS 99, Language Planning).

It was mentioned that these specifications could be a positive development for certain students. However, concern was expressed that the academic nature of the L1 course could dishearten certain students in Gaeltacht post-primary schools and foster a negative attitude towards Irish.

Irish learners will have a higher standard and a better understanding of themselves as learners. If it is a Gaeltacht school, Irish speakers would have better Irish in many ways and competencies to make highly effective communication. That would be of great benefit to the Gaeltacht but if the speaker who is not as 'academic' were to be lost there would be a high risk that certain speakers would lose their confidence and that they would stop identifying with the Gaeltacht community and that they would be left on the periphery. If they were to start imagining Irish as an academic language with which they did not manage to succeed in the specification it would be a very deadly blow to the grassroots of the Gaeltacht. It should be ensured that every learner be enabled on their language journey through focusing on the profile of the various speakers and learners. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

4.4.6 IMPACT ON SUMMER COLLEGES

According to certain respondents the planned changes could have a negative impact on Gaeltacht summer colleges and on the Gaeltacht economy as a whole.

Due to the reduction in the marks for the oral examination (and which could be lower, depending on the mark for the portfolio and 'CBA' /Communicative Task)), there will be no demand for summer colleges anymore and the economy of the Gaeltacht will suffer. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Will the L1/L2 specification restrict or stop students attending Irish colleges during the summer? It will be a vicious circle. Again, not only is it impeding development and increasing the number of Irish speakers in the country, but it would have a serious effect on the economy and on Economic matters in all the Gaeltacht areas. Irish colleges' mná tí (hosts) and their families would be impacted, all the local shops, the restaurants, the buses and the drivers, summer colleges, teachers, grounds keepers and cinnirí (leaders) would be at a loss because of it. (AS 16, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

These proposed draft specifications do not suit students who attend Gaeltacht summer courses. If we continue with the method being proposed by the NCCA there will be no need to go to the Gaeltacht and, in the long term, the draft specifications will have a negative impact on the future of Irish colleges. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

4.4.7 LONG TERM IMPACT ON THE LANGUAGE IN THE COUNTRY

Certain respondents claimed that the education system has a central role in the promotion of Irish nationally and it was suggested, therefore, that any changes need to be mindful of that serious responsibility. Opinions and suggestions with regard to this matter were linked with the idea that there was a need for a change to the course; a matter discussed in section 1.3.1.

Any change made to the Irish course in the Leaving Certificate will have big implications for the future of Irish. Therefore, there is a need to make decisions and changes carefully – decisions should not be made hastily. (AS 128, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

It cannot be denied that the education system, especially the Leaving Cert, has a huge impact on the status of Irish, and also on the attitude the society has towards the language. When they are asked about Irish, the first response people have is “it’s the way it was taught,” or “the education system ruined it for me,” or they make some negative reference to Peig. This negative attitude is passed on from parents to their children, and as a result of that, they view the language as something that is “useless” that they have to suffer through at school. The future of the language largely depends on this change in the Leaving Certificate examination, and we have

to use this opportunity to add new life to the language, and to change people's attitude towards Irish. (AS 167, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Reform of the Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus is one of many key issues in the quest to conserve and promote the use of Irish in the daily lives of people on this island and further afield. To that end, it is imperative that thoughts of the Irish language classroom spark excitement and interest in students at second level, not dread and anxiety as is often the case at the present time. (AS 209, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Quite a number of respondents mentioned their concern regarding the impact the changes could have on the success of Irish and on the attitude towards Irish nationally. It was claimed in some submissions that these changes conflict with other State policies.

My opinion is that this specification will damage the Irish language and that it will add to the bad image and the hate to be felt from some students around the country towards the language. (AS 155, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Because I see the negative impact of the L1/L2 curriculum, I think that this system should not be brought in at leaving certificate level. It will, without doubt, create more problems and more hostility towards the subject and worse still, towards the language. (AS 49, An Individual).

The Senior Cycle Draft Specifications L1 and L2 published by the NCCA on 23 February 2021 are an attack on the Irish language, on Irish medium schools, on Gaeltacht schools, and on all those pupils and teachers in the education system who seek to cultivate a higher standard of Irish. It is, in fact, an attack on the 20-Year Strategy for Irish, on Government Policy on Gaeltacht Education, and on the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill. (AS 141, An Individual).

4.4.8 IMPACT ON UNIVERSITIES

A small number of submissions referred to the impact these changes would have on third level institutes. One respondent questioned the implications for entry to initial teacher training courses. Another respondent claimed that if students had completed two different second-level Irish courses this would have implications for third-level Irish courses.

There is no indication of how these differentiated specifications will impact on entry requirements to third level courses such as Initial Teacher Education courses (B Ed or PME, for example). The current requirement is H4. Will H4 in syllabus L2 suffice in the future? If so, what incentive will be there for students to undertake syllabus

L1? What relation will there be between Ordinary Level L1 and Higher Level L2? The differences between the two specifications, and the relation between the four different levels is unclear. There is a real danger that students will show preference for what they perceive as the least challenging option. (AS 24, Irish Language Organisation).

If the new draft specifications were brought in, difficulties would be created for Irish as a subject at university level as a common benchmark would not exist (i.e., Leaving Certificate Irish). This issue is not discussed at all in the draft specifications and, because of that, it is not known if a differentiated course would be required at third level (one for students who did the L1 specification and one for the students who did the L2 specification), that L2 students would have to do a transition course to prepare them for the third level course or that the standard for Irish as a third level subject would need to lower (in the first year of the third level course or in general). This matter needs to be clarified before any new specification is implemented at Leaving Certificate level. (AS 103, State Agency).

SECTION 5 – THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS AND SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS

In this part of the report the other systemic questions that emerged from the submissions will be discussed. The L1/L2 model, the Junior Cycle experience, and other suggestions regarding the teaching and learning of Irish, were often mentioned. Opinions were also expressed about the consultation process itself.

5.1 SUGGESTIONS AND OPINIONS REGARDING THE L1/L2 SYSTEM

Some submissions specifically referred to the L1/L2 system. Certain submissions were of the opinion that there were difficulties with the terminology and other respondents did not agree with the concept of differentiating based on the schools' language of instruction. These submissions were often taking for granted that students would not have an option, that the L1 course would be more challenging and that compensation in the form of CAO points would not be available. Therefore, the opinions on all of these matters were intertwined with the L1/L2 concept.

5.1.1 L1/L2 TERMINOLOGY

Some submissions were of the opinion that there was a vagueness to the terms L1/L2, that there was a lack of understanding among the public with regard to them and that their use was not consistent with how they are used in the field of linguistics.

A minor point that I would like to mention on this at this point, because it relates to continuity, is that the name of the specifications at Junior Cycle should be changed. Members of the public do not understand what T1(L1)

or T2(L2) mean. There is a lack of understanding about the advantages of taking this course and at which level L1 ordinary level is in the context of L2. (AS 108, Principal in a Gaelcholáiste).

The differentiation made between L1 and L2 school is clear yet complicated at the same time. It is clear in that they refer to schools in which the subjects are taught through the medium of Irish (Language 1 or L1) and schools that teach through the medium of English (Language 2 or L2). However, the differentiation is complicated due to the fact that the L1 and L2 concepts are being used in the draft specifications, and in the education system in general, in such a way that they are not aligning with the public's understanding of the terms i.e., the person's first and second language. As well as that, the use of these terms are not aligning with the basic understanding of them in functional linguistics or other academic areas... But there is certain conflation here when it is considered that the L1/L2 concepts are not being used in the same manner in the draft specifications as they are in literature on the learning and use of languages. It would be much better, in our opinion, to use terminology that would be understandable and useful to those involved in planning, to teachers, to parents and to learners. To that end we suggest that the L1 v L2 terminology would be avoided in the titles of the specifications and that instead we would focus on levels being aligned with learning outcomes at different levels of difficulty (from Foundation level to Advanced level). (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

That a basic reconsideration be done on the L1 and L2 proposal. We believe there should be a departure from the L1 and L2 terminology as that terminology creates misunderstanding among the students of the country. (AS 52, Irish College).

5.1.2 L1/L2 CONCEPT

On a conceptual basis a significant number of respondents were of the opinion that the language of instruction was not the most effective differentiation for developing Irish courses, especially when there are significant differences between the linguistic contexts in which Gaeltacht post-primary schools and Gaelcholáistí function.

The system that will be implemented for the Irish language in the coming years is so important, that we all have a duty to ensure that that system is fit for purpose. And in line with that obligation, the Joint Committee agrees that the L1 and L2 system, as currently specified, is not fit for purpose. Therefore, the Joint Committee are asking the Minister of Education to ensure that that system will not be implemented until the Department carries out a complete investigation on it, and on the other options available. (AS 100, Oireachtas Joint Committee).

One of the most controversial points associated with the debate on L1 and L2, in the case of Irish-medium schools, is that it is not fair that students from English speaking backgrounds at home, but who are attending a Gaelcholáiste or an Irish-medium Unit, would take the same specification as students who are immersed in Irish morning, noon and night in a Gaeltacht area. A review of this point is needed. Is it appropriate to push an L1

specification on students or do they have the right that the school and/or the individual student have the option to take the L2 specification? (AS 71, Schools).

Other submissions claimed that particular attention be given to the context of Gaeltacht post-primary schools.

There are basic, significant, and specific differences between a Gaeltacht School and a Gaelscoil outside the Gaeltacht – and everything related to it – students, parents, teachers, community, language planning system, language rights and education rights. While we are focusing on the new course proposed for the Leaving Cert – I am not too sure that there is any emphasis placed on this diversity or that this is even included in that process or even in this process on the reform that we are debating today? (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

One submission expressed concern that the differentiation between schools based on the language of instruction could damage the status of Irish as a core subject at post-primary level, in addition to creating negative attitudes, division and management challenges. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that students who do not have access to an Irish-medium post-primary school may be overlooked.

The L1 and L2 division creates the possibility for optional Irish in future. There should not be two Specifications. It gives a negative message to Irish learners around the country. It is creating a division between Irish speakers when we should be gaining strength. It does not make sense in terms of management in schools across the country it does not make sense to have two systems in place. Students' language rights will be denied across the country. Good Irish speakers, in parts of the country where they do not have access to L1 schools, will be neglected. Ultimately it will lead to a lowering of status for Irish on a national level. It creates the possibility for optional Irish in future. Optional Irish will be brought in in L2 schools and it will be compulsory in L1 schools. L1 schools will have no reason to argue because they will have got what they wanted, according to the authorities. The death of Irish outside the Gaeltacht will be accelerated and without Irish existing nationally the death of Irish in the Gaeltacht will be accelerated. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

A submission from a higher education institute examined the complexity of the L1/L2 system and the implications of that complexity for its use as a design tool for curriculum/syllabus/specification.

For about the past 20 years, these concepts [L1 and L2] have been examined and the differentiation between them has been reduced. It is now accepted that there is no clear division between people who before now would have been put in the native speaker category (L1) and in the second language speaker/learner category (L2) at a theoretical level or in a practical context. At a theoretical level, the ideology in which the concept of the native speaker/native language was rooted was defective as it was based on the understanding that a person had (ideal) capacity in their native language, or particular knowledge of it, that differentiates him in a measurable level from other speakers. This ideal capacity does not exist in the case of bilingual/multilingual speakers. The

language capacity of a bilingual person cannot be compared in a meaningful way to the capacity of a monolingual person. (There will always be a difference, but those differences only mean that the person is monolingual or multilingual). Another complexity in relation to this is that it cannot be taken for granted that there is homogeneity in terms of language background among students in any school 'L1' / 'L2'. The 'need' for the provision of particular curricula for L1 speakers and L2 speakers is discussed in the draft specifications and that understanding is used as a basis for the decisions made in the draft specifications. (AS 105, Higher Education Institute).

Certain respondents believed the proposed system would be unfair because Irish-medium schools would have to engage with a more challenging course without the availability of any additional compensation in the form of additional CAO points.

Creating L1 and L2 papers as they stand, will most certainly foster negative attitudes towards Irish as, at a minimum, one could question why one cohort of students have a more demanding course (simply because they live in a Gaeltacht area or that they attend a Gaelcholáiste), with the opportunity to achieve the same points as those taking L2. (AS 87, An Individual).

If an L1 course is accepted, under that name or the same concept under another name, Gaeltacht and Gaelscoil students will be discriminated against based on their native language, choice of schooling and native area. I understand that this is not the aim, but it will be the effect. We, the Irish language community, are the only group that would be marked against only the best speakers in that subject. A tougher course and marking system will be applied for them and their results in terms of CAO points will be impacted because of it. Even if additional points are promised that will be nullified due to the additional work required to achieve those points. (AS 57, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Other submissions maintained that differentiation should not be done based on linguistic background/capacity because that is not the case with regard to the curriculum's other languages, including English. It was claimed in certain submissions that the L1/L2 system would be unfair to students in an Irish-medium post-primary school.

We have done a lot of reflection and discussion on this. We have come to this opinion based on equality and competition for every student in the country. A student should not be restricted or limited from achieving the highest level, no matter what school they attend. If there is currently an advantage for a student in an L1 school, you could say it would be the very same for an English student in an L2 school. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

Is there a need for an L1 & L2 specification? If so, does that mean that L1 English should be brought in for English-medium schools and L2 English brought in for Irish-medium schools? (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

Looking at the story from the view of both communities who have different official languages as their main daily language, it would be reasonable to expect that the same type of structure would be planned for both Irish and for English as first or second languages. If there were to be two types of curricula for Irish, depending on the students' language and schooling background, both types should also be there for English, depending on the same characteristics. (AS 51, An Individual).

Every student in the state should have the same Irish Leaving Cert course, as is in the other languages. English, or Polish, or French native speakers are not given a tougher examination that is given to learners, for example. If L1 is accepted, a tougher marking scheme will be applied to Gaeltacht students and Gaelcholáiste students. That leaves that Irish speakers will be at a disadvantage with regard to CAO points. (AS 69, Language Planning).

Students attending a Gaelcholaiste should not be treated differently, simply because it was their choice to be educated through the medium of Irish. Students who are native French, Arabic speakers, for example, are not expected to study a different and more challenging curriculum compared to students who do not speak that language as their first language. The L1 proposal amounts to discrimination against native Irish speakers and those attending Gaelcholáistí. It would appear that these students will be unfairly penalised for choosing to be educated through Irish. The Irish language has enough negatively already associated with it in the general population, not to mind disenfranchising another group who had initially taken a positive step by choosing Irish-medium education. (AS 83, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

5.2 THE JUNIOR CYCLE EXPERIENCE

The L1 and L2 specifications for Junior Cycle level were published in 2017 with the implementation process beginning that year. A theme that often emerged in the submissions was the teachers' and schools' experience with those changes. Submissions referred to various aspects of those specifications, the implementation of the specification and the importance of a review of Junior Cycle Irish. Submissions drew parallels between the negative experience stakeholders had of those developments and the developments proposed at Senior Cycle level.

5.2.1 NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AND THE NEED FOR A REVIEW

Many submissions from teachers, schools and various organisations suggested that they had a negative experience in relation to the implementation of the new specifications at Junior Cycle level. Schools and teachers suggested that the courses are not functioning satisfactorily and, therefore, they are demanding a review. The matter of review will be revisited in section 13.

...there are big problems in relation to the implementation of L1 and L2 at Junior Cycle Level in [this school]. No review of those courses has been carried out as of yet. There are a large number of faults with those specifications. (AS 88, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

I am not at all happy with the new Junior Certificate, and if the Leaving Certificate has the same model, I do not think it will succeed. (AS 126, Student - Unspecified).

There has been a negative experience with the Junior Cycle Specification in my own school until now. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

The JC reform has destroyed the attitudes students have to the subject and in turn is resulting in poor grades and hatred towards ár dtéanga dúchais (our native language). (AS 224, Irish Teacher – Unspecified).

One submission was worried about all developments at Junior Cycle level.

The Framework for Junior Cycle continues to be challenging for teachers. Research recently conducted by [this union] found that, almost seven years on, many teachers have reservations about the specifications in terms of balance between content and skills, clarity of learning outcomes, assessment modalities, including the junior cycle examination. Above all, teachers were profoundly concerned about progression to senior cycle. This theme dominates in this and other (Teachers Union) research and influences teachers' views on curriculum change at senior cycle. (AS 234, Teachers Union).

Certain respondents were more positive with regard to the changes, but it was often mentioned that the specifications could not be comprehensively evaluated because of the pandemic and its impact on the assessment process.

Overall the feedback with regard to the new specification is positive though it must be mentioned that there were no state examinations in the subject based on the specification yet. As we have gained a certain mastery of the new specification at this stage it is understood that it has the potential to increase the creative side of the work and to promote the students' awareness of themselves as language learners. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

...no assessment has been done on this policy or on the specification yet because the students did not get an opportunity to sit any exams yet due to the pandemic. (AS 223, Language Planning).

The L1 and L2 specifications have been implemented in post-primary schools since 2017 and they were to be examined for the first time in 2020 but due to the COVID 19 pandemic the Junior Cycle examinations were cancelled in 2020 and 2021. Because these examinations have not happened yet, and because there has been no review of them, a proper judgement cannot be made with regard to the specifications and whether they are succeeding or not. (AS 91, Education Organisation).

One submission made reference to the challenge that would arise if a student moved from an English-medium school to an Irish-medium school.

There are challenges when students change schools, even students who transfer from an Aonad Gaeilge (Irish Unit) to the school, because there is a big gap in the standard, they and their fellow students had in the Gaeltacht school that is implementing the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Another submission referenced the challenge Gaeltacht schools would face when trying to provide both specifications.

However, it is not an advantage that the students in the Irish Stream have to do L1 when the students in the English Stream do L2 at Junior Cycle level. We have to teach both courses in the one classroom. We are a small school, and the allocation of teaching hours is limited, therefore we have no other option. Both students and parents understand that the L1 course is more difficult, but we impress upon them that there are advantages to it as resulting from it they will have a better standard of Irish that will be of benefit to them when they engage with Leaving Certificate Irish. The same point cannot be made with regard to L1 and L2 at Leaving Cert level. (AS 88, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Another submission was of the opinion that the new specifications had an impact on parents'/students' decisions to choose education through Irish.

Within the past two years I have seen fewer students applying for the Irish-medium Unit. The L1/L2 curriculum is the reason for this. This curriculum has been in place for a few years now and at this point students have experience with the curriculum, a bad experience. I hear stories from students saying it is not fair that they had to do a more difficult curriculum in the Irish-medium Unit. They tell their brothers and sisters in the primary schools this and I see that they plan not to join the Irish-medium Unit. I hear from parents that the students are under too much pressure as a result of the L1 curriculum, that their children should not do the Irish-medium Unit as a result. They tell me, what is the point of doing extra work if there are no higher grades available? (AS 49, An Individual).

5.2.2 LITERATURE

Many submissions, from teachers mainly, described the experience they had with the Junior Cycle literature. A comparison was made between that experience and the developments planned for the Senior Cycle. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction that the literature lists were not available in a timely manner.

For example, as you know, (because we as the Irish Department of the school sent a complaint to you about it in November 2017), in the first year of the new specification, ~~the~~ teachers did not get proper notice about the choice of texts they would have, to give them an opportunity to read/select/prepare them beforehand. We received the list of texts for 1st year on the 30th of August 2017. We were already in school, teaching that particular group. We received the list for 2nd + 3rd year in May 2018, at the end of the school year, which put pressure on us to include students as part of the decision-making process for some texts, such as novels, and there were big difficulties with ordering books for the following August (and some of them - the plays for example - were out of print). In our opinion, the L1 literature course for the Junior Cycle, as it is currently, is too long to ensure proper language acquisition for L1 students outside the Gaeltacht, and I would be certain that that would be a matter for consideration for any review of the Junior course in future. (AS 14, Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste).

Many of the submissions that referred to the literature suggested that there was too much literature on the course which added to the students' workload. According to those submissions the focus on the literature impeded development of the spoken language. Furthermore, it was claimed that the literature burden stifled the students' interest in both the literature and the language.

Has NCCA not taken note of feedback from teachers on the new Junior Cycle? There has been plenty of discussion with facilitators at in-service days. The focus on texts and reading is completely unrealistic. This approach might work with a class of high-achieving, hard-working students, but it won't work in the majority of classrooms. The teachers will end up translating a lot of the texts in order to get the work ""covered."" Class time is so limited - every hour spent reading and dissecting a text is an hour less speaking the language. (AS 157, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Schools have said that there is too much literature to cover, that too much pressure is put on students and therefore that any enjoyment of the experience is ruined. Why is there a need for such a long list, rather than more in-depth study of a shorter literature list. (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

Excessive amount of literature in both specifications: This is probably the most prevalent concern of teachers. It is excessively demanding of students and undermines the emphasis on acquisition of oral/aural communication skills. The over emphasis on literature is demoralising students in the opinion of many teachers. Some of the statements in [the union's] research include: "New course in Gaeilge has far too much literature leaving very little space for oral and listening practice. Inservice constantly promotes the new course but I feel the workload

of literature leaves the students very anxious. The Gaeilge specification is overloaded with literature. It is very stressful trying to teach Higher Level Gaeilge with the amount of literature on the course while trying to develop other skills needed for students to be able to complete CBA's." (AS 234, Teachers Union).

It was also claimed that the amount of literature to be covered had a negative impact on the teachers' experience and motivation.

When I started teaching in 2014 I had a desire to go into the classroom every day. Though there wasn't much Irish in [the local area] it was easy to motivate students using language games. It was easy for them to see progress when they were able to have a longer conversation on a topic or when they got a few extra questions right in class. But now? I hate going into the classroom and teaching poetry and short stories to students that are not even able to write a sentence or answer a basic question. The new Junior Cycle is killing the language and this new Leaving Certificate will completely finish it. (AS 183, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

When certain respondents were commenting on the literature to be covered, reference was made to the works selected for the literature lists and how easy it was to access them.

There was not enough from the Gaeltacht on the literature list e.g., modern songs from the Gaeltacht (that were composed in the last 50 years for example). (AS 57, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

There is too much literature on the course. Many of the texts do not have literary merit. They are not enjoyable for young people, (or for the teachers who are teaching them!) A lot of the material is not easily found. (It is clear that equality with regard to dialect and publishers was the objective in the selection of texts, rather than quality). The sources are too scattered, and a lot of time was spent searching for them. In terms of daily practices, it is not effective to be copying and handing out all the basic instructional material. That is fine for additional notes etc. Irish teachers should not have to do it. It is not so for English or other languages for which written texts are easily available in one book. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Reference was also made to the role the literature would have in the state assessment and to the negative impact that rote learning could have on teaching and learning.

Firstly, it is not credible to argue that the personal responses of students to these texts will not include a heavy reliance on pre-prepared phrases and paragraphs which have been rote-learned. Worse still, for many students with teachers that can accurately predict the exam, rote learning of entire answers to questions in this section will see many students achieve full marks in this section without ever understanding or even believing the arguments that they put on paper. This is the current situation for this section. The 'personal responses' of

students are not personal responses at all, they are merely the pre-prepared answers given to them by their teachers for the purpose of rote learning and regurgitation in a high-pressure, high-stakes, stress-laden exam. To continue as such with an increase in marks awarded for this section would represent a lost opportunity to tailor the way that students are required to engage with literary texts. (AS 193, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

This unease led to requests that research be conducted on the use of literature in the Irish language classroom.

It would also be important to first analyse how the literature approach is succeeding in the junior cycle Irish course first. One aim of the Junior Cycle course is that all learning will stem from the literature. It would be important to research this comprehensively to see if that approach is succeeding on a practical level or if it is failing? It should also be known if it is planned to have the same system in place for the Senior Cycle literature. There is also a need for research to ensure that there would be enough time for teachers and students to comfortably cover all the texts mentioned in the draft specifications within the period of time made available for Irish, taking into account all the other learning that is to be completed. Strong dissatisfaction was expressed that there were too many texts to be covered in Junior Cycle level for example. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

5.2.3 ASSESSMENT

Many submissions expressed opinions with regard to the assessment system at Junior Cycle level. Classroom-based assessments along with examination papers were mentioned and disappointment was expressed that there was no oral examination.

5.2.4 EXAMINATION PAPERS

Certain submissions expressed their disappointment in relation to the sample examination papers. Overall, it was thought that the paper was too challenging and that it disheartened and worried students. Disappointment was also expressed that the papers were not made available in a timely manner.

A sample paper that was too long, too wordy, and too complicated. It would even terrify the good students and it would result in people who would be able to achieve a reasonably high standard moving to Ordinary level. (AS 57, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

In my opinion this paper is unbelievable. A fierce challenge for the Gaeltacht children. Take the Reading Comprehension for example. Very heavy altogether. To make a long story short - I am of the opinion that the LI paper for third year is more difficult than the current Leaving Certificate. (Taking age etc. into account) It is much too difficult for a large number of students. (AS 85, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

I am relieved that the Junior Cycle is cancelled and that my teachers are in charge of assessment. They understand what we have and have not done. They put an exam together that accommodates us. The State Examinations Commission do the opposite. When we saw the sample papers, we got a fright. There is no clear guidance for the exam. As a young person that puts a huge amount of pressure on us. (AS 172, Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The late issue of sample marking papers has really been upsetting for teachers of Gaeilge and has influenced their response to the draft senior cycle specifications. More to the point, it has undermined their trust in the change process overall. It would also appear that many teachers felt that the sample paper provided for both levels was far too difficult, indicating to teachers that the SEC was 'out of touch' with the specifications. "The SEC did not inform teachers until November 2019 as to the allocation of marks and layout of the Gaeilge exam paper for 2020.... We were teaching a programme not knowing the assessment criteria of the formal exam. The Irish Junior Cert Higher Level sample paper was impossible and good Leaving Cert students would struggle with this paper. Language of Reflection required in Gaeilge is very difficult for students. No thought in Sample Papers for former Foundation Level students of Irish." (AS 234, Teachers Union).

5.2.5 CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENTS (CBAS) AND THE LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

Some submissions expressed opinions with regard to the classroom-based assessments. It was mentioned that they were a waste of time and that they put too much pressure on schools, on teachers and on students.

Just like in other subjects, the CBAs are a waste of time and human resources. They put pressure on school resources, especially computer rooms and equipment. There is more paperwork and organisation and all that stress is added to when depending on additional cooperation between different groups. They intrude on the continuity of teaching within the subject and outside it in other subjects when they are engaging with them. They intrude on extracurricular activities that would provide the same educational benefits. By assessing them, a different and enjoyable educational experience is being depleted. In our opinion there is already too much assessment. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

People were also positive with regard to the CBA process.

Students got on well with finishing Classroom-Based Assessments satisfactorily and it seemed that they enjoyed and benefited from being active in the learning. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Another submission mentioned that the descriptors were insufficient as a method of grading/feedback.

... there is the attitude that a descriptor is not enough as acknowledgement for the amount of work that is done to fulfil the criteria. A review of this approach is needed. (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

Various opinions were also expressed with regard to the Language Portfolio.

We as a Department are very concerned about the Language Portfolio. It is clear to us and to other teachers around the country other teachers that this work is not worthwhile at Junior Cycle level. It is a waste of time for the students, and it puts a lot of pressure on them without having any marks being awarded for it! (AS 212, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

The language portfolio is a good idea... the approach was not right but the understanding that such a thing would help children (correcting and re-correcting etc.) was praiseworthy. (AS 57, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

5.2.6 ORAL EXAMINATION

Many submissions mentioned that it is a source of disappointment that there is no oral examination as part of the Junior Cycle formal assessment. It was thought that this devalued the importance of spoken language and consequently had implications for the development of spoken language. Therefore, it was suggested an oral examination be introduced.

The Oral examination should also be brought back at Junior Cycle level. (AS 178, Language Planning).

The use of Irish as a spoken language in the Junior Cycle has been demoted as it has no emphasis on assessment of spoken language. There is a need to wait for a formal review of the Junior Cycle before going ahead with developing and broadening that model to the senior cycle, especially when widespread concern has been expressed with regard to it in the Gaeltacht communities. (AS 230, Schools Organisation).

An end was put to the oral examination in the Junior Cycle and that was a disastrous step backwards... That an Oral Examination would be provided for the Junior Cycle to emphasise the revival of the speaking of the language and to implement continuity of teaching and learning between the two cycles. (AS 232, Teachers Organisation).

There is no oral examination. That is a huge deficiency in the learning of the language. There is no acknowledgement of the spoken language in the mark students receive from the SEC. A survey published by An Gréasán in March 2020 showed that 97% of Irish teachers believe that spoken work should count for a percentage of the final mark on the certificate from the State Examinations Commission. (AS 36, Irish Language Organisation).

Schools are worried about the lack of acknowledgement that is given to spoken Irish. With the old system, the 40% for the oral examination enticed students to take the language at Higher Level and to see Irish as a living language. Though it is said that the spoken element is emphasised throughout the learning, it is not enough. In order to entice students and to foster a love for the language the spoken language should be acknowledged in the assessment. (AS 71, Schools Organisation).

The decision not to have an oral examination as part of the Junior Cycle course, and therefore not giving acknowledgement to the work students do on the spoken language in the grade awarded for the course's final examination, is a big cause for concern. That does not encourage those who learn Irish outside the Gaeltacht nor does it give acknowledgement or encourage native speakers or other fluent speakers to improve their ability in the language. There is a need to review this basic aspect of language acquisition in the education system once a cohort of students has sat the first Junior Certificate examination in the normal manner. (AS 52, Irish College).

5.3 OTHER SUGGESTIONS AND OPINIONS

In this section general suggestions and opinions that emerged in the submissions, that were not directly related to the subject matter of the draft specifications and their impact, will be explored.

5.3.1 THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES (CEFR)

A significant number of the submissions referred to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In order to ensure effective language teaching and learning many respondents mentioned that in order to adhere to best practice the specifications, or any other Irish course, should be aligned with CEFR. It was stated that CEFR is mentioned in the *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* policy.

This alignment would help with continuity with regard to promoting the learning of Irish in the education system. In addition, it was acknowledged that CEFR is a recognised international benchmark that would bring clarity and certainty to the state system, to third level institutes etc. (here and abroad) with regard to language abilities. It was acknowledged that CEFR was mentioned in the Junior Cycle specifications but that it was not mentioned in the specifications for the Senior Cycle. One submission comprehensively examined the importance of the various aspects of CEFR and how it could be used for curriculum specifications.

It is very important to ensure that there will be continuity and gradual progression in the learning goals that are to be achieved in Irish at every level of the education system, e.g., from primary school to secondary, from the Junior Cycle to the Senior Cycle, and from the Leaving Certificate to third level. The Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is the most commonly used system internationally to ensure continuity. It is proposed in the Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 policy that every course and language examination that related to foreign languages would be linked to CEFR, for the sake of continuity and transparency... Here are some additional suggestions with regard to linking the Leaving Certificate Irish specifications with CEFR:

- If the specifications are aligned with CEFR, the link between the specifications and CEFR should be clear and transparent. It is not sufficient to use the 'B1' or 'B2' level labels. Reference should be made to the various scales of ability associated with particular communication activities and specific language skills. The entire CEFR document should be used (especially chapter 3 in the 2020 version) to do this, rather than the holistic scales that do not give a summary of the skills.*
- The CEFR descriptions must be adapted to the Leaving Certificate and Irish context. This means that the descriptions of communicative activities need to be adapted to the sociolinguistic context of Irish, and that the language skills associated with Irish (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) should be further defined, as appropriate.*
- Use should be made of the flexibility of CEFR to accommodate students who have different needs and ability profiles. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).*

The European Framework for Languages should be brought in as a standard. Students' fluency is not being properly analysed, no matter what language it is. That will help the colleges and employers in future to know a particular student's language skills. (AS 121, An Individual).

We think this suggestion that the Irish specification be linked to CEFR is extremely important. This will have plenty of advantages, for example it will be a great help to the state when they are trying to hire additional staff with Irish to the civil service. (WS 120, Third Level Students Association).

Because the CEFR levels are used globally, qualifications that are linked to those levels are transparent. Teachers, learners, third level institutes and employers understand what A2 ability in French, or a B1 qualification in German means. This adds to the continuity from course to course, from language to language and from one level of the education system to another. According to the national policy for foreign languages in the education system in Ireland, every language exam should be linked to CEFR. Though Irish is not part of that policy, almost every course and language qualification from secondary school level to third level are now aligned with CEFR. The new Irish draft specification for the Leaving Cert is an exception, which means that there is an inconsistency between it and other stages that come after it in Irish at third level. (AS 140, Irish Language Organisation).

The proposed new specifications do not appear to be aligned with government policy on the Irish language. The specifications are not linked in a transparent manner with the common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an approach recommended in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language and also in the Department of Education's own strategy for the teaching of modern languages Languages Connect. (AS 32, An Individual).

The various levels could be linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which would assure that the specifications would be aligned with other government policies for the language in a transparent manner, which is being done in plenty of other countries. This would mean that a particular standard could be set down (e.g., B2) for students who wish to study Irish at third level, and in that way, it will be ensured that there will be continuity in the education system between second and third level and that students who will be undertaking Irish at third level will have the same basic ability. (AS 103, State Agency).

It is proposed that the L1 & L2 concept be set aside and that we seriously look at language acquisition in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language and create a Specification/Curriculum/Syllabus based on the TEG model but for it to be age appropriate. An approach like this would help learners to develop language skills properly. The goal of CEFR is to enable learners to be able to use the language effectively in their academic, professional and social lives after the course, rather than preparing learners for the examination. (AS 80, Education Organisation).

5.3.2 THE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND ENGLISH MODEL

A significant number of submissions suggested that the Modern Foreign Languages model be used. People were of the opinion that this would encourage teachers to share good practice and that it would place an emphasis on the spoken language.

It is recommended that the Learning Outcomes in Irish be consistent with the Learning Outcomes in the other languages at Senior Cycle. This would align with possibilities for sharing good practices across languages which would benefit the transfer of skills and in developing the in-depth understanding of the student. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

We have to develop the modern foreign languages communicative method – and apply it willingly and innovatively because we are coming from a really bad place – and we ourselves are guilty. (AS 168, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Assess multiple shorter composition tasks The current required length of the composition, 500 - 600 words, is not fit-for-purpose and is the greatest perpetrator of memorisation. Setting multiple tasks that are more specific with a much smaller word count requirement would discourage rote learning and encourage students to actually learn the skills of composing and creativity. This suggestion is inspired by my experience with Leaving Certificate French, in which several short writing tasks are assessed. My ability to write better on-the-spot in French as opposed to Irish, which I've been learning for much longer, exemplifies the benefit of this mode of assessment. (AS 208, Student - Unspecified).

I also teach Spanish and I really enjoy the freedom we have in class to try new activities, to explore the vast wealth of resources available to us and to give the pupils the opportunity to speak in class and to speak to each other. Getting them to speak in particular takes time and practice and patience. If we must spend time on texts

and indeed the portfolio, the opportunities for natural conversation will disappear. I remember attending in-service several years ago when the marks for the oral were increased. We learned lots of ways to encourage the students to talk, to improve their vocabulary, to improve their confidence and to really enjoy Irish class. (AS 151, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

Other submissions claimed that the Irish specification should reflect the English specification in terms of how challenging it is and in terms of literature.

*I implore that Irish be taught in the Leaving Certificate as English is taught. I therefore implore that there would be two levels, Intermediate level, and Higher level, and that the same standard would be expected from students in Irish as is expected in English. I suggest that the Irish syllabus reflect the English syllabus throughout. Where there is a Shakespeare play on the English Syllabus, I recommend that *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* be on the Irish syllabus. In the case where there is a film on the English syllabus, I recommend that there be a play on the Irish syllabus. I suggest that there be a continuous link between both subjects so that the Irish syllabus be developed as the English syllabus is developed, and that both subjects be kept on the same level at all times. (AS 111, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaeltacht Post-primary School).*

The syllabus needs to reflect the English syllabus for Senior Cycle and the same challenge that would be expected from a native English speaker be given to the native speaker. For the native speaker and for good Irish speakers a course needs to be provided that is suitable and that strengthens their language skills and that develops their thinking skills and that is equal with the English syllabus. (AS 102, An Individual).

5.3.3 ADDITIONAL CAO POINTS

A large number of submissions referred to having the appropriate compensation for students in Irish-medium post-primary schools if they had to take a more challenging Irish course than in English-medium post-primary schools. There would be a need for appropriate reward to entice students in Irish-medium settings to undertake the L1 specification. If such compensation was not available, students would take the L2 specification because it would not be as challenging and therefore easier to get CAO points. A large number of submissions claimed that additional points be available for the L1 specification as is the case with mathematics. In many submissions, the pressure and the importance of the Leaving Certificate examinations and CAO points were referred to.

That being said, it is essential that incentives and compensation are available to students that undertake a more difficult course, for example bonus points. There is concern that the new course would be destined for failure if there is no compensation... Teachers have expressed concern that intermediate level students will not be happy to take a more challenging course without any compensation. This could cause grave damage to Gaeltacht

areas and to Irish-medium education. This issue must be addressed as part of the process. (AS 80, Education Organisation).

The [secondary students association] does not support the general introduction of bonus marks for any subject however we acknowledge that the exceptional circumstances created by the split of L1 and L2 for Leaving Certificate do require a form of compensation for students only bonus marks could supply. (AS 97, Secondary Students Association).

No choice or compensation for sitting a more difficult exam than their counterparts attending English medium schools. This is discrimination against students attending Irish medium schools. The Leaving cert is a standardised exam and should be a level playing pitch for all. Assessment has never been adjusted according to perceived educational advantages or achievements. It is unprecedented that the students competing in the points race who have chosen a more challenging route for their own betterment and in the interest of the Irish language are then forced to participate at a more difficult level than their counterparts in the same race, without any official recognition. It is unfair and simply wrong! (AS 109, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaelcholáiste).

Why should students take a more difficult course for the same points? Why should students and parents place more pressure and hassle on themselves without compensation? The truth of the matter is that the points system is the biggest concern for every student and parent when they are choosing Leaving Certificate subjects. If bonus CAO points are not provided (as in Maths) for students who do L1 it will not be chosen for the Leaving Cert. (AS 48, Language Planning).

With the proposed curriculum, it would be reasonable that a student would select the L2 course, in order to achieve high marks, rather than focusing on L1 and doing additional work that would result in the same points: choosing L2 would leave additional time to spend on studying English in order to increase the points in that subject. As a result of having different systems in place for both languages, the learning of English would have an advantage in that access to an enriched Irish curriculum, both in the Gaeltacht and outside of it, would be reduced instead of the opposite. If different learning structures are to be applied to Irish and English language communities, there would be a need for technical adjustments in the points system similar to what is in place for mathematics. (AS 51, An Individual).

There is an L1 specification for us as a Gaeltacht school & an L2 specification for the English-medium schools. The way things currently stand since the publication of both specifications this week, students in L2 schools will get the same mark / grade that will be awarded to students in L1 schools. Many of us feel that this bears inequality for the youth of the Gaeltacht when they are taking a course that will be more challenging than that of students in L2 schools. They earn acknowledgement for the additional work as happens with the bonus points in Mathematics. What reason does the NCCA for wanting to put the native speaker at a disadvantage? (AS 64, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

This discussion is taking place in a vacuum. These new courses cannot be discussed without putting them in the context of the system in which they will be applied. We might as well be honest with ourselves, rather than pretend, and accept that Leaving Cert points are the beginning and end of the education system, the Leaving Cert system anyway, in this country. It is not the young person, it is not the language, it is not the school, it is not the teachers, the parents, the community, the school's area or even the education itself. But Leaving Cert points. Therefore, we have to discuss the new courses in that context. (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

Having fluent Irish is a punishment. This decision ignores the simple fact that this will drive the Gaeil from the Gaelcholáistí. There is no encouragement here for the native Irish speaker nor for the Irish learner. Instead of going to a Gaelcholáiste, doing a new obscure L1 course and getting fewer points in the Leaving Cert, native Irish speakers and learners alike will want to go to the English-medium school, and get higher points. (AS 70, Group of Students in a Gaelcholáiste).

When one submission referred to the CAO points, it mentions a reference to incentives in the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2016)*.

When you think of the pressure Leaving Certificate students are under and of the emphasis placed on CAO points, it will be extremely difficult to encourage Gaeltacht students and Gaelcholáistí to take the L1 course, a course that will be more challenging, rather than the L2 course. You would imagine that this much would be true especially in the case of students who will not want to, or have the capacity to, take the L1 higher level course – more CAO points would be available to them if they were to do the L2 higher level course in place instead of the L1 ordinary level. Actions to encourage students to choose the L1 course over L2 are not discussed in the L1 specification at all, and though such actions are referenced in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education (p. 35), they are actions that only a small number of students (who would achieve high marks in the examination) would benefit from and therefore it is not considered that they would entice the majority of students in Gaeltacht schools or in Gaelcholáistí. It was proposed that:

- *incentives would be provided to entice Gaeltacht and Gaelcholáiste students to take the L1 specification instead of the L2 specification.*
- *bonus points for the CAO would be among those incentives (the same way bonus points were brought in for higher level mathematics in 2012).*

(AS 103, State Agency).

There was one submission that was strongly against awarding additional CAO points.

It is a cause of concern for [teachers organisation] that additional points are being sought – bonus points – for students who take the L1 specification, unlike students who would undertake the L2 specification. We would be strongly against such a suggestion. It would give an additional advantage where there are plenty of advantages already. In schools that can't provide L1, especially DEIS schools, students would be at a greater disadvantage.

The range of disadvantages that they currently experience would be broadened. Along with that, the awarding of additional points would contradict the governments and the department's policies with regard to inclusion and equality in curriculum and assessment matters... We would not like that sort of privilege gap to be opened in terms of Irish between L1 and L2 schools. (AS 232, Teachers Organisation).

One submission was concerned that the specifications could not be appropriately evaluated due to the issue of additional points.

It is difficult to differentiate between the implications of the specification for the school's students or the implications of bad publicity that would stem from the controversy with regard to the additional workload without any additional compensation marks. That is a pity because the specification should be evaluated on its own merit rather than wrestling with political/educational controversies. However, there is a danger that students would change schools to take the L2 specification in a non-L1 school and that would be a pity, but if an emphasis was placed on the celebration of the language and on the long-term advantages with L1 there is a chance that it could be overcome. (AS 129, Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

5.3.4 OTHER MODELS TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING/LEARNING OF IRISH

A discussion document under the auspices of Conradh na Gaeilge was published in October 2021 (Hyland and Uí Uiginn, 2021). This discussion document was part of one written submission (AS 140, Irish Organisation). Two possible models were presented in the discussion paper that could, according to the authors, enhance the learning of Irish. A large number of submissions made reference to this discussion document and submissions often took whole extracts, word for word, from the document with regard to both suggestions.

5.3.4.1 FOUR LEVELS

The first model in the discussion document was the creation of a system in which there would be four levels rather than the three that are there currently. There would be additional CAO points available for the top-level course.

Option 1 - Provide new specifications at the following four levels:

- *Foundation level*
- *Ordinary level*
- *Higher level*
- *Advanced level – a new course aimed at a higher standard in oral and written language skills along with the study of a broader range of Irish literature, literary history and culture.*

Option 1 would have the following advantages:

- 1. Students in L1 schools would have the option of taking the examination at Advanced Level if they wished and it would also be open to students in L2 schools. Unlike Maths and Applied Maths, it would not be an additional subject but another level that meets the learning needs of a cohort of students whose learning needs have not been adequately met at senior cycle level to date.*
- 2. There are four levels under this model as with the draft L1 and L2 specifications, but these levels respond in a more appropriate fashion, in our view, to the various learning cohorts.*
- 3. It eliminates the need for an ordinary level L1 exam, an exam for which there would, in all likelihood, be little or no demand.*
- 4. It would ensure that the cohort of students currently taking Irish at Foundation level would have their learning needs met.*
- 5. The various levels could be linked in a transparent way to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, ensuring that the specifications are aligned with other government language policies.*

The specifications at these various levels would be open to all students who wish to undertake them, and additional CAO points would have to be available for those who choose the examination at Advanced Level to compensate for the additional work that would be involved in studying for an exam at this level and to incentivise students to undertake the course. (AS 140, Irish Language Organisation).

A large number of submissions supported the basic concept of this model's concept. In many cases respondents stated they were supporting the authors or Conradh na Gaeilge's suggestions. In other cases, whole extracts were taken from the discussion document word for word.

The Advanced level would consist of an innovative course that would be focused on a high standard of spoken and written language along with information on aspects of the scholarship, literature and life of Irish. It is proposed that a certain amount of additional CAO points be made available to those who would choose the Advanced level examination as compensation for the significant additional work that would accompany this specification. There is a similar system already in place in mathematics with regard to the additional points. This system would be fair and progressive and there would be a suitable advantage available to students for doing additional work at a higher level. However, without these bonus marks there is a danger that students – in Gaeltacht schools, Gaelcholáistí and other schools – would choose a course at a lower level, which would contradict the aim we all have, that is to provide a course that would aid the country's students to attain a high level of ability in Irish. (AS 52, Irish College).

I strongly support the recommendations made in the discussion document prepared by Fíona Uí Uiginn and Áine Hyland, which corresponds to the Senior Cycle L1 and L2 Irish draft specifications which were published for a consultation carried out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. I think that this discussion document is very comprehensive and that the NCCA should take on board every recommendation contained within it... The specifications at these different levels would be open to every student who wished to take them

and there would be a certain amount of additional CAO points available to those who choose the examination at Advanced level as compensation for the additional work that would accompany this specification. (AS 77, An Individual).

Provide new specifications at the following four levels: (i) Foundation level, (ii) Ordinary level, (iii) Higher level AND (iv) Advanced level - a new course aimed at a higher standard in oral and written language skills along with the study of a broader range of Irish literature, literary history and culture. Additional CAO points should apply for those who choose the examination at Advanced level to compensate for the additional work involved and to incentivise students to undertake the course. (AS 54, Parent with a Son/Daughter in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

However, there was one submission that expressed concern with regard to that suggestion.

Why would I be against any additional level... advanced level, for example... Plenty of Gaeltacht schools are small... it is not feasible to have one person teaching four levels in a class and that is what would happen with "advanced level". It will not benefit the children either. The teacher will not be able to accommodate them. (AS 57, Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

5.3.4.2 AN ADDITIONAL COURSE

The second possible model presented was the creation of a new subject that would focus on literature and language enrichment. This course would run parallel to the Irish language course which would be focused on language skills. Comparisons were made with how mathematics is complemented by applied mathematics.

Option 2 - Provide specifications at the following three levels:

- *Foundation level*
- *Ordinary level*
- *Higher level*

AND

Develop a new Saíocht agus Litríocht na Gaeilge which would be available to a cohort of students who would be interested in undertaking this course of study based on the same model as Maths / Applied Maths currently available to students. This subject, Irish Language, Culture and Literature would be available to all students and CAO points would apply to it in the same ways as happens with Maths / Applied Maths.

Option 2 framing would have the following advantages:

1. *Students in L1 schools would have the option of taking the subject **Irish Language, Culture and Literature** and it would also be an option for students in L2 schools. The new specification would meet the learning needs of a cohort of students who have not been properly catered for at senior cycle level to date.*

2. *This model would involve 3 levels for Irish and an optional additional subject at one level.*
3. *It eliminates the need for an ordinary level L1 exam, an exam for which there would, in all likelihood be little or no demand.*
4. *It would ensure that the cohort of students currently catered for by Foundation level would have their learning needs met.*
5. *The various levels could be linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which would ensure that the specifications were aligned in a transparent way with other state policies for the language.*
6. *This approach would be supported by politicians as this model has emerged as a solution in the discussions on this issue at the Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Irish Speaking Community. (AS 140, Irish Language Organisation).*

A large number of submissions supported the concept of this model. In many cases respondents stated they were supporting the suggestions of the authors or of Conradh na Gaeilge. In other cases, whole extracts were taken from the discussion document word for word.

Two subjects for the leaving cert: - one subject - Irish Communication - that every student would study (having foundation, ordinary and higher levels) and that the subject be based on the Common European Framework of Reference. - the other subject - Irish Scholarship and Literature - which would be an optional subject like applied maths. (AS 117, Irish Language Organisation).

I think the best reform would be one that focuses on the language itself as the current modern foreign language exams do. An optional subject could be created where students with a high standard of Irish could opt to study Irish literature as a second Leaving Cert. subject, should they wish to do so. I believe this would better cater to all students and have a positive outcome for both our students and the language itself. (AS 204, Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

...an additional optional subject based on the same model as Maths/Applied Maths. Additional CAO points should apply for those who choose the optional extra subject, based on the same principle as Maths/Applied Maths. (AS 54, Parent with a Son/Daughter in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

I am a student in transition year and I would like to express to you that I am against the L1 and L2 system. I am supporting Conradh na Gaeilge and other similar organisations' ideas with regard to the system. (AS 61, Student - Unspecified).

Certain submissions proposed additional CAO points for the course that would be based on the literature and scholarship of the language.

That the Irish curriculum in the Leaving Cert be split in two parts: part 1 as basic functional Irish, focused on conversation, communication and simple grammar and part 2 where there would be an emphasis on literature, the history of Irish and to get a more in-depth knowledge of the language BUT that there would be additional marks / points given to students who take this additional optional part of the course. (AS 123, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaeltacht Post-primary School).

There was a mix of suggested models in other submissions.

A common Higher level course for the entire country in Communicative Irish with an emphasis on spoken Irish and greater marks for this part. An additional paper/additional questions in Irish on ~~the~~ literature which would give additional points to the students who were interested in it. There would be an emphasis on spoken Irish for the whole country - which is required and would have high marks going for it. Students with good Irish would still have an advantage in earning high marks on this paper. With this there would be a focus on Spoken Irish, creating a speaking community. There would be no need for students who do not have an interest in literature to take the additional paper. This is how the 'Additional literature' should be applied. An additional paper/new Leaving Certificate Higher level short course could be implemented which would meet the needs of learners in Irish-medium/Gaeltacht schools for example. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

5.3.5 POSSIBILITIES OF THE CURRENT MODEL

Some submissions referred to the current Irish syllabuses and the possibility to reform them rather than undertaking substantial changes.

Return to three papers. Higher, Ordinary and Foundation or rename them to flag change, if it would be deemed necessary. Rethink the make up and content of each allowing all to achieve the level of paper they wish to take. This will allow equity of achievement among the population of students taking Irish at second level. (AS 87, An Individual).

There would be different Leaving Certificate examinations in a model of two specifications, but it was not mentioned that there would be any difference between them with regard to the points system. Neither was it implied that any consideration was made on amending the current curriculum at Foundation, Ordinary, and Higher level as an alternative to bringing in an entirely new scheme. (AS 51, An Individual).

I strongly advise a re-evaluation of this proposal. To be honest there is little wrong with the current course. Perhaps, more oral/project work and a little less literature and we are on to a winner. (AS 224, Irish Teacher - Unspecified).

We are happy with how Irish is in the Leaving Cert currently with a high rate of students undertaking Irish at higher level in the local secondary school... especially in comparison with English as a major language and the foreign languages. (AS 135, Language Planning).

5.3.6 PILOTING

A significant number of submissions referred to the importance of implementing the changes on a phased basis. Links were made with the importance of providing appropriate levels of continuing professional development and teaching resources. The importance of first providing a pilot scheme to ensure that the new course would be effective at the various levels was mentioned.

It recommended that a realistic timeline be developed for introducing any new specification, taking into account a pilot period and that CPD for teachers is to be included. (AS 107, Irish Language Organisation).

It is proposed that work be done with different schools on a pilot basis over an implementation period (two years) to monitor the effect of the specification in realistic and practical settings. It is proposed that these schools be selected on a geographic basis, based on economic status, number of students, the schools' language of instruction and their students' genders. Regular monitoring must be done on the progress before a definite final specification is agreed upon. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

The new course should be piloted in a small number of schools before it is implemented around the country. (AS 136, Higher Education Institute).

I don't know why you are not proposing a pilot scheme. (AS 146, An Individual).

Why was a pilot scheme not implemented first to find out if it is suitable as was done in Maths and in PE. (AS 171, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

5.3.6 IMPACT OF LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

Many submissions referred to the large impact the Leaving Certificate examinations have on schools, students, teachers, and parents. It was claimed that strategic decisions are made in order to increase the students' CAO points. According to many respondents, the significance of the Leaving Certificate must be taken into account when substantial changes are being planned for the education system.

These new courses cannot be discussed without putting them in the context of the system in which they will be applied. We might as well be honest with ourselves, rather than pretend, and accept that Leaving Cert points are the beginning and end of the education system, the Leaving Cert system anyway, in this country. It is not the young person, it is not the language, it is not the school, it is not the teachers, the parents, the community, the

school's area or even the education itself. But Leaving Cert points. Therefore, we have to discuss the new courses in that context. (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

The Leaving Certificate examination is central to the post-primary system, and to the education system as a whole, and it has a pivotal impact on every aspect of the system. This impact relates to students, teachers, parents, the third level and to the community as a whole. The examination has a general impact on Irish in broader life and it plays a role with regard to the functioning of state policies in relation to Irish and the Gaeltacht. (AS 56, An Individual).

We have all understood for a long time that the Leaving Cert is of great importance in every student's life, and it is talked about and mentioned from the first day they attend second level. It has a big impact on their lives when they are choosing a profession, while they are dealing with the Central Applications Office, and with the points system and the competition and pressure they bring. (AS 79, Irish College).

A teaching and learning programme is set out according to what is specified in the syllabuses and because points for getting into third level courses is the main aim most students and their parents have, unfortunately, school staff have no choice but to take that desire into consideration while implementing their Irish programme, Gaeltacht settings included. (AS 99, Language Planning).

It goes without saying that the Leaving Certificate examination has a huge impact on the education system as a whole, on the teachers' teaching approach and on the strategic choices students make to achieve the highest number of points. (AS 91, Education Organisation).

5.4 OPINIONS ON THE CONSULTATION

Many submissions revealed opinions with regard to the timeline and design of the consultation. A number of respondents suggested that a new consultation be undertaken.

5.4.1 TIMELINE

Many submissions expressed their unease with the timeline of the consultation. Certain respondents were of the opinion that changes should not be made, nor should consultations be held, because a review of the Junior Cycle changes has not been completed yet. Some of the submissions referred to what is mentioned in the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2016)* with regard to developing L1 and L2 specifications for the Senior Cycle. Other respondents were of the opinion that the pandemic interfered with the implementation of the specifications, the assessment process in particular. According to them, it was not appropriate to hold a consultation. Some respondents claimed the pandemic impacted the effectiveness of the consultation.

I think that any decision with regard to a new specification for Irish in the senior cycle should be put aside until the review of the junior cycle has been carried out and the results of the review made available. (AS 102, An Individual).

The [support service] team is concerned that there is no comprehensive research or details, based on testing, on the effect of the Junior Cycle before undertaking the new Senior Cycle (there was no exam yet). We are of the opinion that no change be made to Senior Cycle before carrying out a comprehensive and broad review of the Junior Cycle. (AS 113, Teacher Support Service).

The following is specifically mentioned in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education: “Work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools”. It is clear that the NCCA’s proposals are completely contradicting this statement; the broader discussion and debate on the suitability of the Leaving Certificate examination as a whole and the ability of the exam to deal with life at present and in the future should be taken into account... (AS 56, An Individual).

As set out in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education (p. 33): “Work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools”. The L1 and L2 specifications were implemented at junior cycle for the first time in 2017, and that cohort were to be examined for the first time in 2020. Due to the implications of Covid-19 the Junior Certificate was cancelled that year and therefore there are no examination results to review in the context of that new specification. It cannot be said for certain that these differentiated specifications ‘are working well in schools’ at junior cycle level and it is proposed that the L1 and L2 specifications are not implemented for senior cycle until a complete review of their implementation at junior cycle has been carried out and until there is evidence that they have a positive impact on students’ ability, practice and language ideology in terms of Irish. (AS 103, State Agency).

The consultation process for Senior Cycle Irish is underway even though no review at Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2 levels has been done. As a consequence of Covid-19, students have yet to do Junior Cycle Irish. We strongly recommend that a full review of Junior Cycle Irish be undertaken before considering any changes to the Senior Cycle. (AS 95, Principals Organisation).

Teachers are under so much pressure already this year not only from the pandemic but from teaching online and in person trying to finish the courses, doing the marks for the L.C. It is harder for teachers to meet with each other to talk about the draft specifications this year. It is unbelievable that you are trying to do this this year. In my opinion you are not thinking of teachers’ mental health. (AS 171, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

[Political party] believes that it is not the right time to carry out the consultation. [Political party] have asked that the consultation be delayed. In a written question that [political party] sent to the Department of Education on 01/04/2021: 'To inquire of the Minister for Education whether she would be happy to broaden the timeframe for the consultation process on the new curriculum proposed for Leaving Certificate Irish so that teachers, schools and principals will be able to properly participate in the process without adding to the pressure under which they are currently working with Covid-19 restrictions, health concerns and new teaching conditions adding to their workload; and does she agree that the appropriate advice cannot be gotten from teachers, students and principals while they are under this immense pressure.' In short, the Department specified that they were aware of the concerns teachers and organisations have and that those questions would be discussed in future. Teachers are always under pressure, however, in this unusual circumstance of the global pandemic, they are under more pressure than they ever were. The department and the NCCA should be aware of this. [The political party] and all the organisations are united in saying that such an important consultation should not be carried out when teachers' proper attention is not on it. (AS 15, Political Party).

We think that the deadline for the consultation and for the implementation of the new course (that is September 2023) should be delayed. It is, without doubt, unsatisfactory that the process is in full swing during a pandemic. (AS 22, Gaelcholáiste).

Certain respondents believed that the changes/consultation should be delayed until systematic changes have been made to the Senior Cycle.

A review is currently under way with regard to the senior cycle. This process should be concluded and a central role for Irish in that model should be ensured, for society in general but especially for the Gaeltacht communities. (AS 73, Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

A review of the Senior Cycle is under way in the education system as a whole, parallel to this consultation of Leaving Cert Irish. It is not easy to understand how to give a proper judgement on one subject, one of the Leaving Cert's core subjects no less, without the results of that review being made available to the public. This approach appears to be putting the cart before the horse. (WS 91, Education Organisation).

At present, work is under way on the senior cycle in parallel. This process should be concluded and a central role for Irish in that model should be ensured, for society in general but especially for the Gaeltacht communities. (AS 230, Schools Organisation).

5.4.2 DESIGN

Certain respondents expressed opinions on the the design of the consultation. Emphasis was placed on the importance of physical meetings and in their absence, it was claimed that certain groups were left at a disadvantage.

It is extremely important that there would be an opportunity to properly discuss any change in the specifications in the community and this cannot be done effectively online. (AS 223, Language Planning).

Participation in this consultation process is dependent more than ever on digital literacy, access to digital devices, and good internet connectivity. This confers an advantage from the outset on well-resourced groups and disadvantages less well-off groups and / or rural participants, including Gaeltacht participants, with poor internet connectivity. Physical public meetings are needed to facilitate in-depth discussion on questions that will have long-term consequences for Irish-language teaching and learning system-wide. Such meetings cannot be carried out due to current restrictions and online surveys, online meetings and online focus groups are not a satisfactory substitute. (AS 24, Irish Language Organisation).

Other respondents were dissatisfied with the input from teachers in the consultation.

The specification was introduced without any proper consultation with teachers. (On paper it could be said that it was done but realistically it was not. The NCCA pulled groups together here and there, suggestions were taken on board, but they were not implemented and they continued with what they wanted). (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Some of the submissions were dissatisfied with the format of the online survey; the terminology/language used, the questions asked and the lack of opportunity to suggest other models.

To get proper feedback from the public on these draft specifications, it is recommended that accurate information in simple, understandable language is provided to the public through the media and through social media, through the schools and playschools and through the network of Language Planning Officers and that they are asked for feedback. (AS 103, State Agency).

The draft specifications are filled with complex terminology and complex language. It is our opinion that before such documents are issues for consultation, they are accessible and free of jargon that will make them inaccessible to a casual reader. (AS 97, Secondary Students Association).

It was often reported to us during the consultation period that it was not easy to engage with the survey without significant expertise on small details of curriculum issues. Indeed, teachers felt that they could not complete it due to the approach and complexity of the questions. An ordinary person or parent had no chance of approaching it knowledgeably or comfortably and as a result, [education organisation] recommended to people that they should write a submission. Accepting that ordinary people do not have experience in writing submissions, and that the complexity of the survey was a barrier for people, there is a strong danger that the number of submissions/feedback received is not consistent with the level of interest in this issue... A significant omission

that was often mentioned with regard to the survey was the biased approach in that there was no flexibility or space to suggest other models, other than L1 and L2. (AS 91, Education Organisation).

I've already completed the survey. I don't believe it addresses any real parental concerns relating to the lack of resources for the fair implementation of T1 in Gaelcholáistí to leaving certificate level. It's a wholly aspirational document. (AS 174, Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaelcholáiste).

Teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the surveys provided by the NCCA as part of the consultation. Dissatisfaction has been expressed with regard to the length and complexity of the surveys. Dissatisfaction has also been expressed that they do not give people a proper opportunity to express their opinions, that the information being sought is very limited and that they do not engage with the main concerns people have with regard to the specifications. This must be addressed. (AS 30, Irish-Language Teachers Organisation).

The design of the methodologies for the online survey could be questioned. The questions/options are biased and there is not proper scope to express opinions. It is looking for assurance rather than information. (AS 65, Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School).

Other respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the approach of other aspects of the consultation.

I attended an NCCA consultation, and it was terribly frustrating. Certain people's opinions and bias (from the facilitator as well who was supposed to be neutral) was allowed to influence the conversation with regard to policies and specifications for Irish as a subject. No heed was paid to good practice, respect for languages, or to research and fact-based and language-centric information in the discussion about Irish. It was pitiful and shameful. Nobody would be expected to put up with insults if I had a personal problem or an insulting opinion about the subject of geography at school, for example. (AS 178, Language Planning).

5.4.3 A NEW CONSULTATION

Certain respondents suggested that this consultation be concluded, and a new consultation be undertaken. In some cases, it was suggested that the specification/curriculum design be started afresh.

In this context we believe that there should be a second consultation and that all the missing information be made available as part of this second consultation. Literature lists, sample papers, marking schemes, information about the incentive for students who take the L1 course, and answers to all of the other basic questions should be included. (AS 228, Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School).

From the analysis that can be done on the public controversy with regard to the consultation, it is clear that the public and public organisations are doubtful of the evidence base that lays the foundation for these draft specifications. Also, I do not feel that the public have confidence that adequate consultation was done with those who have expertise in minority language education. In light of these restrictions to the consultation process it is difficult for the NCCA to claim that the process they devised is trustworthy. In light of the damage these amendments could cause, I suggest that the process be started again and that participants who understand minority language education be central in drafting the amendments. (AS 116, An Individual).

[Gaeltacht parents organisation] demand, for the good of the Gaeltacht, the salvation of the language community, the amount of them that are left, and so that the next generation will blossom, that this defective process be stopped completely. Defective because we do not have the proper information to make any judgement on this new course. [Gaeltacht parents organisation] also demand that a liaison or arbitrator be appointed and that a system be put in place, to conduct a proper investigation of the appropriate language accommodation within the current system – the points system – for young people in the Gaeltacht, to give them an opportunity to reach their full potential in the language and that their language rights or their educational rights not be denied. We ask that the people of the Gaeltacht be spoken to – schools, teachers, parents, young people, employers, and state, language and community organisations. If this is not properly approached, there will be a divide. Much of the progress that has been made in terms of education and language planning matters in the Gaeltacht will be rendered useless. (AS 98, Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht).

Other respondents were of the opinion that the teaching and learning of Irish throughout the education system would have to be examined.

There is a need to review the curriculum from top to bottom to ensure that students are achieving fluency in Irish after 14 years of study. The planned draft proposals are not going to fix this basic problem. There is a need to start anew. This review must have a goal of creating bilingual citizens and of not denying the students their Gaelic heritage. As Thomas Davis said 'A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories, 'tis a surer barrier and a more important frontier than mountain or river.' (AS 121, An Individual).

The debate at the 'Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Irish Speaking Community' in Leinster House on the 03 November 2021 showed that we should not proceed with the model proposed at this time by the NCCA until a complete review of the system from the bottom up is conducted. (AS 200, An Individual).

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APPENDIX 1 - CATEGORISATION OF THE SUBMISSIONS

Note:

- Teachers/schools/principals were categorised as Gaeltacht schools if they are registered with the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme.
- Gaelcholáiste – Any Irish-medium post-primary school outside the Gaeltacht.
- Education Organisation – organisations that are working in the education field, patronage bodies would be included here.
- Schools Organisation – Organisations that represent/work on behalf of schools.
- Language Planning – submissions from any person or committee/group that deals with language planning.
- Teachers' Organisation – organisations working on behalf of teachers, unions would be included here.

An Individual	63
Teachers	
Irish Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	2
Teacher in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	2
Irish Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste	8
Teacher in a Gaelcholáiste	1
Irish Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School	38
Teacher in an English-medium Post-Primary School	0
Primary teacher	1
Irish Teacher - Unspecified	11
Teacher in an Aonad Gaeilge (Irish Unit)	1
Teacher - Unspecified	1
Group of Teachers in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	5
Group of Teachers in a Gaelcholáiste	2
Group of Teachers in an English-medium Post-Primary School	5
Parents	
Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	9
Parent with a Son/Daughter in a Gaelcholáiste	9
Parent with a Son/Daughter in an English-medium Post-Primary School	1
Parent - Unspecified	1

Students	
Student in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	0
Student in a Gaelcholáiste	1
Student in an English-medium Post-Primary School	0
Student - Unspecified	4
Group of Students in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	0
Group of Students in a Gaelcholáiste	1
Group of Students in an English-medium Post-Primary School	2
Principals	
Principal in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	2
Principal in a Gaelcholáiste	1
Principal in an English-medium Post-Primary School	1
Director of an Aonad Gaeilge (Irish Unit)	1
Principal in a Gaelcholáiste	1
Schools	
Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	5
Gaelcholáiste	5
English-medium Post-Primary School	0
Parents Committee in a Gaeltacht Post-Primary School	1
Parents Committee in a Gaelcholáiste	0
Parents Committee in an English-medium Post-Primary School	0
Gaeltacht Primary School	2
Gaelscoil	0
Language Planning	11
Organisations	
Community Organisations	1
Irish College	4

Irish Colleges Organisation	1
Political Party	1
Higher Education Institute	2
Teachers Organisation	2
Irish Language Organisation	7
Education Organisation	3
Parents Organisation in the Gaeltacht	2
Principals Organisation	1
Oireachtas Joint Committee	1
State Agency	1
Schools Organisation	3
Government Department	1
Secondary Students Association	1
Third Level Students Association	3
Irish-Language Teachers Organisation	1
Teacher Support Service	1
Total	234