



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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Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

ASTI

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

- ☐ Yes
- ☐

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

Ms.Catherine Barry and Ms.Siobhan O' Donovan

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

- ☐ Yes
- ☐



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.

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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.

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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.

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.

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.



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.

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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.

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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.

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

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

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?

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

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

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?



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.

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

Supports for Successful Enactment

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

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

ASTI Submission on Leaving Cert English
Specification 29/04/25(K.Barry and S.O' Donovan)

The rationale and aims offer clarity to the English teacher and are quite positive.They echo the rationale and aims of the current English syllabus and this will be comforting to teachers.It is the view of the ASTI that the current English Syllabus is excellent and needed very little changes (if any).The rationale promises that students will engage



with a wide variety of texts that “give voice to varied cultural identities, representations and social perspectives”. However, in the interests of inter-candidate equity, particularly in the oral assessment component this variety of texts may prove problematic as it would require all examiners to be very familiar with all texts. As a result, it may become necessary to limit the list of texts and thus the varied experience the rationale promises. This is one example of several contradictory elements within the Learning Outcomes and also between the Learning Outcomes and the proposed assessment structure. It is crucial that such contradictions are addressed and resolved before implementation can be considered.

Key Competencies/Strands of learning

There is a contradiction in the line that “The learning outcomes specifies will not be achieved in a singular encounter, but will be developed by students in their recurring encounters with texts in various ways”. This aim is contradicted by an assessment structure that will necessitate a modular approach where students will “bank” areas such as the comparative study relatively early on. Furthermore, if oracy is seen as a strand that is interwoven throughout the Specification it seems counter-intuitive to hold is the oral assessment at the end of fifth year. The strands of study and learning outcomes are very broad and may lead to a situation where teachers will aim for variety over depth.

In relation to literacy, it is perhaps wise to see this not as a binary question of being able/unable to read and write but rather as a range of competencies that exist along a continuum between basic, functional literacy at one end and, at the other end, the ability to comprehend and compose lengthy, complex and sophisticated texts. The ASTI does not believe that this Specification delivers when it comes to moving students along that continuum. Recent OECD research on adult literacy reveals how Irish adults compare with those in other OECD member states, looking not just at functional literacy but also at the ability to engage with complex and challenging text. Shockingly, only 5% of Irish adults have the highest level of literacy, compared to an OECD average of 9%. Perhaps the Leaving Cert English Specification needs to focus more on language and literacy, including the study of challenging literature which builds the capacity for academic and lifelong reading and focus less on podcasts and looking at pictures.

Many Leaving Certificate subjects contribute to literacy levels within the general population, building as they do the knowledge that is essential to comprehension, but none does so more than the subject of English. It is the ASTI’s position that the subject can act as an opportunity to develop literacy through the aesthetic appreciation of and functional analysis of literacy and non-literary texts and texts forms, a process which is inextricably linked with the development of students’ ability to express themselves articulately in oral format. This development requires a level of focus and prioritisation that is not evident in the Specification in its current format. A key reason for this is the inclusion of socially worthy, but aspirational learning



outcomes that amount to construct irrelevance as they fall outside the already very generous perimeters of how subject English is seen worldwide. Studying English can contribute significantly to students' personal growth, but it should be remembered that this personal growth is generally accepted as being growth through English and not growth as English; personal and social learning outcomes should not take the place of academic learning outcomes that are either unique to the subject, or where English is the main curricular site of their development.

An example of this construct irrelevance is the competency of "participating in society and working with others". This is a worthy aspiration for students but it is not difficult to see how it cannot form part of any assessable model of the subject. The heterogeneous nature of the secondary classroom, both in terms of ability and in terms of motivation, render any consideration of collaborative or group assessment untenable and inequitable. Similarly, the phrase "transform the society in which they live" is

perhaps expecting a little too much of the student of English.

The phrase "Students will reflect on their own learning, being open to feedback and using it to improve their own learning" attempts to make affective and personality-associated outcomes compulsory and cannot be mandated or assessed in any meaningful way. Perhaps a verb change from "will" to "should" would help here.

Course Overview

It is of some concern that having completed the comparative study at the end of fifth year students will no longer engage in comparative work. Also, the level of ability to interrogate texts comparatively will be considerably lower at the end of Fifth Year. The expectations of SEC examiners must be lower. This has serious implications for the international recognition of Leaving Certificate English. It is not unreasonable to foresee a situation where grades in Leaving Certificate English are not valued, or are less valued than at present, in other jurisdictions. This would be an injustice to young adults who would thus find their ability to study abroad, as well as their future career opportunities, curtailed through no lack of diligence or innate ability on their behalf. The proposed early deadline for submission of the AAC on creative writing probably occurring in term 1 of Sixth Year this will mean that effectively students will cease to develop in this area once this task has been submitted, and that what constitutes a maximum-grade answer will not equal what the most able candidates could produce at the end of sixth year. This reduces the ability to make a valid inference from any Leaving Certificate grade, as it discriminates against candidates who are slower to mature than their classmates. The remaining exam will contain the Single text question, poetry and some comprehension element. An examination which is shorter than either the current Paper I or Paper II yet which carries more percentage weight than either of them necessarily means the concentration of pressure, stakes and thus entirely unnecessary stress for candidates. It is the belief of the ASTI that this proposal is the area of the Specification that entirely gives the lie to oft-repeated



claim that changes to Senior Cycle are being made with the welfare of students in mind and that reduction of examination-linked stress is a key motivating and driving force. Were that to be the case, the examination would at least reflect the fact that it is assessing 60% of a subject that most students have been engaged with since early childhood.

The final exam duration **MUST BE 3 HOURS AT A MINIMUM**. Anything less would not allow for students to meaningfully engage with the questions.

Strand 1 Exploring

This strand is similar to what is current practice however we would question the phrase where students will “speak in a variety of styles and modes”. Strand 2 Creating
Some concerns were raised by members about the meaning of the term “multimodal”. Also, there are fears that this strand will be abandoned as soon as the creative writing AAC is completed.

Strand 3 Comparing

As previously stated the main concern here is that this strand, like strand 2 will be abandoned, in this case at the end of fifth year. Also, the issue of the many hundred examiners being sufficiently familiar with the texts on the comparative list means the choice will have to be limited. Many teachers may object to this but it is a real challenge for the SEC because inter candidate equity must be maintained if the oral is to have integrity. Finally, the students will be a year younger than currently when their comparative skills will be assessed. Therefore, their ability to produce sophisticated comparative analyses will be lesser. Teachers and Examiners will need to be reminded of this to avoid undue pressure being applied on students to reach a standard they cannot. Contradictory imperatives of care for students, realistic aspirations and the requirement of the Leaving Certificate to set a benchmark of academic excellence, potentially collide and cancel each other out in this area.

Strand 4 Analysing

There are no problems with this strand or the language under this heading in the specification. However, it is essential if the skills of being able to analyse and critique a text are to form part of the assessment, as indeed they do, then adequate time **MUST** be given for it to be done meaningfully in the written exam. Once again The ASTI is requesting an exam of 3 hours minimum.

AAC ORAL EXAM

The ASTI broadly welcomes the introduction of an oral exam in English. Much work will need to be done in order to have a national standard that all examiners will be trained on annually so that inter candidate equity will exist. It is imperative that more time be allowed for this work to be undertaken (i.e. a pause in the accelerated reform). Also, if the oral must take place at the end of fifth year then the level of sophistication of the candidates responses will in no way match those that are currently being produced on the written exam. This must be taken into consideration.



Creative writing AAC

The creative writing AAC is an area of the Specification that the ASTI is most concerned about. Authenticating students' work in this AAC will prove very challenging and quite possibly impossible. Teachers are conscious of the vulnerable position they place themselves in should they refuse to authenticate a student's work that the candidate, and his or her parents are claiming to be the candidate's own. Unfortunately, another scenario whereby a teacher may in fact assist their students to a level where the piece is no longer the student's work but the teacher's, is also possible. The worry is that the focus of the student and their parents will be solely on creating/acquiring the best possible response to submit so that the 20% for the AAC can be gained. This would mean the actual aim of organically improving one's writing skills for life will be lost.

The Written Exam

It is the long held view of the ASTI that English should have two papers. However, the specification only allows for 1. It is vital that the student is awarded sufficient time to engage meaningfully with the questions on the paper. Also, in order to encourage the development of creative writing skills as well as comprehension skills this third option on the paper must carry weight and must not be undervalued.

CONCLUSION

It is regrettable that Minister McEntee and her department have not yet agreed to a pause in the "accelerated" Senior Cycle redevelopment to allow for the appropriate preparations to be carried out with care prior to the introduction of the new Subject Specifications. The ASTI regrets the reduction of the English written examination to one paper and are perplexed when it comes to identifying a sensible motive for this decision. While the union is happy to see that an effort is being made to retain all components of the current English Syllabus, we feel that the expansion of the subject through less-relevant learning outcomes and the necessity of preparing and engaging with a complex and multi-faceted assessment process, will lead to a much impoverished classroom experience compared to that of our current students. While the oral exam is a welcome suggestion, The ASTI has concerns around its timing as well as the comprehensive training all examiners will need to do annually. The ASTI also has serious concerns around the Creative Writing AAC and particularly around the validity of it as an assessment. Finally, The ASTI insists that the remaining 60% examination should be spread over two papers, or if not, a single examination must be at least three hours in duration.