The Junior Cycle (JC) Modern Foreign Language (MFL) –
Short report on the consultation event organised by the NCCA –11 April 2016
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The following points are my own notes and info gleaned during the day. There was no official statement made apart from the introduction by Paul Caffrey who highlighted the rationale and broad objectives of the new JC curriculum (as outlined in the 'JC consultation report' available online). He underlined that the reform is a work in progress and encouraged colleagues/ school principals/ parents/etc. to give their views via the NNCA survey (opened till 5 May 2016).

After this introduction, the forty or so attendees were asked to join pre-established discussion groups -5 groups of roughly 8 people, one being a NCCA convenor.

Participants were representatives of secondary schools and third level institutions of the four main languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish) but also of Russian, Chinese, ESL (and maybe others); colleagues from Embassies and Language Centres were also present.

Composition of our group: two secondary school teachers; a colleague from the Goethe institute; three from third level institutions (NUI, Galway, NUI Maynooth & UL -lecturers of French & Spanish, two being teacher-trainers); Paul Caffrey (retired inspector of Italian, DES), convener.

This is a summary of the points of interest discussed (some confirmed) during the morning and afternoon sessions:

-learning a modern foreign language will be mandatory in the new JC curriculum

-one common level (no more Ordinary and Higher levels)

-the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)** guidelines are used for learning outcomes; pitched at reaching the **A2 level by the end of JC**, in relation to **five skills**; CPD on the CEFR will be provided to teachers

-the 'course specification' for the JC is organised around three strands:
- communicative competence
- language awareness
- socio-culturalknowledge and intercultural awareness

These imply:

->more emphasis on the communicative element of the language

->more use of the target language in class

->a better understanding of language grammar

->more intercultural awareness

-> more interconnectedness between languages (to value the different L1s & L2s in the 21st century classroom/ multilingual society)

->a more holistic approach to (language) learning

-student-centered learning

->less prescribed content for teachers as **learning is competence oriented ('*able to*')**

->a combination of formative (monitoring learning) and summative (evaluating learning) assessments

->two classroom-based assessments (CBA)* in year 2 and 3 + a state examined assessment task (reflexive in nature) in Spring year 3 + a state exam at the end of year 3.

*CBA:
- An oral examination task (not necessarily a one to one oral exchange with the teacher; it could be a recording of students' role play/ presentation/ debate or other scenario)
- A portfolio [two items chosen from a compilation of (multimodal) materials as 'evidence of learning'; learning logs and student reflections will complete the student portfolio/*folder*]

  ->*these tasks aim to promote autonomy, flexibility & creativity.*

-no (final) grade will be awarded but instead a reference to a level 'band' will be given; importance of the 'student profile' (specific learning strengths/achievements in CBAs* stated on Junior Cycle certificate)

Other points alluded to:

-40 mns class/period minimum/ 1h class/period envisaged

-the need for smaller numbers in language classrooms (24 students like for practical subjects)

-is 'communicative competence' the same as 'language proficiency' (fluency/ accuracy)?

-what about student differentiation?

-the need for the integration of portfolio from year 1 of Junior Cycle (not just year 2 & 3)

-little reference in the report to the use of technology for learning inside and outside the classroom

-the issue of quality and equity

-to promote an interdisciplinary approach

-any progress on the DES Language Strategy?