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THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE ENGLISH SYLLABUS

PREFACE

The remit of the specialist course committee for English, which was put in place by the NCCA, stressed that the new English syllabus should give priority to the study and acquisition of the language skills, both oral and written, that are needed for adult life.

Specifically, the new syllabus should provide opportunities for the development of the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, inference, synthesis and evaluation. Also students' knowledge and level of control of the more formal aspects of language, e.g. register, paragraphs, syntax, punctuation and spelling, should be given particular attention in the new syllabus.

Consequently this syllabus, both in its structure and in its content, is a radical and original response to the stated remit. The study of thinking skills and language are emphasised throughout. Itemised lists of skills related to specific categories of language use are presented as the expected learning outcomes. Students will be expected to see every language product whether it be a memo or a poem, a political speech or a play, as a text which needs to be studied and its specific genre understood.

Developing students' interest in literature remains central to Leaving Certificate English. The syllabus has also been innovative in this area. Building on the Junior Certificate syllabus, it has introduced the comparative study of texts and the study of film, enlarged the range of choice in texts and revised and updated the poetry course.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Each person lives in the midst of language. Language is fundamental to learning, communication, personal and cultural identity, and relationships. This syllabus aims at initiating students into enriching experiences with language so that they become more adept and thoughtful users of it and more critically aware of its power and significance in their lives.

1.2 This syllabus builds on the aims of the Junior Certificate English syllabus, which emphasise the development of a range of literacy and oral skills in a variety of domains, personal, social, and cultural. In the Leaving Certificate course, students will be encouraged to develop a more sophisticated range of skills and concepts. These will enable them to interpret, compose, discriminate and evaluate a range of material so that they become independent learners who can operate in the world beyond the school in a range of contexts.

1.3 English at this level must excite students with aesthetic experiences and emphasise the richness of meanings and recreational pleasure to be encountered in literature and in the creative play of language. Students should be engaged with the voice of literature, learn to dialogue critically with it, and so come to understand its significance and value.

An English course at Leaving Certificate must also be wide-ranging enough to accommodate not only vocational needs and further education, but also the life long needs of students and the language demands, both oral and written, that are placed on them by the wider community.

1.4 The term "language" includes verbal and visual forms of communication. In this syllabus the role of the media, film and

theatrical experience will be significant. Developing students' powers of discrimination and interpretative abilities in relation to these media *and the* encouragement of performance and of creative productions will be integral elements of this syllabus.

- 1.5 This syllabus will seek to ensure that the varied traditions within the Irish cultural context are adequately represented.
- 1.6 Resources will be chosen to give the fullest recognition possible to the experiences of both sexes.
- 1.7 Language is not a neutral medium of expression and communication. It is embedded in history, culture, society, and ultimately personal subjectivity. In the contemporary world the cultural relativity of a person's own use of language needs to be highlighted. To achieve this end, a range of resources will be selected from different periods and cultures and students will be encouraged to approach them in a comparative manner. In encountering this diversity, students should develop an understanding of how the language a person uses shapes the way that person views the world.
- 1.8 All products of language use - oral, written, and visual - can be described by the general term "text". All texts create their own view of reality by using a specific linguistic style within specific categories of language forms, which can be called "genres". Thus a song, an advertisement, a dialogue, a public speech, a child's book, an expository essay, a legal document, a scientific report and a poem can all be classified as genres. It is the overall purpose of this syllabus to empower students so that they can become sophisticated users and interpreters of many genres.

2. **STRUCTURE OF THE SYLLABUS**

- 2.1 The course is organised around two general domains:
- (i) comprehending
 - (ii) composing
- 2.2 Within these two domains the students will be actively and creatively engaged in using language. The concept of shaping is central to these domains. Students in their comprehending tasks will come to understand how language shapes experience through style, genre, and context. In their composing tasks, students will be afforded the opportunity of using language to shape and order experience for themselves. The integration of the two domains in the teaching of this syllabus will be a vital necessity. The principle of integrating the teaching of language and literature, already central to the Junior Certificate syllabus, is of great moment here as well.
- 2.3 To give a more structured sense of development to the course, these two domains are to be largely encountered in the context of specific areas of language use and through the study of certain texts and resources.
- 2.4 There are many ways of classifying language use. However, for the purposes of this syllabus it is proposed to classify language under five general headings, which relate to the central concept of language as a powerful means of shaping and ordering experience. The five general headings are:

- The language of information
- The language of argument
- The language of persuasion
- The language of narration
- The aesthetic use of language

- 2.5 It is accepted that to classify language in this way is artificial. The general functions of language outlined here will continually mix and mingle within texts and genres. So, there can be an aesthetic argument, a persuasive narrative, or an informative play. But if students are to become adept with language, then they need to understand that it is through these functions, used within a variety of genres, that language achieves meaning, power, and effect.
- 2.6 It is of primary importance in this syllabus that the students should engage with the domains of comprehending and composing in oral, written and, where possible, visual contexts. The subject "English" as envisaged by this syllabus is not limited to the written word. In the modern world, most students encounter significant language experiences in oral and visual contexts. The experience of language in the media in all forms, visual, aural and print, needs to be recognised as a prime, shaping agency of students' outlook. This wide range of encounters with language will be reflected in the assessment and examination of students.

3. A I M S

The aims of this syllabus are to develop in students:

- 3.1 A mature and critical literacy to prepare them for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life in all contexts;
- 3.2 A respect and appreciation for language used accurately and appropriately and a competence in a wide range of language skills both oral and written.
- 3.3 An awareness of the value of literature in its diverse forms for enriching their perceptions, for enhancing their sense of cultural

identity, and for creating experiences of aesthetic pleasure;

- 3.4 In addressing these aims this syllabus will foster students' development in the following areas:
- 3.4.1 **CONCEPTS & PROCESSES:** the ability to think, reason, discriminate and evaluate in a wide variety of linguistic contexts, personal, social, vocational and cultural. In comprehending, students should be able to analyze, infer, synthesise and evaluate; in composing, students should be able to research, plan, draft, re-draft, and edit.
- 3.4.2 **KNOWLEDGE & CONTENT:** knowledge about the nature and uses of language and the variety of functions and genres in which it operates. In this context genres of literature will be of particular significance.
- 3.4.3 **SKILLS:** interpreting and controlling the textual features (grammar, syntax, spellings, paragraphing) of written and oral language to express and communicate.
- 3.4.4 **ATTITUDES & EFFECTS:** the development of interest and enjoyment in using language, a respect for its potential to make meaning and an appreciation of its diverse cultural manifestations.

3.5 **COMMENTARY ON AIMS**

It is a complex task to become literate in modern society. A bewildering variety of linguistic forms and styles challenges students today, both inside and outside of school. Developing control and power over language is the most essential educational achievement for all students if they are to become confident, thoughtful and discriminating adults and citizens.

If students are reflective about language they should come to recognise its unique power. They will come to see acts of speaking, listening, reading and writing not just as instrumental skills but as *interpretative*, creative activities through which specific meanings can be placed on experience. Through using language accurately and appropriately, they themselves can realise a sense of personal significance and discover how words can work for them in revealing meanings, inviting thought, and facilitating effective communication.

The aims outlined here are completely interdependent. Students cannot be taught concepts, skills and processes unless they find their encounters with language meaningful. Students will not respect language and their use of it unless they feel it contributes to their sense of understanding of the world. In trying to achieve these objectives it is vital that teachers introduce students to texts which create a meaningful context and invite dialogue and interaction. This interaction can be fostered by encouraging students to adopt a variety of critical stances, to question the authority of texts and to compare and contrast texts.

The development of oracy is a significant aspiration of this syllabus. To that end the development of methodological approaches which emphasise dialogue, group-discussion, oral presentations and performances are strongly recommended. Students should be encouraged to express their opinions, speculate and engage in argument to foster their capacity to think well.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Within the five designated areas of language outlined earlier (2.4) viz,

The language of Information

The language of Argument

The language of Persuasion

The language of Narration

The Aesthetic use of language

students will be required to develop the following range of skills and competencies

4.1 THE LANGUAGE OF INFORMATION

Students should encounter a range of texts composed for the dominant purpose of communicating information, eg. reports, records, memos, bulletins, abstracts, media accounts, documentary films.

4.1.1 Comprehending

Students should be able to:

- * Give an account of the gist of a text.

- * Specify appropriate details for relevant purposes.

Summarise the information they obtained from a text.

Comment on the selection of facts given: evaluate the adequacy of the information and indicate omissions.

Identify the point of view of an author.

Outline the values assumed in a text.

Indicate the genre of a text.

Comment on the language use, structure and lay-out.

4.1.2 **Composing**

Students should be able to compose accurately in a range of information genres:

Records: memos, minutes, notices, precis.

Letters of all kinds.

Reports and research projects

Various media scripts and newspaper reports.

4.2 **THE LANGUAGE OF ARGUMENT**

Students should encounter a range of texts with an argumentative function. The range of texts should encompass material which offer models of both deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning as used in journalistic, philosophical, scientific and legal contexts.

4.2.1 **Comprehending**

Students should be able to:

Outline the stages of an argument and identify the conclusion.

Identify the reasoning structure evidenced in key words or phrases eg. therefore, because, nevertheless, etc.

Distinguish between statements/propositions and examples.

* Distinguish between opinion, anecdote and evidence.

Evaluate the validity of an argument.

Attempt to identify assumptions present.

Outline the values being asserted.

4.2.2 **Composing**

Students should be able to:

Put forward a theory or hypothesis

Justify a decision

Attempt an overview.

4.3 **The Language of Persuasion**

Students should encounter a range of texts which have a persuasive function, eg. political speeches, advertising in all media, satiric texts, some forms of journalism.

4.3.1 **Comprehending**

Students should be able to:

Identify the techniques being used to persuade eg. tone, image, rhythm, choice of words, selection of detail.

Evaluate the impact of a passage in achieving its desired effect.

- * Indicate to which audience it is addressed.

Analyze the value-system advocated and/or implied by the text.

Outline whose interests it serves.

4.3.2 **Composing**

Students should be able to compose in a range of contexts:

Newspaper articles

- * Advertising copy

Public relations/propaganda/political statements.

4.4 **The Language of Narration**

Students should encounter a wide range of texts which have predominately a narrative function. This should involve students in encountering narratives of all kinds, eg. short stories, novels, drama texts, autobiographies, biographies, travel-books and films.

4.4.1 **Comprehending**

Students should be able to:

Develop an awareness of their own response to texts and analyze and justify that response.

Indicate aspects of the narrative which they found significant and attempt to explain fully the meaning thus generated.

Outline the structure of the narrative and how it achieves coherence within its genre.

Develop an awareness of narrative characteristics of different genres and how the language in these genres is chosen and shaped to achieve certain effects.

Approach narrative texts from a variety of critical viewpoints eg. analyze and compare texts under such categories as gender, power and class and relate texts from different periods and cultures.

Compare texts in different genres on the same theme.

4.4.2 **Composing**

Students should be able to compose in a range of contexts:

- * Anecdote
- * Parable, Fable
- * Short Story
- * Autobiographical sketch
- * Scripts
- * Dialogues

4.5 **The Aesthetic Use of Language**

Students should encounter a wide range of texts in a variety of literary genres for personal recreation and aesthetic pleasure. This would include engaging with fiction, drama, essay, poetry and film in an imaginative, responsive and critical manner.

4.5.1 Comprehending

Students should be able to:

Develop appropriate stances for reading and/or viewing in all literary genres. This means students should approach drama scripts from a theatrical perspective, view films as complex amalgams of images and words and read poetry conscious of its specific mode of using language as an artistic medium.

Engage in interpretative performance of texts.

Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations.

Re-read texts for encountering rich and diverse levels of suggestion, inference and meaning.

Attempt to compare and evaluate texts for the quality of the imaginative experience being presented.

4.5.2 Composing

Students should be able to:

Compose within the aesthetic forms encountered.

Compose "interventions", i. e. alternative scenarios based on texts studied.

Keep Response Journals - expressive of their growing acquaintance with a text over a period of time.

Compose analytical and coherent essays relative to a text.

5. LEVELS OF PROVISION AND ATTAINMENT

- 5.1 The Leaving Certificate course in English will be offered at two levels, Ordinary and Higher Level.
- 5.2 Different levels of attainment relative to the skills and concepts outlined will be expected from students doing the Higher and Ordinary Level courses.
- 5.3 At both levels a competence in the accurate and appropriate use of language will be a fundamental requirement. All students will be **expected to be assiduous in their attention to *paragraphing*, syntax, spelling and punctuation.**
- 5.4 At Higher Level, as a minimum requirement students should demonstrate the ability to:

comprehend a range of challenging texts. This means analysing in depth, inferring at sophisticated levels, speculating and questioning assumptions

evaluate and critically respond to texts

identify and analyze the form, structure and style of a text and show an understanding of how all these elements constitute its genre

compare and contrast a range of texts under a variety of abstract categories eg. cultural and historical contexts, authors viewpoint, literary form and period, etc.

compose effectively, with style and precision, in straightforward and complex genres, such as discursive essays, arguments and reports.

5.5 At Ordinary Level, as a minimum requirement, students should demonstrate the ability to:

comprehend at an appropriate level a range of texts. This means showing understanding of a text at a literal level and making some inferences

recognise the genre of a text, identify its purpose, and describe its structure

relate texts to their own experience, generate personal meanings, discuss and justify those meanings, and express opinions coherently

compare and contrast texts under a variety of headings, eg. hero/heroine, themes and issues, language and genre, etc.

compose effectively in a range of straightforward genres, such as narratives, short reports and accounts, discursive writing, and letters

6. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

6.1 The approach to the study of English advocated in this syllabus will require students to study:

- (i) language in a wide variety of contexts, genres, functions, and styles
- (ii) a range of poetry, one literary text, and a group of texts in a comparative manner.

Through these four interactive and complementary areas of study, students will build up their ability to comprehend and compose and so develop the mature and critical literacy that is the overarching educational aim of the syllabus.

6.2 It is envisaged that teachers and students will attempt to make the study of language as immediate as possible by using resources to hand. It is also envisaged that some of the texts designated hereafter for study in the aesthetic context, can be usefully employed for developing language expertise and awareness. Within all these texts, the various uses of language designated earlier will be evident to some degree and can be analyzed as thought appropriate.

6.3 An extensive selection of poetry has been specifically prepared for this syllabus.

Students at Higher Level will be required to study a representative selection from the work of eight poets: a representative selection would seek to reflect the range of a poet's themes and interests and exhibit his/her characteristic style and viewpoint. Normally the study of at least six poems by each poet would be expected.

Students at Ordinary Level will be required to study a selection of poetry. The selection will normally consist of about forty poems.

- * The poets and poetry for each level will be prescribed.

At both levels students will need to read widely in poetry to prepare for the question on an unseen poem in the examination

- 6.4 From a prescribed list of texts, students at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level will be required to study at least four texts in the following manner:

One text to be studied on its own. In this context it will be clearly indicated which texts are suitable for study at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level.

A comparative study of three or more texts; the emphasis in this study area will be on attitudes, values, structures and styles.

At Higher Level the texts can be compared on the basis of the following:

- a theme or issue;
- a historical or literary period;
- a literary genre;
- the cultural context;
- the general vision and viewpoint.

For each course, three of these comparative modes will be prescribed to give a definite structure and direction to the comparative study. There will be questions on two of the modes in the examination.

At Ordinary Level the modes of comparison available will be the following:

Hero/Heroine/Villain

Relationships

Social Setting

Change and Development

Specific Themes eg. love, race, prejudice, violence, etc.

Aspects of story: tension, climax, resolution, ending, etc.

At Ordinary Level three of these comparative modes will be prescribed for each course to give a definite structure and direction to the comparative study. There will be questions on two of the modes in the examination.

6.5 At Higher Level the study of a film can be included in a comparative study, but three written texts at least must also be studied. At Ordinary Level the study of a film can form one element in a comparative study.

6.6 At Higher Level the study of a Shakespearean drama is compulsory. This may be chosen *either* for study as a single text *or* as an element in the comparative study of a group of texts.

At Ordinary Level the study of a Shakespearean drama will be optional. Shakespearean drama will always be included both for study and examination. The list of prescribed films will include a film of a Shakespearean play.

7. **EXAMINATIONS**

- 7.1 The syllabus will be assessed by a terminal written examination. (The feasibility of oral and aural assessment will be researched).
- 7.2 At both Higher Level and Ordinary Level there will be two papers, viz. English I and English II. There will be an equal allocation of marks to each paper.

7.3 **English I**

This paper will be specifically aimed at testing the comprehending and composing abilities of students. The paper will consist of one or more texts. A variety of texts will be used, e.g. a report, an argument, a poem, a picture, a story extract etc.

Higher and Ordinary Level students will be required to answer a number of comprehension questions, fulfil a functional writing task, and write an extended composition in a specific genre. In the composition students will be expected to demonstrate clearly their engagement with and understanding of the original text(s), reveal their own coherent, evaluative response to the text(s), and put forward their own view in a particular written genre.

The text(s) and the questions at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level will be set at a standard appropriate to the ability of the candidates concerned.

7.4 **English II**

This paper will test students' knowledge of and response to a range of texts.

There will be Three Sections on this Paper.

SECTION A: *In-depth study of a text*

There will be a question on each text designated for the course.

There will be options within each question.

Students must answer one question.

SECTION B: *Comparative study*

There will be questions on two of the modes of comparison prescribed for the specific course.

* There will be options within each question.

Students must answer one question.

SECTION C: *Poetry*

At Higher Level:

(i) An unseen poem

(ii) A general question on one of the prescribed poets:

- At Ordinary Level:
- (i) An unseen poem
 - (ii) Two questions on prescribed poetry.

One question will be on an Ordinary Level poem by a prescribed Higher Level poet.

One question will be on a prescribed Ordinary Level poem.

- * Students must answer one question.
- * The poems will be printed on the examination paper.
- * There will be options within each question.