



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Junior Cycle Irish

Irish – medium schools (L1)

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Who is this specification for?

This specification is aimed at native speakers and learners of Irish in Gaeltacht schools and at students in the Irish-medium sector Gaelcholáistí and Irish-medium units more generally.

These schools have a diverse linguistic landscape. Irish-medium schools (L1 schools¹) provide for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, native speakers and learners of Irish; those whose main language at home is Irish, those who come from bilingual homes, those whose main language at home is English, and those who come from multilingual/bilingual families.

In the specification, the language needs of both native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish are considered. The provision of enriched language-learning experiences for all students, particularly those who are native speakers of Irish, is of the utmost importance. These students use the language on a daily basis, at home, in the neighbourhood and in school. Due to their immediate language environment, they have fairly well-developed productive and receptive language skills. This specification aims to develop, enrich and enhance the full range of students' language skills.

As students undertake this specification they develop their vocabulary and their command of colloquialisms. They learn the importance of using accurate, rich language. Arising from their language environment, they recognise *beochultúr na Gaeilge* and have opportunities to internalise this culture. This represents an important step for students at junior cycle, as they grow and develop as capable, active users of Irish.

1 L1 is the language medium of the school (English in English-medium schools; Irish in Irish-medium schools). L2 is the second language (Irish in English-medium schools; English in Irish-medium schools).

How does this specification support native Irish speakers?

This specification supports native Irish speakers by providing for enriched language-learning experiences that will enable them to

- improve language skills
- enrich language and cultural awareness and awareness of self as a language learner
- expand and enrich vocabulary
- differentiate between dialects (outside of own dialect)
- focus on language as a system, i.e. understand language patterns
- understand various language registers.

It is expected that these competencies and understandings would support native Irish speakers to:

- take advantage of opportunities for language use in the community
- learn through Irish across the curriculum
- play an active part in Gaeltacht community life.

This approach is in line with the State's policy on the Irish language: *The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (2010)*, *the Gaeltacht Act (2012)* and *the Gaeltacht Education Policy 2017-2022 (2016)*.

Criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht school are set down as part of the Gaeltacht Education Policy. At post-primary level, a recognised Gaeltacht school will implement this L1 specification for Irish at junior cycle and will encourage the uptake of the specification by students, particularly native speakers of Irish.²

What language skills can be expected?

The learning outcomes in each of the three strands of this specification are broadly aligned with the B2 descriptors independent language user, of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)³. All language skills need not be acquired at the same level, for example spoken competency could be more advanced than written for example. The student relies on the teacher's feedback and guidance, their own self-awareness as a language learner and opportunities to use language to further develop their language skills.

² Department of Education and Skills (2016). *Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, p. 12.

³ Language proficiencies are set out in the CEFR: A1, A2 (basic user), B1, B2 (independent user) and C1, C2 (proficient user). See: Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Reference of Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Introduction to junior cycle

Junior cycle education places students at the centre of the educational experience, enabling them to actively participate in their communities and in society and to be resourceful and confident learners in all aspects and stages of their lives. Junior cycle is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcome for all.

The junior cycle allows students to make a greater connection with learning by focusing on the quality of learning that takes place, and by offering experiences that are engaging and enjoyable for them, and are relevant to their lives. These experiences are of a high quality, contribute directly to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of learners, and where possible, provide opportunities for them to develop their abilities and talents in the areas of creativity, innovation and enterprise. The learner's junior cycle programme builds on their learning to date and actively supports their progress in learning and, in addition, supports them in developing the learning skills that will assist them in meeting the challenges of life beyond school.

Rationale

Students who study Irish through this specification develop and deepen their language skills. When students embark on this journey of language acquisition, their personal, cognitive and social development progresses and they become capable of participating positively in their language community or communities. When students study Irish they can develop a desire to participate in the Irish language community and a respect for that community and for other language communities. Students' knowledge of transferable skills and their mastery of the language will be critical both for learning and for life in general. This fosters students' ability and confidence to develop as thoughtful citizens in the language community. By learning, acquiring and using Irish, students discover information, develop thinking skills, and express opinions and emotions. Accordingly, students are able to manage various demands associated with school, the community, employment, further education and life as a whole.

Students find themselves on a continuum when it comes to their language acquisition journey. The many benefits of bilingualism are widely recognised in international research. Bilingualism and plurilingualism contribute to imaginative and creative ability, creating a multifaceted approach to life.

A certain level of competence in the Irish language is required in different employment fields in Ireland and overseas. Government departments and agencies have a statutory obligation to provide services through the medium of Irish. The official and working status of the Irish language in the European Union creates further opportunities for employment. Irish represents an advantage for students who wish to work in these various fields or who want to conduct their business through the medium of Irish.

The diversity of the Irish language community is recognised. The term Irish language community comprises the areas where Irish exists as a living language in the community. In addition, the language is spoken by families on a day-to-day basis and by many new speakers of the language outside those areas, all over the country and abroad. By studying Irish, students are connected to their own language community. The language is a window through which they can look in parallel at their historical and contemporary culture and identity and gain an appreciation of the importance of assuming personal ownership of the language. Students show respect for the language spoken at home, for local use of the language and for literary practices beyond school. By thinking about and studying Irish and elements of Irish culture, the students' awareness the culture of the language community and culture of their own local community increases. This appreciation often encourages students to consider their own place in the world and to think about cultural identity on a wider basis. The deeper connection and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of their community can be empowering for students. By studying the traditions of the local community, both new and old, students' intercultural awareness is developed. This enables them to explore and compare the views and attitudes of the community and/or of their own community.

By exploring texts, including multi-modal texts, and appropriate communicative tasks based on those texts, students develop 'communication and thinking skills which enhance their appreciation of the language itself (language awareness). They observe different aspects of the language, from the way it is used on a daily basis to how it is expressed in writing. Students learn about the structure of the language and how it works. Students are able to use various language registers in context. Through appropriate language tasks based on those texts, students gain an understanding of the differences between spoken and written language. The observations and language awareness developed help students considerably in rectifying errors and inaccuracy. In addition, language awareness helps

students make informed language choices while manipulating subjects, ideas and concepts, not only in relation to Irish itself but also in other subjects. Students become involved and engaged with one or all of the language skills; listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction and writing. They discuss and compare and investigate a variety of texts, including literary texts, developing their communicative, thinking and critical skills. Students read literature with an insight and imagination not only in the classroom, but for their own enjoyment as well. As they read relevant texts, the students' critical ability is developed.

As learning is a social activity as well as a personal activity, students engage with the skills and opportunities associated with both personal and collaborative learning to achieve appropriate language goals. By interacting with the teacher and with classmates and through reflection, students' appreciation of themselves as language learners grows. They gradually become familiar with their own learning strategies and personal style of learning. By completing various language tasks, students understand the areas where they have seen an improvement in language use, the areas which require further improvement and how to undertake those improvements. As a result, students' confidence and their ability to self-manage both their learning and the language are enhanced. Students build on their language and digital skills while creating texts, communicating online, or seeking information, considerably expanding their general digital literacy.

As students' respect for and mastery of Irish is developed, they will have more opportunities to enjoy life and to do their best for society, both now and in the future.

Aim

In the junior cycle specifications for Irish, students consolidate and deepen their understanding of Irish. Students are enabled to communicate in an effective, interactive, confident manner in formal and informal settings in the language community. The fostering and development of awareness is emphasised; language awareness and cultural awareness as well as students' self-awareness as language learners. Junior Cycle Irish seeks to consolidate and develop the skills students bring to post-primary school. Students are empowered to assume ownership of their own learning; an important life skill.

Students are encouraged to

- use language effectively and confidently, both personally and in communicating with other users in the language community
- use the Irish language in a variety of contexts in the language community
- enrich their Irish and speak and write it confidently and accurately
- enjoy creative and innovative communication in Irish
- express themselves through consolidation of their literacy skills
- explore and create a wide range of texts in various ways, for learning, research, and recreation
- have an appreciation and respect for literature in Irish so that they may enjoy literature and benefit from it
- gain a better understanding of Irish culture and have respect and understanding for other cultures and languages.

Overview: Links

Table 1 below shows how this specification for Junior Cycle Irish (L1) can link to some of the statements of learning contained in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

Table 1: Junior Cycle Irish and the statements of learning

STATEMENTS OF LEARNING

| The statement | Examples of relevant learning |
|---|---|
| SOL 1: The student communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1. | Students will participate in a wide range of language activities to develop their spoken and written communication in a wide variety of contexts. |
| SOL 3: The student creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts. | Students will engage with a wide range of texts to enjoy, understand and assess their content. |
| SOL 6: The student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives. | As the students' language, cultural awareness and self-awareness grows, so will their appreciation and respect for other cultures and for cultural diversity. |
| SOL 16: The student describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships. | Students will learn the significance of structures and the natural flow of Irish, both spoken and written. |
| SOL 24: The student uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner. | Students will use digital technologies appropriately to support learning and for language use. |

Key Skills

In addition to their specific content and knowledge, the subjects and short courses of the junior cycle provide students with opportunities to develop a range of key skills. This course offers opportunities to support all key skills, but some are particularly significant. The eight key skills are set out in detail in Key Skills of Junior Cycle.

Figure 1: The key skills of junior cycle



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

Table 2: Junior Cycle Irish and key skills

| Key skill | Key skill element | Student learning activity |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Being creative | Learning creatively | As language users, students will have opportunities to use the language creatively and to develop their creativity in both oral language and in writing. Creativity will be enhanced through experiencing literary narratives. |
| 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 which reflect the language accuracy and richness of students in both spoken and written Irish and in cross-curricular subjects. Students will use a wide range of comprehension strategies to engage with printed and digital texts. Students will plan, draft and write in a range of genres demonstrating an understanding of a target group, style and various uses of language registers. |
| 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. |
| Communicating | Using language | Students will be able to communicate positively in a personal and interpersonal manner with peers and with other users in the language community. |
| 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 learning the language 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 to and respect others while completing a wide range of activities and tasks. |

Overview: Course

This specification focuses on enhancing language and literacy skills through **integrated** strands: **Communicative competence**, **Language** and **cultural awareness**, and **Learner's self-awareness**. It is designed based on a minimum of 240 hours of student participation timetabled over the three years of the junior cycle.

Figure 2: Course overview



Strand 1: Communicative competence

The **Communicative competence** strand is the main strand of the specification, and the two other strands, **Language and cultural awareness** and **Learner's self-awareness** actively support it. In order to acquire the language to communicate in the language community, language and cultural awareness and the self-awareness of language learning need to be sufficiently developed by students. Great emphasis is placed on enabling students to use Irish effectively, including in communicating with other users in the language community.

In the main strand, students deepen and enrich their communicative competence and language skills. As their language and cultural awareness grows and as they develop self-awareness as learners in relation to this, their effectiveness as communicators and language users is greatly enhanced. Communicative competence consists of student ability in the following five skills: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing. These are skills required to communicate with other users of the language. While the learning outcomes associated with each strand are set out separately in this specification, this should not be taken to imply that the strands are to be studied in isolation. The intention is to foster, develop and maintain the various skills and competencies by using an integrated approach.

Strand 2: Language and cultural awareness

Language awareness involves students' understanding of and reflection on how Irish works as a language of communication. This awareness inspires students' curiosity in relation to the system and style of the language and encourages accurate and precise acquisition of the language. Students work from their existing knowledge of the language and focus on accuracy and richness. They also direct their attention to normal language usage and to the living culture associated with the Irish language, with Gaeltacht communities and with Irish language speaking communities internationally.

Strand 3: Learner's self-awareness

Self-awareness refers to students' self-awareness as language learners. Each language learner is different and by emphasising self-awareness in learning a language, students concentrate on individual style and their own individual attributes as language learners. This helps them greatly in making the necessary progress. When confronted with difficulties and challenges, students overcome them by reflecting on the reasons for those difficulties and challenges. They understand that they have language learning strategies available to them that will help them overcome difficulties and challenges and help them facilitate learning. They use suitable learning strategies that enable them to overcome challenges relating, for example, to the accurate and vibrant use of language. They know how to deal effectively with feedback as learners. They reflect on their progress and on the progress they still have to make in becoming language users. They understand their own personal motivation for using the language with other users. They understand how to make decisions as learners independently of the teacher and how to carry out self-assessment on their progress in each skill.

Teaching and learning

This specification gives teachers and students the flexibility to use a range of teaching and learning strategies which are appropriate and relevant to the various contexts in which they use the language. This section outlines the teaching and learning approaches embedded in the integrated strands of the specification.

Students' language journey

The learning and acquisition of Irish can be viewed as a journey. The students' objective or destination on this language journey is to be capable, independent and self-governing language users. An important part of the language journey is language learning and acquisition in the junior cycle which progresses from the development of the language in primary school and continues into senior cycle.

It should be noted that some students will have more or less acquired the language as a result of their language background on this language journey and others will have acquired or almost acquired the language towards the end of their journey. In addition, students will have opportunities to use and communicate in the language in their environment. Before students reach their destination i.e. self-governing, independent use of the language, and even if they have acquired this independent use of the language, they have to go further on the journey to achieve accuracy, richness, a distinctive style and elegance. Input⁴ helps the student on this journey. Output⁵ is of particular importance for students on their journey, as are effective teaching, opportunities for use and interaction, classmates, the community and learning facilities and sources.

Teachers, in partnership with students, guide students on this journey. It is the teacher's role to direct and facilitate teaching and learning. This means that they create a rich language input as part of the teaching. Teachers have expertise or special knowledge of the language and have particular knowledge and special skills relating to the teaching of the language (pedagogics) which facilitate learning. When students encounter challenges and difficulties, teachers provide guidance, encouragement, help, feedback and support so that they may progress. Teachers provide appropriate models of rich language which stimulate and enable the student in making progress. They guide students in taking advantage of opportunities for language use and communication in the language environment. They encourage a respect for and stimulate curiosity in the language and Irish culture, and encourage students to be observant.

The importance of progress and awareness

Self-awareness as language learners is the most effective tool students have in order to make progress. With the teacher's help and feedback and by reflecting on considering what they have to do on a personal level as part of their language journey, students take the necessary steps to achieve effective language acquisition. Effective language learners have certain distinct attributes and students learn about these attributes. As they progress, students assume ownership of the language learning process. To this end, they are encouraged (self-motivation, by teachers, their peers and the language community) to use the language. Language use is the communicative interaction which will ensure acquisition and which will enable students to reach their destination.

4 This term means the language heard and seen in the learners' environment or the language available to learners.

5 The language composed or generated by students themselves.

Observation is another tool used by students to make progress: creating a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn, and students become self-aware. Through this awareness, students acknowledge the disparity between their language level as they learn the language (this is referred to as inter-language) and richer, more accurate, and more natural versions and examples of the language. They understand why they make mistakes and take responsibility for correcting those mistakes and produce a richer and more accurate language. They keep a blog or a portfolio in which they regularly describe and reflect on their progress and what they observe about the language and about the culture of the language. They also describe the steps they must take to make progress as a learner and a user. They will not make progress without these elements.

The importance of classmates

Classmates play an important role in learners' progress. By interacting with classmates and through reflection, students' understanding of themselves as language learners and users is developed. By taking advantage of opportunities to communicate with classmates in group work and in pairs in class and in everyday contexts outside of school, students achieve language interaction.

The importance of the language community

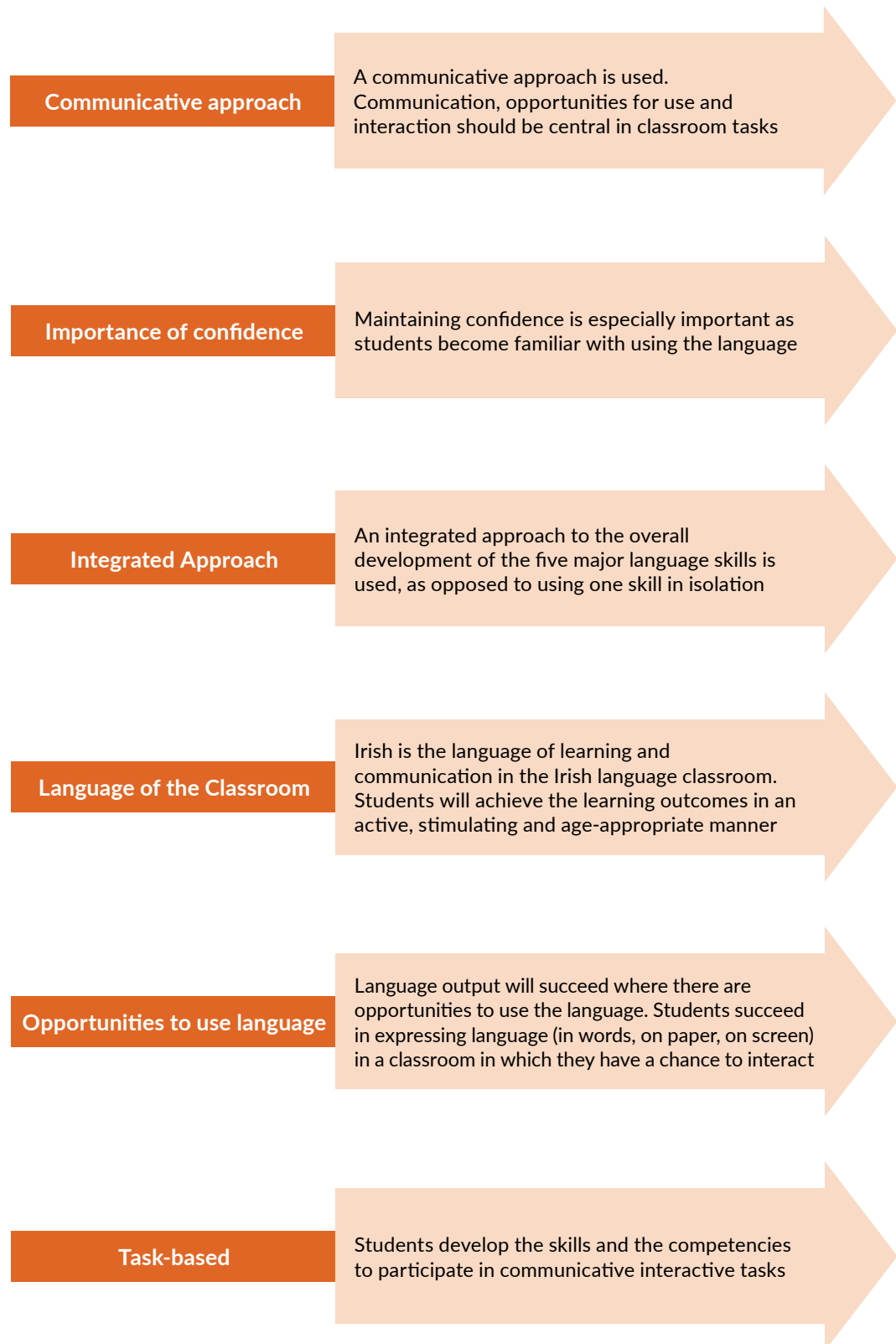
The language community has a central role to play in students' progress. Members of the language community are natural language users and students' interaction with them contributes greatly to language acquisition. They want to be part of the language community and they identify with this community. The language community provides students with examples of the living language and students observe and imitate elements of this language, which in turn act as a stimulus for them. They understand the disparity between their own language and the language provided by the language community. Without a language community, there would be no need to learn a language.

Literacy

There is a significant link between this specification and *The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Learning and Life (2011)*⁶. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. Literacy acquisition is a central component of language acquisition. As students become familiar with various texts (including multi-modal texts), they develop literacy skills. As students create texts, communicate online, or seek information in the Irish class, their language and digital skills are developed and this significantly enhances their overall digital literacy. The use of modern technology contributes significantly to fostering creativity, the acquisition of literacy and the satisfaction students get from using language. Language awareness is an important element of literacy development. This awareness will help students to make informed choices while manipulating subjects, ideas and concepts in other curriculum subjects. Quantitative and numerical concepts also form part of language learning, deepening students' numeracy skills.

6 Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life. The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011-2020*. Dublin: Government Publications Office.

Figure 3: Significant elements of teaching and learning in this specification



Literature

Approach

Why engage with literary texts?

Exploring literary texts is important for students. The development of language skills and the exploration of literary texts should be integrated in the classroom to aid language development and the development of critical and creative skills. Exploring literature supports the development of

- language and literacy
- critical and creative skills
- cultural understandings
- personal development.

A literary text is one which demonstrates the state or circumstances of an individual: a story which derives from emotions, life experience, memories, and the predicament of the human condition. It often demonstrates fantasy, legends, emotions, horror and revelations. Poetry, creative prose and creative film are associated with the heart and the mind, with emotions and with the imagination. Poetry, prose and film must be presented in a way that will arouse interest and will stimulate the imagination and a desire to communicate in students.

Language and literacy

Literature is a source of both formal language and normal, everyday language. Literature is created for the language community and as such is an example of authentic material in a wide range of styles and language registers that can aid students in their language development. Literature is therefore an important resource/aid for learning, for literacy and for the development of language competencies.⁷

Critical and creative skills

Literary texts foster opportunities for interaction, communication and meaningful discussion stimulating students' imagination and thereby supporting the development of communicative, critical and creative skills. While we often imagine writing and literature going hand-in-hand, speaking about literature is much more natural. If one reads a book or watches a film or hears a song it is more likely that one will speak about it before one writes about it. People often have different understandings of, and views on literary texts: not everyone finds the same meaning in a text. Through encountering literary texts, students have opportunities to enhance both their creative and critical thinking skills.

Cultural understandings

Literature provides cultural insights for students. Literary texts contain many explicit and implicit insights on native culture.

⁷ Lazar, G. (1993) *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Personal development

Literature is an important resource for emotional development. Literary texts create opportunities for students to identify with characters and emotions revealed in the texts. This helps students learn about the nature of humanity and about their own life. This aligns with the emphasis placed on wellbeing in the junior cycle as a whole. Each subject has a role to play in that area, including Irish. Literary texts (films, short stories, songs, plays, poems, novels, etc.) influence students' ideas and emotions.

Selection of texts

The selection of literary texts is very important; texts must be selected which students can relate to and with which they can be involved both emotionally and personally. **The students' role in the selection of texts is crucially important.** Teachers will help students explore the possibilities so that they may select the most appropriate option.

The following will be provided to assist with this approach:

- a recommended list of appropriate texts for first year
- a list of compulsory genres with an internal choice of texts for second and third year.

Students will select the texts in consultation with the teacher. Lists will be available on www.curriculumonline.ie

The guidelines below will help when selecting texts

First year

In first year, the foundation will be set for exploring literature in second and third year. Students will explore texts from a variety of genres: poetry/song, drama, short films, novels, and short stories.

At a minimum one text from each genre listed below should be explored in first year. A recommended list of texts will be provided.

- poetry / songs
- short stories
- short film / drama
- novels.

Particular emphasis will also be placed on the exploration of local literature/oral literature. A minimum of three pieces of local/oral literature should be explored in first year. Teachers and students have autonomy at local level to choose the pieces which best suit their context, needs and interests.

Second and third year

Over the two-year period, students will choose texts from a list of possibilities, choosing a minimum of

- one (complete) novel
- one (complete) play
- five poems/songs
- at least two short stories
- at least two short films.

Students will also explore five items of local/oral literature⁸ and schools (teachers and students) have autonomy to select the items to explore, as appropriate to their own context, needs and interests.

8 Texts not covered in first year.

Progression

Primary curriculum

Continuity is fostered between students' experience of learning Irish in primary school and their experience of Irish in the junior cycle. The Primary Language Curriculum (2015) is an integrated curriculum. The same structure (strands and elements) is used for Irish and English. The integrated curriculum meets various language needs and school contexts, including English-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools and special schools. There are two versions of the curriculum: one which is focused specifically on Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools and another which is focused specifically on English-medium schools.

The Primary Language Curriculum recognises that skills and certain concepts are transferable from the first language to the second and to the third language in some cases. This creates opportunities for skill enhancement and for the transfer of literacy skills and learning strategies to other languages.

The Primary Language Curriculum emphasises the development and fostering of

- communicative competence
- positive attitudes to learning languages
- language awareness (exploring and using language)
- self-awareness and autonomous learning.

All these features of the Primary Language Curriculum align with the rationale and aims of this *Specification for Junior Cycle Irish*. This helps to provide a continuous learning experience for students as they add to their language and learning skills in junior cycle.

Senior cycle

This specification through its strands and elements provides a learning experience that creates opportunities to enhance and deepen learning at senior cycle. The learning outcomes that emphasise students' spoken competence, the role of literature in language learning, writing in a range of genres for a variety of audiences and language and self-awareness will be very important for students' learning in senior cycle.

Expectations for Students

Expectations for students is an umbrella term which links learning outcomes with annotated examples of students' work in the subject specification. When teachers, students or parents looking at the online specification scroll over the learning outcomes, a link will sometimes be available to examples of work associated with a specific learning outcome or with a group of learning outcomes. The examples of student work will have been selected to illustrate expectations and will have been annotated by teachers. These examples will include work which is:

- exceptional
- above expectations
- in line with expectations

The purpose of the examples of student work is to show the extent to which the learning outcomes are being achieved in actual cases.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements which describe what knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate having studied Irish in junior cycle. The learning outcomes set out in the following tables apply to all students. As set out here they represent outcomes for students at the end of their three years of study. **The specification stresses that the learning outcomes are for three years and therefore the learning outcomes focused on at a point in time will not yet have been 'completed', but will continue to support students' learning in Irish up to the end of junior cycle.**

The outcomes are numbered within each strand. The numbering is intended to support teacher planning in the first instance and does not imply any hierarchy of importance across the outcomes themselves.

The examples of student work linked to learning outcomes will offer commentary and insights that support different standards of student work.

Definition of text

All products of language use oral, written, visual, or multi-modal can be described as texts. Multi-modal texts combine language with other systems for communication, such as print text, visual images, sound and the spoken word. In using this definition of the word 'text', the specification seeks to consolidate the richness and diversity needed to stimulate students' interest and foster their respect for language. Readers need to fully understand the meaning of the word 'text' to understand the learning outcomes in every element and strand.

Strand one: Communicative competence

Communicative competence consists of students' ability in the following five skills: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction and writing. These are skills required to communicate with other users of the language. Students are capable of working confidently and effectively in interpersonal communication settings in the language community. They are able to both understand and use the day-to-day language of communication at a normal pace in the language community. They enjoy participating in communication with other users and interacting with them. They recognise rich, accurate language and can use rich, accurate language when speaking and writing in Irish. They read a wide range of texts, including literary and multi-modal texts which are used in the language community and demonstrate a critical understanding of the material. They compose their own relevant texts to communicate with other users.

ELEMENT: Listening

Students should be able to:

- 1.1 understand communication messages at normal speed⁹
- 1.2 listen to understand meaning or specific details and coherent, continuous arguments
- 1.3 recognise speakers' perceptions and attitudes (direct or indirect)
- 1.4 understand rich, accurate, dialectal spoken language
- 1.5 differentiate between different dialects
- 1.6 critically select and share listening material using digital technologies

ELEMENT: Reading

Students should be able to:

- 1.7 use a range of reading strategies, including decoding strategies
- 1.8 critically engage with a wide range of texts* using appropriate language and vocabulary
- 1.9 explore conclusions and implications relating directly or indirectly to the content of texts
- 1.10 demonstrate enjoyment of a wide range of relevant authentic texts* to develop their reading ability
- 1.11 identify, explore and share a personal selection of texts* for research and pleasure
- 1.12 recognise and understand terminology in a wide range of texts and written genres
- 1.13 explore and discuss intertextual differences in a range of texts

ELEMENT: Spoken production

Students should be able to:

- 1.14 create and present oral texts by themselves and/or as a member of a group
- 1.15 develop conversation, expanding on personal thoughts in a wide range of topics/subjects
- 1.16 pronounce words naturally with a clear, accurate tone and appropriate emphasis
- 1.17 use rich, accurate Irish (including living language and dialectal forms) using their own dialect as appropriate
- 1.18 develop and enrich their own personal vocabulary and contemporary vocabulary on general topics and areas of interest

⁹ Speaker doesn't need to slow or simplify speech to be understood.

* All products of language use oral, written, visual, or multi-modal can be described as texts. See definition on p. 20

ELEMENT: Spoken interaction

Students should be able to:

- 1.19 take an active role in conversation (including group work), questioning, exploring and developing personal opinions and responding appropriately during conversations
- 1.20 interact confidently and appropriately in different situations for a variety of purposes
- 1.21 check, confirm and exchange information, ideas and views, re-telling and explaining specific details, as needed
- 1.22 synthesise and communicate views from a range of sources
- 1.23 explain thoughts relating to personal experiences with samples and appropriate arguments to persuade/influence
- 1.24 communicate orally using digital technologies
- 1.25 deal with comprehension difficulties so that communication is maintained

ELEMENT: Writing

Students should be able to:

- 1.26 create both personal and formal texts; including creative texts and multi-modal texts, in a range of styles and registers, using appropriate language and vocabulary, demonstrating an understanding of audience
- 1.27 use language flexibly, creatively and for fun
- 1.28 use editing skills during the writing process including drafting and redrafting
- 1.29 respond personally to texts* demonstrating a critical understanding of style, content, tone and imagery etc. in texts
- 1.30 recognise and use writing conventions i.e. spelling, punctuation
- 1.31 share written pieces in various formats using digital technologies
- 1.32 develop their personal writing style using accurate and rich language (using own dialect, as appropriate)

Strand 2: Language and cultural awareness

Students are acquiring Irish in an Irish-language environment. They notice both the accuracy and the richness of the style of the language. They understand what it means to be a good language user, and they try to emulate users who have a rich, accurate grasp of the language. They consider how the language works so as to avoid any inaccuracy. As they are surrounded by the language, they are very familiar with the living culture of Irish and have an opportunity to internalise that culture. They understand the descriptive power of the language and their respect for the language community grows. They identify with the community and are encouraged to use the language in the language community¹⁰.

ELEMENT: Focusing on how Irish works as a language

Students should be able to:

- 2.1 notice rich and accurate input in all language skills and re-use examples of good language
- 2.2 recognise and acquire grammar and syntax
- 2.3 recognise significant grammatical and syntactic differences between Irish, English and other languages in order to avoid cross-linguistic inaccuracies
- 2.4 use the appropriate language register to suit the occasion, audience and type of communication
- 2.5 recognise and understand personal mistakes in speaking and writing Irish and reflect on the reasons for these mistakes
- 2.6 recognise and use accurate spelling and punctuation
- 2.7 recognise the dialectal richness of Irish, differentiating between dialects, and noticing differences in pronunciation and dialectal forms/colloquialisms

ELEMENT: Fostering awareness of the culture of the language

Students should be able to:

- 2.8 choose an aspect/s of Irish-language culture to study and present in a modern, creative way
- 2.9 complete a project/oral presentation on aspects of the living culture of the Irish language

ELEMENT: Fostering awareness of bilingualism

Students should be able to:

- 2.10 demonstrate an appreciation of what it means to be plurilingual
- 2.11 explore cultures of lesser-used languages and compare with other languages

¹⁰ Language community: a community where the target language is spoken as language of communication in the home and in domains outside of it.

Strand 3: Learner's self-awareness

Students concentrate on their own individual attributes as language learners. They understand how to use learning strategies that are appropriate to themselves. They understand their own personal motivation in using the language and take personal ownership of the language and of the process of acquiring fluency.

ELEMENT: Developing self-understanding as a language learner

Students should be able to:

- 3.1 recognise their personal learning style, developing learning strategies to facilitate the acquisition of language skills
- 3.2 deal effectively with feedback
- 3.3 exploit opportunities for language use in the language community

ELEMENT: Developing self-directed learning

Students should be able to:

- 3.4 make independent decisions as learners
- 3.5 carry out self-assessment on their progress in each of the language skills
- 3.6 share feedback with other learners on personal learning in language and learning skills
- 3.7 use language resources (dictionaries, online dictionaries, grammar books, spelling and grammar checkers, etc.) to achieve accuracy and fluency in speaking and writing the language

ELEMENT: Developing an understanding of personal motivation to learn the language

Students should be able to:

- 3.8 demonstrate an understanding of their personal motivation to use the language in the language community
- 3.9 take steps which reflect their personal motivation to advance their accuracy and fluency in the language

Assessment and Reporting

Assessment in education involves gathering, interpreting and using information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and can be used in a variety of ways, such as to record and report achievement, to determine appropriate routes for learners to take through a differentiated curriculum, or to identify specific areas of difficulty or strength for a given learner. While different techniques may be employed for formative, diagnostic and summative purposes, the focus of the assessment and reporting is on the improvement of student learning. To do this it must fully reflect the aim of the curriculum.

The junior cycle places a strong emphasis on assessment as part of the learning process. This approach requires a more varied approach to assessment in ensuring that the assessment method or methods chosen are fit for purpose, timely and relevant to the students. Assessment in Junior Cycle Irish will optimise the opportunity for students to become reflective and active participants in their learning and for teachers to support this. This rests upon the provision for learners of opportunities to negotiate success criteria against which the quality of their work can be judged by peer, self, and teacher assessment; and upon the quality of the focused feedback they get in support of their learning.

Providing focused feedback to students on their learning is a critical component of high-quality assessment and a key factor in building students' capacity to manage their own learning and their motivation to stick with a complex task or problem. Assessment is most effective when it moves beyond marks and grades, and reporting focuses not just on how the student has done in the past but on the next steps for further learning. This approach will ensure that assessment takes place as close as possible to the point of learning. Final assessment still has a role to play, but is only one element of a broader approach to assessment.

Essentially, the purpose of assessment and reporting at this stage of education is to support learning. Parents/guardians should receive a comprehensive picture of student learning. Linking classroom assessment and other assessment with a new system of reporting that culminates in the awarding of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will offer parents/guardians a clear and broad picture of their child's learning journey over the three years of junior cycle. To support this, teachers and schools will have access to an Assessment Toolkit. Along with a guide to the Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) process, the Assessment Toolkit will include learning, teaching and assessment support material related to:

- formative assessment
- planning for and designing assessment
- ongoing assessment for classroom use
- judging student work – looking at expectations for students and features of quality
- reporting for parents and students
- thinking about assessment: ideas, research and reflections
- a glossary.

The Assessment Toolkit will enable schools and teachers to engage with the new assessment system and with the reporting arrangements in an informed way, with confidence and clarity.

Assessment for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)

The assessment of Irish for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will comprise two Classroom-Based Assessments: Language portfolio and Language Task; an Assessment Task and a final examination. The Classroom-Based Assessments will allow students to demonstrate their language, communicative, and interactive abilities in ways not possible in a formal examination. The assessments will be closely related to the day-to-day work in the classroom. There will be an Assessment Task to complete after the second Classroom-Based Assessment. The Assessment Task will be related to the learning outcomes on which the second Classroom-Based Assessment is based. This Assessment Task will be sent to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for marking along with the final examination.

Rationale for Classroom-Based Assessments in Irish

During the three years, students will have opportunities to enjoy and acquire the language across the three strands.

Figure 4: Strands and elements of the specification

| | S1: Communicative competence | S2: Language and cultural awareness | S3: learners' self-awareness |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Elements | Listening | Focusing on how Irish works as a language | Developing understanding as a language learner |
| | Reading | Fostering awareness about the culture of the language | Developing self-directed learning |
| | Spoken production | Fostering awareness of bilingualism | Developing an understanding of personal motivation to learn the language |
| | Spoken interaction | | |
| | Writing | | |

Students will engage in various language activities and tasks:

- communicating and interacting with the language community
- listening, reading and writing for a range of purposes
- enhancing awareness of the culture of the language
- developing awareness of plurilingualism
- focusing on how the language works
- developing self-awareness as a language learner.

Through these activities they will develop knowledge, understanding and skills in language and literacy, thereby achieving the learning outcomes across the strands. The Classroom-Based Assessments offer students opportunities to apply the language skills and knowledge gained to various settings, audiences and meaningful communicative purposes.

Junior Cycle Irish comprises two Classroom-Based Assessments. Classroom-Based Assessments will relate to the students' learning during second and third year of junior cycle education. Classroom-Based Assessments are similar to the formative assessment that occurs every day in every class. However, in the case of the Classroom-Based Assessments, the teacher's judgement is recorded for the purpose of subject learning and assessment review, and for the school's reporting to parents and students.

Classroom-Based Assessment 1: Language portfolio

Students will create a language portfolio with samples of their work. The language portfolio focuses on the language learning process and places the student and their learning journey at the centre of teaching, learning and assessment. This gives students an opportunity to set personal learning goals, showcase their work, reflect on the work and view progress.

The language portfolio may include a range of student-created texts, e.g. projects, learning logs, creative pieces (poems/songs etc. created by the student) reflective pieces, recorded material (audio-visual and visual), texts, presentations completed etc.¹¹

Evidence of learning

As evidence of their learning, students choose **three portfolio items** to submit for assessment. One **sound/video piece** must be included.

Students should make use of a **literary text** or texts (this can be from their study of local/oral literature or from the literature list) from the list of prescribed texts as a stimulus for at least one of the chosen portfolio items to be submitted.

Students outline the reasons for personally selecting the three pieces of work.

¹¹ This is not an exhaustive list.

Classroom-Based Assessment 2: Communicative task

The Communicative task gives students the opportunity to choose a subject, topic or issue they are interested or which is important to them, and explore it over a period of time. In this task, strong emphasis is placed on the student's oral competency and interaction and their link to the language community. Students may choose any one of the following formats to complete the task: interview, role play, presentation, drama, or conversation in response to a stimulus. Students can work individually, in pairs or in a group for this task. However, it must be ensured that each student participates/has a clear role and that each student makes a constructive contribution to the task.

Students are given an opportunity to:

- interact with classmates, the teacher and the language community
- enhance language skills and richness
- develop general skills (researching, time management, self-management, working with others, etc.)
- assume ownership of learning.

Student may use piece(s) from local literature and/or literary texts from the literature list for second and/or third year, as a stimulus for the topic/subject for this task.

Evidence of learning

As evidence of their learning the students research, prepare, give a short classroom presentation and respond to questions from classmates.

Features of quality

Features of quality support student and teacher judgement of the Classroom-Based Assessments and are the criteria that will be used by teachers to assess the pieces of student work. Features of quality will be provided in the assessment guidelines for Junior Cycle Irish. All students will complete both CBAs.

Table 3: Completion of Classroom Based-Assessments

| | Completed | SLAR |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| CBA 1 | Towards the end of second year | One review meeting |
| CBA 2 | Middle of second term in third year | One review meeting |

Assessing the Classroom-Based Assessments

More detailed material on assessment for reporting in Junior Cycle Irish, setting out details of the practical arrangements related to assessment of the Classroom-Based Assessments, will be available in separate assessment guidelines. This will include, for example, the suggested content and formats for student work and support in using 'on-balance' judgement in relation to the features of quality. The NCCA's Assessment Toolkit will also include substantial resource material for use in ongoing classroom assessment of Junior Cycle Irish as well as providing a detailed account of the Subject Learning and Assessment Review process.

Assessment Task

On completion of the Classroom-Based Assessments, students will undertake an Assessment Task. This assessment task will be completed after the second Classroom-Based Assessment component and is marked by the State Examinations Commission.

The Assessment Task will encompass some or all of the following elements:

- students' ability to evaluate new knowledge or understanding that has emerged through their experience of the Classroom-Based Assessment
- students' capacity to reflect on the skills they have developed, and to apply them to unfamiliar situations
- students' ability to reflect on how their value system has been influenced through their experience of the Classroom-Based Assessment.

Inclusive assessment practices

This specification facilitates inclusive assessment practices whether as part of ongoing assessment or the Classroom-Based Assessments. Where a school judges that students have a specific physical or learning difficulty, reasonable accommodations can be put in place to reduce, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the students' performance in the Classroom-Based Assessments.

The accommodations, for example the support provided by a special needs assistant or the support of assistive technologies, should be in line with the arrangements the school has put in place to support the students' learning throughout the school year.

The final examination

The final examination will be set by the State Examinations Commission at two levels: Ordinary and Higher level. This exam will be held at the end of third year.

Students will sit a two-hour examination in which they will be asked to demonstrate their linguistic abilities in various language and literary tasks demanding personal interactive communication. Table 5 below shows the weighting of marks for receptive (listening and reading) and productive skills (creative composition, language awareness, personal responses to literary texts).

Table 4: Assessed in Final Examination

| Evaluating ability/skill | Higher level | Ordinary level |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Listening in context | ✓ | ✓ |
| Reading in context | ✓ | ✓ |
| Communicative composition tasks | ✓ | ✓ |
| Personal/communicative responses to literary texts | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 5: Weightings of marks

| Skills | Higher level | Ordinary level |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Receptive skills | 35% | 55% |
| Productive skills | 55% | 35% |

Appendix A:

The CEFR Common Reference Levels – global scale

Proficient user

- C2** Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
- C1** Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

Independent user

- B2** Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
- B1** Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Basic user

- A2** Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
- A1** Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Appendix B:

The Common Reference Levels–self-assessment grid

Understanding

Listening

- A1** I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.
-
- A2** I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.
-
- B1** I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
-
- B2** I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.
-
- C1** I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.
-
- C2** I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.

Reading

- A1** I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.
-
- A2** I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.
-
- B1** I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.
-
- B2** I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
-
- C1** I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.
-
- C2** I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.

Speaking

Spoken interaction

-
- A1** I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
-
- A2** I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself
-
- B1** I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).
-
- B2** I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.
-
- C1** I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.
-
- C2** I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.

Spoken production

-
- A1** I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.
-
- A2** I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.
-
- B1** I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
-
- B2** I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
-
- C1** I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
-
- C2** I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.

Writing

- A1** I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.
-
- A2** I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.
-
- B1** I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.
-
- B2** I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.
-
- C1** I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.
-
- C2** I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.



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NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
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