Written submission: Consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate English specification

NCCA is redeveloping Leaving Certificate English. The aim of this consultation is to obtain the open and honest views of all stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, and other interested parties. The feedback gained from the consultation will inform the work of the development group in preparing the final specification.

NCCA would greatly appreciate your feedback on the draft specification which can be found here: https://ncca.ie/media/kocjunfw/lc_english-draft-specification_for-consultation.pdf

When providing feedback, observations or comments, please reference the specific section and / or relevant learning outcomes.

The closing date for this consultation is May 2nd 2025 at 5pm.

Data protection and open data section

NCCA is committed to protecting your privacy and does not collect any personal information about you through this written submission, other than information that you provide by your own consent. Where a respondent selects 'yes' to the question: *Are you consenting to be listed as a respondent to this consultation*, respondents are consenting to having their name / organisation's name published in the final report as respondents to the consultation.

Where a respondent selects 'yes' to the question: *Are you consenting for your submission to be published*, respondents are consenting to having their submission published on ncca.ie.

Any personal information you volunteer to the NCCA will be respected and NCCA will apply the highest standards of security and confidentiality in accordance with GDPR (2016) and the Data Protection Acts (1998 - 2018). Further information on the NCCA's Data Protection Policy can be found at https://ncca.ie/en/legal-disclaimer-and-data-protection/.

NCCA, as a public body operating under the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021), is required to publish publicly funded research. In accordance with this Directive, any data from this will be anonymised and aggregated and only made available after the final report is published. This is expected to be in June 20254. All open data is made available alongside the report itself on the website www.ncca.ie

NCCA may use the data you provide in the form of quotations. Where this happens, the quote will be anonymised.

Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

The Heritage Council

Are you consenting to be listed as a respondent to this consultation?

- o   Yes X
- o   No

If yes, please enter the name you wish to have published in the final report.

Dr Eoin Ó Donnchadha, Heritage in Education Policy Development Officer, The Heritage Council

Are you consenting to have the submission published on ncca.ie?

- o   Yes X
- o   No

Rationale, Aim, and Key Competencies [pages 3 - 9]

Rationale: The rationale (pages 3 – 4) outlines the nature of Leaving Certificate English and the role and importance of Leaving Certificate English in realising the purpose and vision of senior cycle.

Aims: The Aims (page 4) outline the over-arching purpose of the subject and the relevance and expected impact of the subject on student learning.

In your opinion, do the rationale and aims capture the overarching purpose and nature of Leaving Certificate English; the importance of the subject in realising the vision of senior cycle and the relevance and expected impact of this subject on student learning. Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

The draft specification "Rationale" and "Aims" sections do a very good job of capturing the overarching purpose and nature of Leaving Certificate English.
In terms of student impact, we would like more consideration to be given to the objects of study in this subject being appreciated as examples of cultural heritage. These include examples of our textual and literary heritage, but also the English language itself and oral expression via English (in its diversity) as intangible cultural heritage. To reflect this more clearly in the final specification's aims, the following amendments are suggested for your consideration.

1) Where the draft specification reads "an awareness of the value of literature in its diverse forms for enriching their perceptions, for enhancing their sense of cultural identities, and for creating experiences of aesthetic pleasure", we recommend the text is changed to read as follows: "An awareness of the value of literature in its diverse forms for enriching their perceptions, for enhancing their sense of cultural identities, **for contributing to their cultural heritage,** and for creating experiences of aesthetic pleasure"

2) Where the text reads "a respect and appreciation for language used accurately and appropriately", we propose the following wording which simultaneously values accuracy without underappreciating that language and oral expression are examples of intangible cultural heritage and consequently can reflect diversity: "A respect and appreciation for language and **oral expression as forms of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for language's accurate and appropriate use**".

Key Competencies: Key competencies is an umbrella term which refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop in an integrated way during senior cycle. These competencies are linked and can be combined; can improve students' overall learning; can help students and teachers to make meaningful connections between and across different areas of learning; and are

important across the curriculum.

The draft specification sets out examples of how key competencies can be developed in Leaving Certificate English on pages 7 – 9.

In your opinion, does this section effectively capture the development of student key competencies in Leaving Certificate English? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This section does a good job of capturing the development of student key competencies. It is noteworthy in relation to student wellbeing that the draft specification states that "through their engagement with the varied texts and sources on the course, students will appreciate, celebrate and understand diverse identities and cultures. In this exploration, students are encouraged to develop and express their own personal identity, values and beliefs and contribute to an inclusive, supportive classroom space." This is particularly positive and accords well with our research findings which indicate that the exploration and representation of diverse cultural heritages (including via examples of textual heritage) has the potential to have positive impacts on student wellbeing, including for students from underrepresented groups. Interestingly, our research highlighted English as an important subject area where this can be achieved.

Strands of study and learning outcomes [pages 10 - 18]

Course overview: The course overview sets out the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions for students in four strands. The specification emphasises a non-linear, integrated approach to learning across the strands.
The details of the strands are described on pages 10 - 18 of the specification.

In your opinion, does the structure illustrate the connected nature of the strands and the development of student knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an appropriate way? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

No comment.

Strand 1: Exploring [pages 12 - 13]

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This section does a very good job of outlining student learning. In terms of improvement, we have one suggestion to make, which we hope you will consider. Where the text reads: "a diverse range of texts including traditional canonical texts, literature from an Irish perspective, 20th and 21st century texts, texts from a variety of media including film texts", we would suggest including a reference to our textual and literary heritage, as well as to texts showcasing diverse cultural perspectives. This might be achieved by adopting the following wording, for instance: "a diverse range of texts including traditional canonical texts, **examples of Ireland's textual and literary heritage,** literature from an Irish perspective, 20th and 21st century texts, texts from a variety of media including film texts, **and texts that reflect perspectives from one or more underrepresented groups (e.g. Mincéirí, members of the LGBTQI+ community, BAME individuals, individuals with immigrant and mixed heritages)."** This suggestion is based on our research which highlights English's connections to cultural heritage, including via texts, and the subject's utility in fostering inclusivity and the representation of underrepresented cultural heritages.

Strand 2: Creating [pages 14 - 15]

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This strand does a very good job of outlining student learning. In terms of improvement, we have one suggestion only. Where the text reads "exploring and using a range of writing starters, idea prompts and creative modelling as strategies to support the creative process", we would advocate for the inclusion of illustrative examples to enhance clarity for teachers and learners. Among the examples of writing strategies or prompts suggested, we would ask that consideration be given to the inclusion of "**historical commemoration, and reflections on place, identity or heritage via creative writing**". This will encourage students to explore their creativity with the English language and with literature via their own local and personal contexts, including their heritage. Our research findings suggest that student engagement is increased when students explore their own heritage via their school subjects.

Strand 3: Comparing [page 16]

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

> This strand does a very good job of outlining student learning. Again, we have only one suggestion for improvement. Where the text elaborates on what students learn, identifying "the contextual, historical and social influences on texts… [and] the ways concepts, identities, places and groups are presented differently in different texts", we would ask that consideration be given to including the following: "**…, and the extent to which different texts can be considered part of our literary heritage, and why.**" This change embeds greater challenge for students, while also promoting access via engagement by encouraging students to view the texts they study as potential examples of their shared literary heritage. Explicit exploration of literary texts dealing with identities, places and groups as heritage also makes sense given that (as our research shows) heritage is intimately bound up with the concepts of people, place and identity.

Strand 4: Analysing [pages 17 - 18]

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

> This strand outlines student learning very well and very clearly. With respect to heritage specifically, there is one comment that might be made. In relation to learning outcome "13. Develop an understanding of the context, conventions, purpose and forms of a range of texts", we would ask that consideration be given in the final text to the inclusion of a reference to heritage. This is because literary conventions, including poetic conventions, are part of our cultural heritage.

Additional Assessments (AAC) [pages 22 - 25]

The draft specification for Leaving Certificate English outlines two Additional Assessment Components, an oral examination and a creative writing task. Descriptions of these AACs, the descriptors of quality and the timing of these components can be found on pages 22 - 25 of the draft specification. It is proposed that the Oral Examination would take place at the end of fifth year and the Creative Writing Task would be submitted in term 1 of sixth year.

AAC: Oral Examination (pages 22 – 23)

The Oral Examination focuses on communicative competence through a discussion on the comparative study.
Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on the **AAC: Oral Examination** in Leaving Certificate English with reference to:
- impact on motivation on students
- alignment with the learning outcomes in the specification
- opportunities for the development of key competencies, and
- access and challenge for students.

> This section of the specification is very clear.

Is there a preferred timing for this component? If so, when?

> No comment.

How does the impact on teaching and learning influence the timing of the Oral Examination?

> No comment.

The specification proposes that the Oral Examination should take place at the end of fifth year. What implications is this timing likely to have for students, schools and the State Examinations system?

> No comment.

What benefits and opportunities might an oral examination offer LC English students, schools and the system?

There may be an opportunity here to enhance student motivation and engagement by allowing students to prepare and discuss one additional text of their choosing not from a prescribed list for this exam, but rather one that has a connection to their own heritage (e.g. local, national or community context). This could facilitate student engagement with the assessment task, while also enhancing accessibility. Perhaps, in relation to this text, students could be examined on their ability to communicate regarding their choice of text and their personal connections to this text, as well as it's comparison to the chosen prescribed texts. This could mean examiners may not require in-depth knowledge of the student's unprescribed, chosen text.

What challenges do you think an oral examination might create for the student, the school and the system?

Consideration might be given in the final specification text to issues of register and dialect and the appropriateness of their use in the oral assessment (links might be made with audience here), while also recognising that (i) oral expression and language are forms of intangible cultural heritage, (ii) that specific features of language may be associated with specific communities and their heritage and these should be respected and not marginalized or disadvantaged, and (iii) that language changes and evolves over time. Failure to address these perspectives is likely to hinder access and disadvantage students from underrepresented groups whose use of English may not always align very closely with the academic standard.

The Oral Examination focuses on communicative proficiency through a discussion on the comparative study. What is your opinion on this mode of assessing the comparative study?

No comment.

AAC: Creative Writing Task (pages 23 – 25)

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on the **AAC: Creative Writing Task** in Leaving Certificate English with reference to:
- impact on motivation on students
- alignment with the learning outcomes in the specification
- opportunities for the development of key competencies, and
- access and challenge for students.

The only comment we would like to make here is that we note "engagement with the task" is a criterion for grading this assessment. Our research shows that learning about their own heritage via their school subjects is something that can promote and enhance student engagement. Consequently, there is room for heritage in its various forms to inform students' creative writing in this assessment, contributing to their engagement and success.

Do you have any other comments on the assessment arrangements and alignment with the rationale, aims and learning outcomes of the specification?

No comment.

Supports for Successful Enactment

What supports would schools need to enable the successful implementation of an oral examination for LC English?

No comment.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on supports that might be needed for successful enactment of this subject specification.

The implementation of this specification could benefit from the support of various stakeholders, including those in education and those in the cultural heritage sector. At present the Heritage Council is developing policy and initiatives relating to heritage in education with a view to doing more to support teachers and learners in this space. In line with our strategic plan, and as a leader in the heritage sector, the Heritage Council will continue to "support and enable heritage-based education and civic engagement that is inclusive and accessible to all" (Heritage Council, 2023, p. 41). We also intend to "strengthen existing partnerships and develop new collaborations with the educational sectors", including at post-primary level (Heritage Council, 2023, p. 41). One would envisage cultural heritage organisations and cultural institutions choosing to employ some of their resources to support the implementation and delivery of a new English subject specification that acknowledges and appreciates cultural heritage's connections to the subject and includes learning outcomes which directly engage students with, and encourage them to appreciate, preserve, promote and protect those aspects of their cultural heritage that are interwoven with the subject, including texts, literature, language and oral expression. Likewise, these organisations and institutions are likely to want to support the delivery of a subject specification that

takes cognisance of diversity, equity and inclusion, and makes room for examples of cultural heritage associated with groups who have been traditionally underrepresented and/or marginalised.