Shape

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Report on the early enactment of Junior Cycle Chinese Language and Culture short course

**September 2024**

Contents

[1. Introduction 2](#_Toc176962316)

[2. Background information 4](#_Toc176962317)

[2.1 Chinese Language and Culture 4](#_Toc176962318)

[Assessment Arrangements 5](#_Toc176962319)

[3. Review Process 6](#_Toc176962320)

[3.1 Methodological approach 6](#_Toc176962321)

[School visits 6](#_Toc176962322)

[Written submissions 6](#_Toc176962323)

[Teacher survey 6](#_Toc176962324)

[Data analysis 6](#_Toc176962325)

[4. Review Feedback 8](#_Toc176962326)

[Aim of the short course 8](#_Toc176962327)

[Relevance of the learning for students set out across the strands 9](#_Toc176962328)

[Using the learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning and assessment 12](#_Toc176962329)

[The Classroom-Based Assessment and Assessment Guidelines 13](#_Toc176962330)

[Feedback from schools regarding the introduction of the short course 14](#_Toc176962331)

[5. Recommendations and Next Steps 16](#_Toc176962332)

[5.1 Feedback directly related to the Chinese Language and Culture short Course 16](#_Toc176962333)

[5.2 Feedback related to the Framework for Junior Cycle 18](#_Toc176962334)

[6. References 19](#_Toc176962335)

[Appendix A Template for Written Submissions and Written Submissions Received 20](#_Toc176962336)

[Written Submissions Received 21](#_Toc176962337)

# 1. Introduction

The [Framework for Junior Cycle 2015](https://ncca.ie/media/3249/framework-for-junior-cycle-2015-en.pdf) aims to support the provision of quality, inclusive and relevant education which meets the needs of junior cycle students, now and in the future (DES, 2015). A key aspect of the Framework is that it provides flexibility for schools to design programmes that are suited to the needs of their students and to the particular context of the school. Programme design is guided by eight underpinning principles, twenty-four statements of learning and the eight key skills of junior cycle and schools decide on the combination of subjects, short courses, and priority learning units (PLUs) offered to students.

The main purpose of short courses is to allow schools greater autonomy in the delivery of their junior cycle programme. The inclusion of short courses in a junior cycle programme allows schools to broaden the learning experiences for students, address student interests and provide access to areas of learning not covered by the combination of curricular subjects available in the school. The Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 notes that short course provision will vary from school to school and will be influenced by factors such as the design and content of the school’s junior cycle programme and timetable, the resources available, students’ needs and interests, teacher availability, experience and expertise and the views of parents/guardians (DES, 2015).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed short courses that are broadly aligned with Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications. These include:

* Coding
* Digital Media Literacy
* Chinese Language and Culture
* Artistic Performance
* Philosophy.

Three further short courses form part of the 400 hours of Wellbeing education:

* CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education)
* PE (Physical Education)
* SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education).

Each short course is designed for 100 hours of student engagement over the three years of junior cycle, with the exception of PE which requires 135 hours. Short courses are assessed formatively and through a Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) and reported upon to students and parents/guardians by the school. There is no terminal examination.

A total of seven additional short courses for Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes have also been developed. Specifications for all short courses are available at <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-Cycle/Short-Courses/>. Schools may also design their own short course or access short courses designed by other schools or organisations.

This report presents an overview of the [Chinese Language and Culture](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c74d14b1-ce78-4aa1-b7a6-cd14a7d7dd5a/NCCA-JC-Short-Course-Chinese.pdf) short course, followed by a summary of the findings from the consultation carried out as part of the early enactment review of the course. The report concludes with key insights and proposed responses for the short course based on the findings from the review and presents a summary of insights gained to support the continued implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

# 2. Background information

This section provides a brief overview of the curriculum specification for Chinese Language and Culture and the assessment arrangements set out in the [Assessment Guidelines](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/9b006069-bc97-4a27-87d5-f3526e91c70b/Chinese_AssessmentGuidelines_Feb2017.pdf). These are important to provide context for the consideration of the review findings.

## 2.1 Chinese Language and Culture

The [Chinese Language and Culture short course](https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/73c6ad25-a16f-4bab-a9ba-5232b7754c1f/NCCA-JC-Short-Course-Chinese.pdf) specification was published in 2016 and aims to enable students to reach basic proficiency levels in spoken and written Mandarin Chinese, to develop their cultural and intercultural awareness, and learn to plan and evaluate their progress in learning Chinese. The rationale for the introduction of the short course included a growing interest in learning Chinese and discovering the culture and way of life.

The course is designed for non-native ab initio[[1]](#footnote-2) speakers, with approximately 70% weighting towards language and 30% towards culture. It was developed in alignment with the [level indicators for level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications](https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/NFQ%20Grid%20Level%20Indicators.pdf). The course is broadly aligned with the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf) (CEFR) Level A1.1 for speaking and listening, with a lower level for reading and writing[[2]](#footnote-3).

Student enrolment statistics from the Department of Education Post Primary Online Database (PPOD) indicate that there is a steady demand in terms of student uptake for the Chinese Language and Culture short course since its introduction in 2016. 11 schools offered the short course as part of their junior cycle curriculum in 2021-2022.

There are four separate yet interconnected strands in the Chinese Language and Culture short course specification (DES, 2016). The strands are modelled on the language domains of the CEFR: personal domain, public domain and educational domain. These are outlined in the table below.

#### Table 1: Overview of Strands in Chinese Language and Culture

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strand 1: Myself, my family and my friends | Strand 2: Out and about in public places | Strand 3: Education and school | Strand 4: Chinese and young global citizens |
| In this strand students communicate about themselves in personal settings. | In this strand students acquire language to participate in different public situations. | In this strand students communicate with teachers and peers in school/out-of-school settings. | In this strand students learn and talk about Chinese people, both in China and around the world, and their connections with other cultures and peoples. |

(DES, 2016, p.9)

All four strands aim to develop student communication skills, intercultural and language awareness and competence in digital literacy.

### Assessment Arrangements

All junior cycle short courses have one Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA). The CBA for this short course is a *Language and Culture Project*. Students select a topic or issue of interest and carry out an exploration over time leading to an oral presentation. Students are expected to demonstrate development of spoken interaction and spoken production and demonstrate their cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness.

# 3. Review Process

The early enactment review comprised the following three modes of engagement during April and May 2023:

* An online survey issued to teachers in post-primary schools where these short courses were offered in the school year 2021-2022 (11 schools)
* Written submissions from stakeholders and interested bodies
* School visits to capture the perspectives and experiences of students (both those currently completing, and those who had completed, the short course), teachers, and school leaders.

## 3.1 Methodological approach

### School visits

The schools selected for the visits were chosen from those schools where Chinese Language and Culture was offered in the school year 2021/2022. This list of schools was based on data from the Post Primary Online Database (PPOD). An open call via email to participate in the review was issued to these schools and a sample of schools was selected from those which registered their interest. The visit to each school included two focus groups involving students (currently studying or who had studied the short course) and the short course teacher(s). Where possible, a short interview took place with a member/members of the senior leadership team. In total, 5 school visits were conducted; 4 teachers, 31 students and 3 school leaders participated in this school-based review.

### Written submissions

Written submissions were invited through an open call on [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) with a template provided to support the submission (Appendix A). Social media was also used to promote this open call. Each of the schools offering the short course was also invited to make a written submission. Two written submissions were received and are listed in Appendix A.

### Teacher survey

A self-selecting approach was used for the teacher survey which was shared via email with schools where the short course was offered in the school year 2021-2022. There was one respondent to the survey who identified as a teacher.

### Data analysis

Parental consent and student assent were sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. Data gathered through the school visits and online surveys was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with the NCCA’s Data Protection Policy (2023). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation through a written submission.

A thematic approach was used for data analysis in this review, framed by a set of guiding themes used throughout the consultation. The findings are presented in the next section of this report.

# 4. Review Feedback

This section presents an overview of the experience of the Chinese Language and Culture short course specification, based on the analysis of the feedback from the consultation. All modes of engagement in the consultation were shaped around similar guiding themes which informed the analysis of the feedback. The analysis is presented under the following headings:

* Aim of the short course
* Relevance of the student learning set out across the strands
* Using the learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning and assessment
* The Classroom-Based Assessment and Assessment Guidelines
* Feedback from schools regarding the introduction of the short course.

### Aim of the short course

The aim of the Junior Cycle Chinese Language and Culture short course is to *‘…enable students to reach set basic proficiency levels in spoken and written Mandarin Chinese, develop their cultural and intercultural awareness, and learn to plan and evaluate their progress in learning Chinese.’* (DES,2016, p.5). The majority of teachers and students agreed that the aim of the short course was being achieved. Positive feedback included that the specification *‘offers a comprehensive framework for introducing the Chinese language into the junior cycle’* and that it is a *‘… great foundation course that provides opportunities for students to engage in Chinese language and culture education, fostering plurilingual and pluricultural awareness…’* (Written submission). Some teachers reported that they did not have any difficulty with the spoken or written components of the short course. They also stated they were creative in introducing topics which were of interest to the students, including giving students Chinese names.

I think the aim is good and this is what’s happening in the class. The cultural aspects are very important, and these are integrated into all aspects of the class. This makes it more enjoyable for the students. (School visit, teacher)

Some students noted having a basic understanding of Mandarin Chinese and an understanding of the culture as a result of experiencing the short course. Other students stated that the cultural and spoken elements of the course were being realised better than the written element. One student referenced that *‘if we went to China, we might get around a little bit better than those who don’t speak it’* (School visit, student).

Schools varied in their focus on the individual aspects of the aim (language and culture). The specification states that 70% of the weighting of the course should be towards language and 30% towards culture and that *‘Schools have the flexibility to adapt any short course to suit their particular needs and school context.’* (DES, 2016, p.9). In general teachers and students were satisfied with the weightings allocated to language (70%) and culture (30%). Students stated that in first year there was more of a focus on cultural aspects. This, it was perceived by students, was to build student confidence. In second and third year the weightings appeared proportionate to most students. In some schools it was evident from both students and teachers that the language and cultural aspects were being taught separately. One teacher reported using a ‘*culture class’* to *‘give the students a break from learning the language’* (School visit, teacher). This was echoed by students.

We did culture, through English. It was done separately. We would have one class of writing and speaking and then another of culture. (School visit, student)

The short course specification promotes an interconnected approach to the learning of Chinese. Assigning specific weightings for language and culture was perceived as serving to significantly erode this interconnected approach. Rather than assigning weightings to the language and cultural aspects, much consultation feedback highlighted the need for

…an integrated approach that teaches culture through language instruction and promotes cultural awareness is preferred. (Written submission)

The review found that while the aim was seen as positive, the main challenge in achieving it was the stated level of proficiency to be achieved: CEFR Level A1.1 for speaking and listening, with a lower level for reading and writing. CEFR Level A1.1, which is comparable to the CEFR Pre-A1 level, appeared to cause participants some confusion during the review. Level A1 was the lowest level available when the short course was developed and published. It should be noted that CEFR Pre-A1 level was introduced in the CEFR CV in 2020 and that this was after the short course had been developed. One written submission, stated that

Currently, the language achievement is expected to reach CEFR A1.1 level after 100 hours of student engagement… appears to be excessive… (Written submission)

In relation to the same issue, two teachers stated that the specification ‘…*should be updated’* to align with the appropriate CEFR level, which would be achievable within the timeframe of the short course, for clarity purposes*.* (School visits, teachers).

### Relevance of the learning for students set out across the strands

During the school visits, students were asked what they liked, or enjoyed most about the short course. The answers indicated a strong interest in and positive attitude towards studying Chinese. Responses from students indicated their interest in many of the cultural aspects such as Chinese New Year, food and music. Numbers and colours were referenced also.

It opens your eyes so much to the Chinese culture that you haven’t learned before. If I didn’t choose it, I would have regretted it now. (School visit, student)

Some students referenced their enjoyment in learning to understand Pinyin, basic characters, and the creation and pronunciation of these characters. They also enjoyed writing simple words or short phrases. Other students provided more utilitarian reasons for their interest in the short course such as: communicating in a basic way in Chinese, using the language when travelling, creating job opportunities/prospects and including this in a CV.

When asked what they had hoped to learn through their engagement with the short course there were many similarities across student responses. The desire to learn to speak and write Chinese and to communicate using the language was paramount. For example, one student remarked

*I really wanted to be able to have a basic conversation with someone in Chinese.*

*I think I did develop this skill too.* (School visit, student)

Learning about new, previously unknown parts of the language was commonly referenced by students.

The tones in the Chinese characters – I didn’t know these existed at the start. As I learned more about them, I thought they were interesting and learned that if you said them the wrong way, you could say something very different. (School visit, student)

Some students expressed satisfaction with how learning Chinese has helped them with learning in other languages.

*It helped my communication a lot and to understand the other languages too. I could see the connection between Chinese and Irish and see what they had in common.’ (*School visit, student)

Teachers referenced support from school management as fundamental to the enactment of the short course in their school and in encouraging engagement with more global languages. The teachers all exhibited positive attitudes towards teaching the short course and enjoyed it.

I have learned a lot in teaching it and it is great when students greet me in the corridor using Chinese that I have taught them. (Online survey)

The native Chinese teachers particularly enjoyed sharing aspects of their own culture and language with students and appreciated the efforts students were making in learning Chinese. These teachers spoke of having opportunities to be creative and to put their own stamp on learning experiences. The non-native Chinese teachers enjoyed participating in the learning process as much as in the teaching process, referencing particular enjoyment in cultural aspects and writing basic characters. These teachers reported some difficulty in trying to introduce the specification. Some teachers lacked confidence in their own ability to teach the short course. Collaboration with other teachers of the short course to share ideas, resources and approaches and to ask questions was referenced as important, but not all teachers had been able to collaborate with others.

I was lucky to have someone nearby who had Chinese in the school so they SLAR’ed with me. Without them I wouldn't have had anyone else to SLAR with. (School visit, teacher)

The review found that lack of access to, or lack of knowledge of where to access professional development posed challenges for some teachers. Other teachers stated they had engaged in professional development on several occasions and maintained strong links with Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) who provide ‘*targeted CPD and support’* in this area (Written submission).

In addition to the availability of professional development, the lack of age and stage appropriate material and resources for students engaging in the short course, particularly through the medium of Irish, emerged as a challenge.

The learning set out in *Strand 1: Myself, my family and my friends* is intended to enable students to communicate about themselves in personal settings. Both teachers and students viewed the learning outcomes in this strand as providing a good starting point, offering opportunities for students to communicate in a basic way with others. Particular reference was made to greetings, writing their names in Chinese, colours and hobbies by students. A number of teachers highlighted the use of pair and group work when working with the learning outcomes in Strand 1 to support the range of abilities in a class group.

The majority of learning outcomes in *Strand 2: Out and about in public places* and *Strand 3: Education and school* were seen as relevant for students in junior cycle. Teachers reported high levels of student interest in areas such as researching Chinese New Year customs, writing their names in Chinese characters, using appropriate greetings and learning the differences between Chinese and Irish schools. Using simple melodies and songs to speak the language was referenced as a useful approach by teachers. Students noted how they enjoyed learning about Chinese culture and found it both *‘interesting and beneficial’* (School visit, student). Teachers reported that some learning outcomes (and exponents) contained outdated traditions and customs and suggested updating or removing some in favour of others which would reflect current practices in China. Language used in some exponents was also found to reinforce stereotypes which are no longer common in China. One written submission suggested incorporating more contemporary culture *‘…particularly aspects that resonate with…young learners.’…’* (Written submission).

A significant portion of the content requires an update to reflect current practices in Chinese language and culture education and to be more applicable within the Irish educational system. (Written submission).

While there was a high level of satisfaction with Strands 1, 2 and 3, *Strand 4: Chinese and young global citizens* appeared to be more challenging. Contributing factors to the challenges in working with Strand 4 was the propensity to engage with the strands and learning outcomes in sequence, thereby having less time for Strand 4; and the perceived level of difficulty of the learning outcomes in this strand. Aspects such as comparing Chinese with another East Asian language, organising a Chinese cultural event, Chinese inventions, and describing a China-Ireland project were noted as particularly difficult aspects for students to achieve within a short course. Teachers stated that it would take significant time to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding amongst students (and teachers) to engage in this learning. Some teachers reported omitting Strand 4 altogether. The teachers stated that they would welcome a review of the nature, relevance and pitch of the learning contained in some of the learning outcomes in this strand.

A number of sample exponents are provided to support teaching and learning across Strands 1-4, and these are outlined in Appendix 2 of the specification. Though not prescriptive, many classrooms were making use of these exponents. The specification states that teachers should use their own judgement but also to use the exponents to decide ‘…*which topics best respond to the interests and abilities of students.*’(DES, 2016, p.18). The review found mixed attitudes to the exponents, ranging from over reliance on them, to finding them too challenging or unachievable, to not finding them useful at all.

Some new words (used in the exponents) are far beyond A1 Level, such as Emperor Qin, Mei Lanfang… these words can hardly be used by students. The words in this topic are difficult on their own…Moreover, from a cultural introduction perspective, these words may prove too challenging for students to comprehend, which could potentially hinder their interest. (Written submission)

It was suggested that a review of some learning outcomes, and in particular the action verbs used, would contribute to making the learning more accessible for students.

### Using the learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers participating in the review acknowledged the importance of the learning outcomes as a basis for planning engaging lessons and activities. All teachers stated they found the number of learning outcomes (53) excessive when planning for teaching, learning and assessment. They reported they ‘*didn’t use them all…’* and *‘There is too big an ask to achieve them all.’* (School visit, teacher). It was suggested that a *‘…reduced number of more focused learning outcomes’ would facilitate a better understanding and more effective delivery of the short course*.’ (Written submission).

Teachers noted issues with the level of challenge of some of the learning outcomes. In some cases, teachers highlighted learning outcomes which would benefit from updating, removal or revision to ensure greater clarity around student expectations. This feedback has been incorporated into the discussion of each Strand outlined above. It was also suggested that a glossary of action verbs would help to support planning for teaching, learning and assessment.

All teachers of the short course referenced a desire for some/more professional learning support and development and noted that the teaching of Chinese Language and Culture requires an extraordinary effort on the part of the school. In each school visited there was only one teacher teaching the short course, which was reported as challenging for the purposes of planning, collaboration and sharing resources. Teachers suggested that access to supports which are age and stage appropriate, in addition to the exponents, would be welcome while one written submission highlighted the importance of raising awareness amongst teachers of the supports that are already available.

The short course specification states that through the four strands *‘…students develop… competence in digital literacy.’* (DES, 2016, p.9). A number of teachers reported using digital technologies in the teaching of the short course. Duolingo, TikTok, Digital Dialects, You Tube videos were referenced as useful. In addition, teachers created their own quizzes and assessments using digital technologies and encouraged students to use the Chinese keyboard on phones and computers. The potential of exploring digital technologies more extensively within the short course to improve teaching, learning and assessment and also to meet the needs and interests of students emerged in the review.

…digital literacy…should explore the application of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning…such as utilising typing instead of handwriting for written production in Chinese. These initiatives will be crucial in …ensuring that the subject is well-positioned and equipped to meet the evolving needs of students and society. (Written submission)

The use of input software was suggested to improve writing skills. Learning to develop their writing skills by practicing typing would require only *‘hours of practice’* while the same level of proficiency through the use of handwriting would *‘necessitate weeks of learning and practice.’* (Written submission).

### The Classroom-Based Assessment and Assessment Guidelines

The Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in this short course is a *Language and Culture Project*. Students are given an opportunity to choose a topic or issue which is of interest to them and carry out an exploration over time leading to an oral presentation (DES, 2016, p.15). The CBA can be completed during second or third year and can be completed individually or in groups of two or three.

Feedback on the *Language and Culture Project* was positive. Feedback from students emphasised positives in terms of their experiences with the CBA in this short course with commentary including:‘*I really liked making the project and choosing my own topic.’, ‘The CBA was a little marred by Covid, but we did a small presentation and it wasn’t stressful at all – I enjoyed it.’* and *‘…it was good you could show what you knew without having to do an examination.’.* (School visit, students).

All schools chose to complete the CBA during third year and referenced that students would not have adequate learning to attempt the CBA earlier than this. Although the CBA should begin after the work in the four strands has been completed, the review found that all teachers completed the CBA without having achieved, or in many cases attempted, some of the learning outcomes, most notably those within Strand 4.

Teachers, in many cases, gave students a range of topics to choose from and encouraged as much use of the language as possible. Students who were in the process of completing their CBA when engaging with the review appeared excited about their prospects and spoke of lots of ideas for issues or topics such as: About me, Festivals, Chinese New Year, the Panda and the Zodiac. There were several references made by students to conducting research, organising material/images, attempting to use key phrases (basic greeting and introductions) and using creative skills to prepare their CBA. Some students had fully embraced their own interests when selecting a topic or issue for the CBA.

All teachers were familiar with the Assessment Guidelines and reported that they were helpful in providing clarity and information in planning for, engaging with and completing the CBA.

Some teachers reported sharing the Features of Quality with their students to develop a familiarity.

We share the Features of Quality with the students. Then they know what areas to pick. This lends itself to their interests. (School visit, teacher)

Other teachers expressed challenges when applying the Features of Quality to the CBA, particularly in relation to the level of communication through Chinese and the level of awareness required of Chinese culture. One teacher indicated that the addition of some support in relation to topics or areas of interest for students to consider, would be helpful.

Although the Assessment Guidelines reference that the CBA offers students the opportunity to collaborate with classmates as they undertake their project and prepare their presentation, this review found that almost all students presented their CBA individually. In many cases, even though students were made aware of other formats (oral interview, role-play, poster presentation) for presenting their CBA, PowerPoint appeared to be almost exclusively used.

The low number of schools offering the Chinese Language and Culture short course presented challenges in engaging effectively with the SLAR meeting process. Most teachers stated that they would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers of the short course. In some cases, teachers indicated that they approached other language teachers within their school to conduct the SLAR meeting.

It is worth nothing that during the review, both teachers and students referred to the absence of a final examination. This absence was seen as offering both opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning. For many students, the absence of a final examination resulted in a less stressful classroom atmosphere and one where learning was more enjoyable than in other subjects which had a final examination.

We enjoy not having assessment stress attached to the course. So not doing a formal exam makes the subject much more enjoyable. (School visit, student)

In some cases, students and teachers reported that there was a tendency for a minority of students to not engage or participate to the best of their abilities because they did not have an examination to prepare for or complete. Teachers also agreed that it was easier for some students to *‘*switch off*’* rather than invest in the short course.

### Feedback from schools regarding the introduction of the short course

Engagement with school leaders during the review found different approaches to introducing and timetabling the short course. In addition, differences were noted across the schools in terms of the rationale for offering short courses and in terms of the opportunities and challenges short courses present.

A broad range of short courses were found to be on offer in the schools visited. These included Artistic Performance, Coding, Digital Media Literacy, Sign Language, Philosophy, Mechatronics and Architectural Design. In most schools, students opted to study two short courses for junior cycle in lieu of one subject from the options available. Three of the five schools visited in this review offered the Chinese Language and Culture short course across the three years of junior cycle. The remaining schools had made the short course available for two of the three years of junior cycle. Timetabling arrangements varied to reflect the length of the class period in the school. School leaders noted that there were increasing curricular demands at junior cycle, resulting in the need to revise timetable allocations for Chinese Language and Culture. In one school, Chinese was mandatory.

School management identified the main benefits of offering the Chinese Language and Culture short course in the school as an opportunity to vary curriculum provision at junior cycle and to provide an opportunity for students to develop more global skills, perceived to be essential for their future lives. One principal of an all-Irish speaking school noted how studying Chinese in the short course was beneficial to students’ language awareness more broadly, but particularly in terms how they learn and use the Irish language.

As an immersion school having Chinese is so powerful because it is a language learned from scratch - the students really understand their own language through this construction of such an unfamiliar language. (School visit, Principal)

Challenges highlighted by school leaders during the review related to the retention of teachers and the availability of qualified teachers to teach the short course. Access to professional development and resources to complement the teaching of the short course was also cited as an issue. One school leader stated:

Being short course based it is logistically tricky – it needs to be timetabled carefully and you need to have personnel to deliver this. Not having native speakers to teach it can be problematic (School visit, Principal)

Although school leaders faced challenges with timetabling and staffing, the review found that their optimism and enthusiasm to offer this short course as part of the school curriculum as an option for their students, remained strong. This enthusiasm was reflected in the teachers’ innovative approaches to navigate and make use of new content and material in teaching and learning. This enthusiasm and positivity was then, in turn, transferred to their students who clearly were enjoying the short course. One principal said

This short course is part of a bigger global picture. China has the second biggest population in the world, heading for one and a half billion. Providing a short course in Chinese to our students will help to pave the way for a wider interest in the language. This will pay dividends socially, culturally and economically. (School visit, Principal)

# 5. Recommendations and Next Steps

NCCA would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers, students, school leaders, other stakeholders and organisations who contributed to this review. Their feedback provided rich insights into how the Chinese Language and Culture short course specification has been enacted in schools as part of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), and how short courses can continue to enhance the student learning experience.

This section of the report considers the feedback from the review to identify key insights and proposed responses. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge the extraordinary effort made by school leaders and teachers to offer opportunities for students to engage with short courses as part of the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle.

The feedback is explored under two headings:

* Feedback directly related to the Chinese Language and Culture short course
* Feedback related to the Framework for Junior Cycle.

## 5.1 Feedback directly related to the Chinese Language and Culture short Course

The review highlighted the positive experience of short courses as part of the junior cycle curriculum. It is clear that the introduction of short courses provides an opportunity for schools to broaden the learning experiences for students, address student interest and provide access to areas of learning not covered by the combination of curricular subjects available in the school, as envisaged in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

Key insights gained through the review provide some areas for consideration within the short course. These areas, coupled with some proposed responses to be acted upon in the short term, are outlined in the sections below. Areas for action set out within the proposed responses will begin in Q1 of 2025 with a revised Specification and Assessment Guidelines to be completed by Q4 2025.

The findings point to the value of adjusting the short course specification and Assessment Guidelines to align more coherently with CEFR CV and to the Pre-A1 level in order to enhance the teaching and learning experience and to promote student engagement.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key Insight(s)** | **Proposed Responses** |
| The aim of the short course provides a good foundation for students to engage in Chinese Language and Culture, but it was found to be difficult to realise. The challenges relate primarily to the overall pitch of the specification (CEFR A1.1) and subsequently the content of some learning outcomes being too ambitious. Another is poor integration between the language and cultural aspects of the short course.  The structure of the learning outcomes and strands results in some teachers engaging with them in sequence. The learning in Strand 4 can be neglected. | Revise aspects of the specification to clearly align with CEFR CV and to the Pre-A1 level. Amend the aim accordingly following any adjustments.  Revise the structure of the specification to ensure that the interdependence of language and culture is clearer. Ensure that the revised structure supports students to develop their spoken and written competence in Chinese and their cultural and intercultural awareness in an integrated way. |
| Teachers experienced difficulties in achieving the learning within some learning outcomes. | Revise learning outcomes in the specification to ensure they align to pre-A1 level of proficiency.  Review action verbs used in some learning outcomes.  Include a glossary of action verbs as an Appendix in the specification to support planning for teaching, learning and assessment.  Include additional text or a section with information outlining the essence of each strand, in the *Overview: Course* to support teachers in engaging with the learning contained in each of the strands. |
| Some learning outcomes contain outdated traditions and customs. | Remove outdated and irrelevant traditions, language references and customs and update learning to reflect current cultural practices. |
| The current number of learning outcomes is unmanageable. | Revise some learning outcomes and ensure learning is age and stage appropriate and achievable within 100 hours of student engagement. |
| Teachers experience a degree of isolation in the context of planning and assessment and challenges relating to the SLAR meeting process. They also stated that they experienced difficulties in relation to knowing where to access resources and professional development. | Explore the potential of additional  supports for teaching and learning for the  short course with Oide and PPLI and recommend raising awareness of resources that are currently available and useful. |
| The use of exponents varied between over reliance or not using them at all, while the pitch of some exponents was found to be too high. | Review the nature, relevance and pitch of the exponents alongside any changes made to learning outcomes or strands, where necessary, to further support teachers in planning for teaching and learning. |
| Teachers felt that the Assessment Guidelines would be enhanced by reviewing the language of the Features of Quality and providing advice for students to help in the selection of a topic of interest for their CBA. | Revise the language used in Features of Quality, as needed.  Provide additional support for students on possible cultural topics linked to the learning outcomes of the specification. |

## 5.2 Feedback related to the Framework for Junior Cycle

Feedback from this review will be shared with all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Key insights in this respect include:

* The positive impact of short courses on curriculum provision, student learning, and the development of a range of key skills
* Support from school management is fundamental to the enactment of the short courses in schools and in encouraging engagement with short courses
* The absence of a final examination for the short course was perceived as contributing to a less stressful classroom atmosphere where learning was more enjoyable than in other subjects which had a final examination
* The student-centred nature of the CBA and the autonomy afforded by the Assessment Guidelines
* The challenges faced by schools in offering and timetabling short courses in an increasingly crowded curriculum space, where teachers require specific confidence, competence, knowledge and understanding, and students require access to digital technology
* The need for timely reporting on the CBA through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) to acknowledge student achievement.

It is also important to note that a research study exploring the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in Ireland is currently underway. As a longitudinal study, the experiences of schools will be explored over a period of four years, in order to capture the complexity, challenges and successes in enacting the Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015). The three interim reports from this study available at [Junior Cycle National Project | University of Limerick (ul.ie)](https://www.ul.ie/ehs/junior-cycle-national-project). These reports provide further insights into the experience of junior cycle in schools. The ongoing study will produce a final report later this year. The final report will draw on the findings across the 4 years and the 3 interim reports to explore, in detail, the core themes emerging and to make recommendations.

# 6. References

Council of Europe (2001), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, [online] available at <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>

Council of Europe (2020), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, [online] available at www.coe.int/lang-cefr.

Department of Education and Skills, DES. (2015) *Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages Specification* Dublin,DES, [online] available[*https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/bbb30195-a78a-4d66-9b80-04af66349905/JCMFLspec.pdf*](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/bbb30195-a78a-4d66-9b80-04af66349905/JCMFLspec.pdf)

Department of Education and Skills, DES. (2020) *Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese Curriculum Specification* Dublin,DES, [online] available at [*https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/91fc0a65-7922-453a-91dc-f5e0dae30c5b/Chinese-Specification-for-Leaving-Certificate\_EN.pdf*](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/91fc0a65-7922-453a-91dc-f5e0dae30c5b/Chinese-Specification-for-Leaving-Certificate_EN.pdf)

Department of Education and Skills, DES. (2016*) Short Course Chinese Language and Culture* Dublin,DES, [online] available *at* [*https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c74d14b1-ce78-4aa1-b7a6-cd14a7d7dd5a/NCCA-JC-Short-Course-Chinese.pdf*](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c74d14b1-ce78-4aa1-b7a6-cd14a7d7dd5a/NCCA-JC-Short-Course-Chinese.pdf)

Department of Education and Skills, DES. (2015) Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015, Dublin, DE [online] available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Framework-forJunior-Cycle-2015.pdf>

Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI. (2019) *National Framework of Qualifications Grid of Level Indicators* Dublin, QQI, [online] available at <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/NFQ%20Grid%20Level%20Indicators.pdf>

# Appendix A Template for Written Submissions and Written A black background with green letters Description automatically generatedSubmissions Received

**Junior Cycle Chinese Language and Culture Short Course: Early Insights Review**

**Template for Written Submissions**

NCCA is undertaking an early insights review of the junior cycle short course specification for Chinese Language and Culture. The purpose of this review is to gather feedback from school management, teacher/educators, students and interested parties in relation to the experience of the Chinese Language and Culture short course.

Feedback for the review will be gathered through school visits, written submissions and online surveys. All of the feedback will be analysed, and a report will be published. NCCA will use this feedback to continue to support post-primary schools in implementing Chinese Language and Culture in their schools.

If you wish to provide written feedback on Junior Cycle Chinese Language and Culture, please use the prompts below and return your written feedback by email to [consultations@ncca.ie](mailto:consultations@ncca.ie) marked ‘Junior Cycle Chinese Language and Culture’ in the subject line, by **Monday 29th May.**

You will find it helpful to access a copy of the Chinese Language and Culture specification before completing the survey. This can be accessed here: https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-Cycle/Short-Courses/Chinese-Language-and-Culture/ [https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses/Digital­ Media-Literacy/](https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses/Digital­%20Media-Literacy/)in addition to the Assessment Guidelines for the short course.

1. **The aim of the Chinese Language and Culture short course is to enable students to reach set basic proficiency levels in spoken and written Mandarin Chinese, develop their cultural and intercultural awareness, and learn to plan and evaluate their progress in learning Chinese.**

Does the Chinese Language and Culture specification achieve this aim?    
Does it capture and facilitate learning about what’s really important for Chinese Language and Culture?   
In other words, through engaging in this course, do students come to understand, value and take appropriate action on topics that are relevant and important in learning Chinese Language and Culture?

1. Are there any omissions or topics that need to be given more emphasis within the specification?
2. What opportunities and challenges have you experienced in using the learning outcomes within the specification to plan for teaching, learning and assessment?
3. Are there any particular learning outcomes that are unclear or problematic?
4. Are there any particular learning outcomes that have really worked well in terms of teaching, learning and assessment?
5. Are the Assessment Guidelines helpful or is anything missing?
6. What feedback would you like to give us on doing the Classroom­ Based Assessment?
7. Overall, what have been the main successes and challenges so far in teaching the Chinese Language and Culture short course?
8. Any additional feedback not covered in the questions above?

### Written Submissions Received

Written submissions were received from the following organisations:

* Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI)
* UCD Irish Institute of Chinese Studies.

The template used to guide written submissions can be found in Appendix A.



1. Ab initio is a Latin term meaning from the beginning (‘ab’ meaning from and ‘initio’ meaning beginning). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. At the time of publication of the curriculum specification in 2016, the lowest CEFR Level was A1. The CEFR was updated in 2020 and introduced a new Pre-A1 Level. Pre-A1 represents a milestone, halfway towards Level A1, a band of proficiency at which the student has not yet acquired a generative capacity but relies on a repertoire of words and formulaic expressions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)