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.

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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?

National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

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

- o **Yes**
- o ~~No~~

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

Emer Whyte and Amy Lucas

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

- o **Yes**
- 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 rationale and aims do capture the purpose of Leaving Certificate English in many aspects. The focus on building capacity in reading, speaking and writing is supported by the acknowledgement of a need for a range of oral, visual and digital texts. However, there needs to be an addition of oracy and aural along with gesture to portray rationale for English.

Key Competencies: Key competencies are 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.

> From an inclusivity lens, this section does recognise that students should have many opportunities to make their key competencies visible and the learning outcomes should be achievable relative to students' individual aptitudes and abilities.

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.

The diagram on page 11 does not show how the 4 strands are interconnected with one another. There is a danger that teachers will view these in isolation. The recognition of reading for pleasure, exploration of a variety of texts and opportunities to listen to others views and orally express opinions works to achieve an inclusive curriculum.

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.

a) More clarity needed for outcome 3 *'develop language competence for effective communication…'*. The learning outcome assumes the development of proficiency in language skills which may disadvantage or pose a challenge for students with speech and language or specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia. Clarity around planning to support such students is needed, particularly those who fall just above the line for reasonable accommodations.

b) Clarity for planning for teaching and learning- there should be a list of comprehension strategies included in an Appendix. Teachers will often lack this skill. The '*students learn about'* section needs to be spaced more clearly next to the numbered learning outcome e.g. 5 should be across from 'writing and speaking'. The use of 'etc' creates anxiety for teaching planning and should be avoided.

c) Alignment with the rationale and aims- There is good alignment in general- the word '*gestures'* is not represented adequately but oracy, listening, reading and writing is.

d) Opportunities for the development of key competencies- yes there will be opportunities with the range of text and development of vocabulary for textual exploration

e) Access and challenge for all students- In order to access texts, there will need to be choice in the text types (such as graphic novels, texts that have a High-Low reading age, texts that have accompanying audible notes, braille features and ISL add-ons). It is important that when creating a text list that these things are taken into account. The genres and sub genres need to have breadth and depth to cater for a wide variety of students. Options for spoken responses to texts will need to allow for alternative communication devices, gestures, facial expressions and visuals to help develop communication skills.

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.

a) Clarity for planning for teaching and learning- remove the 'etc' in the '*students learn about'* as it creates ambiguity. It would be helpful to include an Appendices that includes strategies and supports for writing. This is helpful in LCA Specifications

b) Alignment with the rationale and aims- Yes it needs to be explicit that written word is the process of writing.

c) Yes there are opportunities for the development of key competencies

d) Access and challenge for all students- There needs to be emphasis on the use of digital technology and accessibility tools that will allow students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways and that this flexibility will also be included in the summative assessment moments to remove as many barriers as possible.

Overall, this strand presents as being inclusive for all students. Learning outcome 8 'use strategies and supports for planning, drafting….' and 'writing starters, idea prompts and creative modelling acknowledges the need for scaffolding for all students. It also places an onus on the teacher to provide such strategies to facilitate students developing skills.

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.

a) Again, this strand does align with the rationale and aims and provides inclusive opportunities to develop key competencies. Consideration must be given for students who would find '*engaging in two way interactions*' challenging. Students with speech and language difficulties, social and emotional difficulties or some student with ASD may encounter difficulties formulating *'coherent, considered and supported oral responses'* and or *'discussing complex ideas'.* Clarity on how best to support such students for planning for teaching, learning and assessment is a must. There needs to be clarity on whether there will be an element of choice between the systematic modes that can be used to explore texts.

b) This strand will need to be emphasised as a skill that is developed across the board and not just for the purposes of the AAC. It is important that students are afforded opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned about the texts in a creative and broad way. Clarity needs to be given as to whether students will be given choice to work on their own or in groups and will they be scaffolded in the modes that they chose.

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, with the correct support from teachers, appears to be accessible for all learners. Students should be afforded time to build up capacity in applying a critical lens to reading of texts. Teachers should empower students to use

accessibility features. There will need to be scope on analytical skills and a connection with what students learn about to develop these skills

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.

The oral assessment component is a welcome addition and provides more inclusive access when it comes to assessment students' learning. It aligns perfectly with all the key competences, especially *'communicating'.* It states that the focus of the oral component will be on *Strand 3: Comparing.* This may prove challenging for some. Clarity on accommodations that will be in place for students for example will the questions / comparative modes be differentiated to suit the level of students etc? Students will need to be given choice in the mode that they use to access the assessment. Some students might need to use text to speech, others may need ISL or support from an SNA or the use of visuals to understand questions. It will be important that students are allowed to creatively engage with two-way communication to ensure accuracy, fluency and coherence to actively listen and respond in an authentic way that promotes their confidence. The types of questions asked should be broad enough to scaffold student knowledge but to also build confidence.
The fact that students will have to discuss and respond to questions about the comparative texts will motivate them to engage with a variety of text forms in a systematic way. The fact that this carries 20% of marks in 5th year should motivate students to engage with study throughout 5th year and reduce overwhelm in 6th year.

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

> End of 5th year is the right time. During June exams works as it prepares them for a supportive environment conducive to assessment.

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

> The timing would have an impact on the teaching and learning. Teachers will need to prioritise learning outcomes in all four strands to ensure that competencies are built up to be able to effectively engage with the assessment. Oral Assessment modes will need to be built into the design of teaching and learning moments throughout fifth year.

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?

> It would mean that teachers and students would have to delve into comparative modes early in 5th year. It would also mean that students would have only months to develop oral communication skills along with the critical thinking skills to compare texts under a range of modes. Students will feel the pressures of external assessment over the course of two years as opposed to the end. Schools will need to release teachers for the assessments and have extra supports available in schools for reasonable accommodations and the SEC will struggle to recruit, adequately train, moderate and support personnel for the oral and written components of English.

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

> It has many benefits, one being that students who have certain learning difficulties would possibly achieve higher grades from the oral component rather than a full written exam. However, as stated previously, more thought is needed around the differentiation for students at different levels especially if it remains a common assessment. The benefit is an alternative mode to demonstrate knowledge other than pen and paper. The breaking down of assessments allows for the workload to be more manageable but schools and systems need to adequately prepare and support this. Only a small amount of teachers have the skills developed to assess oracy skills and this will need to be prioritised in teacher development and support.

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

> Challenges will be for students with communication difficulties, emotional and social challenges and for students with high anxiety to access and engage. Schools will also need to be able to free up adequate space to engage with tasks and to ensure there is no disruption. Schools will also have to reduce the number of assessments they conduct in schools to reflect different modes and reduce pressure on young people.

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?

> From a special educational needs lens, the comparative study assessment would have to incorporate a range of questions based on Bloom's taxonomy to allow all students a chance to achieve a high descriptor. The oral assessment component should also be differentiated to reflect the students' level as a student with learning difficulties may struggle to make connections, gain insights and evaluate ideas with complex comparative modes. This mode is effective, but it would be beneficial if students were enabled to support their communication medium by bringing in a stimulus or by creating a product. That way they have choice and multiple means of representing and expressing their learning.

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.

> Students will be motivated to engage with writing that is meaningful and not learned off for an exam. The fact that this will be in term 1 reduces the overwhelm of term.
> There is good alignment but it is needs to be more explicit that all of the learning outcomes in each strand is integrated.
> Good opportunities for the development of key competencies.
> Students are given the opportunity to access by being allowed to type, use assistive technology features. Spelling and Grammar Waivers will need to be applied where needed and students can be challenged by a broad scope of a task that allows them to take creative flair and incorporate it into a task.

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

> Reasonable Accommodations need to reflect the school student support files and plans that identify needs rather than the need for diagnosis and paperwork. This needs to be in place to ensure that all students who require accessibility tools can access them.

Supports for Successful Enactment

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

> Schools need circular guidance on the need to reduce over assessment and how to bring alternative assessments to the fore.
> They will need to ensure that there is adequate space for hosting assessments.
> They will need support and time given to support the extra bureaucratic elements associated with increased assessments (such as student lists, absences, repeat assessments, how assessments can be appealed, how to ensure students can receive their ongoing reasonable accommodations, supports from Reasonable Accommodations that allow students needs to be prioritised and barriers removed)

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