



Consultation Report on the Draft Specification for Leaving Certificate Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese

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1.Introduction

Draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese were approved for consultation by Council on 5 November 2019. This report outlines the areas of feedback that emerged from the consultation process and the implications for the further development and implementation of the specification. The consultation process ran from 15 November 2019 to 6 January 2020 and consisted of the following elements:

- two online questionnaires
- two focus group meetings with teachers and students
- a call for written submissions

1.1 The online questionnaire

There were two online questionnaires; one for the Chinese specification and the other for the Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications. This is because, while the same framework was used in the development of all four language specifications, there are significant differences between the Chinese specification and that of the other three languages to account for the ab initio pitch of Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese.

1.1.1 Survey one (Chinese)

There were 27 respondents to the Chinese survey (appendix 1). A further 47 individuals/ organisations commenced the survey but only completed the initial questions where they identified themselves (e.g. if they were teacher, parent/ guardian, third level teacher and which institution they came from). Their responses have not been counted because they did not answer any questions related to the draft specification. In this survey, 40% of respondents identified themselves as parents, 22% as teachers, 10% as teacher educators and 7% as third level lecturers. The remainder consisted of Principals/ Deputy Principals, post-primary and third level students and a publisher.

1.1.2 Survey two (Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese)

There were 8 respondents to the survey about the Lithuanian, Portuguese and Polish specifications (appendix 2). As was the case in the other survey, a number of others commenced the survey but only completed the very initial questions where they identified themselves, therefore their responses have not been counted.

33% of respondents identified themselves as third level lecturers and 25% as post-primary language teachers. For the purposes of clarity, respondents were asked to identify the specification on to identify which language they were interested in commenting on. Of the eight respondents

- 1 commented on the Lithuanian specification (Principal/ Deputy Principal of a Primary School)
- 3 commented on the Polish specification (two post-primary language teachers and a third level lecturer)
- 3 commented on the Portuguese specification (two post-primary language teachers and a third level lecturer)
- 1 did not specify the sector they came from or if they were concerned with a particular language.

In relation to their background, of the eight respondents

- 3 identified as third level lecturers
- 3 identified as post-primary language teachers
- the remainder consisted of parents/ guardians, teacher educators and a third level student.

Awareness of the survey was raised in several ways. An invitation was posted on the NCCA twitter account, and an announcement was posted on the ncca.ie website. An invitation was sent via email to those who expressed interest in participating in the consultation, including teachers, third-level lecturers, embassies and various other individuals/ institutions. Members of the development group and the Foreign Languages Advisory Group also assisted in raising awareness of the consultation via their stakeholder organisations and other professional contacts.

1.2 Focus Group meetings

In December 2019 two focus group meetings were held to consult with stakeholders on the four draft language specifications. The first discussed the Chinese specification, the second discussed the Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications as these specifications are identical with the exception of some additional paragraphs in the Portuguese specification. Both events were attended by teachers of all languages, second and third level students, and representatives from third level institutions including language lecturers and ITE teachers. In the case of the second event, there were embassy representatives present as well as one representative from a teacher professional network and advisors from JCT and PDST. Each group was asked questions about the specification (Appendix 2) by a facilitator, and feedback was recorded. Perspectives of students on the draft specification are only partially included in this report as this aspect of consultation is ongoing and will be completed in the coming weeks. Participants were invited to express their views on the following questions:

To what extent

- do the aim and objectives address what is important for students to know, understand, value and be able to do having studied this subject at Leaving Cert?
- do the (two) strands address what is important for the students to know, understand, value and be able to do at the end of Leaving Certificate Chinese?
- do you think that the assessment components will be effective in assessing students' learning in Leaving Certificate Chinese?
- do the various assessment components address what is important for students to know, understand, value and be able to do in relation to the Learning Outcomes?

1.3 Written Submissions

2 written submissions (appendix 3) were received in response to the invitation for written feedback on the draft specification. Both submissions concerned the Portuguese specification. One was from a third level Portuguese lecturer from UCC. The other submission was from the directors of Portuguese Language Centre (Dublin).

2. Feedback from the consultation

This section of the report provides a summary and analysis of feedback received through the focus groups, online surveys and written consultation received during the consultation period.

2.1 Feedback about the Leaving Certificate Chinese specification

In the focus groups and online survey participants were asked a number of questions about how well the various sections of the draft specification address students' knowledge, understanding, skills and values with regard to Mandarin Chinese. The themes arising from the discussions are set out below.

2.1.1 Clarity of overall specification, the aims and objectives

Of those who responded, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that all sections are clear, although a small number stated the assessment section lacked clarity. For example, one suggestion for improvement to the specification was

exam assessment evaluation

(Primary teacher, online survey)

Almost all participants agreed that the specification's aims and objectives are appropriate. Similarly, almost all said that the Overview and Teaching and learning sections are clear and support the rest of the specification while a few said that the Related Learning section could be shorter.

2.1.2 Strands, Elements and Learning Outcomes

(a) Overall response to the structure of the strands

Almost all participants respondents reported that they agree or strongly agree with the statement that the interlinked and interdependent relationship between the strands is clear.

One commented

This particular language is easier to learn when you have a better understanding of Chinese people and their culture. The sentence structures, grammar and way of speaking is so deep rooted in Chinese culture that the sentences can seem unnatural for Western English speakers. The integration of culture and language is key when learning Mandarin Chinese

(Post-primary teacher, online survey)

On the whole participants were very positive about the delineation of the strands:

I like the fact that learning about language not on its own, also entails understanding of culture- this feature broadly welcomed

Designation of strands is very appropriate (Focus group participants)

The strands were viewed as having a “good balance” by one focus group participant

I welcome the structure of the 2 strands – there is a good balance there. It’s quite innovative. Strand 1 separates out the sub strands very well

Another focus group participant expressed concerned with the “genericism” of the specification

There is a danger of genericism – so maybe this doc needs to be a “bit more Chinese”. Chinese has very specific features. This is an issue. Needs to be more on tones and pronunciation. The document needs to spell this out more clearly.

(b) Learning Outcomes

When commenting on the Learning Outcomes many participants agreeing that they are appropriate, clear and understandable, linked to the requirements of assessment, appropriate for an ab initio specification and are articulated clearly and appropriately although some queried whether all learning outcomes were appropriate for ab initio learners.

The nature of learning outcomes was discussed in the focus group with some being very comfortable with them

It's vague in a good way-still gives you topics/ideas

It allows for teacher autonomy

Use of simple language-reassuring for teachers

Using the word "simple" throughout the learning outcomes- loving the continuity

(Focus group participants)

Others sought greater clarity and specificity:

What is content- what will be taught?

*Some points should be more specified e.g CLC 5 what kind of visual support?
In pin yin or characters?*

*We are not suggesting limiting teacher autonomy but narrow it down –
these LOs may make it difficult for teachers to exercise autonomy*

A discussion emerged regarding the place of history in the learning outcomes.

Re. PPC12 – add a bit more on history in here

*There is a worry that if the history is made TOO BIG in a spec then less time
is spent on the target language learning*

(Focus group participants)

A student also added to the discussion

*I enjoy learning about the culture and the history - it's fascinating – and we
still manage to hit all of the marks to learn the language and the writing. It's
important to learn about the history and culture too.*

(Focus group participant)

(c) Application of the strands and learning outcomes in the classroom

Challenges that could arise in the classroom were discussed, such as to whether teachers would be familiar with the modes of communication and in particular mediation.

Mediation is a new concept and the teachers might not know what this is.

(Focus group participant)

It was also queried how teachers from China may experience teaching in Ireland

The Chinese teachers in Ireland for the first time have a difficulty when in Ireland to teach on the short course so this might be even more difficult.

(Focus group participant)

Other suggestions for ways to approach learning and teaching including the following:

Introduce Chinese culture in school and let the students who learning Chinese get involved, and responsible for the event, let them explain and teach other students about Chinese culture and language.

(Parent/ guardian, online survey)

A key consensus which emerged was the need for clarity about the place of the target language (TL) and L1 in the Chinese language classroom and whether the sociolinguistic and pluricultural cultural aspects can be taught through the TL

Re. use of target language - what is appropriate? Be realistic

Some cultural LOs will need English language use to introduce them- how do you balance language input?

2.1.3 Assessment

There was much discussion and commentary around the assessment of student's learning; formative and summative as outlined below

(a) Overall feedback on assessment

Others asked for specificity with regard to assessment

Need far more detail in these sections

Could there be specificity about number of characters they need?

(Focus group participants)

(b) Weighting of various components

Many participants supported the focus on oracy and the extra weighting allocated to the oral component (when compared with other components and existing curricular languages)

I think it's really good that there's a lot of marks going for spoken and listening. For HL, good that reading is a bit lower than O level.

The importance of communication – speaking - can give a boost to more reserved people. (Focus group participant)

Communication is very important which is why this is needed. It's more important to be able to speak the language at the end instead of being able to write it first.

(Focus group participants)

The high percentages for the oral exam is a great incentive for students to speak the language. It is far too common with Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK), the Chinese proficiency exam, that students can only read and write.

(Post-primary teacher, online survey)

while others expressed concern about the exact weightings proposed

Shouldn't be 25% though – not sure why listening and mediation went down though – these should be equal across the levels. More emphasis on the speaking and listening but there could be more % given to this. O level distribution is quite good.

Maybe the same proportion for both levels – the last HL mark of 20% should be reduced to 15% and give the 5% to listening.

(Focus group participants)

(c) The assessment of pluriculturalism

Discussion explored the interlinked nature of the strands and the assessment of pluriculturalism

If the 2 strands are designed to be interlinked, how is it assessed? Is it help understanding of language- or is there in the exam a section, for example 'describe a Chinese festival...'

PPC 3- how can this be assessed?

Clarification needed - are some of these LOs only formative?

(Focus group participants)

(d) The role of Student Language Portfolio in Assessment

The proposed 'Student Language Portfolio' was a major feature of the discussions in each of the focus groups with a range of sub-themes emerging. The rationale for having a portfolio was discussed and the role it played in the classroom and oral examination discussed. Almost all participants in the focus group and online respondents agreed that, as a means of documenting and reflecting on their learning, the portfolio will help learners to develop an

awareness of the language learning process strategies and to become more autonomous in their language learning

The portfolio does link to formative assessment (online respondent)

It helps students personalise their learning of Mandarin and gain ownership of learning (Focus group participant)

The importance of clear guidelines was highlighted

Leaving it vague leaves you the freedom to do what you want but then that's countered by you doing something wrong...guidelines cannot be vague – must be more specific. You cannot put everything down on an exam paper
(Focus group participant)

With regard to the role of the portfolio, specific clarification and guidance was sought

*Will the pieces in the portfolio be marked? If so, by whom?
How many pieces will be required for the oral? Do they have to be about culture or language – is there a list?*
(Focus group participant)

(e) Writing system used in the examination

One post-primary language teacher urged caution about the possible implications of students using technology to write their examination

The character writing element of Mandarin Chinese for the Leaving Certificate is a huge challenge for students taking a written exam. For students with special accommodations to use an electronic device for this examination could be considered as an unfair advantage.

(Post-primary language teacher, online survey)

2.1.3 Other feedback

(a) Queries and concerns regarding the writing system

A number of participants at the focus group and those who responded to the online survey (parents in particular) sought clarification about the writing system that would be used in the Chinese classroom; Simplified or Traditional Chinese. Opinions were divergent on this issue

To make Chinese language as interesting as possible for the students, as practical as possible. Writing should be simplify. Encourage students to use the language in day to day life

(Parent/guardian, online survey)

*I hope students can choose to learn Chinese in Traditional or Simplified
(Parent/guardian, online survey)*

I would recommend learn traditional Chinese to develop students writing skill. Once you know traditional Chinese, no problem to pick up simplified Chinese (parent/guardian)

(b) Time allocation

When asked to comment on the extent to which they think it is possible for students to achieve the expected learning outlined in the draft specification within the time available (a minimum of 180 hours) most respondents did not answer. Of those who did, there was a varied response

Try during the school time, no students likes to do language course outside of school hours (parent/guardian)

I think after 180 hours of exposure to Mandarin Chinese students will have a good understanding of both the language and the culture. The draft specification is feasible for students to achieve as long as the correct material and information can be provided to them. The aim of learning should always be focused on useful, relevant and necessary Mandarin so students would be able to hold basic conversation with a native Chinese speaker. (PP teacher)

Another respondent suggested the time allocated was not adequate for learners to achieve the intended learning

I think it is difficult for students to achieve the expected learning outlined in the draft specification is feasible within the time available. Chinese is different from most other languages in the world, its unique writing system requires students and teachers to devote more time. Usually students take more time to read and write compared with other languages. (Teacher educator, online survey)

(c) The place of the junior cycle short course, the delivery of the programme and teacher supply

Many participants' initial judgements of the new specification were made through the lens of the current junior cycle short course and some logistical issues which shaped their responses. This had the effect of diverting the focus of the discussion away from the questions asked to participants concerns related to the ab initio pitch of the specification and the implications of this:

It needs to be clear to people that there is no connection between the short course and Leaving Certificate Chinese.

Need to connect the JC specification with this LC Specification. Languages connect says it will connect – it needs to. However, the new LC spec needs to explain that it isn't connected. Need to clarify the relationship between the short course and this specification. (Focus group participants)

Factors concerning the selection of students and schools was a point of discussion

It should be open to people who are committed to learning the language, although should be open to all.

(Post-primary student at focus group)

The selection of schools for the specification will also affect the selection of the students too. Schools could do with guidance on this.

The student's profile needs to play a part in deciding who does the course. How do after-school kids cope with it and TY as well?

(Focus group participant)

(d) Challenges for learners and teachers related to the pitch

Some Chinese language teachers queried the ab initio pitch as some learners will have already studied Chinese at junior cycle and/ or in TY. Some respondents suggested that this could be a problem and suggested that two Chinese specifications, pitched at different levels, should be created:

There's a gap between a person who has done the short/TY course and someone who is doing it straight off. Need to fill this gap – splitting into H and O levels won't just cover this. (focus group participant)

There will be a demand for a more difficult course.

There will be a demand for students to do Chinese later and this course will not allow that.

(Focus group participants)

One student at the focus group had questions about the specification's purpose and pitch

I want to know is the course made to bridge a gap to allow them to go to 3rd level or is it a gateway course for something to do on your own time – a taster course.

(Post-primary student, focus group)

Another student, who has studied Chinese for a number of years was specifically concerned about the ab initio pitch from the perspective of using the language in the future:

When I leave this course will I get a job with this? Can I be dropped into China and find my way around? Need to know more about the different tasks I can do – they seem good but simple. They seem to be the bare minimum.

(Post-primary student, focus group)

while another focus group participant felt that the ab initio pitch is appropriate

But leaving it open and inclusive allows more people to do it

(Focus group participant)

Furthermore, while most participants were familiar with the concept of an ab initio pitch and several queried what this would look like in practice, while others were not familiar with the CEFR (the specification is broadly aligned with Pre-A1/ A1 level of the CEFR)

Need to try to clarify what is meant by A1 and pre-A1 – across written and spoken, etc. What is learned at A-1 level?

This might also affect the entry level of students that the teacher has to cope with. Needs to be clear in the specification.

(Focus group participants)

2.2 Feedback on Lithuanian, Polish & Portuguese specifications

2.2.1 General comments about the specifications

On the whole the structure and content of Polish and Lithuanian specifications was welcomed

This is a very positive move for languages

This is a clear and focused specification and not cluttered

Very realistic and suitable to 21st century learner

Very nice for the teacher – opens up the opportunities for the teacher and unrestrictive (the focus is not on particular content -but view on the communicative purpose – removes the straightjacket)

(Focus group participants)

Some cautioned about the new terminology in the specifications, in relation to the modes of communication.

The word mediation is new language used in specification and what that means and entails for pupils and schools needs a little unpacking somewhere (focus group participant)

Continuity from junior cycle was welcomed

You can really see the joined up thinking here – it's very linked to junior cycle MFL

Some expressed concerns that the broad nature of the learning outcomes could pose difficulties for teachers

How will we know what will be on the exam?

How will students preparing for this exam at home know what to learn?'

2.2.2 Aims and Objectives of the Specification/ Teaching and Learning

All or almost all respondents agreed that aims and objectives in the specification are appropriate, with one respondent commenting:

Evidently, the success of the framework is the dependent of the translation of this into the classroom. However, the rationale that it sets out is one that differs from the current norms and would perhaps make the subject more engaging and tangible.

(Focus group participant)

Similarly, most respondents said that Overview and Teaching and learning sections are clear and support the rest of the specification. Other amendments and additions suggested across the specification were as follows

Could there be something in the objectives about celebrating the heritage and foster the link to the community in Ireland or abroad?

Page 18 – two top statements could be stronger in relation to integration – could have a baseline and stronger from the beginning – should be more dominant and prominent.

(Focus group participants)

2.2.3 Strands, Elements and Learning Outcomes

In relation to the Learning Outcomes almost all participants agreed that the learning outcomes are appropriate, clear and understandable, linked to the requirements of assessment, appropriate for an ab initio specification and are articulated clearly and appropriately. It was remarked that this specification represents a shift in the teaching and learning of language at leaving certificate level.

The learning outcomes are fantastic for those teachers who are fully aware of the different concepts embedded within the specification. However, this specification does represent a massive shift in the way that languages are taught at leaving cert level. I think that the specification at points would benefit from examples given of how and when students could be taught to work towards the outcomes or proving their ability to deliver the outcomes. Secondly, I think that the specification could benefit from having a glossary.

I think that greater attention needs to be paid to the new terms and concepts involved in this specification. These constitute a shift in the way that languages are taught in Ireland and require proper definition from the beginning (PP teacher)

There's loads in it and yet it's so open – it's amazing

(Focus group participants)

2.2.4 Assessment

(a) Assessment – general consensus

With regard to the assessment of the language, most participants agreed that the Assessment section provides them with a good understanding of the assessment demands of the new Leaving Certificate curricular languages and that the Oral and Written components would successfully assess the elements it aimed to assess

(b) Weighting of Assessment Components

The weighting of Assessment elicited different views

The weighting is very good. It's perfect!

The oral at Ordinary Level should be a little higher – this might encourage students/teachers to do more. Take it from reading. Conversation is the medium on which all else flows – it helps all the others – would give it more value – I envy the Irish space where there is 40% for oral.

(Focus group participants)

(c) The Assessment of Pluricultural Competence

As one of the two strands seeks to develop student's plurilingual and pluricultural competence, respondents were asked about whether they thought that the assessment section of the specification. One third level lecturer commented in the online survey

Because there are different varieties of the language used in the assessment components so students will be able to show their knowledge in different ways.

(d) The purpose and role of the language portfolio in Assessment

As with the Chinese specification, most respondents agreed that the portfolio, as a means of documenting and reflecting on their learning, will help learners to develop an awareness of the language learning process and that documenting and reflecting on their learning will help learners to develop language learning strategies and to become more autonomous in their language learning.

There is a strong case for the PF as a learning tool (focus group participant)

Discussion centered around the role of the language portfolio with regard to formative and summative assessment. Some participants expressed the worry that if the portfolio were to be assessed by itself, it would end up being "formulaic, bureaucratic and rehearsed". One focus group participant commented

I love the PF, keep it formative, but do connect to the oral as indicated in the spec. In this way, it leaves room for the PF to be creative and independent.

although others wondered what the incentive would be if it was not formally assessed. Like those who commented on the Chinese specification, some requested clarification about the purpose of the Portfolio in relation to assessment

Guidance is needed on the portfolio – number of pieces of work, deadline for completion of portfolio, ways of ensuring that the work is done by the student themselves, etc. (Focus group participant)

2.2.5 Comments pertaining specifically to the Portuguese specification

(a) Overall comments

There were divergent views among participants online and in the focus group who gave their feedback on the Portuguese specification. A number felt it was appropriate

I like it a lot, it is designed with 21st century skills in mind, and also designed using the CEFR framework, which is a good thing (focus group participant)

The languages strategy identified the Brazilians and the New Irish, but nothing here in this spec guarantees that the Brazilians will maintain their culture and their identity. This is missing (focus group participant)

While some focus group participants suggested

the Brazilian context is 'missing'

Others said

it is ONE language and the spec allows for all varieties to be given space.

Similarly, learning outcomes were felt to be appropriate

They are comprehensive; and much more interactive than current syllabi. The student is very much in the centre of the learning experience.

There's a good range of verbs which is great.

Diversity is there, there is space for reflection and critical thinking is there. All good. Like the digital aspect, and it is good that there are 'new' ways of teaching the language. Using technology will allow you to explore Lusophony. PPC19 is a good LO to explore all aspects of culture including their Irish culture

(Focus group participants)

(b) Inclusion of all learners

Of those who commented specifically on the Portuguese specification, some expressed concerns about the variety/ standard of Portuguese

The Portuguese specification should acknowledge both standards otherwise, as well as not showing awareness "of the languages and cultures of our immigrants" there is a very high risk that only one will be adopted at implementation stage.

Others commented that learners from a Brazilian background could be disadvantaged

The respect of differences in the case of Portuguese can result in the discrimination against the bigger community of Portuguese native speakers. In the name of 'inclusion' the students of heritage language will feel that their variety of language is less valuable as it isn't European, the variety introduced in many schools in Ireland...the document needs to be careful when repeating linguistic and cultural hierarchic in the name of 'diversity'. Why Portugal is always the first country cited? (PP teacher)

Another expressed a concern that European Portuguese will be the “centre of the course”:

It is quite clear that the European Portuguese will still remain the focus of the LC Portuguese course despite Languages Connect focus on Brazilian Community and more opportunities in the market labor for learners of Brazilian Portuguese... Pluriculturalism and plurilinguism is taken into consideration as so far as they don't challenge Higher Education assumptions that the European Portuguese should be the centre of the LC course (post primary language teacher, online survey).

The same respondent and others suggested listing the countries in alphabetic order

For example, why not cite countries by alphabetic order (Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal)?

One submission also referred to the risk of alienating students from a Brazilian background if all variations are not acknowledged

The 'all varieties' Portuguese LC represents a huge challenge for implementation... The policy document must reassure the balance and consistency of the proposed inclusiveness in a clear and detailed statement, including an indication of the fairness of the LC exam in itself and the respect for heritage language and student's identity and integration...The risk here is to, after such a long investment, alienate students from Brazilian background if there is a continuation of the LC exam in European Portuguese disguised by samples of cultural curiosities of the 'other' countries that speak Portuguese. (Comment in online submission)

(c) The Assessment of Portuguese

While many were happy with the overall assessment of Portuguese, some sought clarification that all standard variations of Portuguese would be accepted at the point of summative assessment and others voiced concerns about inclusivity in assessment:

The assessment doesn't specify that the LC exam won't be in European Portuguese and corrected accordingly as in the past. The consistency of the 'multilingualism and multicultural' approach must continue in the assessment. The fact must be clearly state here. Students and teachers need to be reassured of that before engaging with the course. If not, unfortunately there is no such inclusive approach but a disguised continuation of the European Portuguese LC with the addition of a course.

(Post-primary teacher, online survey)

Potential difficulties were flagged for teachers who are not fully aware of the differences between the main varieties of Portuguese

As a teacher, I don't believe that Portuguese language teachers are fully aware of differences and correct mistakenly other uses of the language. The assessment is one of the main pieces for the success of the new LC and I don't think the draft reflects that crucial role for the fairness of the approach. The low attendance of the old Portuguese LC can be related to the fact that European Portuguese was the language used in the exam and the Marking Scheme didn't mention if students would be penalized for using other Portuguese. (Post-Primary language teacher, online survey)

Specific concerns with regard to assessment included the following comment

Reading, reception and recognition will pose problems for some variations in Portuguese. How do you reflect the way that students will access the different types of Portuguese in the exam? (focus group participant)

One proposed solution was two exams

Could there be 2 exams? Select an A or B section for the variety of Portuguese that you are most comfortable with? Or just offer a variety of texts that will allow for the variety to be covered. (focus group participant)

The importance of fairness, integrity and consistency in the assessment of Portuguese was highlighted in one online submission

It is crucial to deepen the discussion of fairness of LC assessment (oral, aural and written), the difficulties to implement a full 'all varieties' Portuguese(s) and resources (both for Second Language and for heritage language). The document must include a clear statement about the integrity and consistency of the project including the respect for the heritage language. Reading texts and exams, for example, should consider the variant students use at home and understand. (Comment in online submission)

d) Other comments about the Portuguese specification

One respondent requested for a section about context to be inserted into the Portuguese specification

The first and most important comment on the specification is that it needs to add some context as Portuguese is spoken in several countries. Polish is

being added as a curricular subject because of the number of Polish immigrants, Lithuanian is being added because of the number of Lithuanian immigrants and the Languages Connect strategy tells us that Portuguese is being added because of the large number of Brazilian immigrants (online submission)

Finally, there were some comments regarding what can be expected in the time available in light of the issue around variations

In a 180 hour course it is unrealistic to expect a student to attain a high level in either Brazilian Portuguese or European Portuguese and in addition to be able to identify and distinguish differences in the variations. (online submission).

2.2.6 Other comments on Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese specifications

(a) Feasibility of achieving the intended learning in the time allocated

When asked to comment on the extent to which they think it is possible for students to achieve the intended learning outlined in the draft specification within the time available (a minimum of 180 hours) only half the respondents answered. Of those who did, those who thought it was possible stressed the importance of good teaching and resources

I do think that it would be possible to achieve the aims but only with very effective, efficient teaching. Many of the outcomes require teachers to undertake new approaches to teaching languages. These will obviously be delivered through training but I do think that it is important at this early stage to paint a picture of concrete examples of this happening in the classroom. It could be just a sentence here and there that reinforces the ideas so that teachers can relate them to tangible outcomes that they are familiar with.

Another respondent was less confident:

I think students need more time than 180 hours to achieve the expected learning outlined in the draft specification for Polish (Third level lecturer, online survey)

(b) The importance of CPD and students who learn the language outside school

The importance of adequate and ongoing CPD supports was stressed by many participants

They worry will teachers get the same support that teachers of the new JC are getting. Moving to LOs requires support - will there be resources and text books to support the teaching of the new course? (Focus group participant)

Some expressed concern for students who would not be studying the language at school

Many students will be studying for this exam in different settings – state schools, Saturday schools and independently at home – which is very different than other subjects. Hence clarity and guidance is even more necessary.

For students studying at home without a teacher – they too need guidance on this.
(Focus group participants)

Another participant at the focus group pointed out that it will be important how this subject is offered in schools when it comes to the option bands.

For example, will it be put on an option line against other languages? Or will it be put on an option line against subjects like Business, Technology subjects etc.? This will impact on the take up.

(c) Reaction to the new curricular provisions

Similar to the Chinese specification, there was a positive reaction to the fact that these languages are moving from being non-curricular languages to curricular with the addition of oral and aural components and the change from B2 level (CEFR) to A2/ B1

Great to see an oral part to the exam and a focus on oral communication in the spec. The current exam discriminated against students who were strong orally but weaker at writing the language.

(d) Other suggestions made in consultation

In addition, the following suggestions were made

- The objectives could be shortened
- A glossary could be added *A glossary would be very useful as there is a lot of new terminology here*
- The Related learning section could be shortened
- A section on differentiation should be added

3. Considerations and conclusion

It was evident from the consultation that despite some fears and concerns the draft specification is welcomed by most participants in the consultation. This section of the report looks at ways in which progress can be made on some of the issues raised.

Considerations

The consultation process revealed some constructive and considered concerns about particular sections of the specification. Addressing these concerns will be the immediate focus of the development group. The following are areas to be considered:

- Insertion of a glossary to support teachers, parents and students and to clarify terminology used in the specification
- Insertion of a section about Differentiation
- Insertion of an appendix with CEFR self-assessment grids and other relevant material to support teachers in their understanding of the alignment with this document
- Editing of material from the specification
 - Shortening the section on objectives (in all specifications)
 - Condensing the section on Related learning (in all specifications)
 - Clarification and deletion of some learning outcomes (in all specifications)
 - Clarification about the role of the portfolio (in all specifications)
 - Further clarification that all standard varieties of Portuguese will be acceptable in the assessment components (in the Portuguese specification)
 - List the countries in which Portuguese is spoken in alphabetical order (in the Portuguese specification)
 - Clarification which writing form of Chinese will be expected (Simplified or Traditional)
 - Clarification of the ab initio pitch of Chinese specification and that it is not a follow-on course from the junior cycle short course in Chinese Language and Culture (in the Chinese specification)
- Addition of Assessment Criteria to clarify what is expected of learners in the various assessment components

- Production of guidelines that give clarification on the various assessment components including the oral exam, the role of the portfolio, the way that plurilingual and pluricultural elements will be assessed
- Resources and teacher CPD
 - Extra supports for teachers of Portuguese which reference how the issue of varieties can be addressed
 - Support for teachers of Mandarin Chinese in particular with regard to the use of the Target Language in the classroom

Conclusion

The consultation process was very informative and beneficial. The engagement of those who participated in the consultation is acknowledged and NCCA is grateful for the open, honest, committed, experience-based and expert feedback received. Consultation feedback indicates there are very positive views on the draft specification and suggest that provision of CPD, supports and resources are fundamental to successful implementation.

Appendix 1 - Focus Group Meetings

Participants were invited to express their views on the following:

To what extent do

- the aim and objectives in the specification address what is important for students to know, understand, value and be able to do having studied this subject at Leaving Cert?
- the (two) strands address what is important for the students to know, understand, value and be able to do at the end of Leaving Certificate Chinese?
- you think that the assessment components will be effective in assessing students' learning in Leaving Certificate Chinese?
- the various assessment components address what is important for students to know, understand, value and be able to do in relation to the Learning Outcomes?

Appendix 2- Written Submissions

The following written submissions were received

- Portuguese Language Centre, Dublin
- Individual submission
 - Anna Lessa, UCC

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