



NCCA

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

Report on the early enactment review of Leaving Certificate Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese

October 2025

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1. Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) convened the Leaving Certificate Development Group for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese in 2019 to begin the development of new Leaving Certificate specifications for each of these subjects. These specifications were developed as a response to the [Languages Connect Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026](#). The introduction of LC Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications in September 2020, as optional subjects for senior cycle students, was a historic and welcome development at post-primary as these languages were previously assessed as non-curricular subjects at Leaving Certificate.

The initial cohort of students completed the first examination of these subjects in June 2022, with an overall total of 1135 students presenting for assessment. From 2022 to 2025, the examinations were subject to adjusted assessment arrangements following disruption to learning experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The following is a breakdown of student numbers presenting for assessment at Leaving Certificate from 2022 to 2024 for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

Table 1: Number of students sitting LC Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese (2022 –2024)

Language	2022			2023			2024		
	HL	OL	Total	HL	OL	Total	HL	OL	Total
Lithuanian	174	12	186	193	17	210	251	14	265
Polish	789	29	818	916	40	956	998	52	1050
Portuguese	131	0	131	187	0	187	276	0	276
Total	1094	41	1135	1296	57	1353	1525	66	1591

This early enactment review was completed in Q3, 2025 to gather feedback and explore:

- how the curriculum is being enacted and how it could be improved
- the student experience of learning and assessment
- how teachers are working with the curriculum

This report presents an overview of the consultation conducted as part of the review, followed by an overview of the findings. Based on the findings from the review, the report concludes with key insights and proposed next steps. In considering the feedback outlined in this report, it is important to be mindful of the extraordinary effort made by teachers of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese to introduce this subject to the senior cycle curriculum.

2. Background information

This section provides a brief overview of the curriculum specification, the role of the CEFR, the assessment arrangements, and the assessment adjustments introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which is important contextual information when considering the findings below.

Overview of specification

The specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese are designed for a minimum of 180 hours of timetabled student engagement and are organised around two inter-related and inter-dependent strands, Communicative Language Competence, and Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence.

Table 2: Overview of the strands in the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese

Communicative Language Competence Strand	Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence Strand
is concerned with enabling learners to communicate meaningfully in the target language (TL)	is concerned with enabling learners to use languages for the purposes of communication and intercultural interaction
Learning outcomes are organised as follows: Modes of communication ¹ 1. Reception 2. Interaction 3. Production 4. Mediation	Learning outcomes are organised as follows: ² 1. Plurilingual competence 2. Pluricultural competence

The specifications were designed using a framework approach. This involved a common approach across each specification including the introduction, aims, expectations for learners and assessment approaches. The specifications for [Lithuanian](#), [Polish](#) and [Portuguese](#) provide for two levels, Ordinary and Higher level. Active engagement with the learning outcomes is central to supporting overall language proficiency and the following table sets out weighting of the assessment components for each of these subjects at both Ordinary and Higher levels.

Table 3: Overview of Assessment Components

Assessment Component	OL	HL
Oral examination	25%	30%
Aural examination	30%	25%
Written examination	30% Reading 15% Writing	25% Reading 20% Writing

¹ CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001

² Ibid, p.168.

The role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Council of Europe has engaged in extensive work on language education since the 1970s. It launched the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment](#) (CEFR) in 2001. This is a framework of reference that provides tools, guidelines and resources for the development of language curricula, textbooks and assessment tools and programmes to support the teaching and learning of languages. The CEFR has been used internationally for language education to:

- promote and support the learning and teaching of modern languages
- enhance intercultural dialogue, and thus mutual understanding, social cohesion and democracy
- protect linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe
- promote the right to quality education for all.

Since its publication, research and collaboration in the area has continued, leading to the publication of the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors](#) in 2018 which was used as a frame of reference in the development of the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. Since then, the Council of Europe has published the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment: Companion Volume](#) (CEFRCV) in 2020, updating and extending the original framework and replacing the original with a more user-friendly text.

The specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese are broadly aligned to A2/B1 levels of the CEFR spanning the Basic User and Independent User levels and are available to all students.

Adjustments to assessment arrangements introduced during the Covid 19 pandemic

On March 12, 2020, the national response to the Covid-19 pandemic began a process of substantial emergency measures in education, leading to a number of revised assessment arrangements which were reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The changes reflected and recognised the disruption to learning that students experienced due to the pandemic. Students studying Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese from 2022-25 undertook the Leaving Certificate examination under these revised assessment arrangements. Adjustments to the oral examinations included questions on three set topics and also on a wider variety of themes/topics in addition to a discussion on a sample of texts from their Language Portfolio. Adjustments made to the final examination increased choice and reduced the number of questions to be completed. From 2023-25, while the number of questions to be answered in the final examination conformed to pre-adjusted arrangements, additional internal choice was provided in the written production section.

3. Overview of the review process

This review was conducted from March to May 2025, and comprised the following three modes of engagement: an online survey, focus groups for teachers and students and the opportunity to make written submissions on behalf of an organisation

Online survey

A survey was used to gather feedback from anyone who wished to share their experiences of Leaving Certificate Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. This was shared online via www.ncca.ie and was promoted through educational stakeholder networks. 22 responses to the survey were received. The breakdown of survey participants can be seen below.

Table 4: Breakdown of survey participants

Breakdown of survey participants	Number of participants
Post-primary teachers Leaving Certificate Polish	1
Post-primary teachers Leaving Certificate Portuguese	1
Post-primary teachers Leaving Certificate Lithuanian	1
Parent/Teacher educators Leaving Certificate Lithuanian	1
Students of Leaving Certificate Polish	6
Students of Leaving Certificate Lithuanian	9
Students of Portuguese	3

Written submissions

An open invitation for written submissions was made through www.ncca.ie. Two written submissions were received by the following educational stakeholders:

- Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI)
- Polish Teachers of Ireland TPN.

Focus groups

An open invitation to attend in-person or online focus groups for senior cycle students and teachers/educators of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese was made through www.ncca.ie. The focus group events were also promoted through educational stakeholder networks. 23 students participated in the focus groups (2 in-person focus groups and 1 online focus group). Three teachers attended an online focus group.

Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the review consultation. Parental consent and student assent were sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. Data gathered through the school visits, and online interviews, was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the review consultation was stored as digital files in line with the NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2020). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation through invited written submissions.

The feedback from the review is presented below in Section 4 of this report.

4. Feedback from the review

This section presents an overview of the feedback on the enactment of the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese based on the analysis of the information captured across all the modes of engagement. The feedback is presented under the following headings:

- Student engagement with Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese
- Working with the learning outcomes
- Considerations with regard to the CEFR
- Assessment arrangements
- Framework approach

This section also sets out some other areas of feedback within the review which are not directly related to the specification itself but were mentioned by participants during the review.

Student engagement with Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese

Participants in the review welcomed the opportunity for students to engage with Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese as curricular subjects for the Leaving Certificate. The clear structure and content of the specifications were viewed favourably, with many examples of positive learning experiences reported. The growing popularity of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese was highlighted, with reference to the increasing numbers of students opting to study Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese every year. The emphasis on plurilingual and pluricultural competence was acknowledged as empowering, given the context of Ireland as a multicultural society.

The review provided some insights into student motivation for choosing to study Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese at senior cycle. Students stated that studying these languages not only supported their literacy skills but also strengthened family and cultural connections to their communities in both Ireland and their home countries. Furthermore, the opportunity to interact with other young people who also spoke the target language was considered to be a highly beneficial outcome. Some students reported additional benefits related to studying Lithuanian/Polish/ Portuguese such as improving their written language skills. In addition, many perceived studying these languages as being beneficial with regards to obtaining CAO points. Having the option to study one of these languages was also deemed useful for those who did not study Irish in school and who needed an extra subject for the Leaving Certificate. A number of students were influenced by the possibility of working in the target language community. Many also stated that their overall positive learning experience during senior cycle would lead them to recommend studying Lithuanian/Polish/Portuguese as a Leaving Certificate subject to both family members and friends.

Working with the Learning Outcomes

There was a general consensus that the learning outcomes for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese were clear and useful, outlining what students need to know, understand and do after their two years of study. In their feedback, many teachers commended the organisation of the *Communicative Language Strand* in line with the four modes of communication. There was much support for the *Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence Strand*, given the diverse backgrounds of many students who engage with the curriculum specifications. This was echoed in the feedback provided by students in the review, with many highlighting how much they enjoyed deepening their intercultural knowledge through working on cultural projects in areas such as literature, music and dance. Students engaging with the Portuguese specification particularly appreciated learning about different variations of the language as well as interacting with students who spoke these variations.

It was suggested through one written submission that the *Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence Strand* could be further strengthened by reference to the Framework for Reference for Pluralistic Approaches (FREPA). Support for the assessment of cultural learning was also mentioned in both submissions as an area of note, with the suggestion of integrating intercultural communicative tasks and reflection prompts to support the learner experience.

Considerations with regard to the CEFR

Participants noted that broadly aligning the specifications to A2/B1 CEFR levels added clarity. Teachers highlighted the importance of having knowledge of the CEFR when working with the learning outcomes. The inclusion of sample CEFR illustrative descriptor scales to support A2/B1 levels in the Appendix section of the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese was also welcomed with some suggestions for further elaboration. Some suggestions were made in relation to the possibility of refining some learning outcomes to reflect the jagged learning profile of students, where students may develop different language skills in an uneven manner.

There were mixed viewpoints regarding the expectations for learners at CEFR A2/B1 levels. The diversity of students' language proficiency was highlighted in the feedback. It was stated that many students come from heritage language backgrounds, with some having prior experience of schooling in their country of origin. Others include second-generation speakers with varying experiences of using the target language at home. Similar observations were noted in the feedback from students. Some students reported having a high level of proficiency in the target language, with one student suggesting that accessing an advanced class would be beneficial. Others detailed the challenge of learning in a class with students who had higher levels of proficiency, finding it difficult to adjust initially to the level of language spoken in the class.

The Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications can be accessed by both heritage language speakers and students who do not have any prior experience of the language. Some participants across the modes of engagement questioned how students with no prior knowledge of the language would realistically be able to reach A1 proficiency before commencing senior cycle and then continue developing proficiency toward B1 level. It was suggested that 180 hours of engagement with the learning outcomes would not be sufficient in supporting a student with no prior knowledge of the language to progress to A2/B1 level at senior cycle. It was suggested by participants that to meet the needs of absolute beginners, the level would need to be at A1 level

in fifth year and that the learning outcomes would benefit from more detail, particularly in relation to clarifying the linguistic competencies expected at different levels of proficiency.

Assessment arrangements

There was much discussion and feedback gathered throughout the review which focused on the assessment arrangements for Leaving Certificate Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. These are explored here under headings based on the different modes of assessment.

Oral examination

The current assessment arrangements for the oral examination were viewed as generally working well, building students' confidence and allowing them to develop natural and fluent communication. It was acknowledged that the oral examination provided a good opportunity for students to achieve success, as many are either native speakers or heritage speakers of Lithuanian/Polish/Portuguese. Students who participated in the review highlighted how regular oral work allowed them to improve their language skills across a range of themes. Students also reported that frequent oral work helped to increase their confidence in communicating in the target language.

Oral examination – the Language Portfolio

Participants in the review highlighted a number of considerations related to the Language Portfolio and its role within the oral examination for Leaving Certificate Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. While most of the feedback around the Language Portfolio focused on assessment, some students noted the benefits of developing a portfolio over the two years of senior cycle, emphasising its role in supporting enjoyable learning experiences. Other students discussed how the Language Portfolio was helpful in developing their creativity during this period, as they engaged in tasks such as writing essays, drawing maps, designing cooking activities, doing presentations, making audio and video recordings, creating resources for revision etc.

Teachers participating in this review reinforced the importance of supporting students to prepare for the discussion on a sample of texts from their Language Portfolio in the oral examination while students discussed the importance of teacher feedback. Additionally, some students highlighted how preparation for the discussion on sample texts from the Language Portfolio helped to reduce stress ahead of the examination as they had agency in shaping the discussion around texts of personal interest such as a poster, a project, a presentation etc. However, some concerns regarding the use of the portfolio in the oral examination were also expressed and it was suggested clearer guidance for teachers on the role of the Language Portfolio was required.

The oral examination comprises a 12-to-15-minute general conversation, including a discussion on a sample of texts completed by the student as part of their Language Portfolio. Students are not permitted to bring samples of their work into the examination. There were some concerns expressed that students fail to see the value of the Language Portfolio, with many believing that the hard work required to develop the Language Portfolio over the course of two years was not rewarded in the oral examination. There was also a general impression that students who do not engage with the Language Portfolio in a meaningful way during the two years of senior cycle can still achieve in the oral examination. Many students expressed a preference to bring samples of texts from their Language Portfolio into the examination in order to avoid having to memorise points about their work. It was outlined how students can refer to a support in the oral

examination of other Leaving Certificate languages and it was suggested that allowing students to bring in a support would promote fairness and equity across languages³.

Aural and written examinations

Positive feedback was communicated in relation to the aural and written examinations of Leaving Certificate Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. It was perceived that students tend to do well in the aural examination, with this being a generally strong area of proficiency. Participants in the review commended the design of the writing tasks, which had a strong emphasis on real-life communication. The writing prompts were also welcomed as being practical and meaningful. Tasks were described as beneficial for students in terms of supporting critical reflection and engagement. Students reported how their engagement with written and comprehension tasks helped to improve their proficiency in areas such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension level, spelling and grammar etc.

There were mixed views on answering in English in both aural and written examinations, which was sometimes perceived as confusing. Furthermore, it was suggested that translation was not an aspect of the learning outcomes and should not be expected in a language examination. However, answering in English was viewed positively in other feedback gathered, highlighting that this approach supported students who may be less proficient in the target language. In this context, the inclusion of questions in English was considered to be important, given the jagged language profile of candidates presenting for examination.

Some concerns were raised regarding the number of tasks to be completed within the allotted timeframe of the written examination. It was suggested that this was placing pressure on students, such as finding that the length of the reading comprehensions was challenging, particularly for those who might read at a slow pace. Participants emphasised the importance of consistency across all language subjects in their feedback.

In terms of the pitch and standard of both written and aural examinations, some participants suggested that both written and aural examinations worked well, with some perceiving that the aural examination was easy to follow. Some participants in the review focused on the broadly aligned CEFR levels outlined in the specifications and the perceived level of difficulty associated with the Leaving Certificate written examinations for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. However, there were also some suggestions that the written examinations for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese sometimes demanded more than the A2/B1 levels outlined in the specifications and that this could be considered challenging for students particularly from a non-heritage-language background.

Framework approach

The written submissions in particular welcomed the alignment between Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications, stating that the framework approach was useful in supporting a generally consistent approach across all three languages. As noted in Section 2 of this report, a framework approach involves a common approach across each specification including the introduction, aims, expectations for learners and assessment approaches. It was suggested by some participants that a framework approach should consider further the diverse needs of students accessing these specifications, i.e., heritage language speakers and students who do not have any prior knowledge of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. Participants stated that while some students may speak the language fluently, their reading and writing skills could be less

³ For further information, see: [Oral Examinations - State Examination Commission](#)

developed. Awareness of this jagged learner profile was noted as an important consideration when broadly aligning the specifications to CEFR within a framework approach.

Other areas of feedback

The review also highlighted some areas of feedback relating to the uptake and resourcing of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. Participants stressed the importance of working towards integrating Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese into school timetables, as is the case with many languages at post-primary level. It was noted that students typically access these three subjects either by taking classes externally or by working independently. Students were also in favour of having the opportunity to study Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese within their respective school settings and the daily timetable.

Participants in the review suggested that many post-primary schools lack information to promote and support Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications and that clear information on the oral examination needs to be disseminated to both schools and parents in order to support independent learners who are studying these languages without the continuous guidance of a teacher. It was suggested that greater alignment with regards to assessment across all languages at senior cycle might help school management teams to offer more informed support to independent candidates of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

Participants in the review also discussed the fact that students can only access specifications for these subjects from fifth year onwards. Providing access at junior cycle to Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese was suggested as a means to support uptake amongst both students from heritage language backgrounds and students who do not have any prior knowledge of these languages.

The question of resources was also widely discussed with some participants in the review highlighting the lack of supports such as a textbook or authentic materials for teachers to support planning for teaching and learning. The shortage of qualified teachers of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese was also discussed in terms of additional challenges facing these subjects as well as the financial cost of undertaking higher education courses to upskill in the languages.

5. Key insights and proposed next steps

NCCA would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers, students and other stakeholders who contributed to this review. Their feedback was very insightful into how the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese have been enacted and experienced since their introduction in 2020.

An analysis of the feedback from the review indicated that:

- The aim and objectives of the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese are being achieved through student engagement and are viewed as relevant and meaningful to the lives and future lives of students
- The framework approach used across the specifications supports a generally consistent approach across all three languages
- The assessment components are seen as an appropriate means of assessing language proficiency across the different language skills.

- Students, teachers and wider stakeholders responded positively to the introduction of the specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese, and it is hoped that the uptake and popularity of these subjects will continue to increase. It is seen by some as challenging for students with no background in the languages to take the subjects ab-initio in 5th year.

Table 5 below sets out potential considerations and/or future developments informed by the key insights. It is envisaged that these will help to inform language developments as part of broader senior cycle redevelopment and will be communicated to the relevant stakeholder.

Table 5: Key insights and future developments/ considerations

Key insight	Future developments/consideration
<p>The nature of the learning outcomes set out in the specifications was broadly welcomed and seen as providing clarity for planning teaching and learning, although some consideration may need to be given to supporting the jagged language learning profile of students and enhancing the integrated intercultural communicative approach.</p>	<p>This will be considered through the work of the Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Languages Development Group as part of Senior Cycle Redevelopment across Tranche 4 and 5.</p>
<p>The use of CEFR levels for broad alignment is helpful and provides clarity, and the inclusion of sample CEFR illustrative descriptor scales to support A2/B1 levels in the Appendix section was also welcomed.</p>	<p>This feedback will be used to inform the work of the Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Language Development Group in their deliberations around the CEFR and the updated CEFR CV and how this can support Modern Foreign Language developments.</p>
<p>Further consideration may be needed in relation to the role of the Language Portfolio as a support for students' learning and how this may be further integrated across the two years of senior cycle.</p>	<p>This feedback will be used to inform the work of the Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Language Development Group and will be communicated to Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) in the context of their role in supporting the professional learning needs of teachers of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese as they</p>

	<p>continue to engage with the current specifications.</p>
<p>In terms of summative assessment there was some discussion regarding the use of examples from the Language Portfolio in the Leaving Certificate oral examination and the perceived range of CEFR levels evident across examination tasks in the examination paper.</p>	<p>This feedback will be shared with Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Language Development Group where relevant to support deliberations regarding alignment of the curriculum with teaching, learning and assessment, and the design of the Additional Assessment Component (AAC).</p>
<p>Feedback highlighted the need for additional teaching materials in all three language subjects to support learning and teaching. Teachers highlighted the importance of having knowledge of the CEFR when working with the learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Communicate the need for these supports to Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) to help to inform ongoing and future professional learning experiences and the development of support materials.</p>

Next steps

The redevelopment of the curriculum specifications for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese will be guided by the work of the over-arching Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Languages Development Group convened in September 2025. The Leaving Certificate Modern Foreign Languages Development Group will be tasked with the development of a modern foreign languages framework and the review and redevelopment of all modern foreign language specifications with task groups established to provide the expertise to address language-specific aspects of the development for each of the three individual languages. The insights gained through this review will help to inform the work of the Modern Foreign Languages Development Group, the development of the modern foreign languages framework and the work of the language task groups for Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

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Appendix 1: List of organisations who submitted written submissions

The following is a list of organisations who shared a written submission and wished to be named:

- Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI)
- Polish Teachers of Ireland Teacher Professional Network (TPN)



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