

## **I can... Benchmarking the Junior Cycle Framework and Short Courses in Modern Language on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP)**

The reform of the Junior Cycle and its strong commitment to placing students at the centre of their learning by ‘creating more space for (...) active learning and student engagement’ (Framework ... p.5) and the invitation by the NCCA to develop ‘short courses’ to provide more ‘flexibility’ and ‘creativity’ (same ref) present an ideal opportunity for benchmarking language learning in the Irish Post-Primary system with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its companion tool, the European Language Portfolio (ELP).

The CEFR has become the benchmarking reference for language education systems throughout Europe. It was developed by the Council of Europe to provide a common basis for language education and life-long learning. It was launched in 2001 and has since established the communicative or ‘action-oriented’ definition of language symbolised by the now widely used ‘can-do descriptors’ also known as ‘I can...’ statements. It provides a framework of reference for the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to communicate effectively as well as the criteria for describing language proficiency. These are summarised in its ‘Self-Assessment Grid’ for language proficiency according to the Council of Europe six levels from Basic user (level A1) to Proficient user (level C2).

The ELP, also launched in 2001, the European Year of Languages, is the practical application of the CEFR. It provides language learners and teachers with a tool designed to place the learner in charge of his or her learning through setting goals, charting progress and presenting evidence of language learning and language proficiency. It has also become a European-wide reference tool and has been widely adopted by and adapted to a variety of national circumstances and linguistic contexts.

Both the CEFR and the ELP go beyond describing and promoting the development of language competence. They identify how an ‘awareness of language’ can help language learners become better learners. They also emphasize the symbiotic link between language and culture and the role of intercultural encounters in language and intercultural learning.

The following table illustrates the parallels which exist between the Junior Cycle Framework and Short Courses on the one hand and the CEFR and ELP on the other, in terms of vision, curriculum, methodology and assessment.

The factsheet on the following page provides a quick reference for the key principles of the CEFR, the main features of the ELP and specific terminology used in both.

See the table document ‘**Aligning the Junior Cycle Framework and Short Courses Specifications with the CEFR and ELP**’ presented separately.

## In summary ...

### CEFR

- The **Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching and assessment** (CEFR) was launched by the Council of Europe in 2001 to promote language diversity, languages for mobility and a common system of reference for languages throughout Europe. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1_en.asp)
- **6 key principles** are promoted:
  - Plurilingualism and the recognition of partial competence
  - Communicative language use in learning, teaching and assessment
  - Language awareness and learner autonomy
  - Life long language learning – in school, outside school and beyond school
  - Interculturalism and dialogue between cultures
  - European citizenship and mobility within Europe
- **5 language skills**  
It distinguishes five language skills, two receptive skills –listening and reading- and three productive skills –spoken interaction, spoken production and reading
- **6 proficiency levels**  
It identifies six bands or broad levels of language proficiency

▲	<b>C2</b>	(Mastery)	<b>Proficient user</b>
▲	<b>C1</b>	(Effective Operational Proficiency) (EOP)	
▲	<b>B2</b>	(Vantage)	<b>Independent user</b>
▲	<b>B1</b>	(Threshold)	
▲	<b>A2</b>	(Waystage)	<b>Basic user</b>
▲	<b>A1</b>	(Breakthrough)	

- **CEFR self assessment grid**  
The six proficiency levels and five language levels combine into a grid designed to help identify one's own **linguistic profile**. It increasingly serves as reference for teachers, curriculum designers, testers, and certification bodies.  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/assessment\\_grid/assessment\\_grid\\_english.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/assessment_grid/assessment_grid_english.pdf)

### ELP

- The Council of Europe designed the European Language Portfolio as a practical application of the CEFR. It embodies the six principles of the CEFR and uses its can-do descriptors/statements with reference to its six levels of language competence.  
<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>
- It performs two functions:
  - **Pedagogical function:** it guides language learning by promoting planning, reflection and self assessment
  - **Reporting function:** it presents evidence of learning and language competence
- All European Language Portfolio are made up of three components:

- A **'Language Passport'** which summarises linguistic identity (including self-assessment of competence levels) and language and cultural experiences
  - A **'Language Biography'** which uses can-do statements to track the language learning process from goal setting to review and recording of progress
  - A **'Dossier'** which provides the opportunity to 'collect, reflect and select' a representative sample of evidence of language proficiency.
- **One framework- different versions.** All ELPs accredited by the Council of Europe include the above three components and follow the CEFR principles and common reference levels. Various versions of the ELP have been developed to address the needs of different target groups, school-based or otherwise, and different language combinations throughout Europe.

## Conclusion

In summary, in the area of Modern Languages the CEFR and ELP can play a central role in support of the Junior Cycle Framework's principles and particularly in its drive to promote Engagement and Participation, Learning to Learn, Continuity and Development, Creativity and Innovation, Choice and Flexibility and Inclusive Education, as well as Quality. They can also be aligned very closely with five of the Learning Statements and with all of the Key Skills which provide the framework for the new Junior Cycle Short Courses. The central Key Skills in this context are Managing Myself, Communicating, Managing Information and Thinking. The ELP can however also present added-value in relation to Being Creative, Working with Others and Staying Well in its acknowledgement that, in any language, there is more to communication than words.

With regard to a focus on 'innovation' and 'identity' in the Junior Cycle Review, the CEFR and the ELP can 'refresh' the perception of Modern Languages at Post Primary level with the 'I can...' approach to language learning, language description, assessment and appreciation. The ELP can guide language learning and the development of language awareness, learning how to learn and intercultural awareness. An interactive online version of the ELP, or e-ELP, will provide learners with the opportunity to assess and document their learning in a medium that they are familiar with. It can also make a significant contribution to their future mobility and employability. 'Identity' is also core to the ELP concept, in particular with its 'Language Passport' component which provides proof of linguistic identity and enhances and celebrates the value of pluri-lingual identity. Students will not only be able to say 'Have done a Russian/Spanish/Italian/... Junior Cycle short course, will travel! but simply 'Have ELP, will travel!-with all my languages'.

The CEFR is increasingly adopted to serve as a benchmark for language education systems throughout Europe and the ELP has become a European-wide currency for language learning and language competence. It also has the potential to support and chart intercultural learning. As such it is an imperative that new courses for Junior Cycle be benchmarked against it.

## References:

- A Framework for Junior Cycle, NCCA, October 2012
- Developing Short Courses in Junior Cycle – Draft Handbook, NCCA, December 2012
- Common European Framework of Reference for languages learning, teaching and assessment ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1_en.asp))
- European Language Portfolio (<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>)