



# Report on the enactment of Junior Cycle English 2020

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# Introduction

In line with the Framework for Junior Cycle, a new subject specification for Junior Cycle English was introduced in 2014, with revised assessment arrangements confirmed in 2015. The introduction of the specification in 2014 occurred at a time of significant change within post-primary education in Ireland and was undertaken during a protracted industrial dispute. The specification for Junior Cycle English was developed in line with the Framework for Junior Cycle (2012), whereby assessment, including final examinations would move over time from external assessments to internal assessments administered and marked by schools. The emergence of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) saw this approach to assessment revised and placed the responsibility for the development, administration and reporting on the final assessments in the context of wider Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) reporting with the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The three main consequences of the industrial relations dispute and the amended Framework for Junior Cycle were delayed engagement with CPD; the addition of the Assessment Task; and the dual approach to assessment with assessing and reporting on student achievement in the JCPA shared between teachers via CBAs (teacher judgements supported by features of quality, SLAR meetings and published examples of standard) and the SEC (final examinations).

In June 2018, the NCCA published a *Report of the Review of the Early Enactment of Junior Cycle English* (2018). This report offered early insights into the views of teachers, students and stakeholders on the enactment of the English specification in schools. It concluded with a series of recommendations which included suggested changes to the specification and recommendations for CPD. The full list of recommendations and a summary of the actions arising can be found in Appendix 1.

The purpose of this follow up report is to gather feedback from teachers after further engagement with the specification and in light of the feedback and actions arising from the earlier report, and also to reflect on junior cycle English within an international perspective of the teaching of English in the lower secondary stage of education. Feedback for this report was gathered in three ways:

- teacher feedback at consultation events (approximately 39 teachers participated. See appendix 2)
- written submissions from stakeholders and open email submissions (see appendix 2)
- international desktop research and interviews with teachers by researchers with expertise in secondary English policy and practice internationally.

The structure of the report encompasses feedback on the enactment of the specification, international perspectives, and conclusions and recommendations.

# Feedback on enactment of the specification

This report looks to gather further insights into the enactment of the specification for junior cycle English now that three cohorts of students have had this specification as their curriculum, in keeping with the earlier recommendation that the experience of the specification in schools should be kept under review. Awareness of this follow-on review was raised via NCCA websites and by INOTE (Irish National Organisation of Teachers of English) and other stakeholders. Feedback for this consultation was gathered at consultation events in Dublin, Cork and Galway with an open invite extended to all who wished to attend. In addition, written submissions from key stakeholders and the public were also received via the NCCA website. Discussions at the events focused on the following areas: the specification, planning and task design; examples of student work; classroom-based assessment 1 and 2; subject learning and assessment review meetings; assessment task; final examination and text lists. The written submissions touched on some of the areas in greater or lesser detail. Certain themes emerged across various headings and will be reported on below.

## Specification, planning and task design

As with all junior cycle specifications, expectations for students' learning is expressed in the form of learning outcomes. These set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning. Teachers indicated greater familiarity with the specification and the learning outcomes approach to curriculum specification than in the earlier review. Some echoed the sentiments from the earlier report in welcoming the structuring of the specification into the three strands of oral language, reading and writing and the integrated approach to learning. Others welcomed the specific learning outcomes for first year to help to guide their planning. Mixed views were expressed about the number and nature of some of the learning outcomes with teachers suggesting that the learning outcomes in the specification can be both too open and too specific. Teachers suggested that planning for teaching and learning with the learning outcomes is challenging and particularly mentioned in this context the learning outcomes which include lists of examples and/or multiple verbs. The stakeholder submission from Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) made similar observations about challenges relating to planning with learning outcomes. There was also some commentary on the articulation of skills and knowledge in the specification by teachers. Some commented that the Learning Outcomes specify what the students should be able to do but not what they should know.

The specification is designed for a minimum of 240 hours engagement across the three years of junior cycle. Similar to feedback from the earlier review of English, many teachers reported a reduction of teaching hours for English in the preceding two years, while others had moved to one-hour classes which had an impact on the number of English classes timetabled per week. Many of the comments from teachers on time focused on concerns around having time to analyse texts in the classroom.

Feedback from participants in this review focused somewhat less on perceptions of the increased demands of the specification than in the earlier review and some teachers commented on further adaptations they were making in their year-on-year planning to respond to the guidelines for texts and give what they viewed as sufficient time to these texts whilst simultaneously planning for student learning across the full span of the learning outcomes. Teachers reported that English departments are endeavouring to be agile in adapting to their student cohort and said that this has proved difficult in places. It was clear from the feedback that teachers are still working on pacing their teaching of the specification over the three years. One teacher spoke of the use of professional time to schedule time each week with the English Department as a very positive contribution to building time for planning and collaboration.

Most of the teachers who participated in this review commented that they are planning collaboratively with colleagues in their subject department. Some examples were shared of practices where professional time for English teachers was timetabled together, which enabled department meetings to be held throughout the year and supported an approach to planning as evolving practice. Some teachers participating in the focus groups, as well as submissions from JCT and DES, emphasised the challenges experienced by teachers in planning, particularly in the construction of learning intentions for the integrated skills of reading, writing and oral language and in the development of students' personal responses.

Teachers who participated in the review welcomed the general approach taken in the specification, particularly the strands and the emphasis given to oral language. As in the earlier review, they spoke of increasing their focus on incorporating planning for oral language development in first year and reported seeing the benefits of this for students' overall language development and particularly when students engaged with CBA 1, oral communication, in second year. Planning for CBA 2 was also reported as being incorporated across the three years of junior cycle and teachers expressed growing familiarity with the expectations for learning in the specification. Teachers also spoke about using Assessment for Learning and a wide variety of teaching methodologies to support learning, whilst also referencing the challenges of keeping students meaningfully engaged, particularly in group work.

## Examples of student work

NCCA works on an ongoing basis with teachers across schools to develop and publish examples of student work which is intended to support teacher judgement about the quality of student work. This work is published following a quality assurance (QA) process which involves teachers and colleagues from JCT, SEC and the Inspectorate. These examples of student work are most often used by teachers to support discussions during SLAR meetings where there may be uncertainty around the descriptor awarded to a particular piece of student work.

Mixed views were expressed about the nature, purpose and use of the published examples of student work on [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie). Some organisation/agency submissions and some teachers requested that a broader and more diverse range of examples be made available online, representing more diverse contexts and range of ability and achievement, including examples of multimodal texts. Almost all teachers said that they had accessed the examples of student work in the initial stages of implementation of the specification, but most said that they had not looked at the samples in some time. This reflects the initial findings outlined in the earlier English report. There was also some discussion of the standard exemplified in the examples of student work. Some teachers did express the view that it is important to have the national standard exemplified in the examples of student work and also commented that it is very difficult to ensure consistency across the country. The potential for standards to evolve over time, which was commented upon in the early insights review of phase two subjects, Science and Business Studies, was not referenced by English teachers as they participated in this review.

## Classroom-based assessment 1 and 2

CBA 1, oral communication, was viewed very positively by the majority of teachers who provided feedback. Many commented that the components of oral literacy were being taught before the introduction of the specification but welcomed the fact that it is now more systematically included as part of planning for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting. Some teachers view the broad scope of the first CBA as positive, as students can choose the topic of interest to them and choose the appropriate format of communication, which can act as a motivating factor for students. However, as was reported in the earlier English review, most said that a digital/power point presentation tends to be the default choice of most students. Some teachers suggested that the broad scope for CB1 outlined in the *Guidelines for Classroom-Based Assessments and the Assessment Task* is too broad and indicated

that they would prefer a narrower choice, possibly linked to some other aspect of the course to guide students in their oral communication CBA.

Given increased experience of scheduling, there was greater emphasis on the challenges of scheduling CBAs than in the previous review. Many suggested (teachers, and stakeholders) that as more revised subject specifications and related CBAs become part of school planning and the learning experience for students, there is increasing pressure on schools, teachers and departments in terms of scheduling the CBAs. Where teachers viewed CBAs as an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment, the CBAs were viewed as a positive experience that enhanced the learning experience of the students. Where CBAs were viewed as stand-alone assessment events there was different feedback. Some teachers commented on parental pressure and the existence of grinds in CBAs as examples of classroom-based assessments being treated as high stakes assessments and of student refusal to work in partners or groups to perceived pressure to perform. There was also feedback from teachers suggesting that many students do not value the CBA and some teachers spoke of students opting out of doing the CBA on the basis that it has no impact on their final grade. Some teachers expressed the view that CBAs should be recognised and valued and that this could be achieved by combining with the results of the final examinations to provide one overall composite descriptor or grade. Whilst feedback in relation to the CBAs arises from the experience of English teachers, some of these comments are not subject and specification specific but relate to the wider Framework for Junior Cycle such as the scheduling and value placed on CBAs, the use of grade descriptors and issues around reporting. These topics are explored below on page 13.

There was some discussion around planning for CBA 1 for students with SEN. Some teachers suggested that the CBA is not inclusive for all students while others expressed the opinion that the CBA provides opportunities to support students with SEN and validate their learning.

In feedback on CBA 2 many teachers participating in the review spoke of the opportunities for feedback conversations arising from this CBA, and how this is beneficial for students as it places value on the drafting process. Teachers reported that students benefitted from reflecting on their work and gaining ownership of their writing in the decision-making process of selecting their work for the Collection of Texts. Some spoke of student ownership of the Collection of Texts such that they were writing and creating independently and coming to see themselves as writers. One submission noted the potential for enhancing alignment of practice with the specification by encouraging the use of the Collection of Texts for the development of a comprehensive collection that demonstrates student progression and achievement rather than focus on minimum requirements for summative assessment. Additional wording for the *Guidelines for Classroom-Based Assessment and Assessment Task* to this effect was



suggested, in addition to sharing of practice which may be beneficial in helping to develop a broader, more effective use of the Collection of Texts.

Challenges associated with this CBA include the management and storage of student work which was mentioned by several teachers (and initially highlighted in the earlier report); applying features of quality to different genres of work, particularly where some genres lend themselves to displaying creativity more than others; and giving feedback at a common level in the awareness that the final assessment is still accessed at higher and ordinary level. The JCT submission also queried the inclusion of collaborative and multimodal pieces as part of CBA2 which, whilst in keeping with the spirit of the Collection of Texts, can prove more challenging for the application of the features of quality. This issue was also raised regarding the extract included in the Assessment Task.

As was the case with CBA1, mixed views were expressed about how inclusive CBA2 is for students with special educational needs. Some teachers spoke about the challenges of supporting students to display their learning, particularly when assistive technology or other supports may or may not be deemed necessary. This is consistent with the concerns around inclusive teaching, learning and assessment reported in the earlier English review.

## Subject learning and assessment review meetings

Feedback on the experience of SLAR meetings varied. Where teachers spoke positively about SLAR meetings, a number of supportive factors were frequently referenced. SLAR meetings went well where: there was support for staff to hold the meetings; the majority of staff saw the value of the meetings; there was a positive collegial atmosphere that supported professional conversations. In these cases, SLAR meetings were reported as an opportunity to discuss teaching and learning in the classroom as well as to decide on the allocation of descriptors. Some of these supportive factors were initially reported in the earlier English report such as the support of management and an atmosphere of professional collegiality. Their reiteration here suggests that these factors continue to play an important role in how teachers experience SLAR meetings in schools. There was some commentary that the meetings formed the basis of planning for the following year where successes were built on and colleagues collaborated on materials and resources. Some teachers saw the role of facilitator as an opportunity to upskill and the rotation of the role was seen as a positive aspect of the SLARs. Some teachers mentioned that PME students were invited to attend the SLAR meeting and saw this as a positive induction into the role of English teacher. The JCT submission commented on the opportunities provided by the SLAR meetings to discuss and appreciate the work of colleagues, contributing to growth, creativity and development within English departments. Some teachers

reported having had negative experiences of SLAR meetings and indicated that, in their view, this was due to disengagement from the process, an absence of professional conversations and a sense that SLAR meetings thus became tokenistic.

## Assessment task

The views expressed about the assessment task by focus group participants were overwhelmingly negative. The purpose, function and value of the task was questioned with many seeing it as unfit for purpose. There were serious concerns over the performative nature of the task, where 'reflection on demand' was required and this was regarded as lacking alignment with the aims of the specification. The stimulus material was regarded as confusing for students as it was felt to be too advanced for some students and teachers commented that students reported they could not see the point of its inclusion if there was no requirement to comprehend the stimulus piece. The JCT and SEC also commented on perceptions of a disconnect between the stimulus and the subsequent assessment task. This echoes comments from the earlier English report. The prompts were viewed by teachers at the focus groups as too difficult, requiring a level of metacognition that could be considered beyond what can reasonably be expected from fourteen and fifteen-year old students. There was concern that this could encourage students to provide rehearsed or inauthentic reflections in order to have something to write. Stakeholders and teachers also warned against the risk of over-assessment of students, which the Assessment Task was seen as directly contributing towards.

## Final examination

Teachers welcomed the variety of tasks on the examination paper. Some teachers commented that the assessment of students' capacity to make comparisons between texts is a feature of final examination papers to date which provides a solid foundation for progress to senior cycle English. This differs slightly from feedback in the earlier report where many teachers found that the extent to which students should learn to draw comparisons between texts is not clear in the specification. Some of the focus group participants broadly welcomed the primary emphasis on extended writing, moving from the examination to the collection of texts, whilst others said that they find this problematic. The relevance and variety of genres evident on the paper was welcomed by teachers and seen as a positive development. Some teachers expressed dismay that the approach of having students write about their studied drama, poetry and fiction in the final examination, which was a feature of the final assessment of the 1989 Junior Certificate syllabus via two examination papers (as opposed to two CBAs and a final exam) had shifted to the final assessment of some but not all of the genres and prescribed texts

studied. Some teachers particularly emphasised this point in relation to Shakespeare, which is compulsory for students who intend to sit the assessment at HL yet does not appear on the examination every year. Teachers in the focus groups reported that as the majority of classes are mixed ability in composition, this impacts on the choices they can make for their text selections and so reduces teacher agency when they were planning in the context of their student cohort. This echoes similar feedback from the early enactment report (NCCA, 2018).

Feedback on the assessment of learning outcomes in the final examination was mixed. Many teachers mentioned that a lack of predictability in the exam is welcome as it moves away from a dependence on formulaic answering. Some pointed out that knowledge of subject-specific terms (such as grammatical or technical terms for poetry or drama) is often tested in the examination yet this specificity is not present in the curriculum specification. Many teachers expressed the view that the varied format, layout and structure of the final examination is problematic for students and suggested that a regular structure and spread of marks could help students to navigate and pace themselves through the experience of the terminal examination and display their learning. As in the previous review of English, there was some commentary on the use and structure of the booklets, with some feedback suggesting that the inclusion of rough work boxes was not helpful, and the lined sections may not enable students to fully display what they have learned, such as paragraphing and layout.

Teachers expressed concern for students for whom English was not their first language and who had recently started learning English. These students previously had access to assessment at foundation level that allowed for recognition of their progress and achievement as language learners, but teachers suggested that now, in the ordinary level examination, these students were gaining 'partially achieved' or 'not graded' descriptors and that this could have the effect of diminishing their motivation and sense of achievement. Some teachers expressed the view that there is no need for any examination at junior cycle.

Some of the comments about the final examination focused on structural issues outside the remit of the review of English. These are included on page 13 below under the heading 'Themes relating to the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)'.

## Text lists

Teachers welcomed the text lists in general. The revised prescribed list for 2018 was also welcomed as it invigorated the choices available. But it was pointed out that this did require additional resources to purchase class sets of texts, particularly where schools use the book rental scheme. Schools welcomed the fact that some of the classic novels and plays remain on the list as these gave familiar options but

commented that when they were removed from the list it caused some problems for schools in sourcing the books for students.

The suggested list for first year was broadly welcomed but the practice of primary schools using the list to select class novels for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class was viewed as problematic, as it either delays decision making about book lists until students have already started first year or if booklists are sent out in advance, can lead to students reading the same class novel for English in primary and secondary school. This difficulty was initially reported in the earlier review of English and its recurrence would suggest that the practice has continued. The increase in choice in the film section in response to the issues raised in the earlier report was welcomed but some commented that the list of films remained uninspiring. Many teachers and the JCT submission commented on the accessibility of films, particularly as DVDs become less common, and devices to play DVDs in schools become scarce. Varied opinions were expressed on the place of film and multimedia in English as a subject domain. Some teachers expressed a lack of confidence in teaching this area of the specification and emphasised that further professional development and enhanced familiarity with film terminology was needed. This is consistent with the requests expressed in the earlier English review where there were calls for additional CPD in this area. This has been a focus in the CPD provided (see appendix 1) and further consideration of this can be found in the recommendations of this report. The emphasis on short films in CPD was viewed positively as was their use in classroom teaching as a good resource to help students to access and understand film craft quickly.

There were also some discussions around the guidelines in relation to poetry. Some teachers expressed concern that they were not exploring poetry in the same level of detail as they had previously and said that they often used poetry as a springboard to other activities. There was a suggestion from the teachers at a focus group that a list of prescribed or suggested poetry could be included or a long list of poetry from which a selection could be chosen. Some teachers at the focus groups commented that poetry selection was often dictated by the textbooks available in aiming to select a range of poems that were age and thematically appropriate. It was suggested at a focus group that a collaboration with Poetry Ireland may be useful to support teachers to diversify their selection of poems and go beyond those printed in the textbooks, building on some of the suggestions and resources already provided by JCT.

## Themes relating to the Framework for Junior Cycle

A number of themes emerged in the discussions that referenced broader implications of the Framework for Junior Cycle rather than Junior Cycle English specifically. This feedback will inform the research study on the evaluation of the impact of the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) which is due to commence in 2020.

### **Value and scheduling of CBAs**

Many of the participating teachers commented on the value placed on the CBAs. Teachers said they value the learning experienced by the students and some suggested that there should be more external value associated with the CBA given the time and skill development that it encompasses. Concern that learning displayed outside of final examinations will not be valued by students and parents also featured in the earlier review. In both reviews of Junior Cycle English, there were some queries about the extent to which students are learning through listening to the CBA oral communications of their peers and some teachers commented that this can take up a lot of class time. Some teachers also spoke of ongoing difficulties with absenteeism.

### **Reporting of student achievement**

There was some discussion of the grade descriptors, with many reporting that they lack meaning for students. The revised grade boundaries were discussed in this review and in the review of phase two subjects. Teachers and stakeholders expressed interest in the rationale for changes to the grade boundaries previously in place. Many were of the view that it was demoralising for high achieving students not to reach the distinction band and that the wide merit band potentially created an unrealistic expectation of achievement for some students.

### **Timing of JCPA and communication with parents**

The reporting of the CBAs in the JCPA was also viewed by teachers as problematic both in timing and in terms of sense-making for parents. The timing of the release of the JCPA was criticised and there was a desire for the JCPA to be available on the same date as the results of the final examinations as it would provide a broader picture of student learning for parents. This would also recognise the achievements of students undertaking Level 2 Learning Programmes at the same time as their peers. The JCT submission also commented on the challenges of communicating the changed and dual language of assessment with parents and suggested a renewed communication with parents on this topic at local and national levels.

## **SLAR meetings**

There were concerns expressed over the variation of experience between schools. Some teachers suggested that the Inspectorate could play a role in moderating the results of the SLAR meetings to ensure national standard is upheld whilst other teachers expressed the view that this could undermine teachers growing confidence in making professional judgements both individually and collectively during SLAR meetings. The difficulties faced by small and large schools were also raised, particularly in relation to the time needed for the SLAR meeting. Many spoke of the importance of the support of management in scheduling and valuing the SLAR meetings. Where this was evident, particularly where the timetabling of professional time allowed for the SLAR meetings taking place, the SLARs were viewed as a more positive experience. The recently issued clarification around the timing of SLAR meetings should provide the clarity sought by teachers about the timing of SLAR meetings.

# International perspectives on Junior Cycle English

As part of this review, a team of researchers with experience of comparatively analysing the teaching of English at secondary level across various jurisdictions was asked to review the material available in relation to Junior Cycle English to provide an external perspective on the model of English teaching and learning outlined in the specification. These researchers are based in the University of Glasgow (Louise Hayward and Ernest Spenser) and Kings' College, London (Bethan Marshall and Simon Gibbons). The material they examined included the specification for Junior Cycle English, the Assessment Guidelines for the Classroom-Based Assessment and Assessment Task, some of the examination papers for Junior Cycle English (Higher and Ordinary Level), the text lists and the early enactment review of the implementation of English report. In addition to this desk-top study, two of the four researchers, Bethan Marshall and Ernest Spenser also attended the Dublin consultation event and held a focus group with some of the English teachers in attendance.

The focus of this study was on how the specification and learning outcomes compare internationally in terms of aspiration, expectation, alignment with assessment, teacher agency, coherence, areas of risk and models of change. A brief summary of their feedback is given below.

The study concluded that the **curriculum model** evident in the specification and documentation is consistent, in their view, with current international trends in the teaching of English. The specification for Junior Cycle English embraces a growth model of English, incorporating cultural and critical literacy and encouraging wide critical reading. The prominence of literature was seen as a notable, positive feature as is the recurring emphasis on the integration of spoken and written language. The use of Learning Outcomes, and the clarification of some issues since the initial implementation, was seen as supporting at a policy level a rich provision of English work, while also noting that

*“some teachers felt they now needed to concentrate too much on individual learning outcomes at the expense of wider appreciation of the literature being studied.”*

In examining the difficulties perceived in the expression of the **Learning Outcomes** in terms of what students can do rather than what they need to know, the researchers commented

*“there is an argument to suggest that the two are inextricably interrelated in the use of language to achieve communicative purposes. There may be benefit in making this interrelatedness more explicit in professional learning”*

In terms of the **expectations** evident in the specification, the researchers found that they were “consistent with high quality English curricula internationally” and the use of the Collection of Texts was consistent with approaches taken in other jurisdictions. The specification of amount and types of literature to ensure appropriate challenge and coverage was welcomed, with a review of personal reading suggested as an inclusion to the specification. The choice of texts in the text list was also seen as offering scope for a selection of material that was accessible for all.

In theory, the curricular principles and the **assessment** were found to be well aligned but it was acknowledged that the challenge faced in maintaining a strong alignment across curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is one that faces all jurisdictions. In relation to the CBAs, the development of features of quality was seen as a positive action to integrate assessment for learning and a suggestion was made that further consideration could be given to wider roles that students might play in the negotiation of tasks and progression in learning. The CBAs and the JCPA were seen as reflecting the philosophy of the specification and in their conversations with teachers, the learning gained by students was well valued. However, the researchers echoed feedback from teachers that consideration be given to ways to enhance the significance and status of the CBAs.

The provision of **exemplification** was discussed and it was acknowledged that providing exemplification of listening skills is challenging. An updated bank of exemplars of student work was discussed as a positive action in establishing a common understanding of standards. There was some discussion in the focus group on how to ensure that critical and creative writing are given appropriate significance and are assessed. Some teachers said that an advantage of the Collection of Texts is that it embeds extended writing in ongoing teaching, learning and assessment and allows the space for creativity in a manner that they viewed as more conducive to the creative process than the terminal examination. While noting that the portfolio approach is broadly similar to the approach taken in other jurisdictions, the researchers commented

*“It may be however, that both the range of writing purposes and the process of drafting/redrafting will be best addressed as pedagogical concerns rather than through curriculum specification. There is probably a good case for teachers’ ongoing professional learning, over the coming years, incorporating in-depth consideration of the process of writing, and the relevant pedagogy.”*

The development of **teacher agency** was seen as a central part of the process of curriculum development and enactment. The professional learning experienced by the teachers, in addition to positive experiences in SLAR meetings and in the exemplification of student work, were all seen as contributing to the development of teacher agency. Where additional needs were identified by teachers in the focus group, the researchers noted,



*“They [the teachers] were concerned that the exemplars did not give them enough information about what to do, for example, in relation to reading strategies, digital literacy, exemplification of oral work. This is not a reason to be more prescriptive. Rather, it is a reason to offer more support and to facilitate more opportunities for teachers to support one another in professional networks.”*

The researchers also observed that if the experience of collaborative planning and SLARS are relatively recent developments in Irish schools, then the creation and maintenance of arrangements to promote and support teacher agency are important. The researchers also expressed surprise at dependence on textbooks as a feature of the planning experienced by the teachers as this was not as prominent a feature in the other jurisdictions they had previously researched.

The **final assessment** was assessed by the researchers as representing

*“a good assessment of English capacities, designed to avoid mere reproduction of rote learning. It takes a more proactive view of English than a memory test and the language and literature are well conflated within the second part of the examination”.*

The unpredictability of the structure of the examination, along with the widespread use of ‘mocks’ and a variety of practice material, was however highlighted as problematic for both teachers and students.

The researchers viewed the **assessment task** as both challenging and potentially problematic as it

*“requires of students a high degree of self-reflection on their own work, which may or may not be indicative of the quality of the actual writing that they have done.”*

The researchers queried the relationship between the Higher and Ordinary levels and felt that this distinction was not clear in the documentation. The issue also arose when examining the extent to which the specification is appropriate to all learners. The researchers highlighted the potential of a tiered examination system to have a negative impact on student motivation and self-esteem.

The study concluded with a number of areas for further consideration and reflection based on their perspectives, arising from their comparative work in other jurisdictions. Some of areas are listed below:

- Exploration of the development of a departmental structure, where schemes of work are created independent of textbooks, which is normative practice in the UK and Canada.
- Encouragement of active listening through provision of further exemplar material on oral tasks, such as group work.

- Ensuring that professional learning reflects the breadth of the new curriculum, the pedagogical approaches best suited to it and the wider conceptualisation of assessment that is evident in the documentation.
- Enhancing the significance and status of Classroom-based Assessments, including oral assessments, given that there is a view that they 'do not count' because they are not part of the final examination.
- Exploring what steps can be taken such that the qualification obtained by students taking the Ordinary level examination has appropriate status and they are motivated to achieve it.

# Conclusions

Enacting curricular change is a gradual process and the less than favourable circumstances surrounding the implementation of the specification for Junior Cycle English has impacted on how the changes were experienced by teachers and students. However, in this review and the extensive responses of teachers in the earlier review, there are many areas where teachers said that the specification and its enactment have benefitted teaching and learning in the classroom.

The oral language strand in the specification and the experience of CBA 1 have been broadly welcomed by participants in both this review and in that conducted in 2017. An increased emphasis on oral communication is very much in keeping with the spirit of the specification. The emphasis on broader reading in the specification and the guidelines for texts is supported by the text list, which is generally welcomed and has supported teachers in making text choices from a broad range of options. The development of the Collection of Texts has the potential to further develop students' writing and drafting skills whilst also gathering evidence of student progression in a range of areas. However, some of the feedback in this review suggested that in some cases the potential of the Collection of Texts to support student development as writers is not being fully exploited and is confined to a narrow focus on product rather than process i.e. the two pieces which are submitted for assessment at the end of the CBA2 process.

A number of concerns expressed by teachers and stakeholders in this review and echoed in the international research are considered below:

- teachers expressed a desire for further support for teaching film and visual literacy, including media and multimodal texts. This can vary from school to school and teacher to teacher. It may be important for English departments to assess their needs in their own contexts and plan the professional learning accordingly. A range of development opportunities are available in relation to areas such as film, media studies and creative writing which can be accessed via webinars, teacher professional networks and JCT CPD. In-school teacher led CPD which facilitates sharing of teacher expertise in particular areas can also be used effectively, as appropriate.
- some concerns around extended writing and developing creativity could be addressed by further exploring the potential and importance of the Collection of Texts. While CPD to date has focused on the possibilities for learning through engagement with the Collection of Texts, further and ongoing CPD is needed to fully develop the potential for the collection to support student

development as writers and creators of texts. The value of extended critical and creative writing via the collection of texts could be explored further.

- exemplification of a range of diverse and varied student work should continue to support teachers in reaching shared understanding of the national standard. Publishing multimodal and collaborative examples of student work should be prioritised in the years ahead as part of ongoing gathering and publishing of examples of student work.

There are a number of comments raised in the review that have implications beyond the scope of this subject-specific review and are framework-related issues. The feedback set out below is reported for consideration by all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle, and it will inform the research study on the evaluation of the impact of introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015).

- The process of department-based planning with learning outcomes, particularly long-term planning, would appear to still need further support in the professional development space. The continued and enhanced use of the cluster model of CPD may be beneficial.
- Broad concerns relating to time for planning were expressed during this review. In this review, amongst participating teachers, where the planning process was an ongoing collaborative process across the school year, fewer concerns were raised, though this cannot be generalised across all teachers. Support for the planning needs of teachers, including support at local level, is an area in need of continued development and support. Some exemplification of effective practice around the use of professional time may be a useful additional support for schools and teachers in planning professional time.
- Some teachers suggested that achievement in CBAs should be combined with the final examination mark to form one composite grade for the subject. However, it is important to note that this view was not unanimous and would need to be considered carefully in light of the fact that the separation of teacher judgements and SEC judgements was a core component of the compromise that resolved the earlier industrial relations dispute, and to ensure that the pressure on students is not increased as a consequence. Bringing forward the release of the JCPA could place increased value on the CBAs without awarding a percentage of the final mark to the CBAs.
- Reservations have been expressed about the purpose and value of the Assessment Task. This echoes feedback from the early enactment of Junior Cycle English in schools and feedback

from the review of the phase two subjects, Science and Business Studies. The future role of the Assessment Task requires careful consideration.

- An information campaign for parents to support them in understanding the dual approach to assessment and the grading system for both CBAs and the final examination would be welcome. This could be disseminated through both the National Parents Council and the schools themselves through parent information evenings, parent-teacher meetings and as printed or digital information which can be enclosed with school reports and other communications with parents.

Appendix 1: Recommendations from the early enactment report and associated actions.

**Specification for Junior Cycle English**

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The ‘guidelines for texts’ section should be amended to clarify the position of film. The specification and text list circular should then be aligned.</p>	<p><b>2018:</b></p> <p>On page 11, the guidelines for texts have been amended to offer clarity in relation to film and to align with the most recent Junior Cycle English text list circular.</p>
<p>The meaning of ‘non-literary texts’ needs to be clarified. This could be included as a short paragraph in the specification or as a definition in a ‘glossary of key terms’ appendix.</p>	<p><b>2018:</b></p> <p>Inclusion of definition of ‘non-literary texts’ in a Glossary of key terms appendix on page 21.</p>
<p>Minor amendments to the specification should be made, to align it with later junior cycle specifications e.g. insert sub-headings for Transition from Primary School and Transition to Senior Cycle; insert Key Skills graphic; add a glossary of key terms as an appendix.</p>	<p><b>2018:</b></p> <p>In order to align this specification with other junior cycle specifications, the key skills graphic was added to page 7, the assessment and reporting section (page 16 – 20) was updated and glossary of key terms added as appendix.</p>

## Assessment Guidelines

Recommendation	Progress
<p>A second edition of the Assessment Guidelines should be published. This second edition should include a section on reporting; slightly expand the section on oral communication formats; include the oral communication note-taking template as an appendix; consider advice to schools re: recording and retaining student work in light of GDPR; and update the section relating to inclusion. Other sections should be updated to align with later junior cycle assessment guidelines.</p>	<p><b>January 2019:</b></p> <p>Second edition of the assessment guidelines published including section on recording and reporting, expanded section on oral communication formats, oral communication note-taking template included as an appendix, advice for schools on recording and retaining student work in light of GDPR, updated section on inclusion aligned to later junior cycle assessment guidelines.</p>

## Continuing professional development

Areas where teachers frequently mentioned needing further support are listed below along with the additional CPD introduced since 2018. These examples are indicative rather than exhaustive as CPD is an ongoing iterative process that evolves over time. There is also ongoing collaboration between various stakeholders in this space to respond to evolving needs as they arise.

Area	Progress
<p>Reading comprehension strategies (LO R3) and reading pedagogies (reading aloud, silent reading, independent reading, reading for research) with the aim of achieving a balanced approach in light of students' needs, the learning outcomes and the guidelines for texts</p>	<p><b>CPD 2018:</b></p> <p>Cluster days for teachers that explored how text is defined in the English Junior Cycle Specification, the new list of Prescribed Texts for 2018-2023, related non-literary texts and LO3.</p>
<p>Film and visual literacy (LO R9)</p>	<p><b>CPD 2018/2019:</b></p> <p>CPD workshops on making meaning of the visual text and considering short film.</p>

<p>Oral language pedagogies which support further development of the inter-connected oral communication skills of listening, spoken production and spoken interaction</p>	<p><b>CPD 2018</b></p> <p>Workshops included focus on the dialogic classroom, the SLAR process and online resources for Oral Language Strategies provided.</p>
<p>Writing as a process. There may be scope to link in with existing programmes such as Writers in Schools, Arts in Education, Creative Ireland programme, SWIFT programme, Fighting Words etc.</p>	<p><b>CPD 2018/19 and ongoing</b></p> <p>Online resources developed. CPD focused on the writing process, free writing, drafting and redrafting, the collaborative writing process. Collaborations were made with the Irish Film Institute (Film in Focus Workshop), the National Association for Youth Drama (Young Critics Workshop), The Abbey Theatre (Speaking Shakespeare) and Poetry Ireland (Ignite the Spark) to provide elective CPD to teachers have worked, through Arts in Junior Cycle workshops.</p>
<p>Planning (both incremental and long-term) and curriculum task design (learning outcomes, learning intentions, success criteria)</p>	<p><b>CPD 2018/2019</b></p> <p>Focused on planning a unit of learning. In addition, the Collaborative Planning for Junior Cycle English on page 27 of the 2019/20 Cluster CPD Booklet is a flexible and adaptable approach to sub-group Learning Outcome and Assessment planning.</p>
<p>Integration of Level 2 and Level 3 in planning and in practice</p>	<p><b>CPD 2019/2020</b></p> <p>Integrated planning included. In April 2019, the JCT English Webinar 5, published on the JCT website under <b>Elective CPD Webinar Series</b> focused on L2LP integration in the English classroom.</p>



Facilitation training for Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings.	<b>CPD 2018 – 2020</b> Training for SLAR Facilitation has been rolled out nationally for all teachers of all Junior Cycle subjects through the education centres during 2018/19 and 2019/20.
It was also suggested that JCT collate and publish reviews of ‘new’ texts on the revised text list for 2018 - 2023 on <a href="http://www.jct.ie">www.jct.ie</a>	JCT English Team have published a review of each of the texts on the revised test list for 2018-2023.

### Examples of student work

Recommendation	Progress
Expand the range of examples for the Collection of the Student’s Texts (CBA2), with a particular emphasis on publishing the full range of the band of achievement <i>In line with expectations</i> and on multimodal/digital texts.	<b>2019/2020</b> Further examples of student texts for CBA 2 have been published. Work is ongoing on providing examples of multimodal/digital texts.
Expand the range of examples for Oral Communication to demonstrate inclusive approaches and collaborative possibilities, ideally in formats other than presentations.	<b>2019/2020</b> Further examples of student work published including collaborative possibilities and formats other than presentations. Some examples of inclusive assessment published.
Provide further guidance in relation to inclusive practices for on-going teaching and learning and the extension of this support into classroom-based assessments. This may be provided in a variety of ways, including in further examples of student work.	<b>2020</b> Further work is ongoing on exemplifying inclusive practices for ongoing teaching and learning in the samples of student work provided. See also JCT webinar on L2LP integration in the English classroom

<p>Create a support video for parents/schools in relation to the purpose and function of examples of student work, their role in supporting teacher judgements and the language of the descriptors.</p>	<p><b>2019</b></p> <p>An information leaflet for parents outlining changes to junior cycle was created and disseminated by JCT and can be accessed at <a href="http://jct.ie">jct.ie</a></p>
<p>Primary Examples of Student Work in English for 3rd – 6th class may provide further clarity about student learning in English during primary school and contribute to better transitions from primary to post-primary experiences of English.</p>	<p>A link is available from the curriculum online landing page for junior cycle English to examples of student work in English from primary school.</p>

## Appendix 2: Consultation events and submissions received

### Consultation events:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Number of English teachers</b>
Cork consultation, 12 November 2019	16
Dublin consultation, 5 December 2019	16
Galway consultation, 18 November 2019	7

### Submissions received:

1.	DES Inspectorate
2.	JCT Team
3.	SEC
4.	Gorey Community School
5.	Online teacher submission

