

Early enactment review of Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2



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1. Introduction

This research was the result of a request from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to carry out a review of the early enactment of the Irish L1 and L2 specifications for Junior Cycle. The purpose of the report is to gather the views of teachers, students and stakeholders in relation to Junior Cycle Irish Specifications introduced in September 2017. This work was undertaken by staff of SEALBHÚ between February and June 2022. The information for this review was collected through an online survey for teachers, school visits to organise focus groups with students, online focus groups with teachers, and written submissions from education stakeholders.

We are extremely grateful to the teachers and students who took part in the research and for their support during a challenging time when there was a high rate of Covid19 circulating in the community. The level of engagement reported below reflects the interest and commitment of teachers in the teaching and learning of Irish.

This report is set out in four parts. This introduction is followed by a presentation of the research methodology. Subsequently, the results from the various sources are presented and analysed. Finally, a conclusion is arrived at from the findings of the research.

1.1 Context

In 2015 feedback was collected, through a public consultation, from educational and Irish language stakeholders as well as the general public on one common specification for Junior Cycle Irish. This feedback highlighted the need for continuity in the learning of Irish from primary to post-primary school and for differentiation in learning, teaching and assessment in the L1/L2 contexts. Arising from this feedback, differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for Junior Cycle Irish were developed. The L1 and L2 labels relate to the language of the teaching and learning context of the school rather than to the children's linguistic background. The L1 specification is aimed at native speakers and learners in Gaeltacht schools and students in the Irish-medium sector (Gaelcholáistí and Irish-medium Units), in general. The L2 specification is aimed primarily at students who are pursuing Irish as a second language, in English-medium schools. The specifications were implemented in schools in September 2017 as part of Phase 3 of the introduction of the new subject specifications.

In order to ensure continuity between the last years of primary school and the junior cycle, a move from one specification for all student to two specifications, L1 and L2, was decided according to the language of the school's teaching. In addition, work commenced, in 2018, on differentiated Leaving Certificate specifications. The NCCA published draft Leaving Certificate specifications in November 2020 for public consultation. As part of that consultation, feedback was sought on the implementation

of the Junior Cycle L1 and L2 specifications, with a view to gathering insights that might be relevant to the Leaving Certificate.

A review of the new Junior Cycle specifications was due to commence once a full cycle of three years of teaching, learning and assessment was completed by one cohort of students in September 2020. Due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided to postpone this review until one cohort of students had experienced three full years of teaching and learning, as originally proposed, using the new specifications. However, participants in the consultation on the Leaving Certificate L1 and L2 specifications requested that this review be carried out, even if only to give a partial overview of the implementation of the new specifications, as these insights were considered useful in deliberating the next steps at Leaving Certificate level. For this reason, despite ongoing disruptions to schooling due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided to proceed with an early review of the enactment of the Junior Cycle L1 and L2 specifications between February and June 2022.

The new Junior Cycle Irish language specifications were implemented for the first time in 2017, when an industrial dispute was coming to an end. As a result, some teachers did not undertake the continuous professional development of the new specifications until the spring of 2017, which could have had an impact on the initial enactment of the specifications.

Prior to the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle and the new Junior Cycle Irish specifications, teachers had the option of undertaking a school-based oral test amounting to 40 % of the marks. In this school-based oral test it was intended that the teacher examine the oral competence of their students. While less than 1% of the cohort in 2005 undertook the optional oral test, this percentage grew considerably over the years and 40 % of students undertook the oral test in 2016. The percentage of marks awarded to the oral test was raised in the Leaving Certificate Examination in 2012 and this is likely to have had an impact on growth at Junior Cycle level.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students and teachers did not experience all aspects of the new specifications and their teaching and learning experiences have been greatly disrupted. Schools had to close for periods during the pandemic and move to blended teaching. Not all students had the same access to online resources and teachers and students were occasionally absent due to the virus being contracted by them. No state examinations were administered in any Junior Cycle subject in 2020 and 2021 (except for early school leavers and adult learners) and no cohorts had experience of the three-year Junior Cycle as planned in the specification at the time of this early review. These circumstances may have had an impact on feedback received from participants. Were it not for the pandemic, this early review was planned to take place in 2020. While stakeholders' views are of value at this stage, these restrictions need to be taken into account when arriving at conclusions. It is also noted that "The

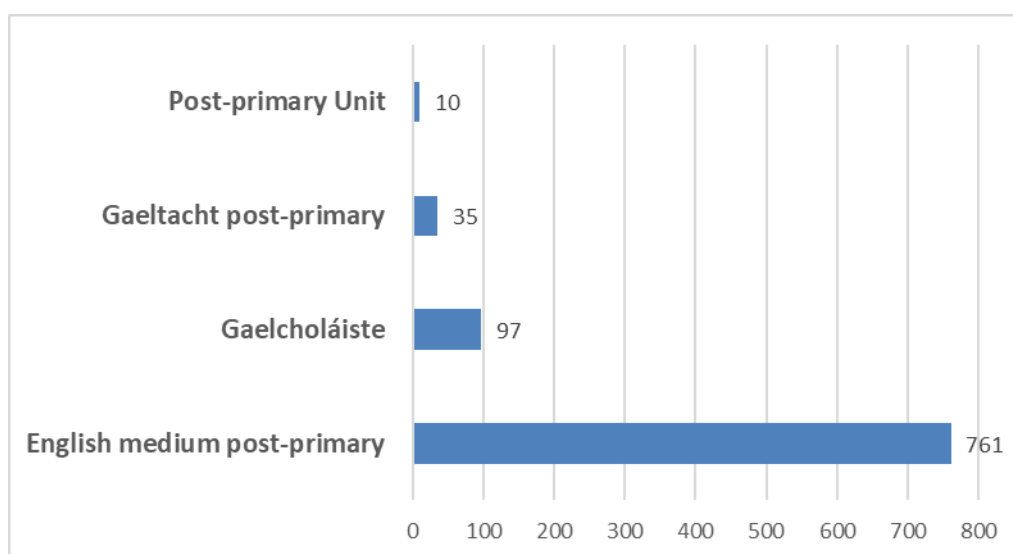
Inspectorate could not continue the normal schedule of evaluations in schools". Taking all of these factors into account, there may need to be a further review once a full cohort of students has experienced all aspects of the course.

2. Methodology

2.1 Teachers' Survey

A comprehensive survey (see Appendix A) was made available online to Junior Cycle Irish teachers (JC) to gather their views on the implementation of the Irish language specifications L1 and L2. The research team drafted a survey and piloted it with a small group of teachers. The recommendations received were implemented and a link to the survey was sent to all post-primary schools and circulated on social media. The survey was responded to by 911 teachers and 84 %¹ taught in English-medium schools, 11 % in Gaelcholáistí outside the Gaeltacht, 4 % in Gaeltacht schools, and 1 % in post-primary aonaid (Irish-medium units) as seen in Figure 1.

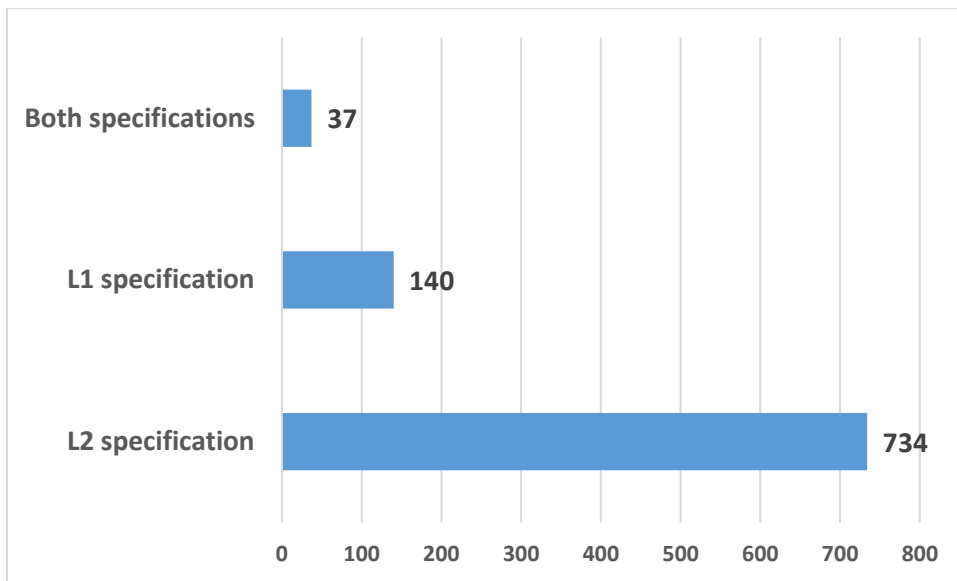
Figure 1. Teachers' responses to the type of school in which they taught (n=903)



While the overwhelming majority of teachers, 761, were teaching in English-medium schools, the remaining 142 were teaching in L1 settings. Teachers who taught both specifications were therefore well represented, and this is consistent with the information in Figure 2.

¹ Although the survey was responded to by 911 teachers in total, this number did not answer each question. It is not unusual in a lengthy survey for respondents to commence a survey and pause at some point intending to return to it. Where a respondent returns to complete the survey, the software recognises the IP address of the respondent and facilitates them in continuing where they paused. For a respondent to complete more than once, it would be necessary for them to use a different IP address.

Figure 2. The specifications being taught by teachers (n=911)



As expected, Figure 3 shows that a majority of teachers (72 %) were teaching in schools with more than 400 students but there was good representation from smaller schools too.

Figure 3. Number of students in the schools of participants (n=909)

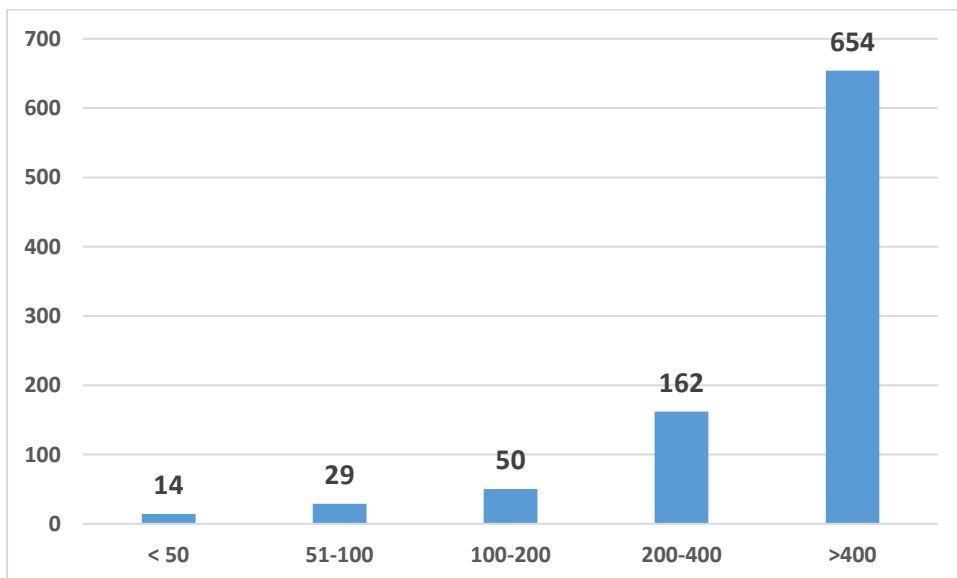
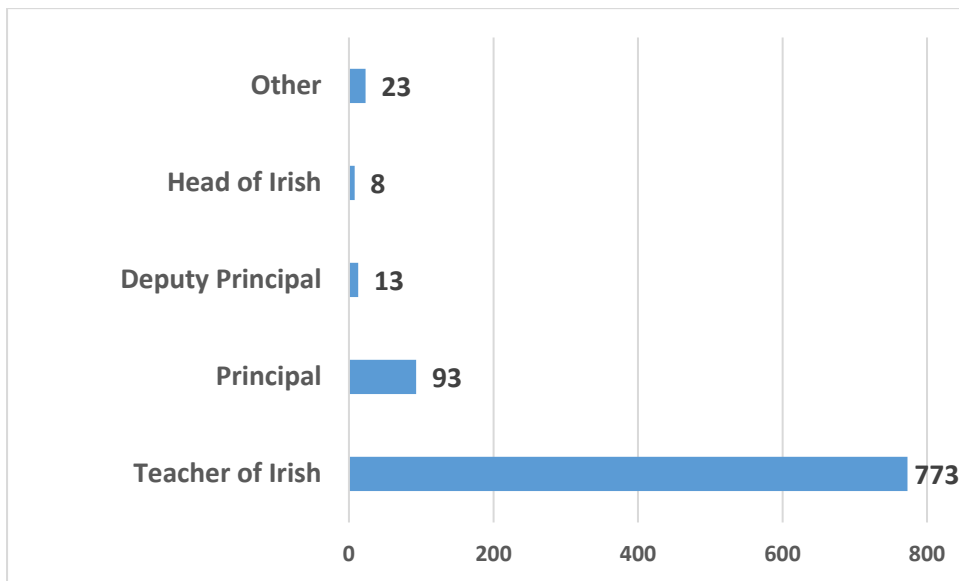


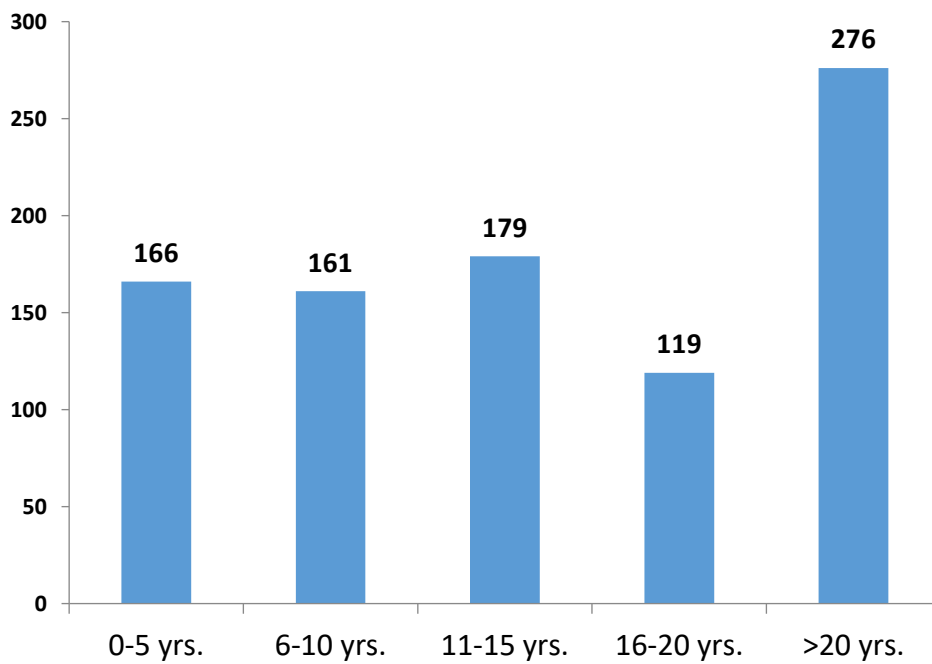
Figure 4 shows that 85 % of respondents were teachers but many principals also responded to the survey. The analysis of the responses by post did not show any significant differences. The term ‘teacher’ is used in the report to describe the responses and views of all teachers regardless of the position they held.

Figure 4. The position of participants (n=910)



In relation to the number of years that the participants had been teaching, it can be seen in Figure 5 276 (30.6%) had more than 20 years' experience and the remaining 69.4% distributed across five-year bands from 0-20 years.

Figure 5. The number of years' teaching of participants (n=901)



2.2 Focus groups of teachers

At the end of the survey, teachers were invited to participate in an online focus group to explore in greater depth the main themes that arose in the survey (see Appendix B). The 104 teachers who expressed an interest in the focus group were invited and, finally, eight focus groups were held in which 31 teachers participated, 24 T2 and 7 T1 teachers. The views expressed by the teachers in the focus groups are integrated with the results of the survey.

2.3 The focus groups of the students

It was particularly important to collect students' views on the specifications and to this end we organised 12 focus groups in which 97 4th and 5th year students participated (see Appendix C). Seven of the focus groups were organised in L2 schools (n=60) and five in L1 schools (n=37). There were various backgrounds in these schools regarding socio-economic status — private and DEIS schools, Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, schools under a wide range of patronage. Students' views are presented in the context of the various themes that emerged in the research.

2.4 Stakeholder Submissions

Submissions were received from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), An Gréasán do Mhúinteoirí Gaeilge (An Gréasán), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (the Inspectorate). The comments received in the submissions are presented in the context of the themes that emerged in the analysis.

3. Results and Analysis

The objective was to collect feedback from participants on the following key issues and this section is set out in accordance with the headings below. Other topics emerged in the research and are discussed in the sixth section below.

- 1) How well the specifications get to the heart of the learning aspired to within Junior Cycle Irish, L1 and L2 and more broadly within the Framework for Junior Cycle?
- 2) The classroom-based assessments outlined within the specifications, as experienced by students and teachers.
- 3) The many ways teachers are using their professional judgements to mediate the new specifications in their schools and classrooms.
- 4) Experience of students and teachers of differentiated provision at Junior Cycle level.
- 5) Perspectives on the transition from Junior Cycle Irish to Senior Cycle Irish for this cohort and future cohorts.
- 6) Other topics that emerged in the research.

3.1 How well do the specifications get to the heart of the learning aspired to within Junior Cycle Irish, L1 and L2 and more broadly within the Framework for Junior Cycle?

3.1.1 The Specification in general

The aim of the Junior Cycle Irish language specifications, as set out, is to develop, reinforce and extend students' understanding of Irish. It enables the student to communicate effectively, interactively and confidently in the formal and informal settings of the language community. Emphasis is placed on fostering and developing awareness: language awareness, cultural awareness and student self-awareness as a language learner. It aims to sustain and develop the skills that students bring to the post-primary school. It enables students to take ownership of their own learning, which will support them in life.

In addition to specific knowledge, the subjects and short courses of junior cycle provide opportunities to develop a range of key skills. There are possibilities in the Irish L1 and L2 specifications to support the development of key skills. Figure 6 shows the eight key skills and aspects linking to Irish language learning activities.

Figure 6. The eight key skills and aspects linking to Irish language learning activities

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Junior Cycle Irish (L2)
Overview: Links

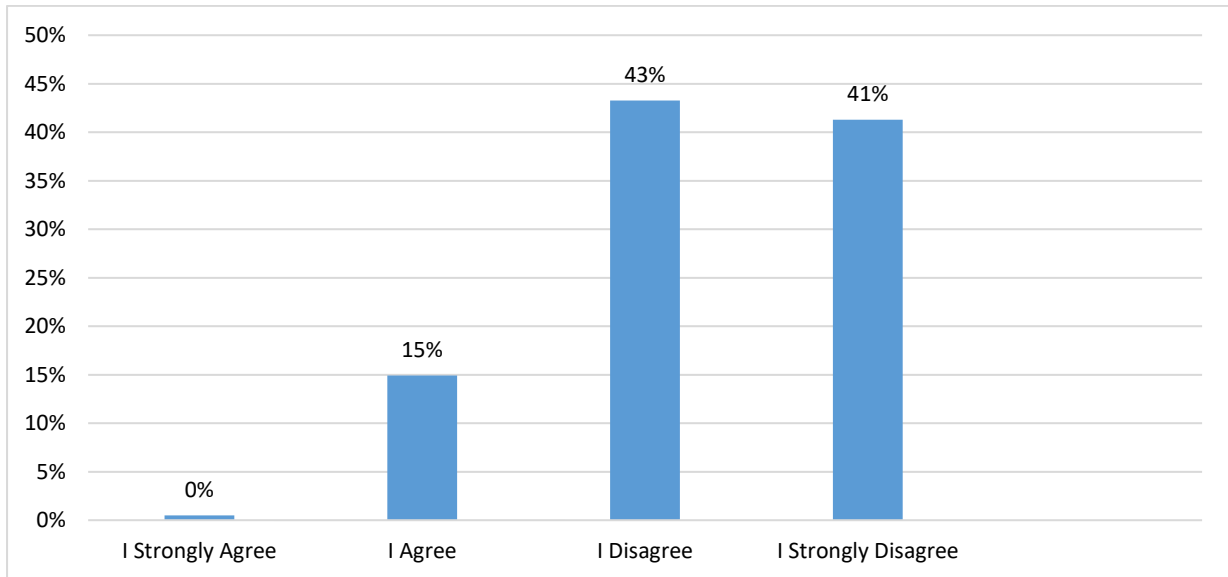
The examples below identify some of the elements that are related to learning activities in Irish.

Table 2 Junior Cycle Irish (L2) and key skills

Key skill	Key skill element	Student learning activity
Being creative	Learning creatively	As language users, students will have opportunities to explore a range of aspects relating to language and culture. They will use various means, including digital technology, to explore opinions and to express ideas creatively.
Being literate	Expressing ideas clearly and accurately Exploring and creating a variety of texts, including multi-modal texts	As students engage with a wide range of texts (including multi-modal texts) they will develop a more critical awareness of how language works. This will enable them to make informed language choices to express themselves, and to find, use and share ideas. By participating in interactive communication tasks, students will develop the foundations of spoken interaction: listening and speaking skills. Students will plan, draft and write in a range of genres demonstrating an increased understanding of a target group and style.
Being numerate	Seeing patterns, trends and relationships	Students will undertake language learning activities such as gathering information from surveys and questionnaires in class. Students will use innovative digital technology to find, gather and interpret information, and communicate that information through description or presentation. They will engage with quantifying concepts and elements of numeracy or functional measuring. They will recognise language patterns in texts, including literary texts.
Communicating	Using language	Students will improve their communication skills by using language that relates to their own lives and to life in general. They will gain experience in presenting information and opinions for themselves or on behalf of a group through Irish.
Managing information and thinking	Reflecting on and evaluating my learning	Students will consider and evaluate feedback received through self-assessment or through peer assessment (from other students) and feedback from teachers to find ways of being more accurate in their own language production (written and spoken) and being more aware of themselves as language learners.
Managing myself	Setting and achieving personal goals	Students will understand the importance of reflection, organisation and clarity to achieve goals effectively and on time when dealing with and creating Irish texts.
Staying well	Being positive about learning	Students will develop a positive attitude towards language learning when engaging with various language tasks and activities and when reflecting on themselves as language learners.
Working with others	Learning with others	Students will consult and co-operate with their peers and with others for the benefit of both their own and others' learning. Students will understand how important and beneficial it is to listen and respect others while completing a wide range of activities and tasks.

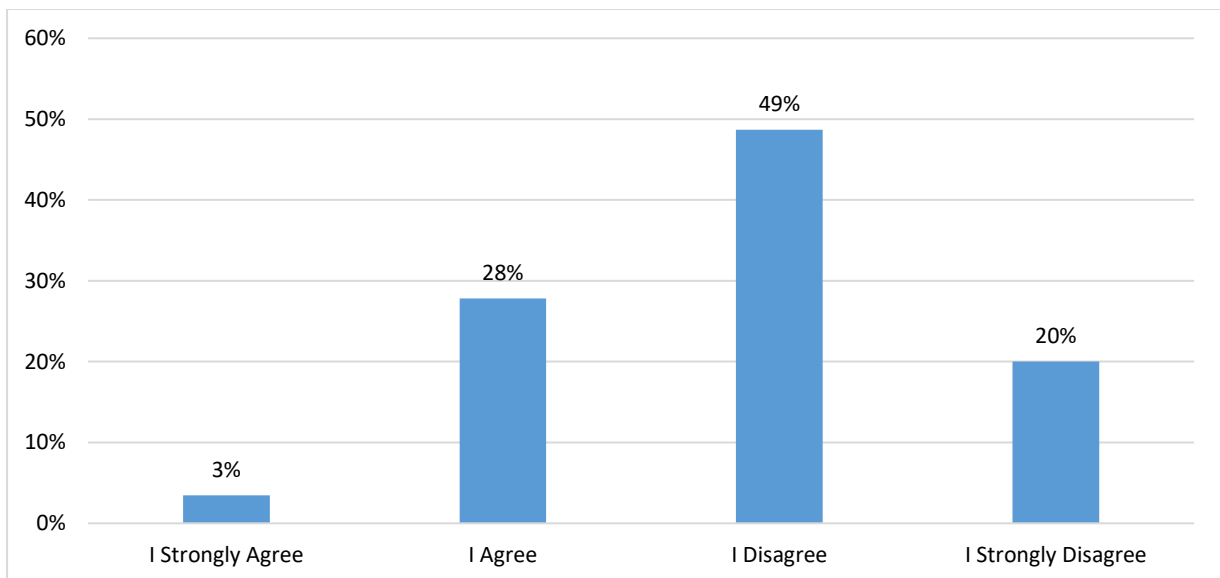
Teachers were asked whether the Specification helped students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle. Figure 7 shows that 84 % of L2 teachers did not think the specifications contributed to this area.

Figure 7. The L2 Specification helps students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle (n=603)



For L1 teachers, Figure 8 shows that 31 % of them thought that the Specification helped students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle.

Figure 8. The L1 Specification helps students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle (n=115)



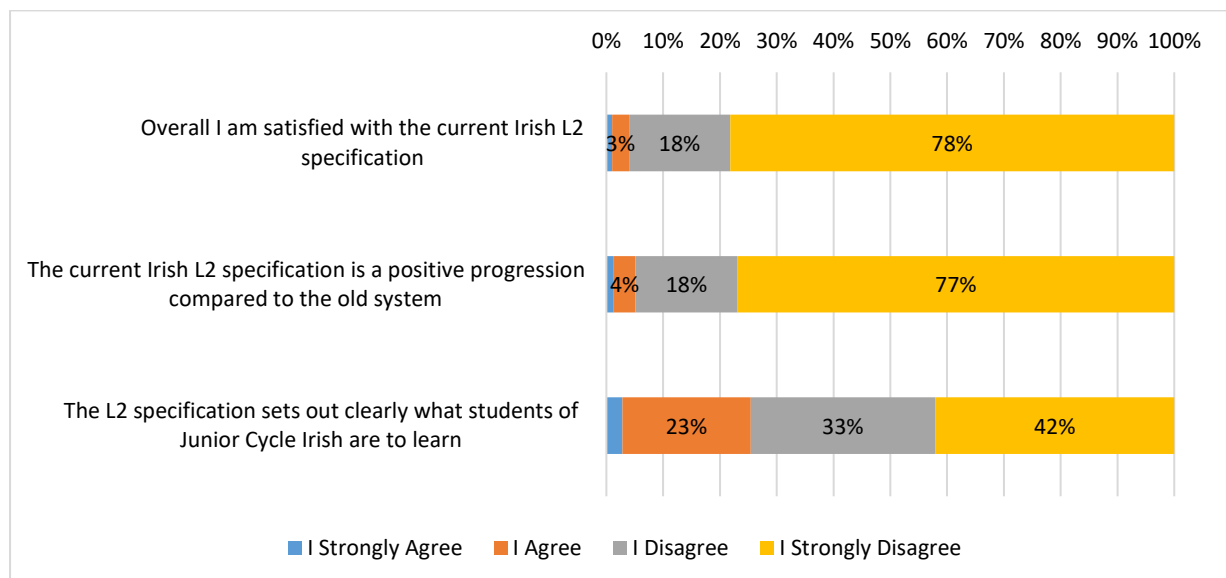
Some teachers considered that it would be helpful if some of the topics to be covered by the students such as multiculturalism were described. As one teacher said she is dealing with more basic topics.

I want them to be able to speak and write about their lives. They are able to speak and write but they are inaccurate. I have to work with things related to everyday life and things like

technology, the importance of sport, the importance of healthy food. That's what I am focusing on, not on multiculturalism. This is very interesting, but my students are not yet at that level. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

Teachers were asked a number of questions to get their views on the Specification in general (Question L2 & L1). Figure 8 shows the teachers' responses to the L2 Specification. 96 % of teachers disagreed that they were satisfied with the current L2 Irish specification overall, 78 % strongly disagreed. 95 % of teachers did not think that the current L2 Irish Specification was a positive step forward compared to the old system with 77 % strongly disagreeing. Three quarters (75 %) felt that the L2 specification did not clearly set out what students have to learn in Irish for Junior Cycle.

Figure 9. Teachers' views on the L2 Specification in general (n=604)



It is therefore seen that overall teachers were dissatisfied with the L2 Specification in general. Based on the feedback of the students in the focus groups, they had broad consensus that there was too much to be covered in the course. This is in keeping with the views of the teachers that there was not enough time available to develop all the language skills as they wish.

As one girl said:

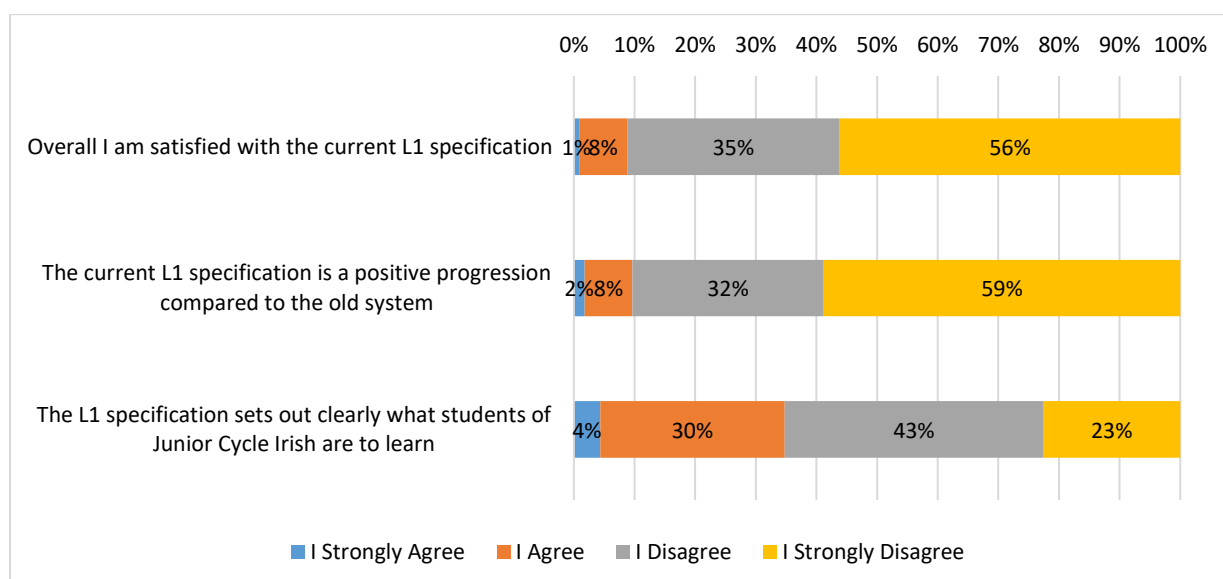
I felt like there were a lot of topics, and that it moved kinda fast. It was hard to like, learn all the vocab and stuff... there was a lot in it [The course]" (L2 student, Focus Group).

Another student supported this opinion:

I feel like we didn't go back to a lot of topics. Like, we would just keep moving on. And only when we had the assessments, that's when we would start going back... I feel like we just had to get everything done... and I don't think we had a lot of time to actually get into the topic.
(L2 Student, Focus Group)

The general questions about the L1 Specification were answered by teachers in L1 schools and it can be seen in Figure 10 that they were also unhappy but the level of dissatisfaction was less strong. 91 % of teachers disagreed that they were satisfied with the current Irish L1 Specification, 56 % strongly disagreed. 91 % of teachers did not think that the current L1 Irish Specification was a positive step forward compared to the old system with 59 % strongly disagreeing. 66 % were of the opinion that the L1 specification did not clearly set out what students need to learn in Irish for Junior Cycle.

Figure 10. Teachers' views on the L1 Specification in general (n=114)



Two open questions were asked to L2 and L1 teachers in the survey relating to the merits of the specifications and changes recommended by teachers.

3.1.2 Strengths of the specifications

L2 teachers' survey

388 teachers accepted the opportunity to answer the open question (Question 9. L2) about the strengths of the L2 specification — *What are the strengths of the current L2 specification?* The main themes arising from the 252 teachers who thought that the L2 Specification had strengths were literature (109), the Classroom-Based Assessments (CBA) (48), reflection and independent learning (24) and the film in Year 1. There were other teachers who thought it had no strengths in their opinion.

L1 teachers' survey

76 teachers accepted the opportunity to answer the open question (Question 9. L1) about the strengths of the L1 specification — *What are the strengths of the current L1 specification?* 56 of the 76 teachers considered the specification to have strengths. The main themes that emerged were literature, classroom-based assessments (CBA), the need for oral examination, language awareness and accuracy of the Irish language, the flexibility of the subject, the choice of literature, reflection and independent learning. Some teachers replied that they did not consider that there was any strength in their opinion.

Based on a low number of subject inspection reports due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the Inspectorate considered that “the application of the specifications is benefiting the quality of the students’ learning experience and collaborative teacher practice in planning for learning, teaching and assessment” (Submission of the Inspectorate). Inspectors saw in their observations:

the use of a wider range of active learning methodologies that encourages dialogue in the target language among students, with a broader approach to assessment fostering diversity in formative in class assessment strategies as well as assessing students’ participation in their own learning. (submission of the Inspectorate)

3.1.3 Learning Outcomes

There are three strands in the Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2 specifications. The importance of developing the learning set out in these strands in an integrated way is emphasised in the specifications. Learning outcomes are statements that describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values the student should be able to demonstrate after studying Irish at junior cycle. The learning outcomes set out in the specifications apply to each student. As set out they show results for the student at the end of the three years of study. The specification emphasises that the learning outcomes are for a period of three years and therefore learning outcomes targeted at a specific point in time will ‘not yet be completed, but that they will continue to support the student’s learning in Irish until the end of Junior Cycle’.

As indicated in the JCT’s submission, “Before curriculum reform at junior cycle level, teachers had experience of an Irish syllabus based on activities, functions, nodes and topics” (JCT Submission). According to the JCT, “more teachers of Irish now recognise the benefit of planning learning outcomes from the different strands and the different language skills supporting, and interdependent on, each other”. 82 % of L2 teachers in the survey considered that the learning outcomes did not accurately reflect all that students will be able to understand and do with regard to Irish, after three years of the Junior Cycle as seen in Figure 11. 86 % agreed that it was not easy to understand the wording of the learning outcomes as seen in Figure 11. 80 % did not find the learning outcomes helpful in planning

for teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting. 85 % were not satisfied with the number of learning outcomes available in the L2 specification. These views were supported by a teacher in a focus group saying:

A full review of the learning outcomes, first. Make them simpler, more suitable, and be much more concise. I also think that the subject, themes and topics arising from the learning outcomes must be developed and that a guide be provided for the types of writing styles that students should know. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

Not all teachers were unhappy with the design of learning outcomes in the focus groups but they needed further guidance:

They [the learning outcomes] are satisfactory. But of course, there is no guidance on topics. It is very open, too open, and at least there should be some guidance... we are dealing with young teenagers here and there should be guidance on what kind of material they should be able to describe: themselves, their family, their school... That's not in the Specification. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

Figure 11 also shows that 93 % of L2 teachers agreed in the survey that guidance should be provided on the subjects, themes and topics arising from the learning outcomes.

Figure 11. L2 teachers' comments on the Learning Outcomes (n=604)

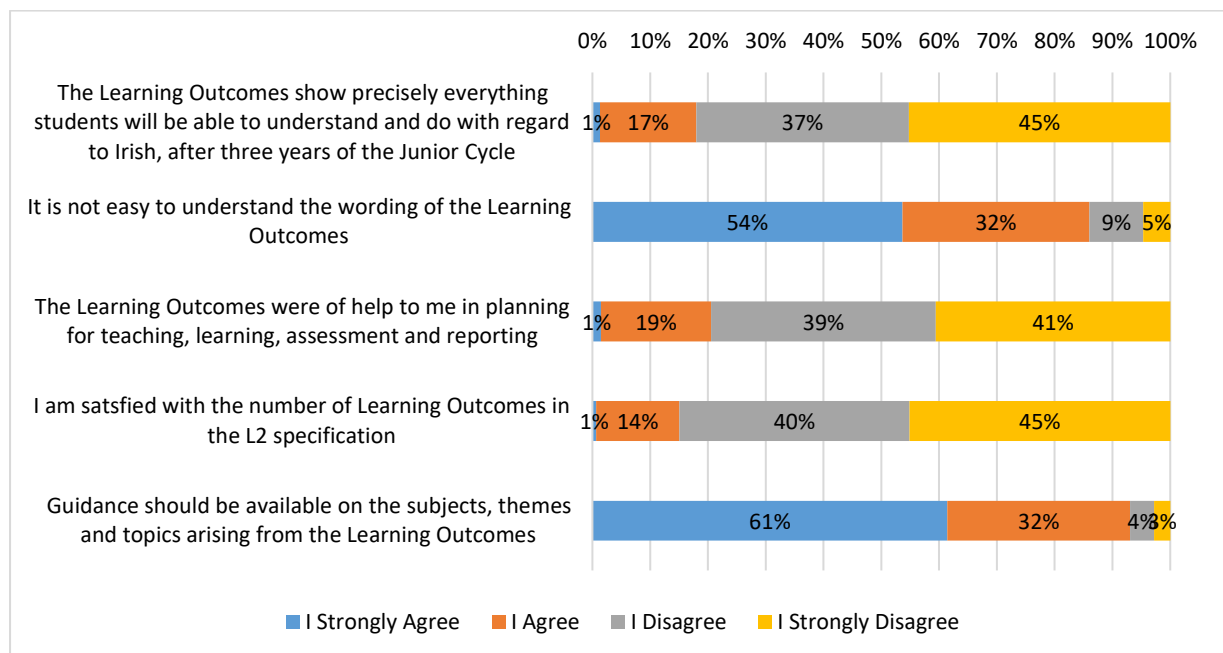
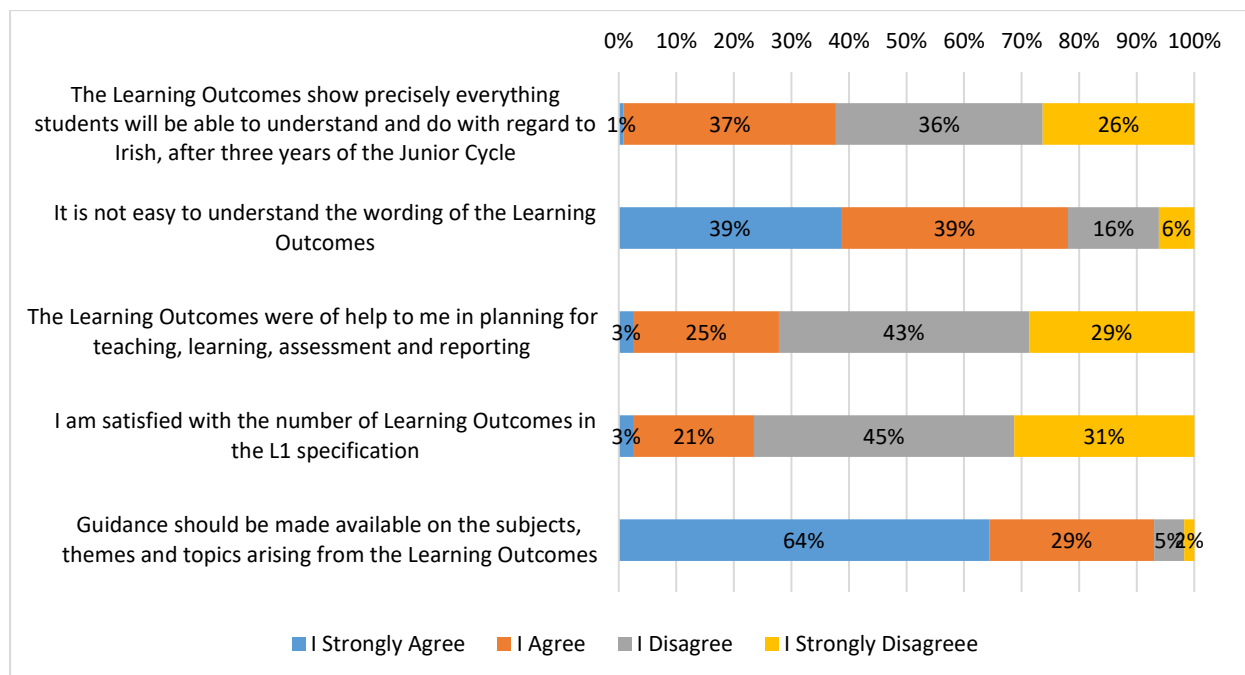


Figure 12 shows that 62 % of L1 teachers considered that the learning outcomes did not accurately reflect all that students will be able to understand and do with regard to Irish, after three years of the

Junior Cycle and 78 % agreed that it was not easy to understand the wording of the learning outcomes. 72 % did not find the learning outcomes helpful in planning for teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting. 86 % were not satisfied with the number of learning outcomes available in the L1 Specification. Many teachers mentioned that guidance should be provided on the subjects, themes and topics arising from the learning outcomes.

Figure 12. T1 teachers’ comments on the Learning Outcomes (n=114)



The teachers in the focus groups were in keeping with these views as the following teachers said:

52 learning outcomes are to be achieved within a three-year period. These learning outcomes are unclear. They are abstract. Practical examples do not match any of the learning outcomes... They are not helpful, they are not practical to me in the classroom. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

I don't think they are quite distinctive enough. They are generally abstract and do not contain examples. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

How I used the learning outcomes in particular in the planning units. We did the lessons and then sought learning outcomes that were similar to them. To tell the truth, that's how it works in practice. Clear guidance is required. There is no information available on the subject, themes and topics arising from the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes alone will not serve as guidance for an external examination. This has created a lot of uncertainty for teachers and students to date. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

According to An Gréasán:

The learning outcomes are too broad, too abstract and too ambitious. They are not robust enough. They are difficult to interpret and there are too many of them. The language used is too specific and too complex for students, which means that they are not suitable for practical use in the classroom on a daily basis. (Submission, An Gréasán)

3.1.4 Changes to the specifications

The survey provided an opportunity for teachers to make recommendations on the amendments they would like to see applied to the specifications.

L2 teachers' survey

490 teachers answered the question (Question 10. L2) about their proposed changes to the L2 Specification — *What changes would you recommend to the current L2 Irish Specifications?* The two most common themes that emerged were an oral examination (67 %) and a sharp decrease in the level of literature (65 %). Many other themes discussed below were mentioned.

L1 teachers' survey

90 teachers answered the question (Question 10. L1) about their proposed changes to the L1 Specification — *What changes would you recommend to the current L1 Specifications?* Similar to teachers in L2 schools, among teachers in L1 schools, the two most common themes were a desire to have an oral examination (58 %) and the need to significantly reduce the level of literature (57 %). Other themes such as the provision of additional facilities and resources for teachers were mentioned and that L1 and L2 should not be differentiated.

3.1.5 Summary

This section found that the L2 teachers were generally dissatisfied with the specification but that L1 teachers were less dissatisfied. The students thought there was too much material to be covered on the course and felt that things moved too quickly. Aspects praised by some teachers included literature, the CBAs, reflection and independent learning and the film in Year 1. A recommendation from the majority of teachers, which is raised in other sections below, was for an oral examination and that there was a need to significantly reduce the level of literature. The Inspectorate submission reported that progress was evident in teaching methodologies and JCT reported that teachers were gaining a better understanding of the learning outcomes and planning accordingly.

3.2 The classroom-based assessments elements within the specifications, as experienced by students and teachers

Teachers and students were asked about the Classroom-Based Assessments (CBA). Participants' responses to CBA1 (The Portfolio) are first presented, followed by CBA2 and finally the Assessment Task.

3.2.1 *Class Based Assessment 1 (The Portfolio)*

The student creates a language portfolio with examples of his/her work. The language portfolio allows the student to set personal learning goals, show his/her work, reflect on the work and see progress. This process helps students to develop and use their language skills and cultural understandings in a range of settings and for the benefit of different target groups and objectives. Some teachers reported to the JCT,

that the students were proud of their work and the progress they had made over a particular period/three years of junior cycle... some of the students enjoyed and benefited from completing the audio or video pieces for the portfolio and that these portfolio pieces varied greatly. (JCT Submission)

The students had a rather neutral attitude to the portfolio. They considered that it was not too difficult, besides choosing their best piece:

It was easy enough. Just, I didn't know which ones to pick, but after that, it was easy, 'cause it was stuff we had done in class, so it wasn't any extra work. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Yeah, I enjoyed the Punann. It's just less stressful. You have time to think about what your best pieces are. Yeah... just, you have time to work hard over the year. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

We were not allowed to put work from the first year in the Portfolio too, so like there was no point to first year if we could not use it. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

When the teachers were asked in the survey 76 % agreed that CBA1 did not provide them with much feedback on students' learning as shown in Figure 12. 42 % of teachers considered that CBA1 ensured continuous work during the course and the rest, 59%, disagreed. 73 % of teachers did not agree that CBA1 helped students reflect on their own learning and almost all felt it was too challenging.

Figure 13. L2 teachers' comments on CBA1 (n=609)

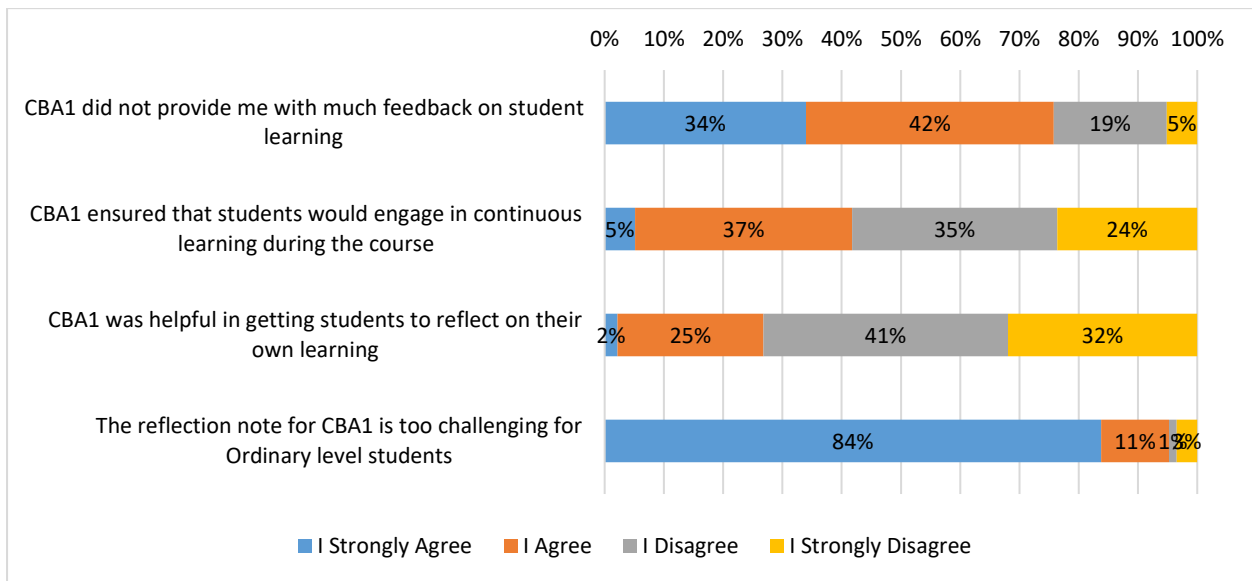


Figure 14 sees that around one third of L1 teachers were of the opinion that CBA1 provided them with feedback on students' learning, the other two thirds did not agree with this. Just over half (54 %) of teachers considered that the CBA1 ensured that the students are doing ongoing work during the course. 45 % of teachers considered that CBA1 helped students reflect on their own learning with a large majority of the belief that the reflection note was too challenging for ordinary level students.

Some teachers reported to the JCT that "the freedom to choose portfolio pieces for CBA1 was enjoyed by some students but that others wanted the teacher's input/opinion in making the decision" (JCT Submission).

Some of the teachers in the focus groups thought that the portfolio was worthwhile if the students had the ability.

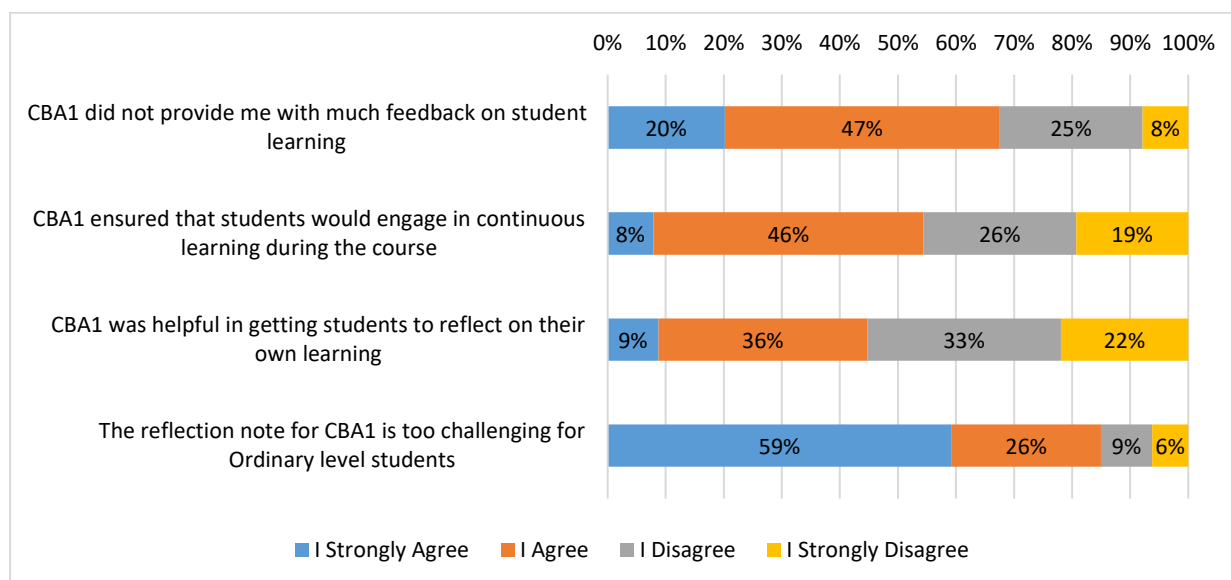
I like the portfolio in that you are working on drafting, polishing things, finally picking out three pieces. Learning can be great if you use it with an able class. But when the class does not have ability. They do not have the basic language. They do not have it from primary school, it is a pretense to let on that they have it from primary school. You can talk about awareness but it's not going to happen. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

Another aspect raised under the portfolio is that it is very challenging for students who are not organised themselves.

To support teachers, the JCT submission states that:

... the development of student's reflection skills [w]as a focus for the Irish L2 workshops three years in a row... the Team designed many resources that were distributed to the teachers on the days of the workshops and are available on the website www.jct.ie. (JCT Submission)

Figure 14. L1 teachers' comments on CBA1 (n=114)



A problem raised by some teachers in the focus groups was access to technology devices:

In my school, the students do not have a technological device. The specification implies that they have these devices but no. It is a great idea, but the infrastructure has not been provided (L1 Teacher, Focus Group).

45 % of L1 teachers acknowledged that CBA1 was helpful in getting students to reflect on their own learning.

3.2.2 Classroom-Based Assessment 2: The Communicative Task

The Communicative Task allows the student to select and explore a subject, topic or issue of interest or importance to him/her over a period of time. There is a strong emphasis in this task on the students' ability to speak and interact and on the link with other language users. It gives him/her the opportunity to develop and improve his/her spoken language and to focus on the development of other key skills. Emphasis is placed on oral interaction and speaking in all formats. The teacher's input gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate their language skills during the assignment. For questions, the questions are unprepared/non-scripted and are appropriate to the student's age and stage of learning.

Students had more to say about CBA2, the communicative task, in the focus groups rather than the portfolio or assessment task. Overall, the students said they enjoyed CBA2, because it gave them the

opportunity to practice their spoken Irish, on a subject they chose themselves. This freedom of choice prompted them to work, because they were discussing what they were interested in. Here's how one student described it:

I think it was the easiest part of 'Irish'... because we had to talk about ourselves, and we had to do a whole project on ourselves, and I knew myself the most, so I knew exactly what to write. So basically, what we learnt from first year to third year in one conversation. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

They were all happy with their freedom to choose their own topic and one L2 student said, "I think that helped with it, cause you're a little more motivated if you're interested in it" (L2 student, Focus Group). Although they enjoyed the freedom of topic and format, many did not have the ability to write the appropriate vocabulary or the grammar as it should be, without the help of the teacher.

I got to do mine on a famous person, so finding out bits about them was cool. But trying to translate it then to Irish and not have the correct punctuation and everything and grammar without the teacher's help was hard. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The above statement shows that this is understood as a writing task first. It often came up, that the students mentioned that it was a translation lesson, from English to Irish. This understanding was widely shared among students in the schools who taught through the medium of English. They pointed out that it was mostly a writing task, so that they wrote a script, it was learned by memorisation, and then that they said it in front of the class. In some schools, the students recorded the presentation.

For the presentation, there is no emphasis on spoken Irish, as you can just memorise it. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

This contradicts the aim of CBA2 and the overall CBAs. The JCT argues that,

the CBAs are real communicative opportunities that provide students with the opportunity to excel their language skills in terms of wealth and accuracy and to set out personal aims for themselves. In addition, opportunities for oral interaction are an integral part of CBA2. The teacher's questions (unprepared and without script) support students to demonstrate their ability in oral interactions. (JCT Submission)

This description is not consistent with the experience of students who took part in this review. A number of students did not enjoy CBA2, due to being nervous, when speaking in front of their classmates. Other students, however, said this helped them as they knew the people they would be talking to.

Other students spoke negatively about CBA2 due to the constant time pressure they felt under.

The CBAS and dealing with the schoolwork as well, because we were sent home to do a CBA by ourselves and then we might have homework to do as well, just trying to get the course done and the CBAS, then thinking of the junior cert in the background... at that time we still had a junior cert coming up. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Some thought that more effort would be made if the communication task was attached to the final examination. We return to this point in the section on assessment in general below. A L1 student made a point about catering for a variety of abilities:

... especially for anyone who is less strong in writing, to [give] them the opportunity to [find] marks. I thought this was the opinion, and I was satisfied with it at first. When I heard that it had no connection with [the examination], I was almost forced to put it down, and to leave it. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

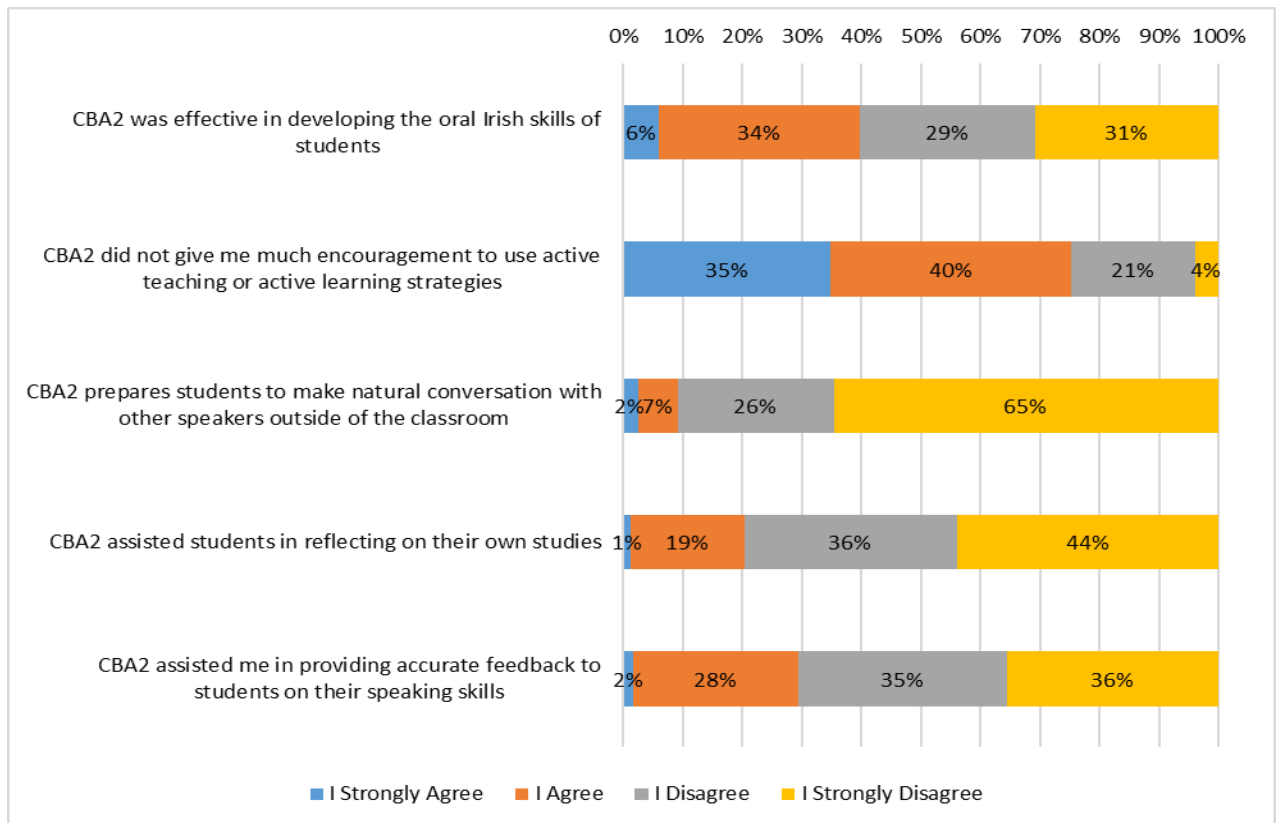
Another student considered that it would reduce the pressure at the end if the CBAs were allocated marks:

It would have been way better. The idea of one big test at the end of the year is bizarre. I think it should be spread out way more. Like maybe still have a test at the end of the year, but definitely have class-based assessments towards our grade throughout the years. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Overall, however, they liked to research their interests, but that they were memorising a script, rather than speaking openly. The students were in favour of an oral exam: "because it would relieve some of the pressure off the written paper" (L2 student, Focus Group).

With regard to CBA2 and L2 teachers, 40 % agreed that it was effective in developing students' spoken Irish skills. Three quarters agreed that CBA2 did not encourage the use of active teaching and learning strategies and the other quarter disagreed.. 91 % of L2 teachers disagreed that CBA2 prepares students to engage in a natural conversation with other speakers outside the classroom. 80 % disagreed that CBA2 helped students to self-reflect on their studies. 30 % of teachers agreed that CBA2 helped them provide accurate feedback on students' spoken skills. Many of them thought that a broad list of topics for discussion should be available for CBA2, in order to avoid plagiarism.

Figure 15. L2 teachers' comments on CBA2 (n=601)



CBA2 was discussed in detail in the focus groups of teachers and students. Some teachers found that there was some value and other teachers did not:

There is little learning that students do in preparing this thing. They go to the internet, or get help from people — too much help, it's okay to get help — but they get too much help from the internet or other sources, they put something together that they don't understand the structure of the language they are using, and in my opinion, I don't know if it has much value. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

The CBAs give students the opportunity to speak in front of people. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

An oral examination would be much better than the presentation, perhaps if the teachers were willing to do so. I would be happy to do that myself. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

CBA2 fosters communication in the Irish class and reinforces students' personal skills. (Teacher T2, Survey)

With regard to CBA2 and L1 teachers 47 % agreed that it was effective in developing students' spoken Irish skills. 70 % agreed that CBA2 did not encourage many of them to use strategies for active teaching

and learning.. 87 % of L1 teachers disagreed that CBA2 prepares students to engage in a natural conversation with other speakers outside the classroom. As one teacher wrote about the strengths of the L1 specification:

The concept is [good] behind the second CBA. But it does not foster the ability to engage in conversations. It would be more effective together with an oral examination (L1 Teacher, Survey).

According to another teacher

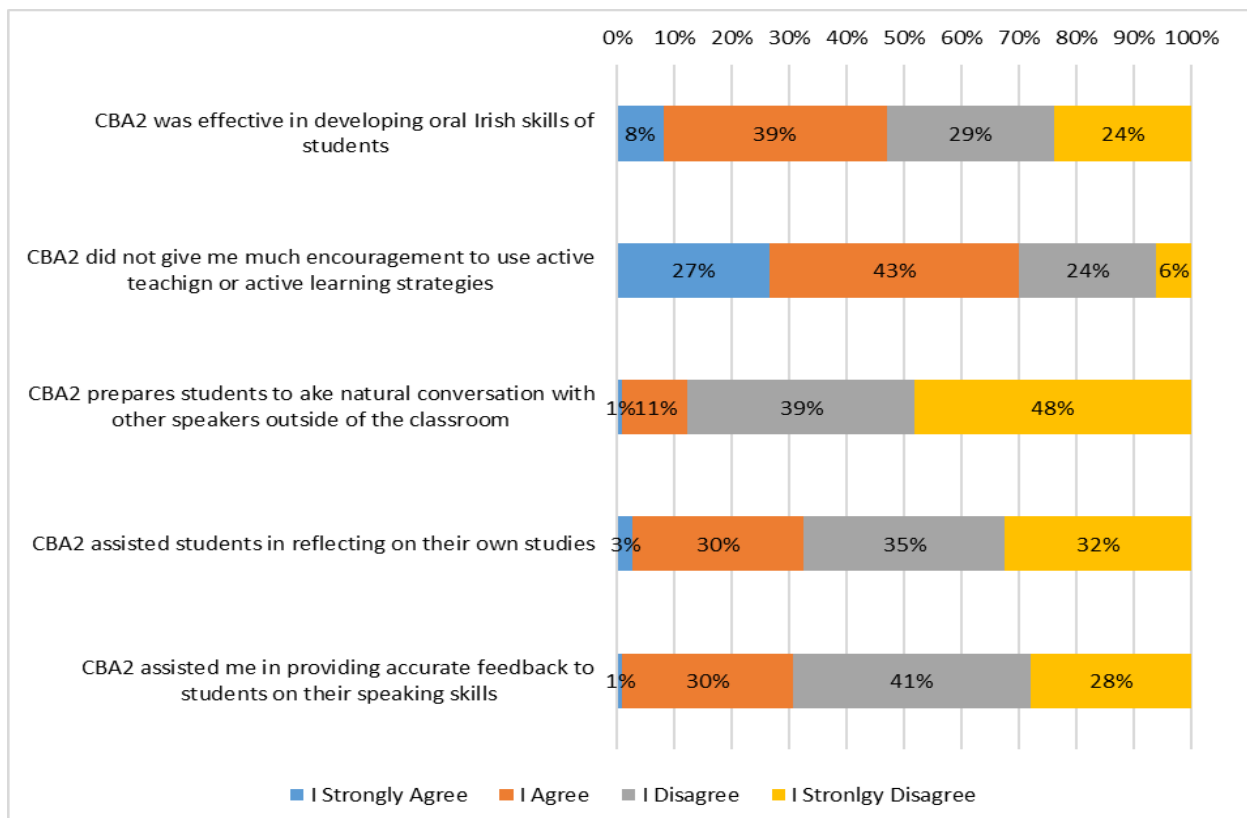
The class really liked it [CBA2] I have to say. They fully participated. People came out of themselves (L1 Teacher, Focus Group).

67 % disagreed that CBA2 helped students to self-reflect on their studies and 33 % agreed as this teacher wrote: “The CBAs are helpful in getting students to reflect on their own learning” (L1 Teacher, Survey). Another teacher who thought CBA2 had value said:

They have an opportunity to conduct research for the CBA (L1 Teacher, Survey).

Only 31 % of teachers agreed that CBA2 helped them provide accurate feedback on students’ spoken skills.

Figure 16. L1 teachers’ comments on CBA2 (n=113)



The JCT Submission states in relation to CBA2 that it is “an assessment aimed primarily at students’ speaking and oral interaction skills” (JCT Submission). Given the views of both teachers and students, CBA2 does not appear to have achieved the desired impact on classroom practice. Rather than testing students’ communicative skills, for many students it is a written research task that is learned off by heart.

3.2.3 *Assessment Task*

The purpose of the Assessment Task is for the student to engage in focused reflection on his/her individual presentation for Classroom-Based Assessment 2. This assessment task is carried out after the second Classroom-Based Assessment and is submitted to the State Examinations Commission for marking. The Assessment Task is worth 10% of the marks used to determine the overall grade. The Assessment Task is provided at Common Level and in the questions that are part of the task the broad cohort of students who undertake assessment is considered. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, few students have had experience in carrying out the assessment task as it was cancelled in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Of the students who had experience of it, they were all unanimous that they did not see much merit in the Assessment Task.

The self-assessment, I was completely lost [...] ‘What did you learn?’, it was very difficult to do that. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

It was kind of, by the time you got to the end of it, you didn’t really pass any remarks. You were kind of just glad that everything else was done... (L2 Student, Focus Group)

You are not really learning while doing the ‘self-reflection’, you’re learning while doing the task. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

One student mentioned that you could easily tell lies

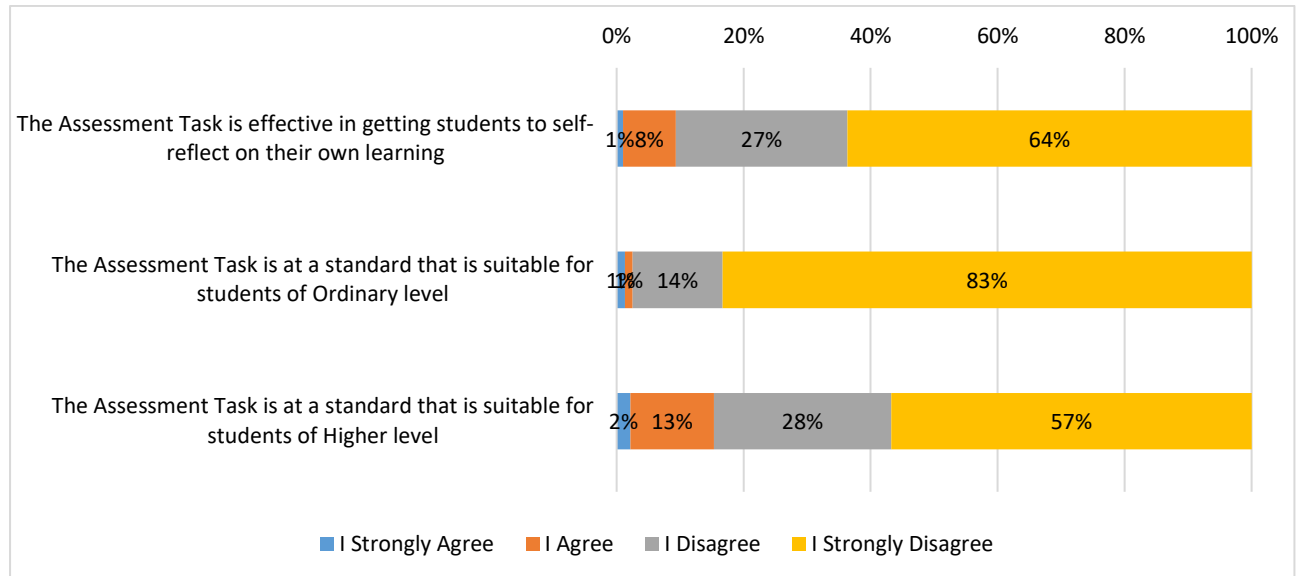
but that didn't make any difference, because no one was looking at what I was really doing. It was [the AT] just about what I wrote” (L1 Student, Focus Group).

No group of students, L1 or L2, stated that undertaking the Assessment Task helped to encourage self-reflection or the development of their language skills..

The L2 teachers were asked three questions about the assessment task in the survey. Figure 17 shows that 91 % of L2 teachers disagreed that the Assessment Task was effective in getting students to self-reflect on their learning. Almost all teachers were of the opinion that the Assessment Task was not of

a standard appropriate to the ability of ordinary level students. 85 % disagreed as regards Higher level students with 57 % strongly disagreeing in this case.

Figure 17. L2 teachers’ comments on the Assessment Task (n=600)

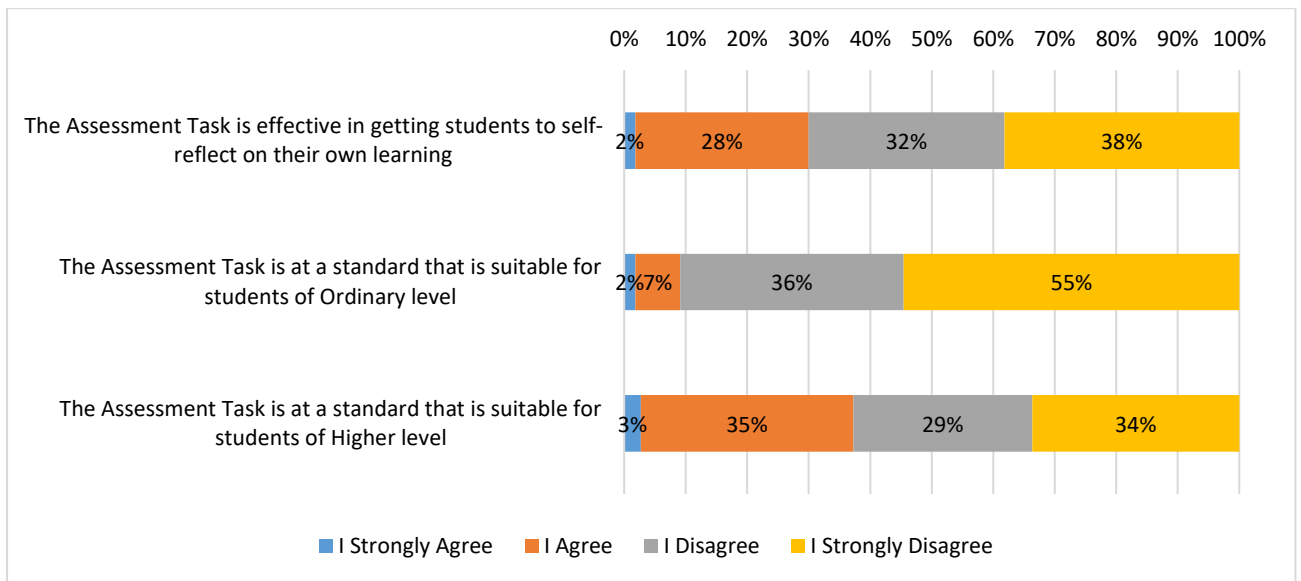


An Gréasán were of the opinion that,

... the assessment task is completely unsuitable for L2 students. The language register that would be required for this task is completely unrealistic. This task would require high order language skills, which L2 students would not yet have developed. In addition, there is no distinction between higher and ordinary level in the assessment task.... We strongly recommend that there is no longer an assessment task for Irish. (Submission, An Gréasán)

L1 teachers also agreed with this opinion as reflected in Figure 18. A very large majority of L1 teachers disagreed that the Assessment Task was of an appropriate standard for the ability of ordinary level students. 38 % were of the opinion that it was of an appropriate standard for the ability of higher-level students. 30 % of L1 teachers thought it was effective in getting students to self-reflect on their learning.

Figure 18. L1 teachers' comments on the Assessment Task (n=113)



3.2.4 Oral communication in the classroom

Some teachers used the opportunity they had in CBA2 to focus not only on the task of communication itself, but also on the promotion of speaking skills with the students, which they enjoyed. Talking about CBA2 and preparing for the 'oral' as the student called it:

... that was the first time that we properly set into... how to speak Irish, how to have a conversation with somebody... That's what everybody enjoyed, actually learning how to speak the language, not doing comprehensions or learning poetry or whatever. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

While overall students were in favour of much more emphasis on oral work, many did not feel that the emphasis was always on speaking skills in the CBAs as seen above. In other cases, however, it was in preparation for CBA2 that they had the opportunity to practice speaking skills:

No. I feel like it was only the CBA, where we were presenting, but that was it. I feel like we didn't do anything else where we were speaking Irish (L2 Student, Focus Group).

Another student supported this opinion,

It was more like they [the teacher] just gave us comprehensions and different short stories, but we never actually spoke it mostly. It was more on writing (L2 Student, Focus Group).

Recognising that they enjoyed speaking work, but did not get enough opportunities to speak, a student said:

Yeah, 'cause we would actually have learned Irish" (L2 Student, Focus Group).

Some students mentioned that they were learning about Gaelic culture, the national language and that they would be proud of it but that they cannot use it. One student said:

I'd love to be fluent in Irish [...] so for first year to third year, get to know the language, be able to talk it. And then, the poems would be easier cause you know the language" (L2 Student, Focus Group).

For the same reason, another student said:

It would be better if we learned more Irish culture while we were actually learning Irish in the first place, because it's like our first language, but no one really speaks it. And I think like speaking it as well a lot more, like, playing games with it or something, would make it more fun. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The impact of oral work on the following student is evident in their comment:

There was a point where we knew that the Junior cert wasn't going ahead, so for the last literally few weeks, we did only speaking, and I think that the point where I learned the most, out of all the Junior Cert. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Students suggested:

More oral work would be better, because I feel like it would improve people's pronunciation and vocabulary, and also more group work. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

More practical, like speaking stuff, rather than just writing. I think with the cultural stuff in it, it would make people a bit more interested. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

3.2.5 Assessment in general

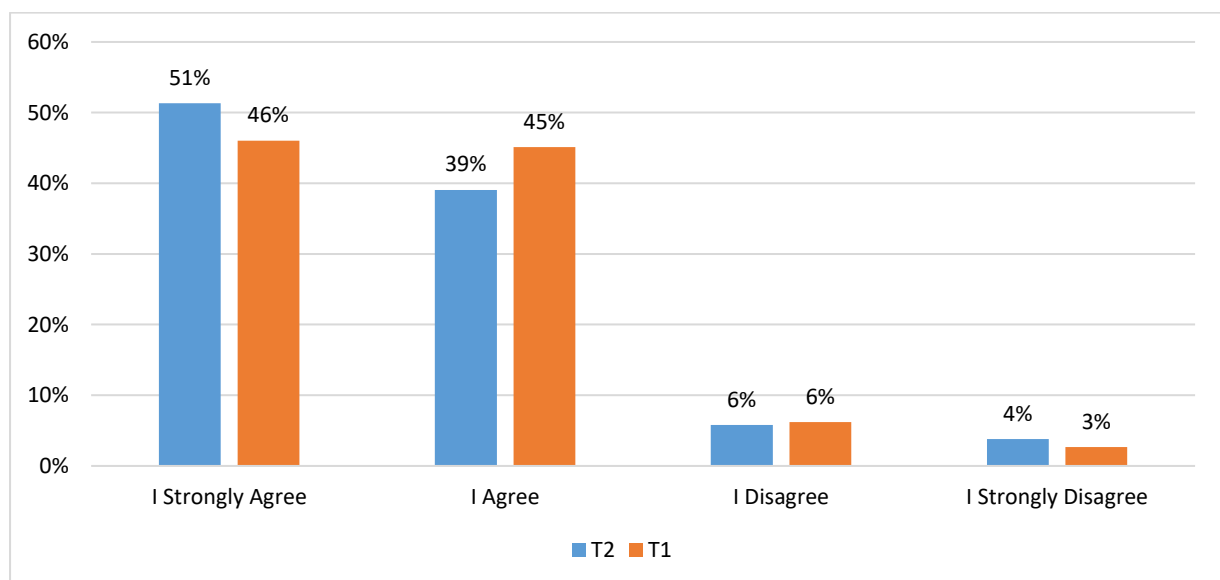
Junior Cycle places great emphasis on assessment as part of the learning process. The assessment of Irish for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) consists of two Classroom-Based Assessments; CBA1: the Language portfolio and CBA2: the Communicative task; an Assessment task linked to CBA2 and a final examination. The final examination is administered by the State Examinations Commission at two levels: Ordinary and Higher level. As the classroom-based assessments and other assessments are linked to a new reporting system, which culminates in the award of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), its aim is to provide parents/guardians with a broad and clear view of their child's

learning journey over the three years of junior cycle. Due to the changes in the number of CBAs to be completed and the cancellation of the Assessment Task and final examinations, the JCPA was not used to report on students’ learning in 2020 and 2021.

The timing of assessments in third year emerged as a theme among participants in the review. The students recognised that all assessment between CBA1, CBA2 and mock examinations was converging around the same time, at the beginning of third year, which caused many problems in terms of time pressures. The Inspectorate recommended e.g. “moving one CBA to second year” as there are two CBAs, the assessment task and the final examination in third year. On the same theme, COGG recommended in its submission: “it would be worth exploring the possibility to cut the number of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBA) to one in second year” (COGG Submission). This opinion was supported by An Gréasán: “... it would be better if there were one CBA and a proper oral examination. We are of the opinion that it would be preferable if a CBA was completed in second year and a proper oral examination was held in third year worth 40 % of the final mark” (Submission, An Gréasán). Three quarters (328 out of 490) of L2 teachers who answered the open question in the survey stated that there should be an oral examination, with 55 out of 90 L1 teachers in favour of such.

The L2 and L1 teachers also recognised the problem of time pressures and the vast majority of them felt that one of the CBAs should be done in second year as seen in Figure 19.

Figure 19. Comments of L2 & L1 teachers on doing one of the CBAs in second year (n=717)



One teacher described the importance of assessment as follows:

It is very important that this is examined at the same time. It is not worth changing specifications if we do not look at the assessment system. All of these things should come

together... emphasis should be placed on students' daily lives, the students' interests in the examination papers, and it is not satisfactory that specifications are devised and then the assessments subsequently. It doesn't work, and that's why we have many of these problems. I think that the JCT, NCCA, the State Examinations Commissions and the Department of Education... should work more closely together on this, and we will find the course that is satisfactory. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

While teaching, learning and assessment arrangements are all undertaken during the process of developing the specifications, this feedback likely refers to the fact that there were delays to the usual timeframe for providing the text list, sample assessment items and examination papers for Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2.

The students were of the opinion that they would like to be awarded some of the exam marks before taking the state examinations. However, they were not in favour of the assessment task for Irish. The students wished that the final examination should recognise all the assessments they would undertake.

Do more projects and have them included in the grades. And definitely get to speak more Irish, because we didn't get to do that. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The views of teachers and students on the assessment have shown that they highly value the final assessment and that the broader approach to assessment recommended in the specifications is not yet embedded in the system. Teachers in the focus groups reported that many of them did not participate in the Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings. This may have been affected by COVID. One teacher took part in one and had the following to say

It was good that time had been provided and OK if it was not getting marks in the final exam. It was interesting to see what kind of standard a student had in another class... It's difficult to disagree with another teacher if another teacher thinks it is excellent and you think it's above expectations. It is difficult to disagree about a student of the other teacher. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

In its submission, the JCT made the following comments:

As students were engaged in CBAs in the other subjects, they identified the transferable/key skills (and elements) mentioned on page 15 of the Framework as being common in the CBAs. Things such as being able to select a topic, do research, make a presentation etc. As teachers value the learning and assessment experience of the CBAs, they are treating them as an integral and effective part of the student's learning journey that will remain with them

throughout their lifetime as an enjoyable and relevant and proud experience. (Submission, JCT)

3.2.6 Summary

The teachers were satisfied with certain aspects of the CBA1, in particular for able students, they ensured ongoing work. Many students liked CBA2 as it allowed them to practice their speaking skills. There was also evidence, however, that it was a memorisation and a written task for many ~~some~~ students. It may be too early to judge the Assessment Task but teachers were of the opinion that it was not suitable for L2 students in particular. The JCT argued in its submission that students' speech and communication skills are being assessed in the two CBAs but the students and teachers who took part in this review were not of the same opinion. It is clear that these participants did not see the CBAs as an integral and effective part of the students' learning journey. They do not think that a balance has been achieved with regard to the CBAs in terms of scheduling, emphasis on oral skills and oral interaction in particular in recognition of all assessment work. They indicated a strong preference for an oral examination and a recognition of speaking ability to be incorporated into the final grade.

3.3 The many ways in which teachers are using their professional judgements to mediate the new specifications in their schools and classrooms

It was seen above in relation to the classroom-based assessments that teachers did not consider that CBA2 provided them with a large amount of feedback on students' learning and did not encourage a significant number of them to use active teaching and learning as they implement the specifications in their classes. An Gréasán referred to the impact of the assessments in its submission:

The impact of assessment on the learning and teaching of the language, and the 'backwash effect' of assessment on classroom practice, must also be recognised. If oral work has not been properly valued in the assessment, the same emphasis will not be placed on these skills in the classroom. (Submission, An Gréasán)

An Gréasán expressed dissatisfaction with the timely release of information to teachers to implement the specification:

Information about the literature texts, the classroom-based tasks or the assessment task was not available early enough. Teachers were getting pieces of information gradually over the three years. The answers were not available when questions were asked. This has fostered a lot of uncertainty and caused problems with the new course. (Submission, An Gréasán)

3.3.1 *Literary genres*

The vision for the role of literature as contained in the specifications, is for the development of language skills and the exploration of literary texts to be integrated in the classroom to aid language development.. Literature is composed for the language community and is an example of authentic material which involves a wide range of linguistic registers and styles, which assists the student in language development. Literature is therefore an important resource for learning, for literacy and for the development of language competences.

Overall, students wanted less literature and more emphasis on speaking the language although they were relatively positive about the choice of literature available. Students in L2 schools in particular felt that they were struggling with learning Irish because of too much emphasis on literature rather than on speaking ability. Oral work was the most enjoyable aspect according to the students themselves. This was to be recognised in both L1 and L2 schools.

I think there was too much emphasis on literature rather than speaking it... Like you couldn't develop your skills. You were learning, learning and learning, but literature does not help the growth of the language, like you have to speak it and we were not dealing with that (speaking skills) in the classroom. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

More talking in the classroom, and [for Irish] not to be solely book-based and comprehensions. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Less literature, and more practically speaking in the classroom. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

It was just literature, there was little emphasis on speaking, until the CBA, but you got only three minutes there. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

They thought there were too many texts, and lack of diversity in them. There was a complaint that many of the short stories chosen for them were too similar, making it difficult for them to differentiate between them.

It was kind of the same storyline. And then you'd be getting mixed up, which one would be happening in what story. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Many of them thought that some of the stories were too old-fashioned and others thought that some of the stories were “silly”, and “childish” (L2 Student, Focus Group). They liked that there were specific genres. Students in one Gaeltacht school stated that there was a choice for the texts,

two books were put up and we were told ‘pick one’. They read the thing on the back, and we had to choose from that, but that was that (L1 Student, Focus Group).

However, this was not regarded as a bad thing. The students in the same Gaeltacht school recognised that students would not be interested in making choices anyway:

If people were given the choice, I don't think people would be too worried about it. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

The JCT stated in its submission that

we have received many positive stories from teachers who give their students a choice in the literary texts they will study. They say that they are often surprised by the final choice made by students, that the department would not imagine as being 'number one' on the list (Submission, JCT, L2).

An example of a drama 'Lá Buí Bealtaine' being chosen by a class is mentioned and that "they (the students) managed to read and discuss the play with interest in the subject and their desire for communication". This showed that

students could make significant progress at their own level of ability when encouraged to take ownership of their own learning (Submission, JCT, L2).

One Gaeltacht teacher identified the challenge of giving students a choice:

A choice of material has been highlighted, another element that is difficult to implement. To give students a choice as it has been put forward in the specifications (L1 Teacher, Focus Group).

There was a student who said that the option to choose could add to the class:

I wish we could've had to pick our own stuff cos maybe we'd be more like in the class, and actually listen properly, cos it was kind of boring, mostly (L2 Student, Focus Group).

But overall, the lack of input did not worry the students that were interviewed:

I just think that's better. You know, like a few people would [be in favour of] one book, and others... so just it's better for the teacher to say 'we are reading this' and there's no arguments then. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

This does not mean that they did not like this aspect of the course:

We had to read a novel, and I'd say that was the most enjoyable thing about the Junior Cycle course (L2 Student, Focus Group).

Other students pointed out that literature helped them to learn keywords through memorising, adding to their vocabulary as this student said:

The words that we learned in the novel, we could use outside the school as well...
(L2 Student, Focus Group).

On the other hand, another student said:

Reading the novel was fun for me, but it didn't really teach us how to speak and stuff (L2 Student, Focus Group).

If the students felt that any aspect of the course helped spoken Irish they were more favourable to it:

It wasn't a bad book as well. I'd say most people who read the book enjoyed it, but definitely the speaking was my favourite part. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Students were generally satisfied with the range of genres available. They felt that the texts were not modern enough, compared to other media, such as music and films.

Because you know [reference to TG Lurgan] Avicii Wake me up in Irish. Like you just learn Irish from it, and it sticks in your mind... you want to learn it, [Whereas] when you're reading them stories where it just drags on, you're falling asleep and you're not enjoying it. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

However, L2 students would enjoy the option of short films, in both second and third year.

not the stories, anyways. They were too long. And they were very unexpected. There was a big twist in them at the end all the time. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

For the most part, the students were positive about the short stories although there were some problems with some being out of print and others were too similar or too old. However, they were reluctant to engage with poetry.

I liked the dramas. Some were entertaining, but personally, with like the poems, I found everyone just really got bored, and it was just very hard to learn 'cause you have no motivation to learn. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

If you're reading a poem in class, you're not really gonna use it again, but with the songs and that, you might actually take an interest. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The poems. We had too many poems to learn. They were very high, confusing. Just didn't want to do them. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

There were like, 6 poems. Like, how are we supposed to learn them and reflect on them? (L2 Student, Focus Group)

You have to learn them, and then remember what thing you learned goes with what poem. You could get them mixed up or something. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

It's just all memorisation and everything. Like, at this point (Year 4), I don't remember anything in any of those poems, so I can't even talk about them, you know what I mean. So, what's the point in learning them? Like, you're only doing them to get good marks on a test. You're not doing it for the joy of it. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

There were a few students who were in favour of poetry but they were in the minority. It emerged in a number of focus groups that the students needed more time to discuss poetry (for example) out loud, rather than just writing and 'learning'.

Even if like, there was more talk involved. With poetry like, if there was a set part of class where you could go to the person beside you, and talk in Irish about the poem, that would [have] really benefitted us. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The JCT acknowledged in its submission that

it was challenging for many teachers in the early years of curriculum reform to familiarise themselves with the role of literature in the teaching and learning of Irish

but from 2018-2019

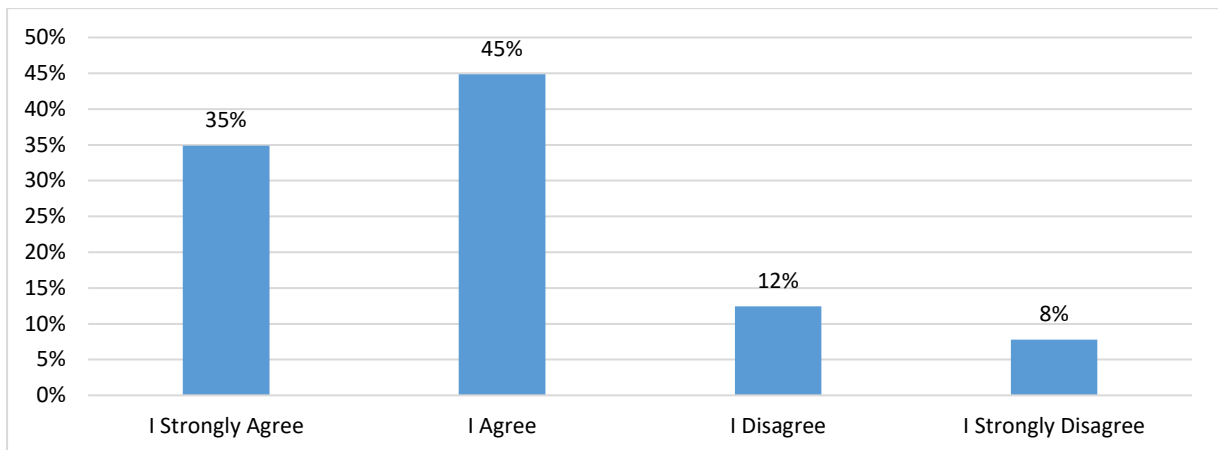
many teachers gave feedback that year that the understanding and insights they got from that CPD workshop had a great impact on them and that they were becoming familiar with the reforms and approaches involved (JCT Submission).

One T1 teacher mentioned the literature genres in response to an open question:

The students and I like that films in Irish are part of the course (It is unfortunate, however, that there is not enough time in the exam to cover all the genres... and in the sample paper, the film was left out as a result). (L1 Teacher, Survey)

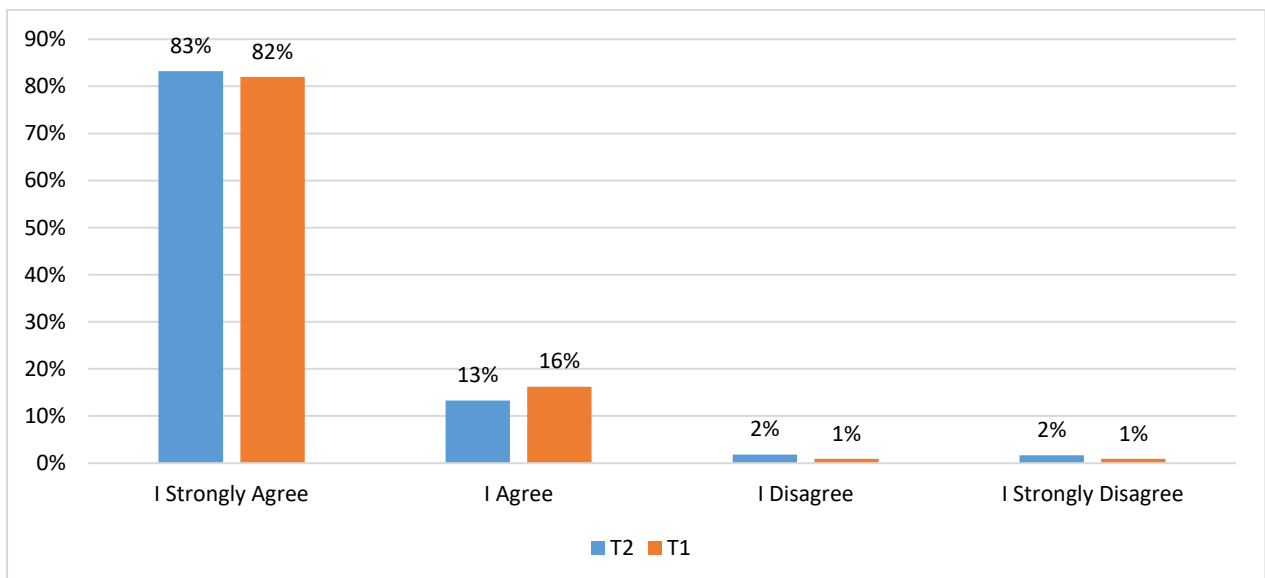
Figure 20 shows that L2 teachers would like to see a short film included as part of the 2nd and 3rd Year (L2) course.

Figure 20. A short film should be considered as part of the 2nd and 3rd Year course (L2) (n=602)



One L2 teacher was positive about the “Diversity of literary genres” (L2 Teacher Survey). Figure 21 shows however that a very large number of teachers thought they did not have enough knowledge of the genres of composition that students should know for the final exam at higher level. This affected them in implementing the specifications. One teacher in a focus group recognised how there were similarities between the English and Irish examinations with regard to writing genres. He considered that the Irish specification was not clear enough with regard to practice on the various genres: “It is not clear that this is not needed, and it is not clear that it is needed” (L2 Teacher, Focus Group).

Figure 21. The views of the L2 & L1 teachers on the information available on the genres of composition that students should be aware of for the final exam at higher level. (n=712)



The development of the Irish language was very much connected to literature. Almost all teachers that suggested an oral examination, said that there was too much emphasis on literature. The opinion expressed by the following teacher in a focus group is representative of many others.

According to the specification, the specification does not respect the speaking of Irish. Listening to and understanding Irish should be a priority... In our daily lives, throughout the world, we always listen, we always talk. We rarely read or write, or at least we spend much less time, reading or writing. So if we are to promote Irish, there should be an emphasis on speaking Irish, listening to Irish in everyday use. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

According to another teacher:

The students are choked by the literature... I have a third year, higher level, and I don't know what to say to them. They tell me, "Why couldn't we do Irish in the way we learn French or Spanish? Why do we always have to do poems and poetry, reading stories and such... Why couldn't they learn the language, because they don't see that they are learning [that]. And many of them when they heard that there was no literary question at ordinary level, they went down to ordinary level. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

COGG supported a reduction in the volume of literature in its submission.

Depending on the specification being undertaken, a certain number of works must be completed in the different genres and the volume of literature to be covered is creating significant and unnecessary challenges for teachers and students. It is recommended that the possibilities of curtailing the number of literary works to be studied be explored, as there is widespread opinion among both L1 & L2 schools, that the current requirements are too demanding. (COGG submission)

Another teacher in the survey stated a preference for

Simple questions on literature in the examination after studying ordinary level
(Survey response)

One teacher was positive about the choice of literature:

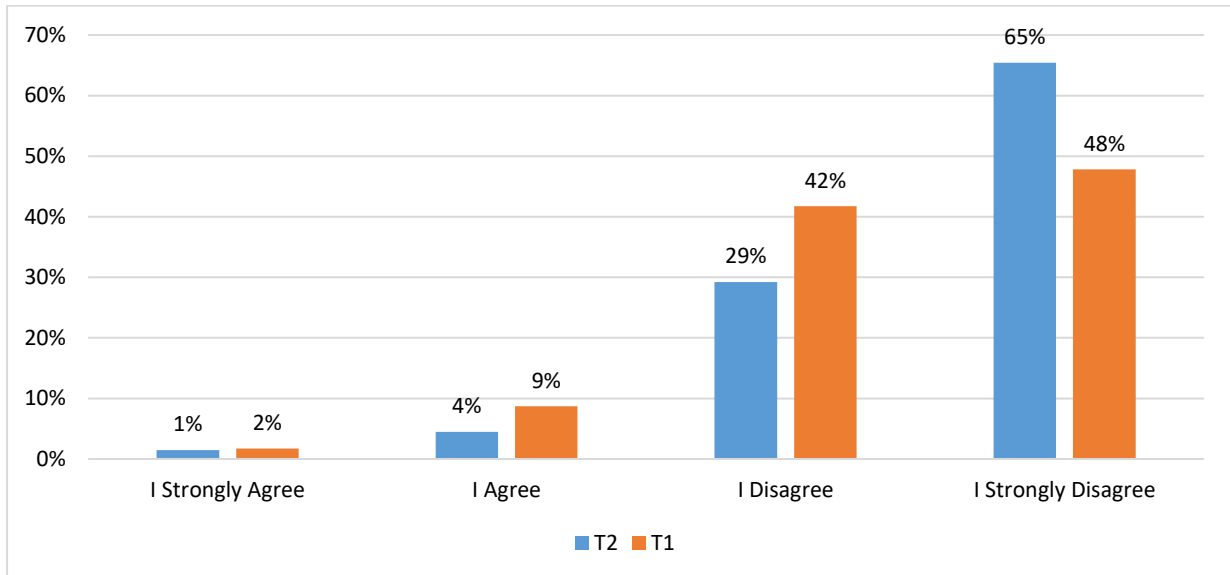
The amount of choice for literature and poetry is a good thing... (L2 Teacher, Focus Group).

Teachers in the focus groups recommended getting rid of the list for Year 1. They also said that there should be one list from Year 1 to Year 3 as the students were confused. As one teacher said:

I see it now in Year 3 as we go back on the poems. Some of the students remember the poems they did in Year 1 and I'm telling them, forget them. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

They thought they should have more time for literature rather than it being squeezed into two years. As seen in Figure 22, only a small number of teachers agreed that the approach taken in each learning unit that learning derives from literature was successful.

Figure 22. The approach that learning in all learning units comes from literature is successful (n=717)

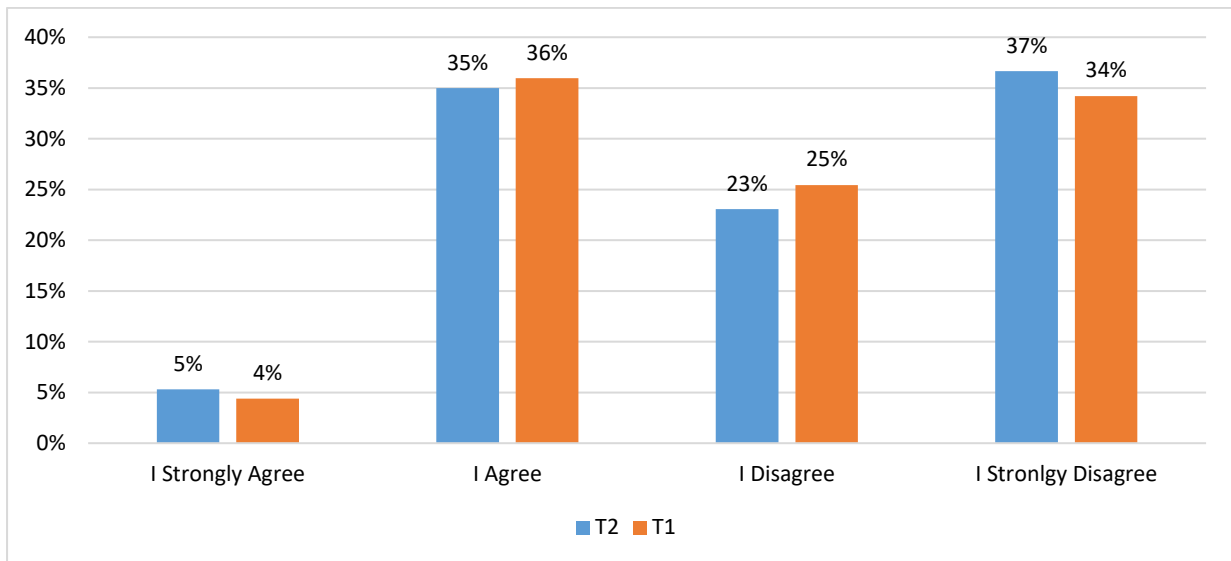


An Gréasán supported these comments in a submission:

It is not clear that the approach that learning in each learning unit derives from literature is working at a practical level. This approach must be fully reviewed. A more practical and appropriate thematic approach needs to be explored. As an example on this point, some textbook publishers have already returned to a thematic approach. (Submission, An Gréasán)

Almost all teachers were of the opinion that the specifications put too much emphasis on literature. A large majority were dissatisfied with the number of texts to be studied for the specifications. 40 % of L2 and L1 teachers agreed that the standard of literature texts available for the specifications was satisfactory for higher level students as shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23. The standard of literature texts available for the specifications is satisfactory for higher level students (n=713)



For ordinary level students, the vast majority of teachers disagreed that the quality of literature texts was satisfactory. According to An Gréasán:

The literature on the course is not suitable for ordinary level students. There are not enough texts suitable for ordinary level students, therefore it does not meet their learning needs properly. A list of ordinary level literature should be provided as an option. (Submission, An Gréasán)

As already mentioned, a large majority of L2 teachers agreed that a short film should be considered as part of the 2nd and 3rd Year course. In line with this opinion, one L2 teacher stated in the survey:

Teachers of ordinary level are not going to spend time on plays, short stories and poems when they are not in the exam. I agree to use the literature as an inspiration and link the text to a theme such as sport/ life of the teenager, but it would take so much time to go through a drama with an OL class... A short film would be much more effective. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

Less than a third of teachers agreed that all literary texts from the list of texts are easy to find. The Inspectorate argued in its submission that it is “timely now that lists be reviewed” for literature.

An Gréasán recommended: “There should be an online pdf or booklet containing all the poems, songs, short stories and dramas on the literature lists” (Submission, An Gréasán). JCT noted that “teachers would love if audiobook copies were available for more of the short stories and novels to support students with special educational needs. Such a resource would support the promotion of the

integrated approach, of course” (Submission, JCT, L2). However, it’s likely that copyright issues would make this difficult in practice.

Less than two thirds of teachers agreed that there are enough literary texts available in the various dialects. One L1 teacher said, “As regards the novel, none specifically attends to the *Gaeltacht X*² dialect and we are very disappointed about that” (L1 Teacher, Focus Group). According to An Gréasán:

Teachers from Ulster have also often mentioned that there are not enough texts from Ulster on the literature lists (Submission, An Gréasán).

According to the JCT,

Many teachers in the L1 contexts welcomed the opportunity to engage with local/oral literature as part of the study of literature in Junior Cycle Irish (L1). Teachers recognise the power of oral literature as a resource in the student’s learning journey to develop a stronger link with the language community (Submission, JCT, L1).

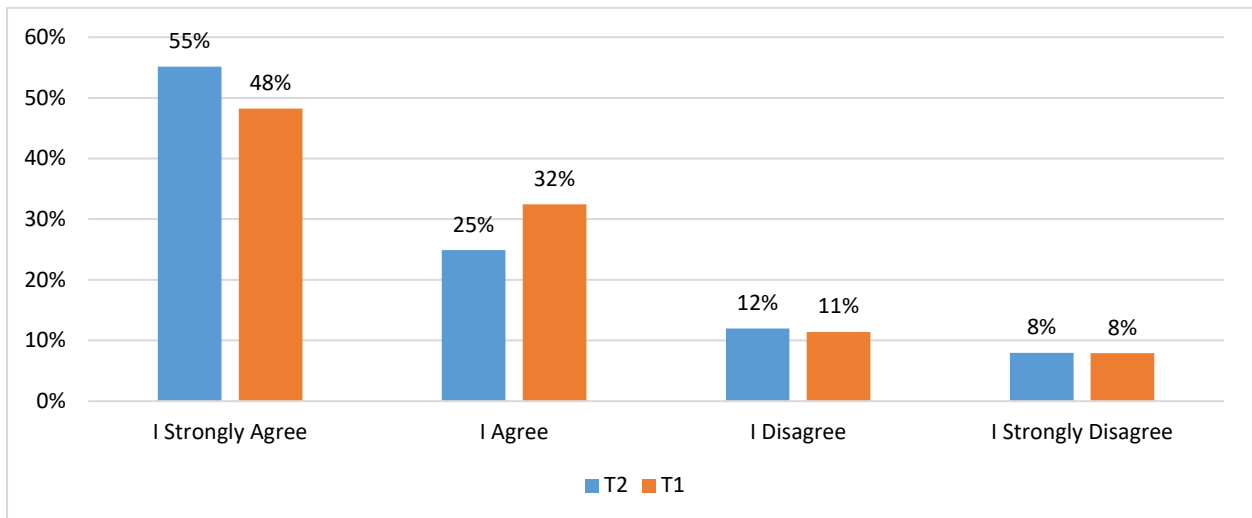
In its submission, COGG referred to the literature lists:

It is essential that reading material is available to students that are attractive, contemporary, relevant and enjoyable. The situation in Irish differs from English in the context of available literature and provision of teenage literature. It is important that there is an opportunity to amend and renew these lists on a regular basis — this is a recognised challenge in the context of Irish, and while there is a certain provision, it is recognised that there is a shortage of regular material that is age-appropriate in the various genres. (COGG submission)

A large majority of teachers agreed that the emphasis on literature contradicts the general aims of promoting the student’s communication skills as shown in Figure 24.

² Not identified to protect the anonymity of the participant.

Figure 24. The emphasis on literature is contrary to the general aims of promoting the student’s communicative skills. (n=716)



The theme of literature emerged on numerous occasions both in the open question in the survey and also in the focus groups of teachers. 319 of 490 L2 teachers (65 %) and 51 out of 90 L1 teachers (57 %) who answered this question felt that there was too much literature on the course. Below is a taste of the teachers’ views in the survey.

Reduce the amount of literature on the course. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

Less emphasis on literature, reading and memorising. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

A decrease in the amount of literature to be done by OL and HL; there is too much and it can’t be enjoyed. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

There is way too much literature. It is not fair to the students or teachers. We're spending way too much time on literature. (L1 Teacher, Survey)

Teach the language first before undertaking literature. They are not mature enough to undertake so much literature at that age... in English or in Irish. (L1 Teacher, Survey)

I think literature makes the course more interesting but if too much literature is involved, you don't have the opportunity to adapt to the language problems they face (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

Some teachers felt that there were serious implications for teachers and students as a result of the emphasis on literature. It was shown in the survey by a teacher as follows:

The Leaving Certificate is now easier than the Junior Cycle. A new fashion is happening in our school — that is that students are doing the ordinary level for the JC and Higher Level for the

LC [Leaving Certificate]. At least with ordinary level, literature is not necessary... and you have time to teach them the LANGUAGE, the tasks on the paper are based on language only. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

Many teachers mentioned that due to the emphasis on literature at higher level, students were doing the ordinary level course. As one teacher wrote:

Too much emphasis is placed on literature — The students don't have the Irish as they come from primary school to undertake it. It greatly affects them and they give up on higher level — the number of higher level students for the Leaving Certificate will be falling as a result. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

This teacher referred to the standard of the students' Irish as they come from primary school which is discussed in the next section.

Overall, L1 teachers were more open to the possibilities of literature by reducing the number of texts as the following teacher wrote:

Reduce the number of texts. (I am very much in favour of literature but the number of texts contradicts the active approach that is supposed to be used to teach each text. You need to jump on too fast) (L1 Teacher, Survey).

According to the JCT,

It is recently that teachers are telling us how much the literature texts are being enjoyed by students in the context of L1 (Submission, JCT, L1).

One consequence of the amount of literature in one teacher's opinion was a lack of time for language accuracy and composition.

I would prefer to have more time to focus on accuracy (i.e., grammar) and composition. The lack of accuracy and lack of wealth in writing is the main obstacle for my students to achieve high results and I felt that I did not have enough time to focus on that. (L1 Teacher, Survey)

The views of the L1 teachers in the focus groups were consistent with this opinion. They generally saw the possibilities in the L1 specification but were "time-constrained" (L1 Teacher, Focus Group). The JCT argued with reference to local/oral literature that

teachers recognise examples of the richness, accuracy and dialects that are reflected in the sources collected by the student, which supports them in their own language journey (Submission, JCT, L1)

Another teacher supported this opinion:

Cut back on literature, teachers do not have time to teach the basics anymore because they are so consumed in completing the literature course (L1 Teacher, Survey).

Teachers have difficulty with the balance between literature and

there is not enough time being spent on acquiring other language skills and on fostering communication skills in particular (Submission, An Gréasán).

The JCT stated in its submission that:

more teachers recognise the opportunities literature texts present of an example of living culture and as a source of Irish language which includes examples of exemplary and everyday language that support the development of all the student's language skills. We have heard many good reports from teachers who take advantage of the literary texts as a catalyst for communication in class and ensure that students experience different formats and approaches as part of the regular formative assessment in class, based on literary text as a stimulus. (Submission, JCT, L2)

It seems that the integrated approach recommended by JCT is not being implemented by the teachers who took part in this research.

3.3.2 Examinations

A feature of the enactment of new junior cycle subjects was to place the focus from the beginning on learning and teaching. To facilitate and support this culture shift, sample exam papers were not issued by the SEC for any subject until the Autumn term of the third year of the first cycle of the new subject specification. In the case of Irish, sample papers for Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2 were issued by the SEC in November 2019. It is also noted that suggested timing for individual questions is not included in all Junior Cycle sample papers and that marking schemes are not provided for any sample papers, however, marks for each question are provided in the sample papers for Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2.

It often emerged in the focus groups that there was a lack of certainty regarding the examination. Teachers said that the wording of the sample examination paper was too general, too complex and they did not understand what was required in terms of the volume of writing, time to spend on each question, standards, marks etc. Teachers considered this a huge problem for the weakest students in particular. As one teacher said:

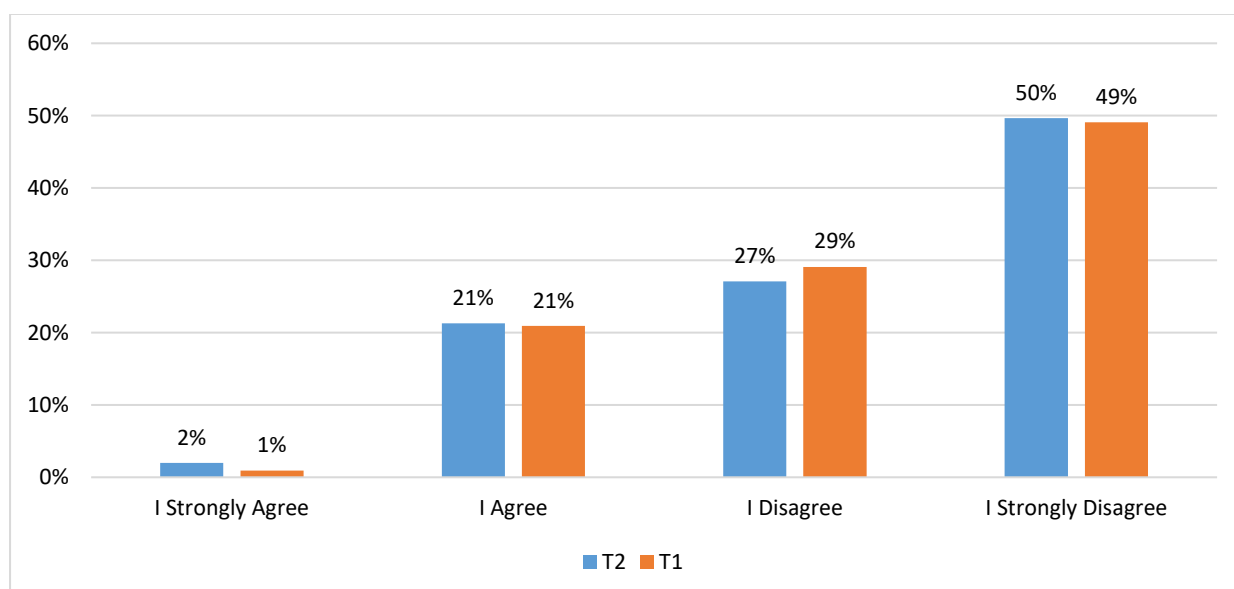
... students who are taking the exams now (2022) do not have an idea of what they should have covered, especially in terms of composition, there is no knowledge of what type of genre students should know, there is no particular knowledge of what type of material students should know. And seriously, this is unsatisfactory, and in a way hinders learning, and it gives students little confidence. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

In its submission, COGG highlighted the following aspects of the examination:

While it is recognised that there will be a period of embedding in relation to the structuring of the terminal papers and the feedback that will result from them, there has been dissatisfaction shown by schools with certain aspects of the papers. Based on this feedback, it would be important to be more careful in the future about the wording and comprehensibility of the questions. Another point to note is that there is a significant discrepancy between the volume of literature covered in the context of L1 in particular and the number of questions appearing in the examination itself. (COGG submission)

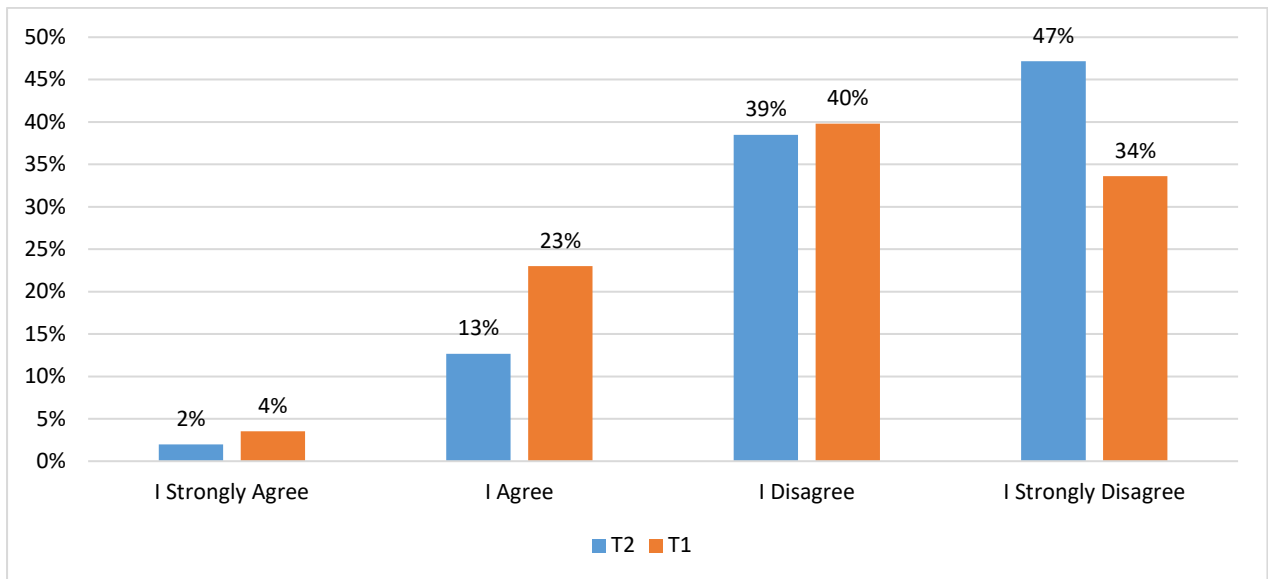
The teachers were asked if they were satisfied with the Sample examination paper. Almost all teachers were dissatisfied with the sample paper for higher level. Figure 25 shows that just over 20% of teachers were satisfied with the sample examination paper for ordinary level. A large majority agreed that the Sample examination paper was not suitable for evaluating the learning of ordinary level students.

Figure 25. The Sample examination paper is satisfactory as it is, in the ordinary level paper (n=712)



Most teachers disagreed that the Sample examination paper encouraged them to use active teaching/learning strategies as shown in Figure 26. Just over one quarter of L1 teachers were satisfied that it encouraged them to use active teaching/learning strategies.

Figure 26. The Sample Examination Paper encouraged me to use strategies for active teaching/learning (n=713)



A large majority of teachers disagreed that sufficient time was available for students in the Final Examination to answer all questions at higher level. The L2 teachers were divided half and half on the Final Examination at ordinary level, half agree and half disagree. Almost a third of L1 teachers were agreeing that sufficient time was available for students to answer all questions at ordinary level.

Almost all teachers were agreeing that a marking scheme and other sample papers should be provided. As L1 teachers said:

We received the sample paper in 2018 I think. Now in 2022, the students have two hours, 270 marks... I do not yet know where the 270 marks are going. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

We did not receive a marking scheme. I don't know if I am too hard or too soft on my students as nothing is available as a guide to me as a teacher. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

Still after three, four years, there is only one sample paper. This is terrible... They tell us in our teaching that there should be success criteria but there are no success criteria available for us. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

It is a shame that the examination papers from last year and the previous year have not been published. When the exams were cancelled. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

An Gréasán had this to say about the examination papers:

The sample examination papers were published too late. The sample papers were only published in November in year 3 of the first group, and only one sample paper was published

for each level. This was not satisfactory and teachers and students were working in the dark. A marking scheme has not been provided either again, which also fosters uncertainty. When the sample papers were published in November 2019 the standard was too challenging for students, and our requests to publish more sample papers to give teachers and students more guidance were ignored. (Submission, An Gréasán)

Almost all teachers agreed that there is too much emphasis on literature issues on the Higher-Level Sample examination paper. A high percentage of teachers agree that the sample examination paper was not suitable for evaluating the learning of ordinary or higher-level students. L1 teachers expressed the view in the focus groups that the questions were too complicated. As one L1 teacher said: “Some of the questions, I think, are too difficult for children fourteen or fifteen years old” (L1 Teacher, Focus Group).

An Gréasán drew attention to the same issue:

The instructions in the questions should be intelligible and students should be able to handle them. Tasks should be interesting, exciting, relate to students’ lives and interests, and not artificial or absurd tasks. The sample papers ... are not in line with this. (Submission, An Gréasán)

Students and teachers expressed opinions on the listening comprehension as part of the sample papers. The students in the L2 schools in particular said they had difficulties with them. The speed of speech was the most common complaint and there was so much speech. Also, there was a complaint that the questions were too long to keep a concept in the head to answer the question.

It flies through... It’s so much, especially if they ask long sentences. You’re trying to write it out and think of the spelling at the same time and then try to get to the next question. (L2 Student T2, Focus Group)

I didn't like the listening comprehensions. They were a bit too fast, and not slow enough pace for some people that can't take in loads of information with only a couple of seconds to write down an answer. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

In particular, L2 students experienced difficulties in dealing with the different dialects, due to a lack of language contact. One L1 teacher in the survey identified it as a good thing that “emphasis remains on the aural” (L1 Teacher, Survey). Some L2 teachers asked for greater emphasis on listening comprehension, easier questions, slowing down of the recording and to play it three times. Some thought that some of the questions based on the listening comprehension were not fair: “Questions in the aural are looking for opinions. This is not fair” (L2 Teacher, focus group).

None of the students who took part in this review sat an official Junior Cycle examination, so it is not possible to judge what opinion they would have on this aspect of the specification. Regarding the one sample paper issued (November 2019), the students who viewed it had several complaints. The main opinion that emerged was that they felt that there was not enough time to complete the paper, that the wording was difficult to understand, and it made it more difficult for them that there were no marks on the questions to guide them in terms of how much time to spend on each question. In terms of being prepared, the majority of them said that they were not.

I was fortunate that COVID came. This is the only thing I have to say. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

I was not ready for it at all. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

We wouldn't have been ready at all; oh, yeah, we would fail it. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

3.3.3 *Summary*

There is an emphasis in the Irish L1 and L2 specifications on self-awareness and self-directed learning. The JCT presented some evidence of students taking ownership of their own learning. It was not clear from the students and teachers who took part in this research that this practice was widespread. A number of teachers identified the challenge of giving students a choice. Literature again emerged in this section with teachers unhappy that the learning in the learning units stems from literature in particular for ordinary level students. L1 teachers saw more possibilities with literature, but to reduce the number of texts. Teachers and students expressed unease about aspects of the sample paper and discontent with the aural section of the sample paper was also evident.

3.4 Experience of students and teachers of differentiated provision at Junior Cycle level

A significant aspect of the specifications is that there are two specifications that recognise the different levels of ability in different school contexts. Teachers passed comments on this in the survey and focus groups. The students did not express any particular views on this issue. L1 teachers in the focus groups welcomed the differentiation in the L1/L2 model of provision.

It makes clear that the native speaker and the learners, that they have specific recognition in that there are differentiated accommodations made. That was the great aim of the specifications. That the native speakers be catered for but that the learners are also important and must be encouraged. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

It is very clear to me that as an L1 teacher in the Gaeltacht for the first time ever, now that it is on paper, that the native speaker must be accommodated and supported but that the learners are also there. I welcome that. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

It was seen above that there was more support from L1 teachers for CBA1 and that not every student may have sufficient ability to reflect on their own learning. One L2 teacher wrote:

The portfolio-related redrafting is good for higher level students (L2 Teacher).

On the other hand, another teacher in a L2 school wrote:

Too challenging for students in L2 [schools] (L2 Teacher, Survey).

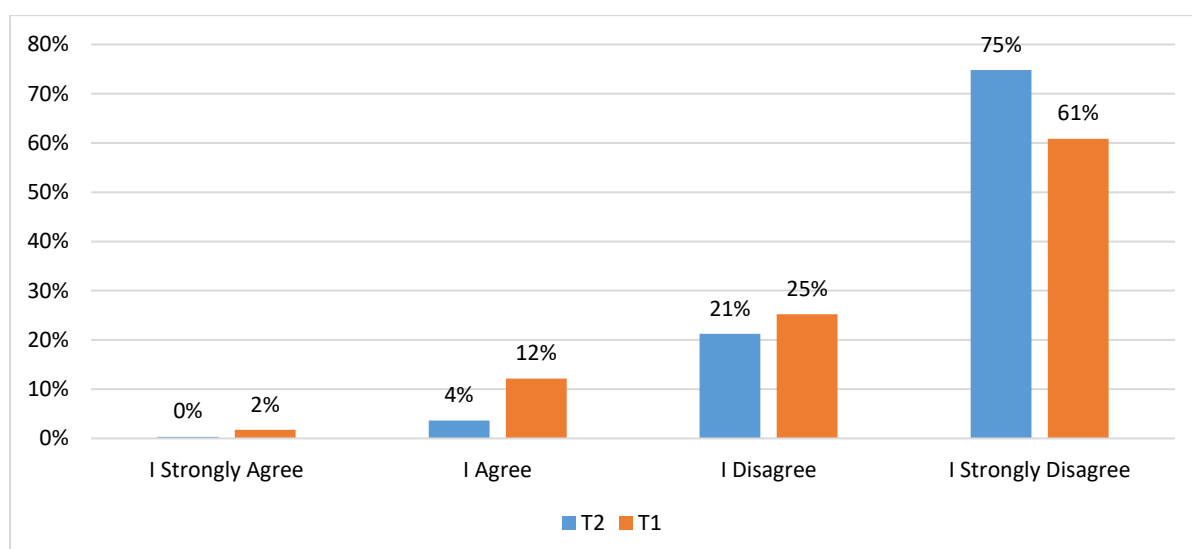
Some L1 teachers welcomed the additional challenge:

It gives fluent Irish speakers the opportunity to strengthen their ability and standard of communication and language. It encourages self-reflection and provides an opportunity to that end. It fosters independence in the student and encourages the student to take responsibility for his or her personal learning. (L1 Teacher, Survey)

It gives Gaeltacht/Gaelcholáistí a greater challenge compared to the old course — but they have been overwhelmed with the amount of literature that has been given to us. (Teacher T1, Survey)

With regard to differentiated provision for students of differing abilities, the vast majority of teachers disagreed that the specifications and assessments catered for students of all kinds of abilities as shown in Figure 27.

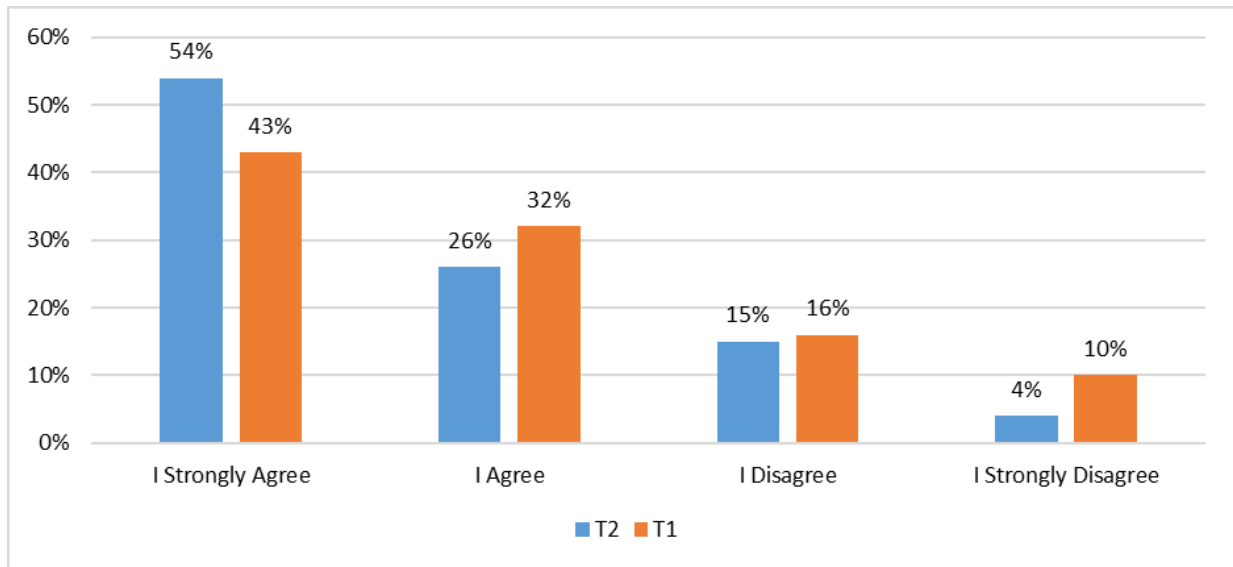
Figure 27. Specification and assessments cater for all students, of all kinds of abilities (n=718)



Many teachers wanted a return to a situation where a Foundation level examination would be available, and this opinion was stronger among L2 teachers than L1. As one T2 teacher described it, there was a call for:

A foundation level paper to be available for the weak students. (Teacher T2, Survey)

Figure 28. A Foundation level test should be available to students (n=714)



The largest volume of feedback from teachers on differentiation related to the challenges they felt were too great in the specifications for most students, not to mention students with additional educational needs. Some of the views expressed by teachers in the survey on differentiation are presented below:

Bring back the oral examination. There is a lot of literature. Students are under pressure, especially weaker students" (L2 Teacher, Survey).

... weak students in higher level are running into ordinary level class (L2 Teacher, Survey).

Weak students cannot do CBA2 properly, memorise their work (they fail according to the exemplars on the JCT site, that is not right) (L2 Teacher, Survey)

There is no differentiation, weak students are not catered for (L1 Teacher, Survey)

40 % oral examination, especially for weak students who are fluent in the language (L1 Teacher, Survey)

The course is not catering for students at different levels of ability — the amount of literature is hindering students' progress in the language (L1 Teacher, Survey)

Teachers in L1 schools raised the standard of the examination paper. As seen here, they were of the opinion that the standard was too high did not cater correctly for a range of abilities:

The paper we received is undoubtedly challenging. It was and it's long. It is aimed at the student who is good at writing. The weak student is completely forgotten. Or the student with special needs or a native speaker, they don't have a place in the paper. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

100% of the marks are for the written word. It's not catering for all my students. Some have learning difficulties. They have special needs. They are unable to write at the speed required to get good marks in the paper. But they are good Irish speakers but it doesn't cater for them to a large extent. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

3.4.1 Summary

L1 teachers were particularly positive about how the L1 specification meets the needs of more able students. Teachers were concerned about the provision for less able students or students with additional educational needs. They wanted a C Level examination to be available for these students.

3.5 Perspectives on the transition from primary to Junior Cycle Irish, and from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle Irish for this cohort and future cohorts

Differentiated curricula have been available in Ireland's primary schools for many years. A new integrated curriculum, the Primary Language Curriculum, was introduced in 2019 to support children in their language learning from junior infants to sixth class. Two versions of the curriculum are in place, one aimed at Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, and one aimed at English-medium schools. In this section, the transition from primary to post-primary is discussed, followed by from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle. With the exception of COGG, no other submission mentioned the continuity from primary to post-primary school. COGG drew attention to speaking Irish:

It is evident that when one examines the emphasis on spoken Irish at Leaving Certificate level and the emphasis placed on communicative and oral language in the Primary Language Curriculum, it can be seen that the current system at Junior Cycle does not provide enough continuity or preparation of students for the forthcoming oral examination at Leaving Certificate level, for which there are so many marks awarded, and amendments are required accordingly. (COGG submission)

L2 students had many views on continuity and the general consensus among them was that there was a huge leap in terms of the standard of Irish required in the post-primary school compared to the primary school. This leap appeared to be less significant for students in L1 schools. Many L2 students said they had little Irish when transitioning from primary school and they thought this was not recognised when they started in post-primary school. This created problems with language learning because, in their opinion, teachers and the course generally expected them to have a higher standard than they had:

I thought it was a big jump, because when you come into secondary school, they only speak Irish with you, they [the teachers] just speak Irish to you, so when you're trying to tell them that you don't understand it, and that you'd rather them to say it in English, they kind of say a little bit of English, but then they'll go back to Irish, and then you're kind of confused again. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Primary to secondary is just a very big jump. It's like they're assuming that you're the same level English-speaking as Irish-speaking. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Some of the comprehensions, it's like they're expecting us to be fluent in Irish... but if you don't know most the words, then you have to develop them... so if we know how to speak Irish, say, for the first few years of Junior cert, and we got to know the basics, or even more than the basics, just speaking Irish, then put us on to comprehensions and poetry. Then we'd know what the words to use... (L2 Student, Focus Group)

In particular, the difference in standard was recognised in second year. Other students were quite satisfied with the transition, although they found the jump from primary to post-primary school, in terms of learning Irish, challenging.

First year wasn't too bad. You were introduced to the verbs and everything, the different tenses... it was a nice transition from primary into secondary school. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

I thought it was alright. But once you hit second year, you were just loaded with work. Like, first year was quite handy. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

According to some L2 students in particular, the emphasis on the written word and the literary work in Junior Cycle contributed to the difficulties they experienced, with regard to the acquisition of the language. The students identified a problem with the books available — they were not catering for students who did not speak Irish. There was a complaint that there was no English in the teaching books, to guide the basic learner:

Sometimes it tells you what to do in Irish, and you don't understand what the question means in Irish (L2 Student, Focus Group).

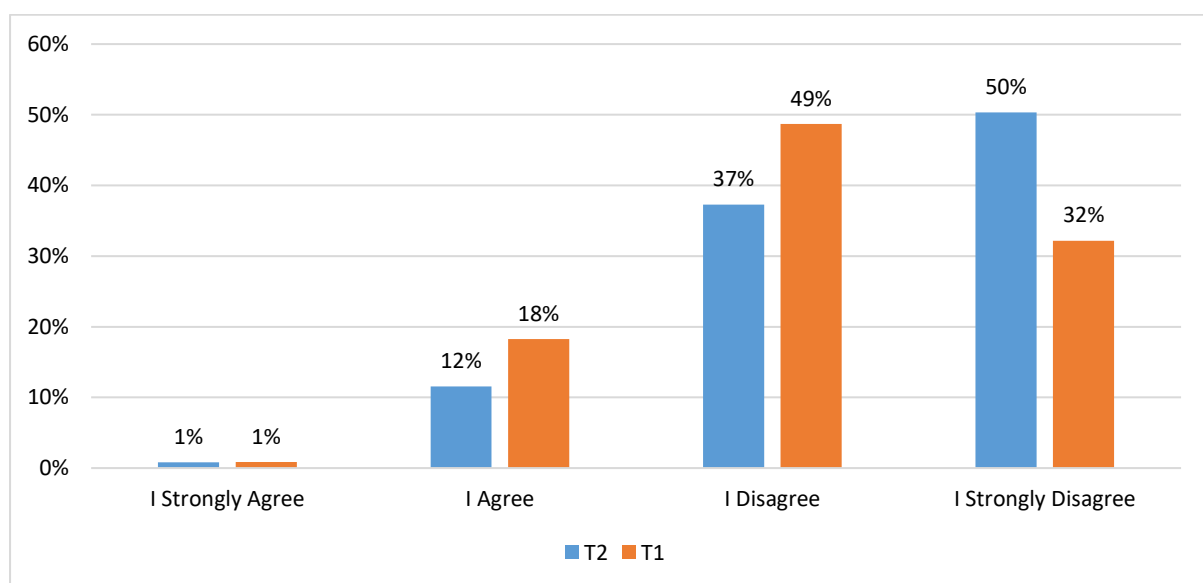
It was evident from students' reports that they felt that Irish was taught in a very different way at the two levels of the system they experienced; from a primary context that did not place much emphasis on literature to a post-primary context, which was ruled by it. It was understood that the work in primary school was more focused on the spoken word, and they reported that they enjoyed this. The lack of emphasis on spoken work made Irish more difficult at post-primary level.

We did lots of songs together, and things like that, and I think there is a big difference in the way that I am learning Irish now... I think it's harder [now]. When you are, kind of, speaking it, it becomes more natural after a while. (L1 Student, Focus Group)

There were a number of students in L1 focus groups who came from English-medium primary schools, but they were able to overcome this problem after some time, due to the school context. For those who went from an Irish-medium primary school to a L2 post-primary school, no similarities were identified in the way in which Irish was taught. This, again, demonstrates the importance of learning Irish within the school context and general culture, outside the Irish class only.

Teachers had an opportunity to express their views on the continuity of learning from primary school to Junior Cycle and on to the Leaving Certificate course. Figure 29 shows that a large majority disagreed that the L2 Specification builds well on what the students have learned from primary school.

Figure 29. The Specification builds well on what the students have learned from primary school (n=721)



Many L2 teachers mentioned in the survey the low standard of Irish of students arriving from primary school:

The standard, which students come with from primary school, is not high enough to undertake the higher level. It should be undertaken like the MFL- implying that students do not know basic things. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

The standard required from students is too high as many of them come in from primary school with little Irish. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

I'm not disrespecting primary teachers but it's there. The quality coming in to us is lower. There is no way of avoiding that but to acknowledge it. (L2 Teacher , Focus Group)

For a few years now, the standard of Irish in first year is weaker, and they don't love the language... and it's harder for us [Teachers] then. We have a common level class in front of us, and how to encourage them all, and to work with them, and just it's really difficult with a first-year class now. (L2 Teacher, Survey)

It appears from the teachers' views that there is a discrepancy between the students' standard of Irish when entering the post-primary school and the standard required by the specifications.

With regard to continuity from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle, a number of students complained that there was no oral examination at Junior Cycle level and that this did not help them prepare for the Leaving Certificate:

I think an oral exam would be better because you have to do one in sixth year... Not having one in third year and then going into Leaving Cert and having to do one, and all that pressure... I think having one, not as serious, in third year... would set you up and know how to do it for sixth year, so it's not completely new to you. I think it would be better that way. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The view emerged from students in fifth year that they felt that Leaving Cert literature was easier than the junior cycle course. Some students did not see much difference between the teaching method for Senior Cycle and Junior Cycle, saying that the emphasis on the stories was very similar: "straight back into it" (L2 Student, Focus Group). This again points to the fact that literature is also an integral part of the Leaving Cert course. It also helped when they had the same teacher, which ensured some kind of continuity.

The students from L1 schools were mostly satisfied that they were prepared to undertake the Leaving Cert course. Some students in L2 schools were completely negative in relation to the effectiveness of

junior cycle in order to prepare them to undertake the Senior Cycle course. COVID has had a huge effect in this regard.

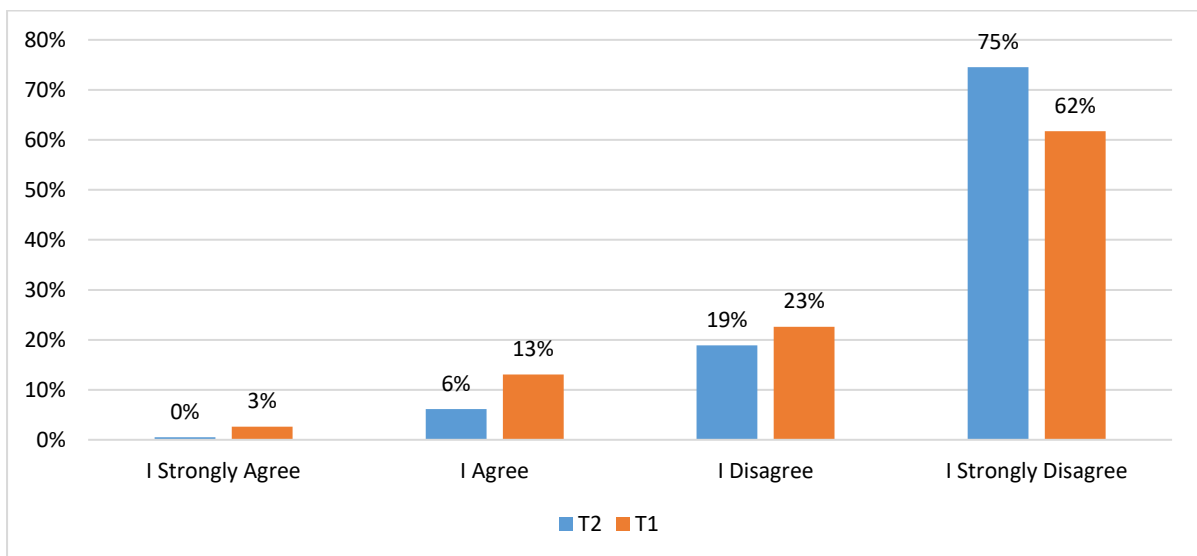
I think, with Covid, we didn't get a lot done, so I don't think we have a big knowledge of Irish. So for me, I don't think I would be 100 % ready for Irish in Leaving Cert. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

Also, as they did not take any state examination, they felt that they were at a disadvantage:

because we never got to actually do the proper exam, we have no idea what it's really like (L2 Student, Focus Group).

Most teachers disagreed that the specifications prepare students to undertake the current Leaving Cert course as outlined in Figure 30.

Figure 30. The specification prepares students to undertake the current Leaving Cert course (n=719)



The teachers in the focus groups pointed out that there was a huge gap between taking the students on a “ideal” learning journey and preparing them to undertake the Leaving Certificate in the future.

A L2 teacher in a focus group supported these comments when she said:

Even if the Leaving Certificate changes, it will be linked to CAO, and as long as things are like that, students must get a good foundation at Junior Cycle level, and at the moment I don't think I am doing the best for my students. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

3.5.1 Summary

L2 students thought there was a huge jump from primary to post-primary school in terms of the standard of Irish. However, this leap was not so large for L1 students. Some students complained that

there was no English in the texts to help them. Teachers felt that the standard required in the L2 specification was too challenging for the students to meet due to the standard they had achieved when coming from primary school. The question of literature and oral examination again emerged in this section. Some students and teachers thought Leaving Certificate literature was easier than the junior cycle course but that the students were not prepared for the Leaving Certificate as the students had not taken an externally assessed oral examination as part of the Junior Certificate.

3.6 Other topics that emerged in the research

This section discusses topics that arose in the submissions, focus groups and questions in the teachers' survey. Although they were not closely related to the key issues set out in the research specification, participants considered them to be important. The issues discussed below include the impact of Covid-19 on the implementation of the specifications, the recognition of students' oral work in the final examination, support for teachers in implementing the new specifications and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages.

3.6.1 *Impact of COVID-19*

The impact of COVID-19 on the learning of Irish was raised by the students in the focus groups. The two main effects of COVID on students' learning were that working from home over a computer was discouraging and deprived them of their self-motivation. Also, they felt there was a drop in the general standard they had:

Usually people would just wake up, on the spot go to class and then, they're barely awake, and then they just sit there, probably just on their phones, while the teacher is just talking about something that you're not even listening to, and then basically you're just wasting a full hour of class doing nothing. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The lack of contact between students took from their ability to learn Irish in an informal manner; in terms of conversation about trivial things between classes, or discuss things in class:

Well, we were online most of the time, and I feel like, not a lot of people had the effort to just go online and do it. A lot of people would just doss the class because you were at home... And they'd think like, 'oh it's online, like, no big deal'. And I think that if we were actually in class, we'd have a lot more done, and you'd be more focused. (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The students thought that Irish and mathematics were the most affected during Covid, as there was no prior foundation and they were less focused on these themselves, without the school context:

Like people could have been logging on, but they weren't actually doing the work
(L2 Student, Focus Group).

In addition, it was recognised that there was a different effect in terms of students from different social classes, and different family contexts:

It was hard [to motivate yourself] because people have different living situations, so like someone could be in a loud house where it's hard to concentrate or listen, whereas some other people have like a quieter space, and they'd probably find it a lot easier, and be a lot more ahead than others. So, it was difficult, 'cause I was in a loud house, so... (L2 Student, Focus Group)

The students understood the effect of being at home for such a long time, in that it took a lot of time to finish the course, as the general standard of Irish had fallen.

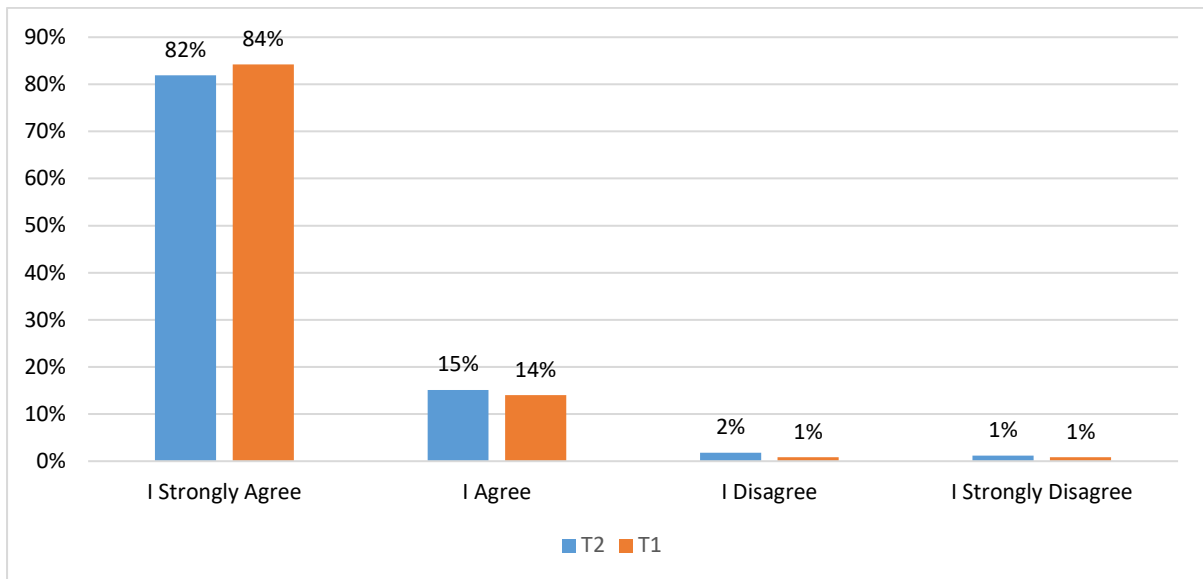
3.6.2 Recognition of oral work

The JCT identified in its submission that many teachers were concerned that the optional oral examination was no longer available. It was seen above that around 40% of students undertook the optional oral examination in 2016. The JCT argues in its submission that it is:

important to recognise that the assessment of oral skills is a mandatory part of assessment for all students (which was not the case for the Junior Certificate; the oral examination was optional). Students' speech and communication skills are being assessed in both Classroom-Based Assessments. (Submission, JCT)

It seems from the views of the students and teachers that this was not the experience most of them had. There was strong support from teachers for recognition of oral work in the grade received by students from the State Examinations Commission as shown in Figure 31.

Figure 31. Oral work should be recognised in the grade that students receive from the State Examinations Commission (n=716)



Few teachers have not agreed that an oral examination was required as shown in Figure 32. It was seen above that this was supported by some students in the focus groups.

Figure 32. There is no need to introduce an oral examination as part of the Junior Cycle assessment (n=716)

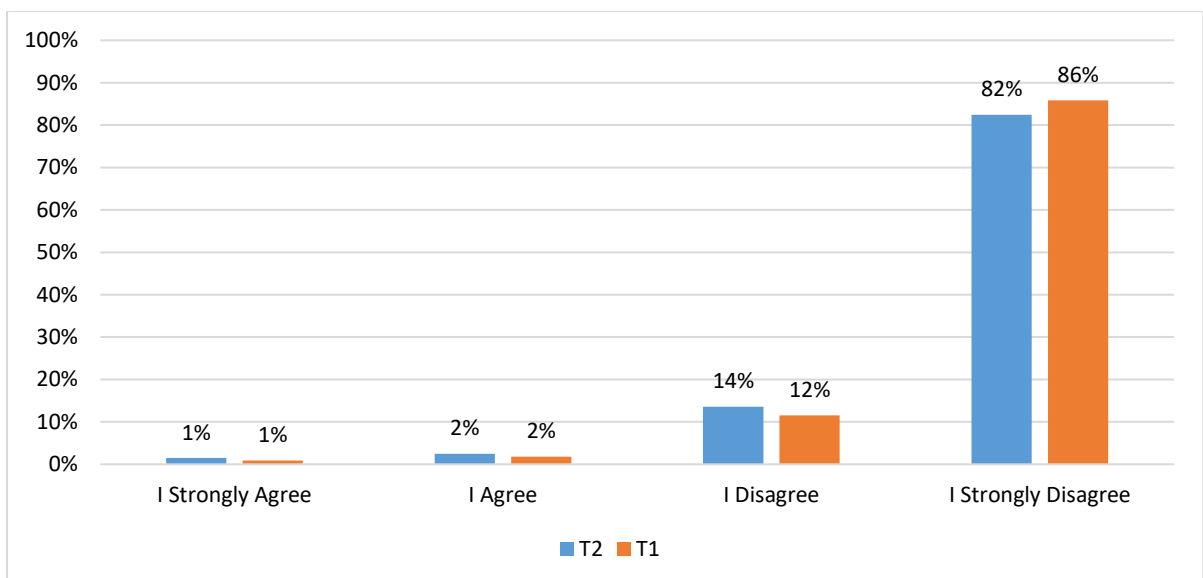
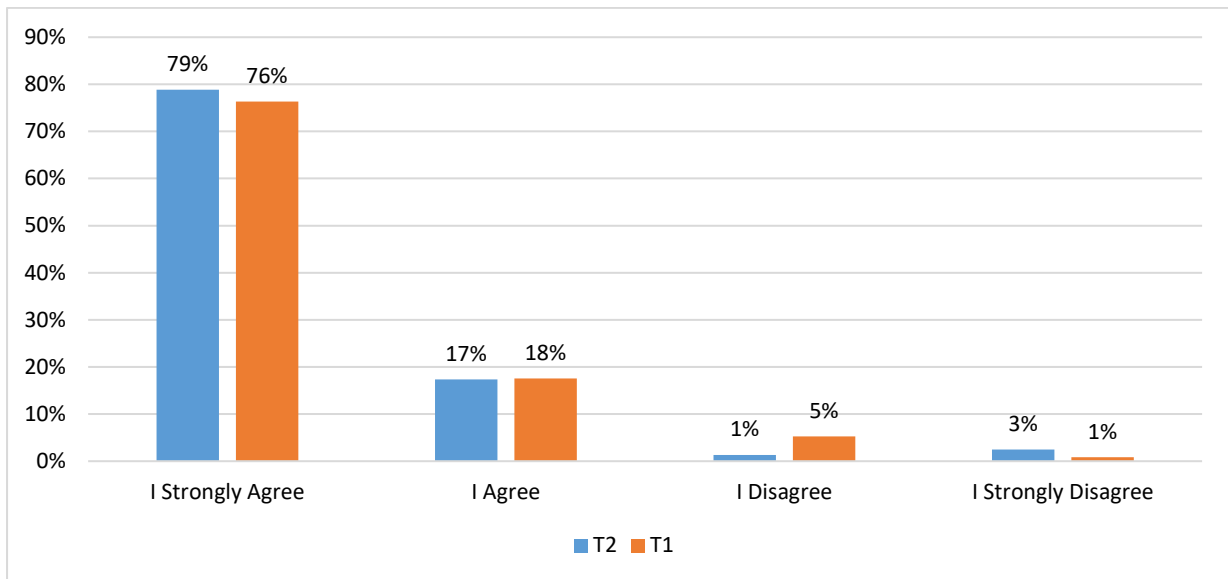


Figure 33 shows that there was strong support among L2 and L1 teachers for an oral examination as part of the assessment with almost all L2 and L1 teachers in favour of one CBA and an oral examination instead of two CBAs.

Figure 33. L2 & L1 teachers' comments on the existence of a single CBA and an oral examination (n=714)



It emerged in the focus groups with teachers that there was a strong demand for an oral examination to replace one of the CBAs. The teachers understood that there was a question about who is to correct the oral examinations, but they are determined that it had to be there. There was an insight from teachers who had experience of the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate. One teacher was of the opinion:

As there is no oral exam, students do not respect speaking the language. Teachers do not emphasise speaking the language because there is no exam on it... We did the oral examination for the junior certificate in our school, and the oral exam resulted in a significant increase in the number of students who did Irish at Higher Level at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. There is evidence that if the oral examination is emphasised, and if the students are prepared for it, students will work for the oral examination and prefer preparation [for this] than preparation for written work. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

This opinion was held by many other teachers who thought that the spoken language was not adequately respected in the specifications and that a valuable element was lost as a result.

Twelve of the 52 learning outcomes deal with speaking ability... on paper it is there. But the problem I have with it, where I am coming from, teaching in a Gaeltacht School and parents at home are struggling and trying to raise children with the language, where we also have a Policy on Gaeltacht Education, and which clearly states that the parent and speaker must be

supported. The specification does not recognise the spoken language. (L1 Teacher, Focus Group)

COGG referred to the assessment of spoken Irish in its submission and the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme:

The Policy on Gaeltacht Education and the language-based criteria to be met by schools, on their journey to achieve recognition as Gaeltacht schools, place a strong emphasis on speaking Irish as the language of teaching and socialisation in these schools... it is recommended that this important aspect be reviewed and that a much more significant weighting be given to the aspect of spoken Irish, which is so important. Schools have shown significant dissatisfaction with the current arrangement and would like to see this element given significant additional recognition in the assessment... COGG is strongly of the opinion that recognition of this vital aspect of language learning is essential. (COGG submission)

An Gréasán insisted in its submission that there be an oral examination:

There is no doubt that a proper oral examination should be introduced in L1 and L2 schools at Junior Cycle level. To this end, an acceptable system must be found which ensures that the examination is externally assessed so that any marks from an oral examination go towards the final mark. It must be ensured that the oral work is recognised in the grade that students receive from the State Examinations Commission. It is not satisfactory to continue with things as they are at present. All stakeholders need to be consulted in this regard. (Submission, An Gréasán)

Teachers acknowledged the challenges of organising an external oral examination. Ideally, they would like the State Examinations Commission to appoint examiners to undertake the examinations in the same way as the Leaving Certificate oral examinations. If this was not possible, teachers recommended that schools could appoint local examiners outside of the school to undertake the examinations. If neither of the first two options were possible it was said that the school's teachers could be interviewers and record the oral examinations, but the State Examinations Commission could mark the examinations externally. Teachers pointed out that they would be flexible with regard to the approach. Many of them had experience of undertaking optional oral examinations in the past as this teacher explained:

Another teacher took your class. We will help each other. We are doing a CBA in our free time anyway. It gives them a better chance [the students] (L2 Teacher, focus group).

3.6.3 *Support for implementation of the specifications*

As outlined in the submission from the Inspectorate:

Since 2016, a comprehensive, innovative and creative CPD programme has been provided by Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the Department's dedicated support service for the implementation of the specifications. The development and delivery of workshops and other CPD events for teachers is underpinned by a robust participatory process. These collaborative processes, which give a voice to stakeholders, include opportunities for teachers practising in L1 and L2 contexts to contribute to the design and delivery of this programme of supports. (Submission of the Inspectorate)

CPD was provided in person for three years, in addition to elective and other events organised by the JCT to support teachers. Online CPD was provided during COVID as with all Junior Cycle subjects. In addition, optional workshops for teachers were held at least twice a year. As the JCT outlined:

Advice is provided and regular frequent questions are answered not only through direct correspondence with individual teachers but also through a regular mailing system to those registered to receive regular emails. Teachers are informed about updated documents (e.g. circulars), newly designed resources and upcoming events through the tweeting system, through posts on the 'News/Events' section of the website www.jct.ie and in the above-mentioned regular emails. (Submission, JCT)

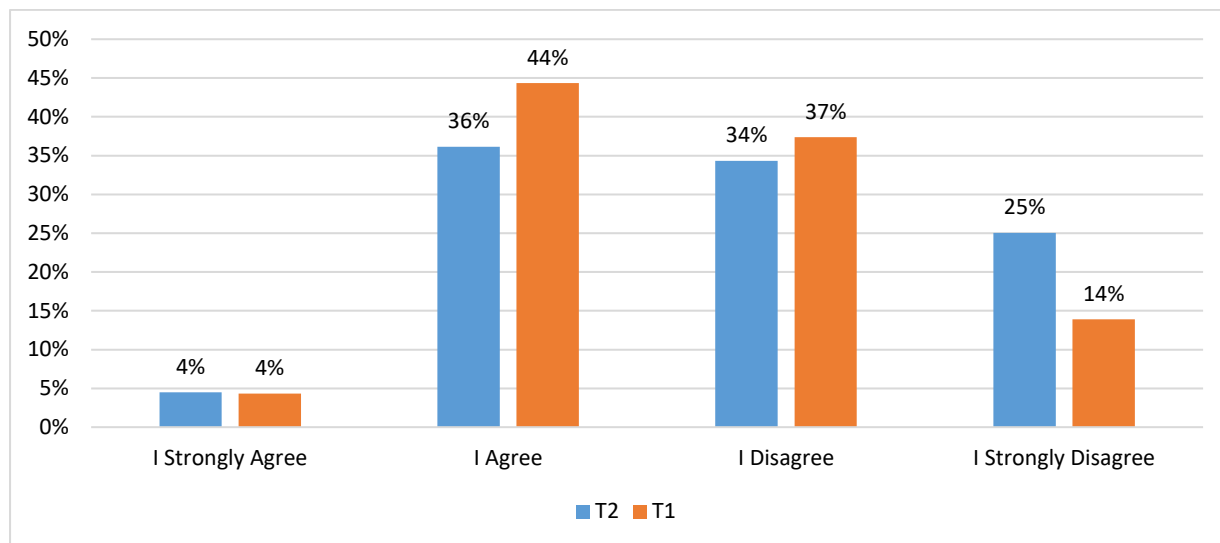
Despite this comprehensive support, views emerged in the focus groups that teachers were dissatisfied with the in-service support they received to implement the specifications. The following teachers were representative of other teachers regarding the in-service days:

They had no answers. So, whatever you asked them, they could not answer them. And from my experience, I think teachers were more frustrated by them [the in-service days]. It was once again uncertainty. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

They were not happy to listen to us. We have opinions as teachers. There is value in what we have to say. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

Teachers were asked about the resources provided to support them in implementing the Irish language specifications. As seen in Figure 34, almost half of the teachers found the examples of student work on www.curriculumonline.ie helpful in guiding their teaching.

Figure 34. I found the Samples of Student Work on curriculumonline.ie helpful in guiding my teaching. (n=718)



Only a small number of them were satisfied with the resources provided to support the Irish specifications in general. As one teacher said:

I do not think there was the appropriate connection between the Department, the State Examinations Commissions, NCCA, and the JCT (L2 Teacher, Focus Group).

There was also a lack of cohesiveness from the teachers' perspective in the planning process of the specifications. An Gréasán referred to this point in its submission:

The Department of Education, NCCA, SEC and Junior Cycle for Teachers should work more closely together to provide better support and resources for teachers. They should work more closely together to provide information and support in relation to assessment, literature, examinations etc. at the beginning, before any course is implemented. (Submission, An Gréasán)

Teachers felt that the specifications were published too quickly and it was left to them to implement them but without the appropriate support they needed.

It seems to me that the Department of Education was in a hurry to put this out. I think the goals and the Learning Outcomes are very general... very open, and sort of, a direct translation of the English course and trying to put it into Irish. (L2 Teacher, Focus Group)

3.6.4 *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*

In its submission, an Gréasán referred to CEFR.

Although the CEFR is mentioned in general in the Junior Cycle specifications, it is not clear that it is being implemented in practice. Level B2 is mentioned for the L1 course, but it is not clear that this level is realistic for Junior Cycle level, when level L2 is the level on which the learning outcomes in third level institutions are based. Comprehensive research should be carried out on which level of CEFR would be realistic at Junior Cycle level for L1 and L2 students, at both higher and ordinary level. There is a need to review the appropriateness of the levels currently mentioned. (An Gréasán)

4. Conclusion

This early review took place in a time that was challenging for research participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research shows that participants had strong views and are all committed to success in the subject. The JCT mentions in its submission that in the early years, teachers found it challenging to familiarise themselves with specifications based on learning outcomes but that there was evidence that teachers were progressively engaging with them. The Inspectorate stated in its submission that the new specifications were benefiting the quality of the students' learning experience and collaborative teacher practice in planning for learning, teaching and assessment. A different approach is recommended in the specifications for the Irish L1 and L2 compared to the previous approach. There is a focus on fostering and developing awareness: language awareness, cultural awareness and student self-awareness as a language learner.

There was a strong message from the large number of teachers who took part in the research that the specifications frustrate them as they do not feel that they can teach Irish in an effective and stimulating way that would cater for their students' abilities. They also feel that their opinions are not being listened to. There was an interest in Irish among students, spoken Irish in particular. The development of Irish speaking skills was the aspect of the course that inspired them most and which they and the teachers place a high value on. The students were motivated to learn when they were working on speaking activities. The students and teachers thought that the specifications did not put sufficient emphasis on speaking Irish and that the main reason for this was that there is too much emphasis on literature. As seen in the various sections above, this theme emerged on numerous occasions. Students and teachers recognised that literature played an important role in the learning of Irish but that the balance in the specifications as it is, is incorrect. They proposed significantly reducing the amount of literature. Some teachers reported that due to the amount of literature they must do, students were avoiding the higher level. Based on the feedback of teachers and students, the emphasis on literature and insufficient emphasis on speaking skills was an obstacle to tackling the new approach. It is recommended that NCCA consider how best to respond to this feedback for students and teachers to find balance in the specifications between oral skills and literature.

CBA1 and CBA2 were liked by the students as a whole, apart from those who were stressed as a result of the tasks. It is a matter of concern, based on students' feedback, that for many of them it was a written translation task that was memorised by many of them. The students wanted to have marks for the CBAs in the final exam and some suggested that an oral examination be held. While some teachers recognised the concept behind CBA2 they did not believe that it was achieving its objective and expressed the view that an oral examination should be introduced. Many were of the view that

speaking ability should be assessed by the State Examinations Commission and incorporated into the final grade. Teachers understood the challenges of organising an external oral examination and put forward a variety of options. However, almost all L2 and L1 teachers were of the opinion that there should be one CBA and an oral examination instead of two CBAs and one of the CBAs to be done in Year 2. The Inspectorate, COGG and an Gréasán in their submissions supported moving one CBA to Year 2. L2 teachers, in particular, expressed the opinion that the Assessment Task was not suitable for students because they did not have the language ability. Assessment has a backwash effect on classroom practice. The current assessment tasks do not seem to encourage the best class practice according to teachers and students. The inspectorate found that a broader approach to assessment was fostering diversity in in-class formative assessment strategies.

With regard to continuity from primary school to Junior Cycle, teachers did not think that the specifications were adapted to the standard of Irish for students entering post-primary school. The standard of Irish students had, in their view, was too low to meet the goals of the specifications and the main challenges related to literature. The students agreed with this opinion and did not feel ready for the material of the classes. The pace of the course was too fast for the student's ability and the teachers were unable to meet the needs of students with additional educational needs. This feedback has implications for the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum. There was some evidence that due to the amount of literature, students were moving from higher level to the ordinary level at Junior Cycle and many teachers expressed a desire for a Foundation level examination to be made available. The vast majority of teachers thought that the specifications are not preparing students to undertake the Leaving Certificate course.

The JCT reported in its submission good progress on the CPD programme since 2017. The teachers who took part in this research did not agree with this opinion. They reported that they had a lot of questions that no one could answer and felt that no one was listening to them. This caused them great frustration. They were not satisfied that only one sample examination paper was made available and without a marking scheme. The JCT explained in its submission that the State Examinations Commission does not usually provide a marking scheme for a sample paper.

Based on the evidence of this early review, students, teachers and stakeholders are very committed to the success of teaching Irish at Junior Cycle. This report presented valuable feedback in relation to the Irish L1 and L2 specifications. Now it is necessary to look at the best ways to respond to it.

5. Appendix A: Teachers' Survey

The first two questions related to ethics.

Q.3 How many years have you been teaching?

- 0-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- 16-20 years (4)
- > 20 years (5)

Q.4 In what type of school do you teach?

- Post-primary school through the medium of English (4)
- Gaeltacht Post Primary (7)
- Post-primary school through Irish/Gaelcholáiste (outside of the Gaeltacht) (8)
- Post-primary unit (1)

Q.5 Which Specification do you teach?

- L1 Specification primarily (1)
- L2 Specification primarily (2)
- I teach both Specifications, L1 and L2 (3)

Q.6 How many students are enrolled in your school/unit?

- <50 (1)
- 51-100 (3)
- 100-200 (4)
- 200-400 (5)
- > 400 (6)

Q.7 What post do you currently hold in your school? (Please select all that apply to you.)

- Teacher of Irish (1)
- Principal (7)
- Deputy Principal (6)
- Head of Irish (8)
- Other (5)

C.8 T2 In this part of the survey we would like you to state how strong you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your experience in implementing the Junior Cycle T2 Irish Specification.

	I very much agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
1. The specification sets out clearly what students have to learn in Irish for Junior Cycle. (152)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The specification builds well on what the pupils have learned from primary school (153)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. The specification prepares students to undertake the Leaving Cert course. (154)

4. The Learning Outcomes accurately reflect what students will be able to understand and do for Irish, after the Junior Cycle three years (155)

5. It is not easy to understand the wording of the Learning Outcomes. (156)

6. The Learning Outcomes have helped me in planning for teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting. (157)

7. I am satisfied with the number of learning outcomes available in the Specification. (158)

8. The specification and assessments cater for a wide range of students' ability. (159)

9. I received the Examples of Student Work on curriculumonline.ie helpful in guiding my teaching. (160)

10. The specification helps students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle. (161)

11. The current Irish language specification is a positive step forward compared to the old system. (162)

12. I have been given sufficient in-care support to implement the current Irish Language Specification. (163)

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| 13. There are insufficient resources available to support the current Irish language specification. (164) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. MRB 1 (The Portfolio) encouraged me to use active teaching/learning strategies. (166) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. MRB1 did not provide me with much feedback on students' learning. (167) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. The MRB1 has ensured that the students are carrying out ongoing work over the three years of the course. (168) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. MRB1 was helpful in providing feedback to students on their own learning. (169) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. MRB2 was effective in developing students' spoken Irish skills. (170) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 19. MRB2 did not encourage me much to use active teaching/learning strategies. (171) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 20. MRB2 gives me the opportunity to evaluate students' learning. (172) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 21. MRB2 prepares students to engage in a natural conversation with other speakers outside the classroom. (173) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 22. MRB2 helped students to self-reflection their studies. (174) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 23. The MRBs/Assessment Task helped me to provide accurate feedback to students and their parents. (175) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 24. It would be better to make one of the MRBs in the second year. (176) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

25. An anti-coating system should be in place to supervise MRB2? (177)
26. A list of some discussion topics should be available to MRB2. (178)
27. The Assessment Task was effective in evaluating the learning of high level students. (180)
28. The Assessment Task was effective in evaluating the learning of ordinary level students. (181)
29. The Assessment Task is of an appropriate standard for students' ability. (182)
30. Assessment and reporting gives me a helpful insight into student learning. (183)
31. The Sample examination paper is satisfactory in the Higher-Level paper. (185)
32. The Sample examination paper is satisfactory in the normal level paper. (186)
33. The sample examination paper is not suitable for evaluating students' learning. (187)
34. The sample examination paper encouraged me to use strategies for active teaching/learning. (188)
35. The oral work in the grade that students receive from the State Examinations Commission should be recognised. (189)

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| 36. There is no need to introduce an oral examination as part of the Junior Cycle assessment. (190) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 37. There should be one MRB and a Oral Exam (instead of two MRBs) (191) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 38. There is sufficient time available for students to answer all questions at higher level. (192) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 39. There is sufficient time available for students to answer all questions at ordinary level. (193) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 40. Short films should be considered as part of the 2nd and 3 rd Year course (T2) (194) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 41. I am satisfied with the number of texts available for T2 Specification. (196) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 42. I am satisfied with the number of texts to be studied for T2 Specification. (197) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 43. I am satisfied with the quality of literature texts available for T2 Specification at higher level (198) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 44. I am satisfied with the quality of the texts available for T2 Specification at Ordinary Level (199) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 45. The literature text list was very helpful for planning for teaching, learning and assessment? (200) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 46. All books from the Text list are easy to find. (201) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

47. There are many books available in the various dialects. (202)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
48. I am satisfied with the current Irish specification overall. (203)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
49. Sufficient time is available to develop all language skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening, interacting) properly. (204)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C.9 T1 In this part of the survey we would like you to state how strong you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your experience in implementing **the** Junior Cycle Irish Specification.

	I very much agree (1)	I agree (2)	I disagree (3)	I strongly disagree (4)
1. The specification sets out clearly what students have to learn in Irish for Junior Cycle. (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The specification builds well on what the students have learned from primary school (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The specification prepares students to undertake the Leaving Cert course. (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The Learning Outcomes accurately reflect what students will be able to understand and do with regard to Irish, after the three years of Junior Cycle. (25)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. It is not easy to understand the wording of the Learning Outcomes. (26)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. The Learning Outcomes have helped me in planning for teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting. (27)

7. I am satisfied with the number of learning outcomes available in the Specification. (28)

8. The specification and assessments cater for a wide range of students' ability. (29)

9. I received the Examples of Student Work on curriculumonline.ie helpful in guiding my teaching. (30)

10. The specification helps students achieve the key skills set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle. (31)

11. The current Irish language specification is a positive step forward compared to the old system. (32)

12. I have been given sufficient in-care support to implement the current Irish specification. (33)

13. There are insufficient resources available to support the current Irish language specification. (34)

14. MRB 1 (The Portfolio) encouraged me to use active teaching/learning strategies. (36)

15. MRB1 did not provide me with much feedback on students' learning. (37)

16. The MRB1 has ensured that the students are carrying out ongoing work over the three years of the course. (38)

17. MRB1 was helpful in providing feedback to students on their own learning. (39)

18. MRB2 was effective in developing students' spoken Irish skills. (40)

19. MRB2 did not encourage me much to use active teaching/learning strategies. (41)

20. MRB2 gives me the opportunity to evaluate students' learning (42)

21. MRB2 prepares students to engage in a natural conversation with other speakers outside the classroom. (43)

22. MRB2 helped students to self-reflection their studies. (44)

23. The MRBs/Assessment Task helped me to provide accurate feedback to students and their parents. (45)

24. It would be better to make one of the MRBs in the second year. (46)

25. An anti-coating system should be in place to supervise MRB2? (47)

26. A list of some discussion topics should be available to MRB2. (48)

27. Assessment Task was effective in evaluating the learning of higher-level students (50)

28. The Assessment Task was effective in evaluating the learning of ordinary level students (51)

29. The Assessment Task is of an appropriate standard for students' ability. (52)
30. Assessment and reporting gives me a helpful insight into student learning. (53)
31. The Sample examination paper is satisfactory as, in the high level paper. (55)
32. The Sample examination paper is satisfactory in the normal level paper. (56)
33. The sample examination paper is not suitable for evaluating students' learning. (57)
34. The sample examination paper encouraged me to use strategies for active teaching/learning. (58)
35. The oral work in the grade that students receive from the State Examinations Commission should be recognised. (59)
36. There is no need to introduce an oral examination as part of the Junior Cycle assessment. (60)
37. There should be one MRB and a Speech Examination (instead of two MRBs) (61)
38. There is sufficient time available for students to answer all questions at higher level. (62)
39. There is sufficient time available for students to answer all questions at ordinary level. (63)

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|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 40. I am satisfied with the number of texts available for T1 Specification. (65) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 41. I am satisfied with the number of texts to be studied for T1 Specification. (66) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 42. I am satisfied with the quality of literature texts available for T1 Specification at higher level (67) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 43. I am satisfied with the quality of the texts available for T1 Specification at normal level (68) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 44. The literature text list was very helpful for planning for teaching, learning and assessment? (69) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 45. All books from the list of texts are easy to find. (70) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 46. There are many books available in the various dialects. (71) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 47. Enough textbooks are available for T1 schools. (72) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 48. I am satisfied with the current Irish specification overall. (73) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 49. Sufficient time is available to develop all language skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening, interacting) properly. (74) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q.10 T2 What are the strengths of the current T2 Irish specification? Mention up to three virtues.

Q.11 T2 What changes would you recommend to the current specification of T2 Irish? Quote up to three recommendations.

Q.10 T1 What are the strengths of the current Irish T1 Specification? Mention up to three virtues.

Q.11 T1 What changes would you recommend to the current Irish Language Specification? Quote up to three recommendations.

We intend to organise focus groups with teachers so that we can learn more about their views on the Irish language specifications. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group? If you click on this link. If not, click the arrow on the right.

6. Appendix B: Questions for Teachers' Focus Groups

A) The course as a whole

Does the Junior Cycle Specification clearly state what is important for the student to know, understand, value and be able to do over the three years of the Junior Cycle.

1. Is there anything special omitted? Any area you would like to emphasise?
2. What are the main achievements and challenges to date?
3. What opportunities did you and your subject team have experienced in using the Learning Outcomes to plan for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting?
4. When teaching on the new Cycle, did you have any new teaching methodology?

B) Assessment: Classroom-Based Assessments (MRB) and Assessment Task

5. What is your assessment of the final reports?
Have you used the sample student work on www.curriculumonline.ie?

—Have he had any impact on your teaching?

—Any suggestions or things you have seen about them?

—Quality, guidance for Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings, collection of samples in schools?

6. Do you have any feedback on the description of the MRB in the Assessment Guidelines?
What is your assessment of the MRBs, in terms of their effectiveness in class?
7. What feedback would you have on your experience of participating in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings?
8. What are the main achievements and challenges to date of the 'Assessment Task'? (If you have undertaken it, so far.)

C) Examination papers and Textlists:

9. What are the main achievements and challenges of the Sample Paper issued?
10. Is the examination paper now satisfactory in your view of the division of the work across the different sections of the course, and in terms of time?
11. Does the text list and course Overview provide clarity on the range of texts and options available to teachers/students?

—Do you have any feedback on the proposed list for the first year?

—What do you think about this (recommended list instead of duty list)?

D) Transfer:

12. Are there any other comments you would like to share in relation to the Junior Cycle Specification?
13. Does the Specification take on what students know about Irish from primary school?
14. How effective is the Specification in enabling students to learn Irish at Senior Cycle?
15. What has been the implications of Covid-19 on your teaching/learning?

7. Appendix C: Questions for Student Focus Groups

A) The course in general

1. What did you really like about Junior Cycle Irish? Why?

What did you like most about Junior Cycle Irish? Why?

2. What did you know least about Junior Cycle Irish? Why?

What did you like least about Junior Cycle Irish? Why?

3. What helped you learn Irish?

—How could learning in class be improved?

What Helped you to learn Irish?

Could learning in class be improved?

B) Assessment:

—MRBs and Assessment Task

4. I would love to hear about your experience with the Classroom-Based Assessments (MRB).

1. —What did you recognise/unliked?

2. —What advice would you give Year 2/3 students about the MRBs?

Your experience of the Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAS), what you liked/disliked? What advice would they give incoming 2nd/3rd years about CBAS?

should one of the MRBs be made in the Second year?

should the MRBs be linked to the exam marks, in your opinion?

5. Did you undertake the Assessment Task? (If they did it)

- a. Did it help you learn Irish?

- b. Did you get a distance?

Did you engage with the Assessment Task? Did it help you in learning Irish? Challenging?

C) Text list and examination paper:

6. What did you think about the different texts you were doing? (stories, songs, poems...)

—What did you like in particular/do you not like?

—How were the texts selected? Did you play a role in the decision?

— Were you satisfied with the choice?

What did you think of the various texts that you considered (short stories, songs, poetry...)

— What did you especially enjoy/not enjoy.

How were the texts chosen? Did you have any say in the matter?

—Were you happy with the choices made?

7. Have you used any Sample Paper/Exam Test.

(If done)

—Was they helpful to you?

—Are you ready for them?

Did you make use of a sample Paper/Mock Examination? (if so)

—did you find them helpful? —Were you ready for the exams?

8. Listening comprehension

9. Should there be an Oral Examination?

—If yes, how would you introduce it?

D) Transfer/Progress

8. How was the journey from learning Irish in primary school to Irish in the post-primary school?

How was the transition from learning Irish in primary to post-primary school?

—How was learning Irish in primary school different?

How was the learning of Irish different in Primary School?

9. *Transfer to Senior Cycle — Have you been prepared by the Junior Cycle Programme for the course now underway for the Senior Cycle. (* Question for students Bl. 5)

Transition to Irish at Senior Cycle(SC) — how has the JC programme prepared you for SC?

10. The implications of Covid on learning?

Effects of Covid-19 on your learning?

11. Are there any other comments that you would like to share in relation to Junior Cycle Irish?

Have you any other comments you would like to add regarding the Junior Cycle Irish?