



NCCA

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

NCCA Information Note: Consultation Report on Draft Specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish T1 and T2

What's happening now?

NCCA is pausing development work on the draft T1 and T2 specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish.

NCCA is immediately undertaking additional research on the model of provision and frameworks used to inform development of curricula for native languages in jurisdictions with a similar language profile.

What's happening next?

NCCA will convene a series of stakeholder seminars to inform advice on the model of provision for Leaving Certificate Irish, considering feedback from this consultation and broader changes as part of Senior Cycle redevelopment.

NCCA will work with key stakeholders and education partners to prioritise planning for enhanced professional learning and support.

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Overview

The *Consultation Report on Draft Specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish T1 and T2* records and responds to the views of stakeholders gathered during the nine-month consultation in 2021. It considers in detail the feedback received on the draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish T1 and T2. It also captures feedback on the potential implications for the implementation of new specifications and summarises systemic considerations that arose such as the model of curricular provision for Irish. The next steps, agreed by the NCCA Council in response to consultation feedback, provide time and space for further scoping, research, deliberation and consultation with teachers, students, parents, Irish language stakeholders, organisations and policymakers on possible ways forward for Leaving Certificate Irish.

Agreed Next Steps

- Pause development work on the draft T1 and T2 Leaving Certificate Irish specifications.
- Immediately undertake additional research on the model of provision and frameworks used to inform development of curricula for native languages in jurisdictions with a similar language profile.
- Convene a series of stakeholder seminars to inform advice on the model of provision for Leaving Certificate Irish, considering feedback from this consultation and broader changes as part of Senior Cycle redevelopment.
- Prioritise planning for enhanced professional learning and support.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the consultation was that a shared vision and purpose in relation to Leaving Certificate Irish has not yet been achieved.

NCCA will continue to work closely with schools and with stakeholders throughout the process ahead, with the objective of arriving at and making a shared vision and purpose for Leaving Certificate Irish, a reality.

Doubts remain about the model of provision, about policy alignment and coherence, and about provision of sufficient professional learning and support. While several alternative models of provision were proposed during the consultation, with a particular focus on this in written submissions, looking across all 5 modes of participation in the consultation, there was no consensus on a specific model as an alternative to T1 and T2.

Questions about the model of curricular provision need to be considered in more detail, from an educational perspective and in the wider context of the future of the Irish language. Further research is needed exploring how other jurisdictions with a similar language profile to Ireland approach curricular provision for a native language which is also a second language. This research may contribute to thinking on possible ways forward. Further planning is also needed in the area of enhanced professional learning and support, so that curriculum changes, when they occur, can be meaningfully realised in practice.

NCCA wishes to thank all who participated in the consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate T1 and T2 Irish specifications. The consultation provided an opportunity to gather rich feedback and a diversity of perspectives about the draft T1 and T2 specifications.

Summary of main strengths and challenges from consultation feedback

Views on current syllabus/provision for LC Irish

It is noteworthy that the vast majority, though not the totality, of consultation participants who commented on the current Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus expressed dissatisfaction with it. Participants from a T1/Irish-medium context were more likely to view the current syllabus as inadequate. They spoke of its failure to meet the needs of young native speakers and students who learn primarily through the medium of Irish. A desire to see such students, particularly native speakers, extend their writing, speaking, personal and social skills; their creativity and their understanding of the richness of Irish language and culture was evident, at times, in T1 feedback.

Participants from a T2/English-medium context expressed the opinion that the current syllabus results in an over-emphasis on rote learning and on literature in Irish, and an under-emphasis on speaking Irish. Concerns relating to students' motivation or lack of motivation to learn and speak Irish also emerged. Somewhat similar to T1 feedback, though for different reasons, a desire to ensure that all students can study Irish at a level of difficulty appropriate to their needs was also evident in T2 feedback. It was suggested that it is important to remember that these specifications are designed for young people still at school and that expectations must be consistent with their age and stage of learning.

Opportunity to air perspectives

Participants in the consultation process were given the opportunity to offer broad observations about the T1 and T2 draft specification documents, before being asked for focused feedback and suggestions in relation to specific sections of these documents. It was noted that this consultation generated a great deal of public discussion. Many welcomed the opportunity to take part in the consultation process, to have a voice and a mechanism whereby they could air their perspectives, questions and concerns.

Unique role of Irish

Participants expressed the view that further consideration should be given to the vital role education plays in the preservation and promotion of the Irish language, particularly in Gaeltacht areas. The challenges of meeting the needs of all students from a diverse array of sociolinguistic backgrounds was a prominent theme in consultation feedback.

Lack of clarity in detail in draft specifications

One of the key themes in the feedback which focussed on the draft specifications was the view that there is a lack of clarity overall in the detail of both draft specifications which would create challenges for teachers, particularly in relation to learning outcomes, assessment and literature. Participants frequently commented on the information that is not provided in curriculum specification documents and/or suggested a need for further clarity in the draft specifications. This emerged as one of the strongest themes expressed in written submissions and responses to open-ended questions in the online surveys for both T1 and T2 draft specifications. Many participants suggested that this created a general lack of confidence in the draft specifications, with others suggesting that it is difficult to give feedback on the draft specifications without answers to systemic questions which could impact on the introduction of new specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish. Teachers and parents frequently emphasised the need for a range of additional supports and resources to support the curriculum specification i.e., textbooks, text lists, practical examples of learning outcomes being achieved in practice, guidance on themes and topics to be covered, sample examination papers, marking schemes and planning templates.

Many commented on the importance of reviewing Junior Cycle T1 and T2 Irish specifications and a small number of consultation participants suggested waiting for broader changes arising from the review of Senior Cycle before introducing revised specifications for Irish. It is important to note that the consultation on the draft specifications for T1 and T2 Irish took place before the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD announced plans for the reform of senior cycle and responded to the [Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report](#) (NCCA, 2022).

Alignment with international frameworks and benchmarks

A number of participants in bilateral meetings and a large number of written submissions proposed aligning the draft specifications with *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* and with international benchmarks or with an assessment framework for foreign and second language acquisition, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). It was suggested that this would ensure effective teaching and learning. Alignment to a framework, it was suggested, would indicate to the student the level of Irish obtained and give direction on how to improve their competency across all of the language skills, with a small number of participants recommending alignment to CEFR across the education system from preschool to third level.

Importance of spoken Irish

One of the most dominant themes in consultation feedback related to promoting spoken Irish in students' lived experiences of the draft specifications in the classroom, and via assessment of students' capacity to speak Irish. Different views were expressed in relation to the existing oral examination. Many expressed the opinion that the oral examination as currently structured, is not a reliable assessment of students' speaking ability.

Looking to the future, in these revised draft T1 and T2 Irish specifications, the percentage of marks allocated to the oral test was the subject of much comment and debate during the consultation and in consultation feedback. Some participants expressed the view that the percentage of marks allocated to the oral should depend on how valid the oral could be as an assessment of the capacity to speak and interact in Irish. A small number of participants,

particularly T2 teachers, suggested that the mark for the oral should be reduced to 35%, as recommended in the draft specifications, or even lower. However, the vast majority of consultation participants did not agree with the proposal in the draft specifications to allocate 35% to the oral assessment. Some suggested that this did not align with the emphasis placed on communication as the main strand of both draft specifications. Views were expressed that the current system of allocating 40% of available marks to the oral has had a positive impact on classroom practice, though research to date has not shown that it has markedly improved students' spoken Irish. There was also a perception that reducing the marks available for the oral examination by 5% might make Higher Level Irish less attractive for students. Some consultation participants suggested increasing the marks available for the oral.

Levels of assessment

Many participants in bilateral meetings and written submissions queried the decision, following on from the removal of Foundation Level in junior cycle, to remove Foundation Level for Leaving Certificate Irish. Concern was expressed that the standard of the ordinary level would be reduced in order to meet the needs of all students appropriately. Some expressed concern that the number of students seeking exemptions from Irish could increase as a result. Others argued that keeping 3 levels across two specifications, T1 and T2, would result in 6 possible examination papers for students to select from and some suggested this is too complex and impractical. Many suggested that further consideration be given to this issue.

During the consultation, further information and clarity in relation to assessment was frequently requested, with a particular request for more detail in relation to the assessment of oral language. Many participants suggested that a lack of clarity could contribute towards or create a general lack of confidence in the draft specifications. Many T1 and T2 survey respondents suggested that the link between the learning outcomes of the draft specifications and final assessment is not clear, with some suggesting that this is due, in part, to the broad nature of the learning outcomes. Many participants commented that they found it difficult to provide feedback without further, more comprehensive information in relation to assessment.

Importance of supports, resources and training

Many consultation participants commented on the challenges of introducing Leaving Certificate Irish T1 and T2 specifications. The need for resources, supports and training were emphasised throughout the consultation, with supports in relation to teaching and learning, literature, dialects, and assessment most frequently requested. A number of focus group participants emphasised the need for 'buy in', in relation to the final specifications. Many participants requested that supports be available before the specifications are introduced in classrooms, with others commenting that it could take a further two years to prepare such resources. The importance of local sources, to add to students' linguistic repertoire and cultural enrichment, was emphasised in particular by participants from Gaeltacht communities.

Teachers and parents emphasised the need for a range of textbooks to support the T1 specification with a small number of participants recommending an anthology, a collection of all the literary texts in one resource. A small number of participants recommended appropriate supports be provided for teachers and students to assist in making choices about which texts to study. It was suggested that practical classroom examples of the learning outcomes being achieved in practice would be useful to students, teachers and parents, with some participants seeking guidance on themes and topics to be covered. A large number of participants, from both the T1 and T2 sector, requested sample examination papers. Many also requested sample marking schemes. Some requested planning templates along with guidelines and examples of student language portfolios.

Participants through all of the consultation methods, recommended comprehensive and ongoing training over a year or two prior to implementation of the specifications. Reference was frequently made to CPD experiences in relation to the introduction of T1 and T2 Irish specifications in Junior Cycle. Participants frequently expressed concern that there would not be enough teachers to teach the two specifications, particularly in small schools. Gaeltacht teachers and respondents to the T1 surveys were concerned that there would not be enough teachers with the appropriate standard of Irish available to implement the T1 specification to a high standard. Concerns were expressed about the lack of teachers from Gaeltacht areas to correct scripts or to assess oral examinations.

Systemic considerations

Model of provision

The consultation was dominated by discussion and feedback on the T1/T2 model of curricular provision for Leaving Certificate Irish. While respondents to the T2 surveys rarely mentioned the model of provision, it was the focus of discussion and feedback via all other methods of participation in the consultation. There appears to have been a misunderstanding that the T1 course would be compulsory for all students in Irish-medium schools. It was intended that Irish-medium schools would have to provide T1 as an option for students but students in T1 contexts would not have to access the learning at T1 level. The T1 specification could also have been provided in English-medium schools. Many participants from T1 contexts strongly suggested that the T1 specification be optional in T1 schools.

Many participants suggested that other potential models of provision be considered. A suggestion for a different model of provision, consisting of specifications provided at 4 levels, came from an Irish language organisation. This suggestion was published online and was frequently referred to or quoted verbatim by other consultation participants, many of whom supported this proposed model. Teachers in one-to-one interviews often expressed doubts about the 4 levels approach, particularly about the most challenging of these proposed levels. Another suggestion from this Irish language organisation, that was mentioned by many participants, was to provide a stand-alone optional course for literature and language enrichment and a mandatory course (for T1 and T2 learners) based on the integrated language skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking and mediation. A third suggestion was to develop an optional subject focused on Irish language and culture. Another suggestion was to provide an Applied Irish course, focused on the skills needed for the world of work, such as translation, interpreting, and media-related skills. Others expressed doubts about these suggestions and there was no consensus on the most appropriate model of provision for Leaving Certificate Irish.

Incentives

Participants frequently expressed concern that the commitment to explore incentives for students to take the T1 course, as outlined in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education, was not clarified in advance of or in parallel to the development of the draft specifications.

Participants primarily called for bonus CAO points to be awarded as an incentive to encourage young people to undertake Irish learning and assessment at T1 standard. If incentives were not available to encourage uptake of the T1 specification, concerns were expressed that students currently attending Gaelcholáistí, Streams, Units and Gaeltacht schools might choose to attend English-medium schools instead. It was suggested that this could also lead to future problems with enrolment. Some participants suggested exploring other possible incentives. Some expressed doubts about the impact of bonus points. Some participants emphasised that not all students wish to progress to third level after school and expressed the view that the proposed incentives outlined in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education are thus not equitable or fair.

Potential impact on Gaeltacht areas

Some participants expressed concerns about the potential impact of the differentiated specifications on the future of the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas. It was suggested that this could reduce the number of young people visiting Gaeltacht areas to improve their Irish language skills. Many consultation participants stated that students attending Gaelcholáistí are at a disadvantage in terms of their level of fluency compared to native speakers and emphasised that they should have a choice between studying T1/T2 and/or when it comes to examinations. Others emphasised that the education system has a key role to play in the promotion of the Irish language nationally and in protecting the future and the enrichment of the Irish language. A small number of participants encouraged further use of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning – learning other subjects through Irish) in English-medium schools.

Many consultation participants suggested that a review of the introduction of T1 and T2 specifications for Junior Cycle Irish be completed so that learning from the Junior Cycle Irish review can inform further work on draft Leaving Certificate specifications. Note that this review commenced in early 2022 and was completed in November 2022. Others emphasised that the changes in Junior Cycle will take a number of years more to embed and that this process was interrupted by emergency changes to schooling as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

For full detail on feedback please see Consultation Report available at:
<https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/gaeilge/>

Section 1 provides background and context to the rationale for creating T1 and T2 Leaving Certificate Irish specifications.

Section 2 considers in detail the feedback received on the draft T1 and T2 Leaving Certificate Irish specifications.

Section 3 summarises feedback in relation to the introduction of the new specifications.

Section 4 outlines systemic considerations such as the model of curricular provision for Irish.

Section 5 proposes next steps.

Analysis of data received from written submissions and online surveys, as part of the consultation on draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish T1 and T2, was completed by the School of Education, Galway University, following a successful application in a tender process. See their analysis report [here](#). Analysis of data received from focus groups, bi-lateral meetings and one-to-one interviews with teachers was analysed by the NCCA.

In response to consultation feedback, an early enactment review of Junior Cycle T1 and T2 specifications, which was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, commenced in early 2022 and was completed in November 2022. It was conducted by Professor Ó Duibhir and Dr Mac Gearailt of SEALBHÚ Dublin City University (DCU) and the report is available [here](#).

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