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?

Irish Stammering Association

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

o <mark>Yes</mark>
o No

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

Irish Stammering Association

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

o <mark>Yes</mark>
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.

> Irish Stammering Association is the nationally recognised organisation committed to building, supporting, and providing services for the stammering community. Stammering and stuttering mean the same thing.
>
> The definitions of fluency and coherence should be clarified in these draft specifications. Fluency is not necessarily an indication of other competencies that are being assessed; a person who stammers can still score highly in areas outlined, even though they may not be regarded as 'fluent'.
>
> Also, confidence and fluency are not mutually inclusive; lack of 'fluency' does not suggest lack of confidence in a subject area, it only suggest the person stammers and therefore has difficulty being 'fluent'.
>
> Being 'fluent' can be a challenge for teenagers who stammer (and those who have other speech, language and communication difficulties / disabilities). This is likely to be exacerbated in any type of formal examinations / assessment setting.
>
> Furthermore, the idea of 'coherence' may also be impacted by stammering due to avoidance and real time 'switching' of words - so that the student does not openly stammer. This concept will be elaborated on a section below.
>
> Irish Stammering Association requests that these terms are clarified or defined so as not to penalise students who stammer. Our specialist team would be happy to support NCCA in this area. Contact details are shared later in this submission.

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.

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.

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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.

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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.

As noted previously, the definitions of fluency and coherence should be clarified in these draft specifications. Being 'fluent' can be a challenge for teenagers who stammer (and those who have other speech, language and communication difficulties / disabilities). This is likely to be exacerbated in any type of formal examinations / assessment setting; this would include examinations that take place in familiar surroundings with familiar people

Furthermore, the impact and presentation of avoidance on 'coherence'. A student may pause to delay a moment of stammering. They may also avoid a particular word and have to switch that word to avoid a moment of stammering. This means the student has to repair the sentence in 'real time', which may present as 'incoherent'. However, it is important to note that this may be an avoidance measure and should not be penalised. A student who stammers may not 'obviously' stammer yet there are a lot of internal adjustments that occur for people who stammer. Stammering can be likened to an iceberg where portions and seen

and heard (repetitions / prolongations / blocks / struggle), yet behaviours and emotions are also below the waterline and not always visible i.e. word switching and avoidance.

The student who stammers may have a potentially high level of achievement but this may not be accounted for within the current 'Descriptors of quality; Oral examination' (Table 2, Page 23).

Confidence and fluency are not mutually inclusive; lack of 'fluency' does not suggest lack of confidence in a subject area, it only suggest the person stammers and therefore has difficulty being 'fluent'. In a formal exam setting a student who stammers may not be seen to "respond with confidence" if they stammer.

Numerous studies commenting on societal views on stammering typically suggest that dysfluency is perceived as a sign of lack of confidence / uncertainty / being dishonest.

The definitions of fluency and coherence for an examination purpose should be clearly accounted for and (re)defined so as not to discriminate against a person with a communication disability. i.e. the person may still stammer, but they are not penalised for stammering or not being fluent.

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?

A clear and supportive system for students who stammer would reduce their anxiety around the oral examination and allow them to focus on meaningful engagement throughout the learning cycle.

Many students who stammer spend valuable time in the run up to exams worrying about how to be fluent / how not stammer (which is not possible as stammering is neurological). This time could be better spent focussing on learning about the content and application of their learning.

The impact of this worry and anxiety should not be overlooked in terms of mental health and general ability to study under pressure. An unclear system is likely to exacerbate these pressures.

A clear and supportive system could also show students who stammer that they will not be penalised for their stammering and that they have strengths as communicators. This would serve them well to go into further education and feel confident to share and participate in discussions.

In addition, it could give them a platform to enter the workplace knowing that their 'fluency' skills are not regarded as a negative feature of their ability to communicate. N.b. the undefinable term of 'good communication skills' litters many job descriptions and can unnecessarily inhibit people who stammer from progressing in the workplace. This review of the draft is an opportunity to provide clear guidelines to support students who stammer.

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

Please see challenges outlined in previous sections relating to challenges for the student.

In relation to school and the system, Irish Stammering Association have recently worked with the State Examinations Commission in relation to supporting candidates who stammer and their experience of the Oral Exam for Leaving Certificate.

We have provided information and guidelines to SEC. We would be happy to meet with NCCA and share similar information and develop guidelines for schools and examiners. Contact details for specialist speech and language therapists are:

Jonathon Linklater, PhD, jl@stammeringireland.ie

Penny Farrell, pf@stammeringireland.ie

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?

As above, definitions and guidelines should be created around terms of 'fluency' or 'communicative proficiency' and 'coherence' with regard to students who stammer and students with speech, language and communication needs. This would maintain the integrity of the examination system whilst allowing for appropriate methods to assess a student's knowledge.

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?

In addition to suggestions given above; supports and guidelines can be developed and shared with schools and students – existing documentation is available from Irish Stammering Association and could be modified and shared on request.

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

Irish Stammering Association staff would be keen to offer support to assist with successful enactment of this subject specification.

Contact details for specialist speech and language therapists are:

Jonathon Linklater, PhD, jl@stammeringireland.ie
Penny Farrell, pf@stammeringireland.ie