



**NCCA**

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

# Background paper and brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Irish

September 2025



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## Introduction

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The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in [Equity and Excellence for All](#) (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Irish is included in Tranche 4, which will be completed in 2027 for introduction to schools in September 2028.

This paper provides a context for the review of Leaving Certificate Irish. It begins by considering the background of Leaving Certificate Irish with Section 1, presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments in this area. Section 2 sets out how the learning of Irish is currently provided for within the curriculum before focusing in more detail on Leaving Certificate Irish. Section 3 provides an overview of insights gained through school visits and the lived experience of schools, teachers, and students. Section 4 considers similar education opportunities internationally and presents an overview of two different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discuss some issues identified for consideration in the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Irish before finally setting out a proposed brief for this work in Section 6, which will guide the work of the development group.

## Background and Context

This section sets out some of the significant developments in the area of Irish (Figure 1), before focusing on the education and broader policy landscape that are most relevant to the review and redevelopment of Leaving Certificate (LC) Irish.

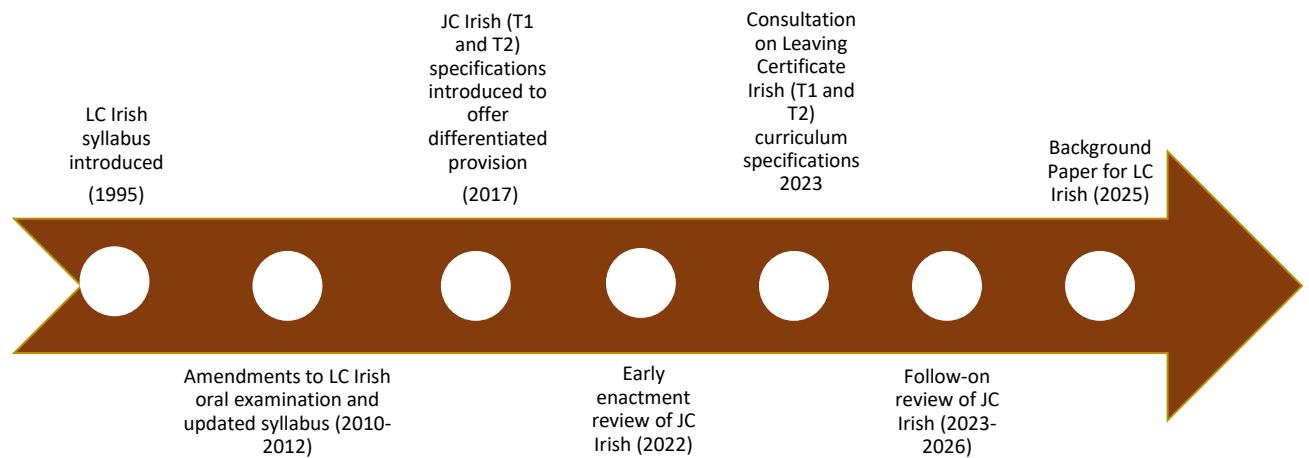


Figure 1 Timeline of developments related to Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle Irish (1995-present)

### Current Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus and amendments to oral examination

The current Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus was introduced in 1995. The general aims of the syllabus are to enable students, regardless of their mother tongue, to achieve full competence and proficiency in all Irish language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, it seeks to provide insight into Irish culture and literature, foster a positive attitude towards the language and language learning in general, and build students' self-esteem and confidence through their identity and cultural heritage, preparing them to function fully in social relations through the medium of Irish. The Minister for Education introduced amendments ([Circular 0042/2007](#)) to the allocation of marks for the oral assessment from 2012 onwards which increased the weighting of the oral examination to 40% and an updated Leaving Certificate Irish Syllabus was introduced in 2010 reflecting this change.

NCCA commissioned a number of research reports<sup>1</sup> to examine any potential impacts on student achievement, on language quality, and on approaches to teaching and preparation for the oral examination, resulting from the amendment to the weighting of the oral examination in 2012 on the LC Irish syllabus. The reports found no significant or clear evidence to suggest that student achievement changed greatly since 2012, when these changes were first assessed. In terms of examination results, there was no evidence of any significant shift upwards or downwards in terms of language quality or student achievement. Further research carried out by Ní Mhaonaigh (2013, 2017) concurred with these findings.

### **Junior Cycle Irish**

After extensive consultation, differentiated T1 and T2 specifications were developed at Junior Cycle for Irish and were introduced in schools in September 2017. The T1 specification for Irish caters for the Irish language learning needs of native speakers and learners of Irish in Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools and units. The T2 specification is designed for students who use the Irish language as a second language and is taught mainly in schools which operate through the medium of English. Further detail on Irish in Junior Cycle is set out in the next section.

### **Feedback and actions arising from the consultation on draft Leaving Certificate Irish (T1 and T2) curriculum specifications**

In December 2018 NCCA commenced development of differentiated T1 and T2 specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish in response to actions detailed in a range of government policies. NCCA initiated a public consultation on draft T1 and T2 specifications throughout 2019. It aimed to gather feedback to refine the proposed curriculum. However, the feedback frequently highlighted broader systemic issues beyond NCCA's remit, such as questions regarding the model of provision and policy coherence. Consequently, NCCA paused further development of the specifications to conduct additional research that included exploring alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and examining language education in other countries. Another action undertaken by NCCA in response to feedback from the consultation was to review the enactment of the JC Irish (T1 and T2) curriculum specifications introduced in 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Two reports -Impact of Revised Oral Irish at Leaving Certificate Level (Ó Curraoin et al, 2017) and Insight into the experience, views and perspectives of teachers and students regarding the changes implemented in 2012 to the Oral Examination in Irish for the Leaving Certificate (Nic Eoin 2017) were published. As an additional support NCCA commissioned a discussion paper in response to the two NCCA Research Reports (Ó Laoire, 2017) which addresses the major questions pertaining to the curriculum and assessment design work relating to Leaving Certificate Irish.

### **Review of Junior Cycle Irish and follow-on review**

An early enactment review of JC Irish (T1 and T2) was conducted between February and June 2022 by researchers from DCU:SEALBHÚ. Strengths identified included a broad welcome for the differentiated model of provision; the level of choice and selection of texts; an increased understanding of the use of learning outcomes and the flexibility offered by these; the use of active learning methodologies; and the use of spoken Irish as a motivator for students' learning. Challenges highlighted in the feedback included the level of pitch of the T2 specification and difficulties encountered at transition points; an overemphasis on literature at the expense of the development of oral language proficiency; and an insufficient emphasis on conversational Irish in assessment components. However, it is worth noting that at this stage no cohort of students had experienced a complete JC Irish curriculum and assessment arrangements due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific changes were subsequently implemented through [Circular 0015/2023](#), revising the volume of prescribed texts, plus amendments to the range of genres and to assessment components. A team of researchers from DCU:SEALBHÚ are currently engaging in a follow-on review (2023-2026) of the early enactment of the Junior Cycle Irish T1/T2 specifications. A [First Interim Report](#) from this follow-on review was published in May 2025.

The early enactment review of JC Irish shared common feedback with the consultation on the draft LC Irish specifications in 2021, with both highlighting a desire for stronger focus on development of oral proficiency and less memorisation in assessments.

### **Primary Language Curriculum**

Changes have occurred in recent years also in the language curriculum at primary level. The Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2019) has the same structure and strands for both English and Irish. It is an integrated curriculum that makes connections across and within languages and that seeks to support the transfer of skills between languages.

### **Related policies and strategies**

Since the introduction of the revised 2010 LC Irish syllabus there have been significant changes in both education and Irish language policy. A number of policies and strategies which may be relevant to the redevelopment of LC Irish are set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Relevant policies and strategies in the context of Leaving Certificate Irish**

Policy / Strategy	Date	Focus of change and implications for the review of LC Irish
The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030	2010	Aims to incrementally increase the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. To achieve this, Irish will be an obligatory subject from primary to Leaving Certificate level, focusing on developing oral and written competence and appreciating its cultural value supported by investment in teacher development, resources, and innovative teaching methods, with an emphasis on

		Irish as a spoken language and its assessment linked to the CEFR.
Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022	2017	Aims to support and promote the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities by ensuring that quality education is provided through the medium of Irish in Gaeltacht schools.
Exemptions from the Study of Irish: Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (English-medium)	2022	Provides guidance on the practices and procedures involved in processing applications for exemption from the study of Irish in post-primary schools.
Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood (and Implementation Plan to 2028)	2024	Amongst the aims are to further develop curriculum support resources at primary and post primary to enhance learner experiences in Irish.
Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future	2025	Commits to continuing Senior Cycle redevelopment and to aligning Irish language curriculums at all levels of education with the Common European Framework of Reference to Languages (CEFR) to enhance spoken Irish at primary, post-primary and third levels.
Policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht	Currently under development	The key objectives are to advance high-quality Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht by increasing provision and attendance in Irish-medium schools and early learning settings, strengthening policy for Irish-medium units in English-medium schools, improving the supply of qualified staff, and deepening community engagement.
Is féidir liom, is féidir linn...Action plan for Irish in English-medium schools	2025 (tbc)	Aims to enhance student experience of learning Irish in English-medium schools through fostering positive attitudes towards Irish, increasing the use of Irish and considering the integration of policies, actions, structures and resources

Arising from the commitment in the Programme for Government outlined above, the redevelopment of LC Irish as part of Tranche 4 sees the commencement of a phased process for working towards alignment of Leaving Certificate Irish to the CEFR.

The curriculum development field has also evolved since the consultation on the draft T1 and T2 specifications for LC Irish. This has included the publication of a comprehensive examination of relevant research and practice on the [technical form of curriculum specifications](#) to help inform what format should be used when designing curriculum specifications for senior cycle. The inclusion of a 'students learn about' column in the template for the technical form of curriculum specifications is designed to assist with the scaffolding of learning outcomes and provides clarity to teachers and others.

Such broad-ranging policy changes make the redevelopment of LC Irish timely. It provides a valuable opportunity to shape the curriculum so that it reflects and responds to the evolving needs of students, their communities and society more broadly.

## Section Summary

- The current LC Irish syllabus, introduced in 1995, aims to develop full competence in all language skills, foster cultural insight, and build student confidence. Although the oral examination's weighting increased to 40% in 2012, research found no significant changes in student achievement or language quality.
- For Junior Cycle Irish, differentiated T1 and T2 specifications were introduced in 2017. An early insights review in 2022 welcomed the differentiated model, learning outcomes, and active methodologies, but identified challenges such as the pitch of the T2 specification and an overemphasis on literature at the expense of conversational Irish. This led to amendments in 2023, revising prescribed texts and the assessment components. A follow-on review is currently underway.
- Plans for differentiated T1 and T2 specifications for LC Irish began in 2018. A public consultation on the draft specifications in 2021 highlighted broader systemic issues, leading to a pause for further research.
- A common thread from the consultation in the draft LC specifications and the JC early insights feedback is a desire for increased focus on the development of oral proficiency and less memorisation in assessments.
- Significant developments in Irish language education and national policies have occurred in recent years. These broad policy changes and curricular development make the redevelopment of LC Irish timely, offering an opportunity to adapt the curriculum to evolving societal needs.

## Irish in the curriculum

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This section provides an overview of the opportunities for learning related to Irish currently available to students within both the junior cycle and senior cycle programmes. It then focuses on the participation rates in LC Irish outlining the uptake of the subject and explores the most recent Chief Examiner's report/subject inspection reports from the State Examinations Commission (SEC)/ and Department of Education/ Department of Education and Youth (DE/DEY)

### Irish in junior cycle

The Junior Cycle T1 and T2 specifications for Irish were introduced to schools in 2017 and aimed to support students to develop, consolidate and deepen their understanding of Irish. Through the learning set out in the specifications students are enabled to communicate in an effective, interactive, confident manner in both formal and informal settings in the language community. The fostering and development of awareness is emphasised: language awareness, cultural awareness as well as students' self-awareness and ownership of their own learning as language learners. JC Irish also seeks to consolidate and further develop the skills that students bring with them from primary to post-primary.

Students complete two Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs): a language portfolio and an oral interaction task. The portfolio (CBA1) supports students in setting personal goals, selecting examples and reflecting on their work—including creative pieces and recordings—to showcase their progress. For CBA2, "Interacting through Irish," students prepare a spoken piece and engage in a conversation with their teacher and, for students in T1, also with classmates, thereby encouraging genuine spoken interaction and building confidence. These CBAs prioritise freedom of choice in topics and formats, fostering student ownership of learning. Together, they support students in consolidating language skills, encouraging self-awareness, and ensuring a coherent learning experience.

### Irish in senior cycle

Students in senior cycle have opportunities to study Irish language-related subjects and modules across the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. In Transition Year (TY), schools have a high degree of autonomy in designing their own programme.

The current syllabus for LC Irish aims to develop students' competence in all aspects of the Irish language, foster an understanding of Irish culture and literature, and promote a positive disposition towards language acquisition, thereby enhancing students' self-esteem and ability to engage socially in Irish. The new Transition Year Programme Statement (2024) provides guidance for schools regarding Irish as a core component. Students undertaking the LCA programme have the opportunity to engage with the Gaeilge Cumarsáideach module which aims to offer a practical and interactive Irish language course for students within the programme.

## Irish in focus

This section explores participation rates in Leaving Certificate Irish drawing on statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and provides an overview of assessment for certification and insights from SEC and DE/DEY reports.

### Student participation

Leaving Certificate Irish has seen a drop in uptake since 2021 relative to the number of Leaving Certificate candidates annually. One factor in this decline is the significant number of students seeking and receiving exemptions. The table below indicates the fluctuations across levels (Foundation, Ordinary and Higher) and the percentage of students sitting LC Irish examinations 2019-2025.

Year	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Foundation Level	Total LC Irish Candidates	Total LCE candidates	LC Irish candidates as a % of total cohort
2019	23,176	22,323	2,834	48,333	56,071	86.2%
2020	24,725	23,546	1,462	49,733	57,668	86.24%
2021	25,596	23,301	1,074	49,971	57,952	86.23%
2022	24,441	23,520	1,933	49,894	58,056	85.94%
2023	23,899	22,851	2,408	49,158	58,006	84.75%
2024	23,649	21,414	2,081	47,144	56,791	83%
2025	24,053	23,661	2,307	50,021	60,937	82.1%

Table 1: Number of candidates sitting Leaving Certificate Irish at higher, ordinary and foundation Level 2019-2025

### Assessment for certification

Leaving Certificate Irish is assessed through an oral examination and a terminal written examination which includes an aural, reading comprehension, composition, and questions on literature (other than foundation level). Differentiation at assessment is achieved through examination at three levels – Foundation level, Ordinary level and Higher level.

The weighting of marks for the different areas of assessment are set out as follows:

	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Foundation Level
Oral	240 marks (40%)	240 marks (40%)	240 marks (40%)
Aural	60 marks (10%)	60 marks (10%)	120 marks (20%)
Reading Comprehension	100 marks (16.7%)	100 marks (16.7%)	150 marks (25%)
Composition	100 marks (16.7%)	100 marks (16.7%)	90 marks (15%)
Literature	100 marks (16.7%)	100 marks (16.7%)	N/A

Table 2: Weighting of marks for the different areas of assessment.

### Insights from Chief Examiner's Report

The most recent Chief Examiner's Report for Leaving Certificate Irish, published in 2017, reports that in the oral examination students excelled in greetings, reading poetry, and delivering descriptive accounts of the picture series demonstrating strong vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. However, challenges persisted in spontaneous conversation and in describing the picture series, with limited vocabulary and frequent grammatical errors, especially at lower levels. Conversation skills were generally strong, but students often struggled to expand on topics or form questions. While many students showed good understanding and confident expression at Foundation Level, a significant number struggled with communication beyond basic topics, necessitating examiner intervention.

Students' aural comprehension performance varied across levels, with students of Higher Level demonstrating strong understanding, students of Ordinary Level showing good grasp of specific information but difficulty with interrogative words, and students of Foundation Level exhibiting several areas of weakness.

The report noted recurring issues such as problems with basic structures, verb tenses, and English language interference, visible in both oral and written assessments. Students at Higher Level displayed good comprehension and vocabulary in compositions, though some were off topic with pre-prepared material being a common, though sometimes poorly integrated, element. Higher Level students generally excelled in initial questions in the reading comprehensions by directly quoting from the passage, securing high marks. Students at Ordinary Level performed well in reading comprehensions, but lost marks for copying text directly from poems instead of rephrasing as specified in certain questions. Responses to literature-related questions were mostly satisfactory, but linguistic weaknesses, summarising rather than analysing, grammatical errors and frequent spelling mistakes were common. Students at Foundation Level showed satisfactory performance in responding to reading comprehensions.

## Insights from Inspection Reports

The [Chief Inspector's Report September 2016 - December 2020](#) notes that while teaching quality in post-primary Irish is generally good, it is not as strong as experienced in other subjects such as English and Mathematics. The report highlights increased uptake of Higher-Level Irish and strong teacher commitment but identifies a need for more authentic opportunities for students to use Irish, both in and outside the classroom. Although active methodologies such as group work may be present, they often lack authentic language use. Recommendations include improving differentiation to challenge all learners, optimising Irish in Transition Year, enhancing digital technology use, making assessment and planning more effective, and appropriate challenge for more proficient learners. An overview of inspection reports in more recent years highlights positive teacher-student relationships, while also recommending the need for a greater focus on planning to meet diverse learner profiles; reduced reliance on English to create more authentic communicative contexts, a greater focus on formative feedback and on enhanced opportunities for the development of oral language proficiency.

## Section Summary

- Junior Cycle specifications (T1/T2) introduced in 2017 aim to deepen students' understanding of Irish, enabling effective, interactive communication in both formal and informal settings. The curriculum fosters language awareness, cultural awareness, and students' self-awareness as learners. Students complete two Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs): a language portfolio and an oral interaction task. These CBAs promote goal setting, reflection, and confidence through student choice of topics and formats, encouraging genuine spoken interaction and ownership of learning.
- Senior cycle provides learning opportunities in Irish across the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and Transition Year (TY) programmes. In TY, Irish is a core component, allocated up to two hours per week, In LCA students engage with the Gaeilge Cumarsáideach module.
- Leaving Certificate Irish is offered at Higher, Ordinary, and Foundation levels. The number of students sitting the final examination has declined since 2021 to 82% in 2025. One factor in this decline is the significant number of students seeking and receiving exemptions.
- Assessment at each level is divided into two parts: Oral (40% of marks), and Written (covering aural, reading comprehension, composition, and literature), with differentiated structures based on the level. Foundation level students are not assessed on literature.
- The 2017 Chief Examiner's Report highlights that in the oral examination students generally

excelled in initial greetings and poetry reading but often struggled with spontaneous conversation, limited vocabulary, and made grammatical errors, particularly when expanding on topics. Common linguistic weaknesses, such as issues with verb tenses and English syntax, were noted across oral and written assessments.

- The Chief Inspector's report highlights how teaching in Irish language classrooms is not as strong as in subjects like English and Mathematics. An overview of recent inspection reports highlights a need to: provide more real-life opportunities for students to use Irish including more authentic language; improved differentiation; increased use of digital technology, and reduced reliance on English in the classroom.

## Insights from school visits

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An expression of interest (EOI) was issued to all schools in September 2024 and NCCA conducted a series of school visits in October and November as part of ongoing work in the area of Leaving Certificate Irish. A representative sample was selected from the 99 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in this work. Eight schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools involved focus group meetings with 73 (39 T1, 34 T2) students in senior cycle and 46 (18 T1, 28 T2) teachers of Irish. The following section provides an overview of the insights gathered through these visits which are relevant to the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Irish as part of Tranche 4 senior cycle redevelopments.

### **Learner diversity and transitions**

The diversity of the profile of students studying Irish was highlighted during the school visits. Teachers of Irish acknowledged the breadth and variety of school settings within which students may study Irish. These include English medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, *Gaelcholáistí*, *Aonaid* (units) and *Sruthanna* (streams). Not all students in T1 settings use Irish at home or in the community, and students often move between T1 and T2 settings across educational stages, creating varied transition challenges.

Many teachers in T2 schools referred to the difficulties students face when moving from primary to secondary school in terms of their previous language acquisition. They noticed that students arrive with different levels of language proficiency in Irish, making it hard to identify specific gaps in their learning as they progress through the curriculum. A significant number of teachers referred to the fact that each student enters senior cycle with a different combination of competences in the language and openness to learning. A number of teachers highlighted the consequent challenges of differentiating class work for students while students in mixed ability classroom settings felt that they were very aware of their language ability in comparison to their peers.

### **Texts and the integrated language and literature curriculum**

It was widely acknowledged that texts help to develop and broaden the learners' linguistic repertoire, however teachers spoke consistently about the time pressures to teach the course. Students were also keenly aware of this. When talking about texts, both teachers and students alike mentioned the importance of enjoying the texts studied. In the main, students expressed a strong preference for films, novels and short stories. It was also acknowledged that texts help students to expand their vocabulary and present teachers with opportunities to introduce, revisit or reiterate grammar rules in context. Some teachers mentioned that certain texts prompted class debates, while others supported and inspired groupwork sessions. Where short films and audiobooks were used, teachers valued having an alternative way to 'read' texts and all the while enhancing student listening skills. Certain texts also led to discussions around dialects and the variations which are unique to each one. However, some T1 teachers commented that there was a shortage of texts and audiobooks to support individual dialects. Several teachers in both T1 & T2 settings said that an increase in the number of audiobooks available would be beneficial.

Regarding poetry many students commented on the transfer of learning from poem to poem e.g. identifying and discussing themes, images, emotions and poetic techniques. Some students expressed an interest in knowing more about the poets. While some stated that they enjoy drama, others found studying plays more challenging especially when the play was studied in isolation from seeing it acted out on stage.

While it was widely recognised that texts help forge connections with the past and our rich cultural heritage, many teachers reiterated the importance of including more modern texts which feature teenage and young adult characters. This was in keeping with student feedback also. Teachers and students alike commented that a number of current LC texts explore what they felt were depressing themes and expressed a wish for content which would be more meaningful to teenagers and young adults. Texts suggested by teachers for future consideration included speeches, news items and podcasts to expose students to the language being used in authentic settings which could increase engagement and motivation.

While in conversation with students and teachers, focus group feedback revealed a wide variety of formats currently used to encourage and challenge students to use the language e.g. blogs, text analysis, character sketches, film/book reviews, diary entries, oral presentations, short stories and debates. On occasion students spoke about creating videos and recording audio texts.

A small minority of teachers believed that the teaching of Irish should not involve literature, and some students mentioned the absence of literature in modern foreign language classrooms. Some students expressed a preference for sharing their own opinions on topics relevant to them or on contemporary issues in society rather than discussing the content of a piece of prose or poetry.

### **Choice, engagement and learner autonomy**

The current senior cycle Irish syllabus offers two prose options at both ordinary and higher level:

- (1) Prós comóntha ainmnithe/Common prescribed prose
- (2) Prós: Ábhar roghnach/Prose: Elective content

Similarly, the senior cycle syllabus offers two poetry options:

- (1) Filíocht chomóntha ainmnithe/Common prescribed poetry
- (2) Filíocht: Ábhar roghnach/Poetry: Elective content

When asked about the *cúrsa roghnach* (elective course) at senior cycle teachers in each focus group believed that providing an alternative to the prescribed prose and poetry was important. That said, none of the teachers participating in the focus groups had opted to implement the optional/elective course. Some teachers highlighted that having an alternative option was essential, especially in an academic year which introduces updated prescribed texts. This option facilitates and supports students who, for a myriad of reasons, repeat the leaving certificate Irish exam. Other teachers referred to colleagues who opted for the *cúrsa roghnach* in response to the varying interests and needs of their students. It was acknowledged that the *cúrsa roghnach* also offers flexibility for external and mature candidates studying texts for the leaving certificate Irish exam. Some teachers believed that a list of texts for the *cúrsa roghnach* section would be useful.

### **Oral work and the development of oral language proficiency**

While speaking to teachers about the role of texts, the topic of the LC oral exam regularly formed part of the conversation. Many teachers in the T2 focus groups commented that finding time for oral work proved difficult due to the time invested in reading, exploring and analysing literary texts with their students. Some teachers and students questioned the weighting of marks for prose and poetry relative to the time invested in teaching, learning and assessing this aspect of the curriculum. In the main, students and teachers alike were keen to maintain the 40% weighting for the oral element of the exam.

Almost all students (whether in contexts where Irish is the language of instruction and communication across the curriculum or where students have less contact with the language, e.g. one 40 minute class, five days a week) expressed a preference for more opportunities to engage in group work to enhance their oral language proficiency, build confidence and develop fluency.

A majority of teachers said that it was difficult to find time to assess student oral work on an individual basis. Although students enjoy groupwork activities, teachers were conscious that not all students contribute orally, even in small group settings. Some students expressed concern regarding their ability to have an informal conversation in Irish while others expressed frustration with rote learning of material. Studying texts appeared to dominate class time with some students commenting that oral work only becomes a focus in term two of sixth year.

Both students and teachers spoke positively about post-pandemic amendments to the oral examination (20 *usraith pictiúr* reduced to 10) and many called for the reduction of picture sequences to be retained. Some students associated the picture sequences with rote learning rather than having a natural conversation about the events depicted in the images.

### **Reading and listening comprehension**

Some students (T1 and T2) spoke about the challenges associated with aural work such as non-daily contact with the language and the unique aspects of various dialects. A few students expressed their frustration with listening comprehensions. Some believed that the speakers spoke too fast while others commented that having only two opportunities to hear each audio clip was insufficient. When asked about their contact with the Irish language outside of school, student responses varied greatly. While some students speak Irish at home and in their local community, a majority of students across all focus groups said that they do not use Irish outside of the school context. Some students mentioned listening to Irish language radio stations at home or in the car. A large number of students watch sporting events on TG4, although some admitted that they found the commentary and dialects challenging to understand at times.

While some students found the content of reading comprehensions interesting and a useful way to learn new and contemporary vocabulary, others questioned the value of them. Some students commented that the reading comprehensions were akin to a wordsearch. Others remarked that questions 6(a) and 6(b) (HL only, e.g. grammar questions or an opinion piece) examined specific knowledge and skills beyond retrieving information. A number of students believed that one reading comprehension would suffice as the same skills are being tested twice. Finally, some students shared the opinion that providing an image to accompany the reading comprehension was a useful support.

## Section Summary

- Teachers of Irish acknowledged the breadth and variety of school settings: English medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, *Gaelcholáistí*, *Aonaid* (units) and *Sruthanna* (streams). This variety of contexts gives rise to a diverse range of Irish language learners.
- Teachers recognise the value of literary studies and the opportunities which texts present to expose students to the language on a variety of topics in a range of formats/genres, however, teachers spoke consistently about the time pressures to teach the course. Many teachers reiterated the importance of including more modern texts which feature teenage and young adult characters. Texts suggested for future consideration included speeches, news items and podcasts to expose students to the language being used in authentic settings which could potentially increase engagement and motivation.
- Teacher feedback revealed that the ‘integration’ element of the ‘integrated language and literature curriculum’ can be a challenge.
- When asked about the *cúrsa roghnach* (elective course) at senior cycle, teachers believed that providing an alternative to the prescribed prose and poetry was important to support choice, student engagement and learner autonomy.
- Some teachers and students questioned the weighting of marks for prose and poetry relative to the time invested in teaching, learning and assessing this aspect of the curriculum.
- Students recognise the value of developing their oral language proficiency, however, finding regular opportunities to focus on oral work during class time is a challenge while teachers felt that opportunities for oral work often remain siloed.
- Some students acknowledged that reading comprehensions present opportunities to expand their vocabulary while others questioned the value of them and commented that they were akin to a wordsearch exercise.
- Aural work was considered challenging by some students. The reasons for this shared during focus group sessions included: the pace of audio clips, only hearing the audio clips twice and a lack of exposure to various dialects.

## International trends in native language education in jurisdictions with similar linguistic profiles to Ireland

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In response to the consultation feedback on the draft T1 and T2 specifications for leaving certificate Irish, NCCA Council prioritised additional research to explore how other jurisdictions with a similar language profile to Ireland approach curricular provision for a native language which is also a second language. The desktop research reviewed publicly available documents on policy for the teaching and learning of:

- French in Canada
- Swedish in Finland
- Irish in Ireland
- Maltese in Malta
- Frisian in the Netherlands
- Māori in New Zealand
- Basque in Spain
- Welsh in Wales.

Using Jan van den Akker's [curriculum spider web](#) as a guide, the research explored context and rationale for the teaching of the native/mother tongue language; aims, objectives and organisation; the place of the language in the curriculum; curriculum content; assessment; language frameworks/benchmarks in place; and enabling factors for the teaching and learning of the language (e.g. pedagogy, teacher role, materials and resources). The initial findings revealed numerous similarities between Ireland and the jurisdictions listed above.

NCCA Council requested an additional deep dive into two jurisdictions, New Zealand and Wales, and this section provides an overview of curriculum provision and the context for these curricula in each jurisdiction.

### New Zealand

The [Māori Language Act](#) of 1987 (now [replaced](#)) recognized Māori as an official language in New Zealand, and the 1989 [Education Act](#) (now [replaced](#)) gave formal recognition to Māori-medium schools. According to the Education Act, all schools must take reasonable steps to offer instruction in Māori customs and te reo Māori.

#### Curriculum Structure

The New Zealand Curriculum emphasises the country's bicultural foundations by ensuring all students have the opportunity to learn Māori. Three main pathways exist:

- Māori-medium education: Over half of instruction is in Māori (immersion levels 1-2).
- Māori in English-medium: Māori taught as a language subject, or up to half of instruction in Māori (immersion levels 3-5).

- No Māori language pathway: Students learn basic words or receive no Māori instruction (immersion level 6).

The [curriculum guidelines](#) for the teaching and learning of Māori in English-medium schools state that, in addition to the cultural, social, cognitive, linguistic, economic and personal benefits for students that come from learning another language, there are specific advantages for New Zealand students in learning the Māori language. These include that learning Māori gives them access to the Māori world and Māori world views, and that the insights students gain as they learn the language will enrich and broaden their understanding of the uniqueness and complexity of Māori culture.

### National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

The NCEA is New Zealand's main secondary qualification, offered at Levels 1 to 3, with Level 3 required for university entrance. Credits are earned through achieving standards, which are both internally and externally assessed.

### Core Components

At NCEA Level 3 (typically age 18), students can select from five [Achievement Standards](#):

- Listening (internal, 4 credits)
- Speaking (internal, 6 credits)
- Reading (external, 6 credits)
- Writing (external, 6 credits)
- Creating useful documents (internal, 6 credits)

These standards develop five interconnected skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural awareness. They relate to four "[big ideas](#)": language accuracy, language fluency, cultural integrity, and language vitality.

### Learning Matrix

The [learning matrix](#) for Levels 6-8 details expectations in the four big ideas, mapping progression for Years 10-13 (ages 14-18). There is a similar [matrix](#) for learners following the Māori-medium curriculum. There is a similar [matrix](#) for learners following the Māori-medium curriculum.

There are also five [Level 8 achievement objectives](#) for the Māori language in the English-medium curriculum:

- Communicating about certainty and possibility
- Developing arguments with supporting reasons
- Recounting events to inform, persuade, or entertain
- Communicating for a variety of audiences
- Responding to texts about Māori language and customs.

In addition, at NCEA Level 3, students should also be able to demonstrate their understanding and use of grammatical structures and vocabulary from up to and including Level 8 of the te reo Māori curriculum.

## **Written Examinations**

Two Achievement Standards involve externally assessed written exams:

- Reading – Reading comprehension; questions in Māori and English; answers now required in Māori only.
- Writing – One written piece of at least 400 words; choice of topics (e.g. story, letter, essay, strategy); must be written in Māori.

Grades are reported as Not Achieved, Achievement, Achievement with Merit, or Achievement with Excellence.

## **Frameworks**

NCEA standards are linked to curriculum guidelines for Māori language teaching and learning, spanning Levels 1–3 of the National Qualifications Framework and Levels 6–8 of the curriculum. These standards provide continuity and progression but do not map to an external international benchmark.

## **Oral language proficiency**

By Level 8, students should be able to speak Māori fluently in diverse contexts and for multiple purposes (inform, persuade, entertain). Assessment focuses on communication quality, justified opinions, effective idea development, appropriate language features, natural pronunciation, and confident delivery (including appropriate body language).

<b>Level 6</b>	<b>Level 7</b>	<b>Level 8</b>
Present and exchange simple ideas and opinions	Present and exchange information in detail	Organize and sustain complex interactions, adapting to unpredictable situations

## **The Use of Portfolios**

Three standards are assessed through moderated internal assessment, including portfolios and digital evidence. For Listening, students must complete at least two tasks. For Speaking two recorded pieces totalling at least five minutes are required. For Creating Documents, at least two crafted pieces (minimum 600 words combined) across different types must be submitted. All work, including plans, drafts, and final submissions, is used for assessment and moderation.

## **The use of texts**

Texts can be spoken, written, or visual and examples include prayers, idioms, songs, proverbs, personal and business letters, short stories, news reports, reviews, and multimedia presentations. The curriculum encourages engagement with a wide range of texts relevant to Māori communities and broader contexts, supporting literacy and cultural understanding.

## **Wales**

Young people in Wales have the right to an education that fosters respect for their culture and supports the right to learn and use the language of their family. Depending on their location, learners may attend Welsh-medium, English-medium, or bilingual/dual-medium schools. Local authorities are required to maintain a Welsh in Education plan, ensuring that all children and young people can learn through Welsh and that the language is taught to a high standard.

## **Curriculum for Wales and Language Continuum**

The Curriculum for Wales, introduced from September 2022, places Welsh within the “Languages, Literacy and Communication” area of learning and experience. A significant innovation is the introduction of a single continuum for teaching Welsh, which all schools, Welsh-medium, bilingual, and English-medium, must implement over time. The aim is to embed Welsh language acquisition across the curriculum.

For students aged 17/18 in senior secondary education, there are distinct qualifications for first and second language Welsh: the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced Level (A Level) in Welsh Language, and AS/A Levels in Welsh Second Language. These are two-year courses, with the AS qualification typically taken at age 17 and contributing 40% towards the full A Level. A Levels, usually taken at the age of 18 are recognised for entry to higher education.

## **Assessment Objectives and Structure**

Both Welsh first and second language A Levels are structured around three Assessment Objectives (AOs):

- **AO1:** Use of spoken language
- **AO2:** Responding to texts
- **AO3:** Using written language

Assessment is distributed across six units (three at AS, three at A2), including written exams, oral examinations, and non-examination assessments. All A2 units include synoptic assessment, requiring students to demonstrate understanding of links between different subject elements.

Key assessment components include:

- Oral exams (covering film, play, oracy, novels, and personal response)
- Non-examination assessments (extended written pieces, essays, or speeches)
- Written papers (language use, poetry, medieval prose, society, translanguaging, appreciation of literature)

The weighting of each unit varies, with oral and written components contributing between 10% and 25% to the final qualification.

## **Framework**

The [Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Act 2025](#) has set an ambitious target: by 2050, all pupils leaving statutory education (age 16) should be able to speak Welsh. The Act, in accordance with the CEFR, specifies common reference levels in conjunction with Welsh language learning goals for each of the three school categories as follows:

<b>School category</b>	<b>Welsh language learning goals</b>
Primarily Welsh Language	Proficient Welsh language user (C1, C2)

Dual Language	Independent Welsh language user (B1, B2 at least, as an initial goal)
Primarily English language, partly Welsh	Basic Welsh language user (A1, A2 at least, as an initial goal)

### Oracy Skills

In both years 1 and 2 (Units 1 and 4) course candidates are expected to demonstrate the ability to speak the language correctly and proficiently using the appropriate register; to listen attentively to others; and to raise questions, develop opinions, interact and form conclusions. In year 2, synoptic assessment requires students to apply their knowledge and understanding of the connections between the various texts contained in the specification. All oral exams are assessed by external examiners and are structured as follows:

- For Welsh first language, oral exam discussions revolve around film, drama, and novels. Oral exams are conducted in group settings of three students.
- For Welsh second language, oral exam discussions cover film, drama, and themes such as the Welsh language in society and the Welsh language on social media. Oral exams are conducted in group settings of three students.

### Use of Portfolios

In year 1, both first and second language courses include a non-examination assessment (portfolio):

- **Welsh first language:** Two extended written pieces (1000 - 2000 words each) in specified formats (e.g. short story, diary, blog, essay, speech). One task is completed under exam-like conditions.
- **Welsh second language:** Three extended pieces in different formats (e.g. report, story, blog, diary), totalling 1500 - 2000 words. One piece is completed under special conditions, with the use of dictionaries and supporting materials permitted.

All portfolio tasks are marked by teachers and moderated externally to ensure consistency.

### Use of Texts

The specifications for both first and second language A Levels encompass a wide range of literary, visual, and factual texts, including drama, prose, poetry, novels, and multimedia materials.

Students are expected to demonstrate critical analysis, personal response, and the ability to cross-reference and evaluate information from various sources.

- **Welsh first language:** Emphasises critical analysis, appreciation of texts, and personal response, including unseen material and various media.
- **Welsh second language:** Focuses on knowledge of texts, appreciation of genres, coherent response in speech and writing, and translanguaging skills.

Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) in both courses requires students to demonstrate knowledge of specific texts, appreciate and respond to different genres, and justify their references with evidence.

## Section summary

- Both jurisdictions acknowledge the cultural, social, cognitive, linguistic, economic and personal benefits for students that come from learning another language.
- Cultural awareness comes to the fore in New Zealand's four '[big ideas](#)' which highlight the need for progressive thinking about the sustainability of the language into the future through engaging in critical analysis of language change and the implementation of language revitalisation strategies to ensure the language continues to thrive.
- NCEA standards are linked to curriculum guidelines for Māori language teaching and learning, spanning Levels 1–3 of the National Qualifications Framework and Levels 6–8 of the curriculum. These standards provide continuity and progression but do not map to an external international benchmark. The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025, in accordance with the CEFR, specifies common reference levels in conjunction with Welsh language learning goals for each of the three school categories.
- Core components of the Welsh upper secondary curriculum include the study of texts such as films, plays, poems, short stories and novels. Texts can be literary, visual and factual. In New Zealand texts can be spoken, written, or visual and examples include prayers, idioms, songs, proverbs, personal and business letters, short stories, news reports, reviews, and multimedia presentations.
- The Welsh curriculum promotes synoptic assessment to assess understanding of the links between different elements of a subject. Oral exams explore topics such as the Welsh language in society and the Welsh language in social media. Texts, studied in class, such as films and novels are also discussed. In Wales oral exams are conducted in group settings and are assessed externally. In New Zealand oral proficiency is assessed internally and requires students to record audiovisual content based on topics that are beyond their immediate personal experience.
- Integrated language and literature curricula exist in both New Zealand and Wales.
- Portfolios are a feature of upper secondary in both jurisdictions. Formats are specified and wordcounts are shared. In creating pieces for their portfolios students are tasked with demonstrating language use in different contexts and for a range of purposes.
- Translanguaging forms part of the assessment process in both jurisdictions (e.g. students curate a written response in Welsh or Māori to an English-language article).

## Issues for Consideration

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This section sets out a number of issues for consideration in the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Irish. These arise from the nature of the subject itself, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper and the current context for LC Irish.

### Stronger emphasis on oral language proficiency

The previous sections of this paper indicate a strong and consistent desire for a greater emphasis on developing oral language proficiency and reducing the reliance on memorisation strategies. Oral language proficiency encompasses spoken production, interaction, and oral comprehension, which when combined with mediation skills, prepares students for engagement in real-life scenarios. Placing renewed emphasis on oral language within the development of the specification for LC Irish could also enhance the development of student proficiency in written, listening and reading skills.

Consideration may be given as to how the redeveloped LC specification can build on oral language development in junior cycle where there is a focus on developing student self-confidence. Learning from other jurisdictions may also be helpful in informing developments in this respect. Consideration could also be given to how the learning outcomes within the specification might enable students to engage with contemporary topics and authentic situations, thereby potentially helping to address concerns identified regarding a lack of spontaneous communication and issues with vocabulary acquisition.

### The potential of a student language portfolio

As noted in this paper, student engagement and ownership of learning could be encouraged through the use of a language portfolio. Through the use of a portfolio students could track and reflect on their own language development and showcase diverse formats of language use and application. This approach could aid in the development and application of language skills and cultural understandings in various settings and for diverse purposes while also enhancing language awareness and their own personal language acquisition. Exploration of the role that a language portfolio could have on the experience of students learning Irish can form part of the deliberations on development of the specification.

### Literacies and numeracy

Literacies and numeracy are an important consideration in language curriculum development. They foster students' ability to interact with language in a variety of formats, help to develop effective communication and comprehension in both spoken and written language and can help to understand grammar and language structure. As highlighted in section 2 above, some students may struggle with fundamental grammar, spelling and syntax. The development of a new specification could explore how to address these concerns.

The current syllabus for LC Irish aims to develop the language skills, articulation and critical analysis skills of every student according to their ability. However, as students progress as language learners and in life they will require a range of literacies including digital literacy, media literacy, critical literacy and cultural literacy. Consideration of how the design of the specification can support the development of a range of literacies will be important.

## **The role of literature and texts**

Literary texts are valued for the opportunities they present to expose students to the Irish language across a variety of topics, in a range of formats, and through different genres. A redeveloped specification offers an opportunity to reconsider the role of texts within the curriculum. While there is a consistent view that the current over-emphasis on literature can detract from oral language development, a new specification could carefully consider the nature and format of texts to be studied focusing on exploration of content that is relevant and meaningful for students. This approach aligns with curricula in other jurisdictions, where students engage with language through a variety of texts which can be literary, visual, digital or factual. Considering texts in the broadest sense, and the model of text prescription, could have the potential to encourage and increase student engagement. Areas for exploration could include the criteria for text selection and the rate of change, text genres, the number of texts studied, and the potential role of translated texts. Consideration could also be given to the importance of offering alternative options such as *Prós agus Filíocht Roghnach* to foster student choice and engagement.

## **Consideration of approaches to assessment**

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of language learning as it helps to monitor student progress and gives students an insight into their own personal language proficiency. Embedding a focus on language awareness in the design of the curriculum could provide an opportunity for an increased focus on formative assessment and student self-reflection. Much has been explored in earlier sections of this paper regarding the backwash effect of external assessment on the student learning experience. The development of a curriculum that provides opportunities for authentic learning experiences which allow students to apply their language skills in real-life scenarios may help to address this negative backwash and provide the basis for more relevant and student-centred approaches to assessment.

This redevelopment also presents an opportunity to reconsider the oral assessment component and explore a range of approaches to move away from memorisation. Consideration of how spoken production, interaction, and oral comprehension in addition to mediation skills might be combined could help to develop a new approach. The assessment arrangements, guided by the parameters set out in Appendix 1, could promote the development of each student's ability and confidence to engage in spontaneous conversation, which will vary from student to student.

To address concerns regarding the siloed assessment of language skills consideration may be given to synoptic assessment. Synoptic approaches to assessment in language learning, as seen in other jurisdictions, provide an opportunity to assess student language development and engagement with language across different areas of the curriculum. This can support students to connect different aspects of language learning and can provide a richer picture of student language acquisition.

## Progression and continuity

Schools report that one of the biggest challenges for teachers of Irish is managing the diverse abilities of students transitioning from primary school to junior cycle and onwards to senior cycle, which impacts on teaching and learning in the Irish language classroom. To overcome these challenges, the development of a new specification for LC Irish should consider coherence and continuity particularly in light of the differentiated provision (T1 and T2) at junior cycle. This could be supported through alignment with the CEFR which is explored further below.

## Potential of alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The [Programme for Government 2025](#) commits to working towards aligning Irish language curriculums at all levels of education with the CEFR to enhance spoken Irish at primary, post-primary and third levels.

The CEFR can help to support the redevelopment of LC Irish as it sets out levels of language proficiency from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient). Broadly speaking, language learners can communicate for general purposes at the upper B1 level, with B2 – C2 level focusing on increasingly specialised language use. Interrogation of the levels within the CEFR can help to guide the development of a curriculum that provides for student progression from junior cycle. Alignment with the CEFR can also support students in understanding their own language proficiency and help to identify both strengths and areas for improvement.

A curriculum aligned with the CEFR can provide enhanced clarity and support teachers in using learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning and assessment approaches with an appropriate level of challenge across all language skills for students. The detailed descriptors set out in the CEFR may also support differentiation which was identified as a challenge in senior cycle Irish classrooms. The action-oriented approach set out in the CEFR promotes real-world communicative proficiency and cultural engagement which may help to connect the learning set out within the specification to students' personal experiences, making the language more relevant to their daily lives. This, in time, could help to mediate concerns regarding the current focus on examination-driven learning.

As stated earlier in this background paper, the development of this curriculum specification will identify relevant elements of the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its Companion Volume (CEFR CV) that can begin the process of working towards aligning the LC Irish curriculum with CEFR. It is important to note that this will be the first of many steps required to respond fully to the commitment outlined in the [Programme for Government 2025](#). Recent perspectives papers, commissioned by NCCA, on alignment of LC Irish to the CEFR will be a useful support in this context.

## Section Summary

- A new specification presents an opportunity to significantly enhance all aspects of communicative language, through enabling students to apply their language learning to real-life situations, to foster genuine fluency, confidence, and spontaneous communication.
- The integration of a student language portfolio may help to enhance student ownership and student engagement with language learning.
- Literacies and numeracy are important aspects of language learning and consideration will need to be given to the range of literacies required by students as language learners and as citizens in a broader society.
- There is an opportunity to review the role of texts, incorporating more modern, engaging, and diverse formats to ensure relevance and support language learning while also considering the model of prescription.
- The redevelopment of LC Irish provides an opportunity to consider the role of assessment, both formative and summative, and to review how the curriculum in its design can provide the basis for relevant and student-centred approaches to assessment including consideration of the oral assessment component.
- The redevelopment of LC Irish will need to consider transition from junior cycle to senior cycle and opportunities for progression.
- Aligning Irish language curriculums at all levels of education with the CEFR to enhance spoken Irish is a government priority and this redevelopment will begin the process of alignment with the CEFR. The CEFR and CEFR CV will be a useful support in guiding curriculum development including the proficiency levels, descriptors, and the focus on an action-oriented approach.

## Brief for the review of Irish

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NCCA has established a development group to undertake the task of redeveloping a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Irish. The work of the Development Group, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and by the Council in the form of the brief, is set out below.

This brief is designed to provide the basis for redeveloping the Leaving Certificate Irish. While the brief is derived from the key insights and issues for consideration identified in the previous sections of this paper, it is also guided by the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects ([Appendix 1](#)).

The specification will be student-centred and outcomes-based and in general terms, the specification should be broadly aligned with levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The model of provision will be in line with the current curriculum provision at senior cycle. The specification will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 180 hours and will be assessed at Higher, Ordinary and Foundation levels.

The specification will align to the template, agreed by Council, for curriculum specifications as set out in the [Technical form of curriculum specifications for subjects and modules in a redeveloped senior cycle](#) (NCCA, 2023). The Senior Cycle Key Competencies will be embedded in the learning outcomes.

The specification will be completed for Q2, 2027.

More specifically, the development of the new specification for Leaving Certificate Irish will address:

- How the specification aligns with the guiding principles of senior cycle and the vision for senior cycle education.
- How the specification could support continuity and progression, including how to connect with and build on related learning at junior cycle, transition year, and in other senior cycle subjects and modules as well as future learning in life, study, entrepreneurship, further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and the world of work.
- How the rationale for Leaving Certificate Irish makes the ambitions of learning the language visible, evident and enjoyable to students, teachers and parents, and foster greater student engagement with the language both in school settings and in the wider community.
- How the specification could support the development of a range of student key competencies and the development of a range of literacies, numeracy and digital skills relevant to future life, work, and study.

- How the specification can further develop student confidence in oral communication and encourage enjoyment through actively participating and applying language learning in different contexts.
- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, could be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions through the learning of Irish.
- How texts might provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for student learning including the opportunities and/or challenges presented by student engagement with texts and the model of prescription.
- How the specification can be guided by and align to relevant elements of the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its Companion Volume (CEFR CV) and how the integration of a student language portfolio might help to foster student engagement and ownership.
- How the assessment of Leaving Certificate Irish aligns to the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects and modules (Appendix 1). Typically, for Irish, as noted in Appendix 1, there should be two assessment components: one written examination (inclusive of aural, composition and comprehension) and an oral assessment.
- How the specification in its design can provide opportunities for assessment that support students as language learners and allow for students with varying abilities and linguistic levels to engage meaningfully with the assessment components.
- How the specification, in its presentation, could support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment.
- How the specification could embrace and embed the potential of digital technology and
- technological advances in teaching, learning and assessment making the language more
- engaging, relevant and accessible for all students.

The work of the Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the Development Group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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## **Appendix 1: Overarching parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects.**

### **1. Background**

- The Minister for Education announced an update on September 20, 2023, on the approach to be taken to the introduction of new and revised subject specifications including how assessment would be addressed in those specifications. Specifically, the announcement indicated that:
  - Each subject shall have an assessment component in addition to the final written examination.
  - This assessment component (an AAC) will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
  - Each subject is to have one written examination; typically marks for the written examination will be 60%.
  - Typically, there should be two assessment components: One written examination and one other assessment component (an AAC).
- More than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and after extensive consideration of the overall assessment load on students. Such exception, however, would be based on strong, clear evidence that a second AAC or a second written paper in the final examination is essential to assess student learning which cannot be achieved through a single AAC and a single written examination paper.

### **2. Introduction**

This document outlines the overarching assessment arrangements and parameters to guide the design of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects which include:

- Art
- Economics
- French
- Gaeilge
- German
- Italian
- Politics and Society
- Spanish
- Technology.

This advice is informed by ongoing work with Tranche 2 and 3 subjects and will be amended, as appropriate, for future tranches which may take account of their subject areas and existing assessment arrangements.

The arrangements as detailed here reflect the policy direction issued by the Minister of Education that all subjects will have an assessment component, to be in a form that is not a traditional written examination, for those components to be set and assessed by the SEC and thereby lead to a reduced emphasis on final examinations in June of 6<sup>th</sup> year.

Specifically, the arrangements for all assessment components as outlined in this document are framed by the Minister’s announcement(s) on March 29, 2022, and subsequently on September 20 2023. Underpinned by the following understandings, the assessment components:

- will not take the form of traditional written examinations
- will be set and marked by the SEC
- will be subject to SEC arrangements for their completion, authentication, and submission.

In developing the arrangements outlined below, the following rationale for moving towards all subjects having another assessment component beyond written examinations is central. This rationale is informed by deliberations on research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC, and on the assessment literature more generally. From this work, it is evident that these components have the potential to:

- **Reduce dependence** on written summative examinations and therefore provide for a **broader assessment system**; written examinations have an important role but can be seen as a ‘snapshot’ of learning and can lead to teaching and learning having an excessive focus on examination preparation; other forms of assessment can mitigate the potential for this narrowing of learning by assessing aspects of student learning better and/or more comprehensively than written examinations alone can do; or assess learning that is not readily assessable through written examinations.
- Support and enhance teachers’ understanding and assessment of **key competencies** by contributing to a greater understanding of how students’ knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are assessed.
- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to **reflect on student learning**, boost students’ motivation to learn and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices.
- Extend the range and diversity of assessment opportunities; including **spreading the assessment load** over the course of the last two years of senior cycle and thus contribute to a reduction in or spreading of pressure on students.
- Build and develop **teachers’ assessment skills and assessment literacy** as teachers support students in working through the assessment activities as detailed within assessment briefs or guidelines.
- Generate student assessment data which can help reduce the vulnerability of the system to future unprecedented or unexpected system shocks such as COVID.
- Allow for assessment opportunities that are more **authentic** than a system relying on terminal written examinations solely.

It is also important to note that a review of the assessment literature more generally also indicates that when introducing other assessment components, it is necessary to consider how to mitigate risks, for example, of:

- over-assessment of students
- over-rehearsal of assessments
- the assessments becoming overly structured, compartmentalised, repetitive, and routine.

As is already the case where other forms of assessment apply, the new assessment arrangements will be guided by the overarching principles of equity, fairness, and integrity.

In addition, at a programme wide level (i.e. taking account of all subjects and modules implemented across schools), it is necessary to have regard to the overall assessment load on students primarily as well as on schools more generally. Whilst it can be expected that SDGs might focus on the approach to assessment in their own subject initially, they are encouraged to be mindful of the overall assessment load across all subjects and modules. Such programme level considerations will also include the methods of assessment being undertaken. As stated above more than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and the following section outlines the process for such cases.

### **3. Process**

This section sets out the process through which a variation to the parameters defined in this document will be considered and decided upon; for example, an additional AAC or a second final written examination.

1. Following extensive discussion by the SDG and after exploration of a range of options for a single suitable AAC/single written examination for the subject, the NCCA Executive generates a written note setting out the strong, clear case being made by the Development Group.
2. The written case is agreed and signed off by the Subject Development Group.
3. The written case is discussed with the Board for Senior Cycle.
4. The written case is discussed with the Council. On foot of this discussion, the Council decides whether or not to send the case forward to the Department.
  - a) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case isn't sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council requests the Development Group to work on the basis of the previously set-out parameters in this document applicable to the subject concerned.

OR

- b) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case is sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council agrees to send the case forward to the Department of Education.
5. In the case of 4b, the written case is sent to the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Management Office (SCRPMO) in the Department of Education for consideration and response.
6. The Department may convene the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Implementation Group (SCRIG) to support its consideration of the request for a variation. The SCRIG is a Department-led structure established to provide oversight and support the co-ordination of work across the key agencies/organisations contributing to the redevelopment of senior cycle. Its members include senior officials from the Department (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, Inspectorate, Teacher Professional Learning [TPL]), NCCA, SEC and Oide.
7. The Department decides to support or decline the request for the variation sought and communicates its decision in writing to the NCCA in a timely manner.

8. The Subject Development Group progresses its work in line with the Council's response (arising from 4a) or the Department's response (arising from 4b and 7).

#### 4. Timelines

The process outlined above will require time. Such time, if involving a number of weeks, could have significant implications for the timeline for specific stages of work on the subject specification and/or the overall completion of the specification ahead of sending it to the Department for consideration. This time factor may necessitate NCCA organising additional online meetings of the Subject Development Group, the Board for Senior Cycle and the Council in order to ensure the development work remains within the overall timelines.

Table 1 below sets out the general parameters and processes to guide the work of the subject development groups (SDG) as they consider the most appropriate assessment for each subject. The specific parameters for each of the Tranche 4 subjects are set out in Table 2.

**Table 1: Assessment parameters and processes – general application to tranche 4 subjects**

Considerations	Parameters to guide the work of the development group.
<b>Nature</b>	<p>The purpose and nature of the assessment component will be clearly outlined in the subject specification and accompanying guidelines to support the completion of the assessment. Details will be provided on the nature of the component. Existing examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• research project/extended essay</li> <li>• oral assessment</li> <li>• performance assessment</li> <li>• portfolio assessment</li> <li>• creation of an artefact</li> <li>• field study</li> <li>• experiment/ proof of concept/ practical investigation.</li> </ul> <p>The subject specification and the accompanying guidelines will articulate clearly what the students are required to do, the form(s) in which it can be carried out and submitted, and the workload expectations associated with the assessment. The alignment of the assessment component to a particular set of learning outcomes from the subject specification will be provided, as well as details on which key competencies and associated learning outcomes will be assessed. This does not preclude the same LOs from being assessed in the final examination.</p>
<b>Weighting</b>	The assessment component in each subject will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
<b>Timing</b>	The SDG will advise on the time required for the carrying out of the assessment component across the course of study.
<b>Completion and Submission</b>	While the SDG may suggest when this may occur (as referenced above having regard to the assessment load on students in particular), a final decision will be made by the SEC following consideration of the overall schedule of completion dates for all assessments across all subjects. This

	<p>will be finalised by the SEC following engagement with the NCCA and DE.</p> <p>The dates for final completion and\or submission of the assessment component by the student will be published by the SEC and this detail will not be included in the subject specification.</p>
<b>Design</b>	<p>The majority of assessment components will result in a completed item that is materially different to a traditional written examination and which tests different competencies being transmitted to the SEC and assessed by the SEC.</p> <p>In some instances, the design of the assessment may require examiners to visit schools to conduct the assessment but manageability at school and system level will need to be considered.</p>
<b>Guidance</b>	<p>Guidelines to support the assessment components will be specific to each subject. These guidelines will be developed collaboratively by the NCCA and SEC. They will be informed by the deliberations of the SDG during the development of the specification and will detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the purpose of the component concerned i.e., what it is intended to assess.</li> <li>• the nature of the assessment component/activity.</li> <li>• descriptors of quality in the form of a graduated rubric and details on assessment standards at higher and ordinary levels if deemed necessary by the assessment method.</li> <li>• details on the timing of the assessment (its duration and when it could happen).</li> <li>• guidance on the processes that may be used for the administration of the assessment.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Parameters for assessment arrangements for each Tranche 4 subject**

Subject	Current arrangements	Parameters for new assessment arrangements
Art	<p><i>Practical coursework: 50% (completed over 12 weeks); In December Year 6 SEC issue a sketchbook and brief with 3 themes and students choose 1. They must create 2 artefacts in 2 distinct areas of practice. 1 artefact is completed in this period and they must engage in planning for the second artefact to be produced in the practical exam.</i></p> <p><i>Practical Examination: 20% (5 hours); invigilated exam. Takes place 10 days after completion of practical coursework (above). The focus is the</i></p>	<p>Written examination: minimum of 30% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum of 60% weighting in response to a brief issued by the SEC.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>

	<p>completion of the second artefact. Planning for this assessment is included in the sketchbook.</p> <p>SEC visit the school to assess both artefacts and the sketchbook.</p> <p><b>Written examination: 30% (2.5 hours)</b></p>	
<b>Economics</b>	<p>Written examination is 2.5 hours duration for higher level and ordinary level students and is awarded 400 of the 500 marks available (80%).</p> <p>Coursework is an individual student research project which is done in response to a common brief from SEC and is worth 100 marks (20%). It is based on the learning outcomes from the specification. The common brief is graded in line with the standards that apply to the level at which the candidate sits the written examination.</p>	<p>Written examination: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>
<b>French</b>	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20% Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25% Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40% Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Focus of oral assessment is a general conversation based on the syllabus content and may include a literary work or a project the student has worked on.</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
<b>Gaeilge</b>	<p><b>Higher and Ordinary Levels</b></p> <p>Written examination with 2 papers:</p> <p>Paper 1: HL 2 hr 20; OL 1 hr 50 (160 marks)</p>	<p>Written examination (inclusive of aural, composition and comprehension): minimum 50% weighting</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 40% weighting</p>

<p>Aural (60 marks)  Composition (100 marks)</p> <p>Paper 2: HL 3 hr 5; OL 2 hr 20 (200 marks)  Reading comprehension (HL and OL: 100m)  Prose (HL 30m; OL 50m)  Poetry (HL 30m; OL 50m)  Additional Literature (HL 40m)</p> <p>Oral Examination: 240 marks</p> <p>For HL and OL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction: 5m</li> <li>▪ Poetry reading: 35m</li> <li>▪ Conversation: 120m</li> <li>▪ Picture sequence: 80m</li> </ul> <p><b>Foundation Level</b></p> <p>One written paper: 2 hr 20 (360 marks)</p> <p>Aural (120m)  Reading Comprehension (150m)  Writing (90m)</p> <p>Oral examination: (240 marks)</p> <p>This is divided into 4 blocks as follows:</p> <p>Block 1: Family and Home  Block 2: School Matters  Block 3: Pastimes  Block 4: Holidays, time, weather and work.</p>	
<p><b>German</b></p> <p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%  Listening Comprehension: HL: 20%  OL: 25%  Reading Comprehension: HL: 30%  OL: 40%  Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period  Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting  Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>

	<p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts:</p> <p>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content</p> <p>B: Discussion of project or picture sequence</p> <p>C: Role play situation</p>	
Italian	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%</p> <p>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%</p> <p>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%</p> <p>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts:</p> <p>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content</p> <p>B: Role play situation</p> <p>C: Picture sequence</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
Politics and Society	<p>Written examination is worth 80% of the total marks available, and the exam is 2 hour 30 minutes in duration.</p> <p>Coursework is a report on a Citizenship project and is allocated the remaining 20%.</p>	<p>Written examination: typically, 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>
Spanish	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%</p> <p>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%</p> <p>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%</p> <p>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL:</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20%</p>

	<p>15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 2 parts:</p> <p>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content with the option of discussing a literary work</p> <p>B: Role play situation</p>	<p>weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
<p><b>Technology</b></p>	<p>Written examination at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%).</p> <p>The higher-level written examination is 2.5 hours in duration and the ordinary level written examination is 2 hours in duration.</p> <p>Coursework at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%).</p> <p>The coursework differs with separate briefs set for higher level and ordinary level.</p> <p>Briefs are issued around 1st October (Year 6) with a completion date of 30th March approx.</p>	<p>Written examination: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>



**NCCA**

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