

NCCA consultation in relation to draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish.

Gaeleideachas information and guidance notes and questions as a support for Parents and Guardians

1. Context

- i. Draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish were published on the 23rd of February, 2021, to be implemented in the schools in 2023 and for examination for the first time in June 2025.
- ii. The consultation, which is being administered by the NCCA, is open until the **31st of August** and responses are welcome from parents, teachers and from the public by completing a survey or by making a submission. Parents with children at every school level can respond to it, if they wish.
- iii. It is recognised the parents are busy with everyday issues during the summer, and therefore, Gaeleideachas recommends undertaking the feedback before the schools close for the summer, if possible.
- iv. The difference between a survey and a submission is that the survey is laid out according to questions on specific themes, in comparison to submissions, which are completely open – where there is an opportunity to write according to your own priorities.
- v. **The information below can be used for guidance and can be adapted for the survey or for a submission. It is recommended to insert points in your own words, as much as possible in accordance with your own opinions.**
- vi. In the Policy on Gaeltacht Education, it states: *It is expected that these specifications will be implemented from September 2017. Work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish **once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools.*** (PGE footnote 4 pge 12). There is no proof that they are succeeding.

Gaeleideachas recommended to the NCCA that the deadline for the consultation be put back until **a review is completed on L1 and L2 in the Junior Cycle**. Unfortunately, this recommendation was not accepted.
- vii. The examinations for the Junior Cycle were cancelled in 2020 and in 2021. Sample examination papers were made available in November 2019 – teachers have shown great dissatisfaction with them. It can't be said that the new L1 Specification is working well in the schools as the examination hasn't occurred and no review has been undertaken on the specification and the challenges pertaining to it.
- viii. Without a proper review, schools won't fully understand if pupils will be able to manage the level recommended in the Senior Cycle.

- ix. Gaeleideachas is of the opinion that the conditions in the schools are currently not favourable for a consultation with the pressure in the system due to Covid-19, as well as the typical everyday pressures in post-primary schools.
- x. This consultation on Irish for the Leaving Certificate is in train despite not having completed the consultation on the Senior Cycle in full (all subjects; approach; reasoning etc.). This consultation is premature.
- xi. This is a critical consultation as there is only one opportunity to get the specification right for this generation and there is every chance that it will be years before a review is undertaken again on Irish at the Leaving Certificate level.

Where did the differentiation between L1 agus L2 come from?

The differentiation between L1 schools (schools functioning through the medium of Irish) and L2 schools (schools functioning through the medium of English) is not a brand new thing with regard to the curriculum. Although every pupil in Ireland follows the curriculum as it is set by the Department of Education, there is a new specification or a different course for Irish at the Junior Cycle level since 2017. There is also an integrated language curriculum at primary school level since 2016 and differentiation is made between all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools and schools functioning through the medium of English. These changes were implemented to accommodate the pupils' language needs more effectively in the all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. These new draft specifications for Irish are being promoted to build on these.

Post-primary school

It was evident that the concept of L1 & L2 needed to be developed at post-primary level so as to have continuity and this was expedited when the Policy on Gaeltacht Education came into the equation in 2017.

In the Policy, it states: *Work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish **once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools.** (PGE page 12)*

New specifications for L1 and L2 Irish were introduced for the Junior Cycle but unfortunately an appropriate range of supports have not been made available as occurred at primary level. As a result of the Pandemic, the first new examinations in the Junior Cycle were cancelled in 2020 and in 2021 and therefore, there is no way in which to measure the new system. There are no genuine examination papers or marking schemes available as a result. Without these and without time being given to schools in order to embed this Specification properly, it is very difficult for teachers to assess the standard of their pupils accurately for the new Leaving Certificate Specification.

Below are some questions which were raised and which have not yet been answered.

Compulsory

The question parents & teachers have is will it be **compulsory** for the pupils in the all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools to follow the L1 Irish course and sit the L1 exam? The Department of Education is responsible for responding to this question and the Department have not yet provided a definite answer to this, which is adding to the discontent in relation to the specification.

Currently, what is stated in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education is only a guide:

“Developing differentiated L1 & L2 curriculum specifications for Irish at senior cycle and ensuring that the learning outcomes of the L1 curriculum specification meet the needs of students in Gaeltacht schools and Irish medium schools, including native speakers of Irish.” (PGE pge 34)

It is intended to do the following:

“Requiring all recognised Gaeltacht schools to make L1 Irish-language curriculum specification available for students and to actively promote student uptake of this option.” (PGE pge 35)

Gaeleideachas recommends as a matter of urgency, that accurate information is made available in relation to the question of compulsion. As a result of a lack of information, concern is growing amongst parents and students.

According to Gaeleideachas, the L1 specification cannot be compulsory for pupils in L1 schools, and even, if optional, the circumstances must be created so as it is chosen and that suitable compensation is made available to pupils.

Compensation for Additional Work for the L1 Specification

A lot of parents have shown concern that there will be **no additional compensation available for the L1 exam**, and that pupils from the Gaeltacht and from all-Irish schools will be at a disadvantage if they have to sit a harder exam without gaining recognition in the form of bonus points.

There is a very strong danger that pupils won't choose a more challenging course without receiving proper compensation for the extra effort, in the form of bonus points due to the strong influence of the points system. The pupils need to be encouraged to undertake the more challenging course and if they don't have that encouragement, the majority of pupils will choose an easier paper, for which they will receive the same points.

There are 3 measures stated in the PGE (pge 35) as compensation for the extra work, which could be implemented:

1. *Introducing a third-level bursary scheme for students who perform at or exceed a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination*
2. *Reserving 10% of places in all ITE programmes for students who perform at or exceed a specified grade threshold in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination if the applicants also comply with the other criteria for entry to the programmes*

3. *Exploring the potential for recognition of performance in the L1 curriculum specification for Irish in the Leaving Certificate as a requirement for entry to third-level courses which require a higher competence in Irish*

The above 3 options are limited to specific choices of the pupil / choices with Irish at third level, and therefore, the choices are not satisfactory to the majority.

The Minister of Education said in the Dáil that officials in her Department were looking into “a range of measures” such as those above to encourage people to undertake the L1 course, but she did not mention bonus points as compensation.

There is a danger that the standard of the pupils’ Irish in all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools will decline if they choose a course and an examination paper that is focussing on schools which function through the medium of English.

Gaeleideachas recommends that compensation or reward in the form of bonus points is made available in order to encourage pupils to undertake a more challenging course.

Layout of the Draft Specifications

- i. The specifications are based on the same model as the Specification for the Junior Cycle and on the Primary School Language Curriculum, to differentiate between the L1 schools (functioning through the medium of Irish) and the L2 schools (functioning through the medium of English.)
- ii. In light of pupils from L2 schools being allowed to undertake the L1 specification, **it is recommended that the specifications are provided with other names instead of L1 and L2 so that there is no confusion in this regard.**
- iii. In both specifications, L1 and L2, there will be Higher level and Ordinary level available and there will be no Foundation level anymore.

Themes

Gaeleideachas guidance points are laid out below in line with the themes in the survey.

If you wish, you can base your answers in the survey on the guidance points below.

i. **Rationale, Aim and Objectives**

- The rationale for the specification cannot be assessed as a proper review on the junior cycle has not been undertaken, as a basic step.
- An L1 specification should not be introduced for the Leaving Cert until a suitable course has been developed to support it.
- If the new specification has a negative influence on the pupils’ standard of Irish, this negative influence will be reflected in the everyday life of the Irish language in the future – there won’t be enough pupils with a high enough standard of spoken or written Irish to work in positions where a high standard of Irish is required. This would contradict the

State's policies for the Irish language – The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language, The 5 Year Action Plan for the Irish Language, The Official Languages Act, the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and the language planning process.

- All subjects in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium post-primary schools are studied through the medium of Irish. A high standard in the Irish language is required to engage with texts and the subjects through the medium of Irish. The course followed in the Irish class should be a strong support to the learning through Irish which is being undertaken in the other subjects, but this will not occur under the current recommendations made in the consultation.

ii. Learning and Teaching

- We need to build on the work completed in primary school and make the **appropriate resources** available in order to develop a proper Irish course which is in line with **Séideán Sí** to support the L1 specification in the Junior Cycle.
- It is recommended to reintroduce the **oral examination at Junior Cycle level**.
- It is recommended that the L1 and L2 Specifications are explicitly linked with the **European Framework of References for Languages (EFRL)** so that there is a definite international system in order to assess the standard. The EFRL focusses on enabling the learner to use the language effectively in their academic, professional and social life, instead of preparing the learner for an exam. There is now an opportunity to utilise this approach in the new Leaving Cert course. If this opportunity is wasted, there is a danger that another generation will leave school with examination skills and strategies instead of language and communication ability.
- It is recommended to investigate options for an exam/course which takes into account **the history of the language and the literature**.
- It is recommended that proper analysis be done on the **major difference between Irish higher level and English higher level** with regard to novels, poems, etc.

iii. Texts

- It is difficult to appraise the new Specification when there is no list of texts available. Currently, teachers or parents don't know which literature will be studied or what the standard will be.
- It is not evident that there is much of a difference between L1 and L2. L1 pupils have to study 3 extra poems – that's the difference between L1 and L2 with regard to the literature.

Gaeleideachas recommends that the list of literature be published as the specification cannot be assessed without it in light of the lack of information in the learning outcomes.

iv. Learning Outcomes

The series of general learning outcomes, as they are laid out in the draft specification, are not sufficient to support teachers.

It is difficult to assess them as the actual course, texts or samples of the examination papers are not available.

v. Communication

The marks for the oral exam have been reduced to 35% and there is no explanation as to the basis for this.

There are some teachers concerned that pupils who are not strong in the written or academic parts of the course will be at a disadvantage with the reduction of marks for the oral examination.

vi. Language Creativity

There is no proper clarity here, there is emphasis on creativity in the language but no information is provided on the methods that will be used in order to do this.

vii. Recommendations for improvement

- Initially, a systematic review should be undertaken of the Junior Cycle in order to assess the standard, the approach and the material. If this is not undertaken, the new specification will be based on incoherence and on speculation.

Online Survey: You can complete the [online survey here](#). The closing date for receipt of responses is **5pm Tuesday, 31st August 2021**.

Written submissions: NCCA welcomes written submissions as part of the consultation on the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Irish L1.

Please email your submission to comhairliuchanT1@ncca.ie. Submissions accepted until **5pm on Tuesday 31st August 2021**.

Further information on the consultation here: <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/gaeilge/leaving-certificate-irish-l1-consultation/>