



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Consultation Report on the draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Classical Languages: Ancient Greek and Latin

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Introduction

Overview

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in [Equity and Excellence for All](#) (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into several tranches. The redevelopment of Tranche 1 subjects will be completed in 2024 for introduction to schools in 2025. The redevelopment of the specifications for Leaving Certificate Ancient Greek and Latin are included in Tranche 1.

The draft Leaving Certificate Ancient Greek and Latin specifications were made available for national public consultation from 8th December 2023 to 21st March 2024. The aim of this consultation was to seek the open and honest views of the public in relation to the curriculum and assessment arrangements in the new draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Ancient Greek and Latin. The key areas of focus within the consultation were:

- how well the specifications get to the heart of the learning aspired to within the subjects
- the teaching and learning features of classical languages
- course structure, strand designation and learning outcomes
- assessment for certification.

The responses to the consultation indicated a very positive perspective on the specifications overall, with the rationale and aim for each subject being highly affirmed, while the framing of the level of the specifications to allow access to all students was also welcomed. There was a strong level of approval for the strand designations and articulation of learning outcomes as well as a general overall welcome for the detail offered in the 'students learn about' column. The assessment arrangements were broadly welcomed, with provision for a second assessment component assessed at 40% seen as a positive and welcome feature. There was a strong view that more clarity on grammar and vocabulary requirements should be provided, as well as more direction on texts (or recommended texts).

The following sections of this report will elaborate in more detail on aspects of these general findings. Section One provides an overview of the consultation process. Section Two provides insights into the consultation findings while Section Three presents key considerations and conclusions.

Section 1: Consultation Process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022). The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2023) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Methodological approach

The consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate Languages specification included multiple modes of engagement including:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- Teacher focus group - online
- One student focus group - online.
- One student focus - in person

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, written submissions and focus group sessions. Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the consultation while parental consent and student assent were sought for focus group participants under the age of 18. The questions were consistent across all focus groups and reflected the questions from the online questionnaire.

A written record of all discussions was made during each focus group meeting. Data gathered through these groups was anonymised, and all data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2023). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation.

A thematic approach was used to analyse the feedback and was framed by the guiding themes of the consultation. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered. The findings of this analysis are presented in Section Two of this report.

Consultation responses

A focus group session was conducted with 4 teachers of classical languages on Monday 4th March 2024. The session was held virtually and while keeping to the consultation themes identified earlier, it did have a focus on the application of the specification in a school-based environment.

The voice of the student within this consultation process was very strong. A focus group session was conducted online with 16 students from different schools on Thursday 21st March with the participants being 5th and 6th year students of either Ancient Greek or Latin.

Mode of consultation	Overview of participants	Numbers
Online survey	Post Primary Ancient Greek/ Latin Teachers	9
	Third Level Researchers	2
	Other	1
Written Submissions	Oide	1
	CAI-T Other	1 1
Focus Groups	Students	16
	Teachers	4

Table 1: Demographic breakdown of respondents to the consultation

A point to note:

In terms of the submission of the CAI-T it is important to note that this set out the views of 80% of classical language teachers in Ireland

Section 2: Consultation Findings

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The consultation focused on how the specification gets to the heart of the learning aspired to within the subject, the teaching and learning elements of the specification, its course structure, and assessment for certification, including the additional assessment component. The findings can be grouped under the following themes:

- Rationale and Aim
- Teaching and Learning
- The Capstone Text
- Strands and Learning Outcomes
- Assessment

2.1 Rationale and Aim

The Rationale and Aim set out for the study of each language received a very high level of endorsement in the consultation, with all respondents noting that the Rationale and Aim were appropriate. As Oide noted from its written submission:

The rationale for the Classical Languages Specifications for both Ancient Greek and Latin effectively communicate the importance and relevance of studying a classical language in today's world. Both outline the broader contextual background to the origins and roots of the languages well, while also pointing to their influences on modern languages and cultures.

2.2 Teaching and Learning

Senior cycle students are encouraged to develop the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that will enable them to become independent learners and to develop a lifelong commitment to language learning and to reading and analysing texts for study, work or leisure. The Classical Languages specifications support the use of a wide range of teaching and learning approaches. Through engaging in self-directed learning activities and reflection, students will plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning and develop a positive sense of their own capacity to learn.

Respondents were asked if this section provided clarity on students' learning experiences. All respondents from the online survey agreed or strongly agreed that the section did so. All respondents from the online survey also agreed or strongly agreed that the description of the language learning journey was clear and that the description of the role of the language portfolio was clear. In the teacher focus group, there was a consensus that there was, as one teacher (from the online survey) summarised it,:

(a)...great opportunity for students to really connect with Ancient Greek and Latin. The specification is appropriate for teachers in terms of flexibility, yet it gave them great guidance in its delivery.

In terms of the section on whether “learning a classical language” was clear, it was felt that further clarification about the level of grammar and vocabulary required would be needed for both students and teachers to support the level of analysis of the texts. It was suggested that this clarity would be addressed through the provision of a list of indicative vocabulary and grammar items. This was reiterated by the students in the focus group who felt that a vocabulary list prompted many of them to opt for the subject as it gave them a sense of direction and focus. There was a consensus amongst the students that without a vocabulary list they would probably not have chosen the subject.

In terms of the Key Competencies there was a consensus that their role within the specification was clear and coherent. There was a particularly positive response to the way the Key Competencies encouraged and facilitated both student centred learning and cross curricular activity.

2.3 The Capstone Text

The Classical Languages specifications give students the opportunity to explore authentic classical texts in a way that allows them to develop their reading skills within the cultural, historical and literary framework of the times that they were written. The purpose of the Capstone text is to provide a common focus of study and examination for all students, regardless of their individual learning pathways, the textbooks they may have used, and the classical texts they may have explored in a classroom context or independently.

All respondents from the online survey either agreed or agreed strongly that this section provided clarity on the role of the Capstone text. If there were any reservations it was around the idea that a more specific focus on the level of difficulty in terms of the grammar required to engage in the language of the Capstone text should be encapsulated within the specification.

2.4 Strands 1 and 2

Learning outcomes in the Classical Languages specifications are presented in two strands. Strand 1 outcomes relate to Language awareness and understanding of texts and Strand 2 outcomes relate to Literature in Context.

The designation of the two strands of the specification is intended to reflect the centrality of language acquisition, and of understanding texts written in their original language, appreciating their literary value, historical context, and cultural significance. The strands are, however, fundamentally inter-related.

Over 85% of respondents from the online survey agreed that what is to be learned in both strands was clear and a strong majority (71%) felt that the learning outcomes contained within the specification articulate what students should know, understand and be able to do across 180 hours of student engagement. Also, over 85% of respondents felt the ‘students learn about’ column was helpful in providing clarity about what is to be learned.

Respondents were asked if the addition of further learning outcomes could improve the learner experience. Feedback noted that in general the learning outcomes very comprehensively describe

what students of the two classical languages should be able to do by the end of the course of study.

Respondents were asked if there were any specific learning outcomes that were unclear. In general, the view on Learning Outcomes (LOs) was positive although several respondents from the online survey felt that LOs 1.12 (focusing on linguistic patterns) and 1.5 (dealing with vocabulary and grammatical rules) could be a little clearer, especially in the context of the level of linguistic complexity and the range of linguistic patterns and structures implied. It was felt that both LOs could be improved by the addition of greater specificity in the accompanying 'students learn about' column.

All respondents from the online survey either agreed or agreed strongly that the description of what is to be learned in strand 2 was clear, that the learning outcomes contained within the specifications articulate what students should know, understand and be able to do across 180 hours of student engagement and that the 'student learn about' column was helpful in providing clarity on what is to be learned. Respondents did mention the lack of specificity in relation to accidence and syntax and the need for an indicative vocabulary list to address this.

2.5 Assessment - Additional Assessment Component: Text in Context and the Written Assessment arrangements

Arrangements for the Additional Assessment Component, which will take the form of a research study, were welcomed by all respondents in the online survey who agreed or strongly agreed that the arrangements set out provided clarity on what was expected of students during the assessment. The respondents also felt that the level of detail was appropriate and that the descriptors of quality were also at an appropriate level.

In terms of further comments on the Additional Assessment Component, the respondents from the online survey highlighted that the submission dates for the completed work should be considered by the State Examinations Commission to avoid clashing with the submission dates of other subject assessment pieces.

Some respondents drew attention to the number of hours proposed for student engagement in the Additional Assessment Component. They felt that as it was worth 40% of the overall mark, 20 hours of engagement did not reflect the value of the AAC and that more hours should be allocated to it. It was suggested that a brief for the AAC should be issued on an annual basis and that a range of authors and texts would be a useful tool in supporting the research study.

In feedback elicited from the student focus group, there was a suggestion that the Research Study to be completed as part of the AAC should be clearly definable and distinctive from other subjects, specifically history, where there was a possibility of overlap due to the strong cultural/historical emphasis in the specifications. As one student mentioned, Ancient Greece has a huge influence on many aspects of contemporary society and so care should be taken in designing an assessment brief as it may impact on other subject research requirements. In terms of the value of the AAC one student (from a student focus group) commented:

It is great that we have so much going into the exam – that is a game changer for picking the course.

2.6 Supports for Successful Enactment

Respondents were asked if they had any further specific feedback, observations or comments on supports that might be needed for successful enactment of this specification. There were some concerns about the number of suitably qualified teachers to teach the subjects and it was felt that there needed to be more investment in the Professional Master of Education (PME) programmes to encourage a more substantial uptake in these subjects for teachers. It was also felt that there needed to be a Level 8 diploma in Ancient Greek and Latin for teachers who wanted to retrain in order to teach these subjects. The question of whether students would be permitted to take Ancient Greek, Latin and Classical Studies together for their Leaving Certificate was also raised.

Oide, in their submission, suggested that it may be useful for the specification to take cognisance of the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR), in terms of future professional learning experiences. They felt that a tentative and broad alignment with CEFR may give teachers an adaptable framework in which to scaffold their planning and teaching of the classical languages.

The respondents were in general very happy with the specifications for both subjects. They liked the close links that the specifications encouraged in terms of the languages, culture and sociohistorical contexts and felt the specifications linguistically fostered a nuanced understanding and appreciation of the languages and language learning in general. This is reflected in the excerpt below from the CAI-T written submission, which highlighted numerous laudable features, including:

1) 'The breadth and range of the course 2) The scope for differentiation and the centrality of inclusion 3) The centrality of the student in the specification 4) The holistic approach to language learning 5) The emphasis placed on learners reflecting on their own learning journey 6) The engagement with the cultural and historical context of texts and the opportunities for pluricultural learning ...' (CAI-T submission)

Section 3: Considerations and Conclusion

Considerations

Overall, the draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Ancient Greek and Latin were very well received and the consultation fulfilled its objective of initiating discussion and debate on key aspects of the design of these redeveloped subjects.

The consultation yielded feedback which will be considered by the development group when finalising the specifications for Ancient Greek and Latin. Key points for consideration include:

- The possible addition of an indicative vocabulary list and recommended texts (confected and original) and the provision of further clarity on grammar items
- Further clarification in relation to accidence and syntax structures

- Additional detail relating to the role and nature of the Capstone text
- Refinement of some Learning Outcomes – specifically LOs 1.5. and 1.12.

Conclusion

The consultation process was very informative. NCCA acknowledges participants' engagement and is grateful for the open, honest, committed, experience-based and expert feedback received. Consultation feedback indicates there are very positive views on the draft specifications, while acknowledging that provision of professional learning, supports and resources are fundamental to successful implementation. The positive response from teachers indicates a sense of optimism about the opportunity to revitalise the subject, given that it has not undergone any meaningful changes in several decades. Furthermore, the reconfiguration and modernisation of the subjects and the opportunity for students to take the subjects without prior classical language knowledge provides some reasons to be hopeful about their future status.

In conclusion, the overall thrust of consultation feedback elicited considers the draft specifications for the Classical Languages to be balanced and progressive. The specifications set out a foundational framework for teachers and students and incorporate many elements of culture and language in a way which not only facilitates students to appreciate the nuances of the ancient world but also to recognise its resonance with the contemporary world. It is to be hoped that these considerations will support the revitalisation of the subjects of Ancient Greek and Latin in the curriculum.

References

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Appendix One: List of Contributors

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