



Dublin International Study Centre

CEFR ALIGNMENT POLICY

Contents Page

CEFR Alignment Policy	3
Purpose	3
Scope	3
Definitions.....	3
CEFR Entry and Exit Requirements.....	4
Guiding Principles	4
Curriculum and CEFR Mapping	5
Assessment and CEFR Referencing.....	6
Diagnostics and Progression	7
Teaching, Learning and Teacher Training.....	8
Roles and Responsibilities	8
Monitoring and Review	9
Document Control.....	10

CEFR Alignment Policy

Purpose

1. This policy defines how Dublin International Study Centre (DISC) aligns the design, delivery, assessment, and quality assurance of English language teaching in the International Foundation Year (IFY) and the Academic English Skills (AES) module with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This policy has been developed to reflect the underpinning principles of language as a tool for effective and contextually relevant communication. It enables consistency with QQI's ELE Code/Statutory QA Guidelines, TrustEd Ireland requirements, and the Council of Europe recommendations (CM/Rec(2008)7).

Scope

2. This policy applies broadly across DISC's AES provision to ensure a consistent and transparent approach to CEFR alignment. It defines the areas, programmes, and personnel to which the policy is relevant, and clarifies the contexts in which it is implemented:
 - The AES module on the IFY programme
 - Staff involved in curriculum design, teaching, assessment, moderation, external examining, academic support, teacher training, and quality assurance.

Definitions

3. For the purpose of this policy, the following terms are defined to ensure clarity and consistency in application:
 - **CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages):** An action-oriented framework (A1–C2) describing language proficiency, based on the principles of inclusivity, mutual understanding, appreciation of diversity, and the importance of language in creating a common basis for communicative language learning, teaching (including assessment), and curriculum design. It provides sets of scales with competency descriptors for the CEFR bands under the headings of Reception, Production, Mediation, Interaction, Communicative Language Strategies, Communicative Language Competences, Pragmatic Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, and Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competences.
 - **AES (Academic English Skills):** The core language and study skills module within the IFY programme, focused on developing academic reading, writing, listening, speaking (transactional as well as interactional), research skills, and an understanding of, as well as the ability to uphold, academic integrity.
 - **Entry Level:** The CEFR proficiency level (e.g., B1+, B2) at which a learner is admitted to a programme, determined through placement testing and

writing/speaking samples.

- **Exit Level:** The CEFR proficiency level (e.g., B2+, C1 in specific tasks) learners are required to demonstrate in order to successfully complete a programme and progress to the next stage.
- **Mediation:** A CEFR competence involving the ability to process, transform, and relay information (e.g. paraphrasing, summarising, explaining data, or interpreting meaning for others) as well as mediating concepts and communication.
- **Progression Threshold:** The minimum CEFR-aligned performance a learner must demonstrate in order to advance within or beyond a programme.
-

CEFR Entry and Exit Requirements

- This section establishes the CEFR entry and exit standards that apply to DISC's IFF and AES module. These standards are benchmarked against the QQI NFQ Level 5 learning outcomes, the CEFR policy guidelines (Council of Europe CM/Rec(2008)7), and DISC's Admissions and Progression Policies. They provide clarity for admissions, programme delivery, assessment design, and progression to partner universities:
 - **Entry Level (IFY AES):** Learners are normally admitted at **B1+** level, broadly equivalent to **IELTS 5.0–5.5**. Learners entering at B1+ are supported through the intervention strategy and receive additional one-to-one tutorials as needed.
 - **Exit Level (IFY AES):** Successful completion requires demonstration of B2+/C1 overall proficiency, with C1-level performance in key academic tasks such as extended academic writing, lecture notetaking, and seminar participation. This is broadly equivalent to IELTS 6.5 overall, with no skill below 6.0, as required for university progression.

These thresholds are designed to equip IFY graduates with sufficient academic language proficiency, critical thinking, and communication skills necessary to achieve their goals and succeed in higher education, consistent with QQI and CEFR standards.

Guiding Principles

- The following principles guide how DISC applies the CEFR across its English language provision. They clarify the values and approach that shape curriculum design, teaching and learning, assessment, and staff development, ensuring that CEFR is used meaningfully and consistently in practice.

Principle	Application at DISC
-----------	---------------------

Descriptive, not prescriptive	CEFR descriptors inform learning outcomes and assessment rubrics, but tutors adapt them flexibly to suit the AES context and learner needs.
Action-oriented Approach	AES teaching and assessment tasks are designed to enable learners to develop the sub-skills needed to manage authentic academic tasks, reflecting what will be expected of them in their intended target communities (e.g. extended essays, lecture notetaking, seminar participation).
Transparency & Comparability	Entry and exit levels are published in CEFR terms; assessment rubrics reference CEFR descriptors; results are recognised by partner universities.
Plurilingualism & Lifelong Learning	Learners are encouraged to draw on their full linguistic repertoire and develop a range of strategies for the ongoing development of independent learning and intercultural competence.
Quality Assurance	CEFR is intrinsically embedded in assessment design, moderation, external examining, and annual programme reviews to ensure validity in terms of construct and grading, reliability and consistency.
Teacher Professionalisation	A working understanding of the CEFR — from a macro-overview of its principles, through a detailed examination of the framework design and learner-oriented scales, to its operational realisation in programme design, teaching, and assessment — forms a key part of staff induction and ongoing CPD. Within the AES programme, the focus on effective use of descriptors, assessment calibration, and intercultural awareness is recognised as an essential element of the teacher's toolkit, and staff receive orientation and training in these areas.

Curriculum and CEFR Mapping

6. DISC's AES curriculum is explicitly mapped to the CEFR to ensure that learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments are coherent, transparent, and internationally recognisable. This mapping provides a structured pathway from learners' entry levels (B1+/B2) to the required exit levels (B2+/C1 academic tasks),

supporting successful progression to undergraduate study. To achieve this, DISC applies a set of curriculum mapping principles which anchor programme outcomes to the CEFR framework and enable consistency across teaching, learning, and assessment. These principles, drawn from Council of Europe recommendations, guide how the Scheme of Work is constructed and how assessments are designed and moderated:

- **Principles of mapping:** In line with Council of Europe recommendations, the AES curriculum uses CEFR can-do statements to define outcomes for each skill and competence (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, mediation, and interaction). These descriptors inform both the Scheme of Work and assessment rubrics.
- **Integration with QQI National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 5:** Learning outcomes are benchmarked against NFQ Level 5 standards, ensuring alignment between CEFR descriptors and the NFQ requirements.
- **Assessment linkage:** Assessments are designed and calibrated using CEFR descriptors, and moderated to ensure validity and comparability, in line with the Council of Europe's *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR*.
- **Curriculum transparency:** The mapping allows learners, staff, and partner universities to clearly see how each stage of the AES module builds cumulatively towards internationally recognised proficiency levels, enhancing credibility and enabling mobility.

Assessment and CEFR Referencing

7. All AES assessments at DISC are designed to be transparent, reliable, and directly referenced to the CEFR. This ensures that learner achievement can be clearly mapped to internationally recognised standards, while also meeting QQI requirements for validity, reliability, and fairness. To achieve this, a comprehensive assessment framework is in place, which integrates the following elements:
 - **Summative assessment design:** Key assessments on the AES module, such as the extended academic essay, listening examination, and seminar/presentation, are explicitly aligned with CEFR B2+/C1 descriptors. Each assessment is constructed to reflect authentic academic tasks that learners will encounter in their higher education context (e.g. listening to lectures, engaging in seminars, producing extended written work).
 - **Rubrics and marking criteria:** All marking rubrics are anchored to CEFR categories, including linguistic range and accuracy, coherence and cohesion, task achievement, interactional competence, and mediation. Rubrics are published to learners in advance to promote transparency and guide self-assessment.
 - **Formative and diagnostic alignment:** Coursework assessments, such as extended essays and presentations, are designed to reflect the formats of the final summative assessments. Learners receive detailed, criterion-referenced feedback and clear guidelines that are aligned with CEFR descriptors and the programme's learning outcomes. This structured approach provides a continuous

feedback loop, enabling learners to refine their skills and progress effectively toward their target outcomes.

- **Benchmarking and exemplars:** Samples of learner writing exam scripts (high, medium, and low level) are provided through the Study Group network and used as benchmarking tools during standardisation sessions. These samples support the calibration of marking practices and inform the moderation process, enabling the consistent application of CEFR descriptors.
- **Moderation and externality:** Internal moderation includes double-marking of key summative tasks and cross-sample review across tutors and terms. An External Examiner reviews a representative sample of work each term, with a particular focus on CEFR alignment, comparability, and assessment standards.
- **Validation and quality assurance:** Assessment procedures follow the Council of Europe's Manual for Languages Relating Examinations to the CEFR, which provides a structured methodology for linking assessment outcomes to CEFR descriptors. This process supports both the validity (assessing what is intended) and the reliability (consistency across markers and cohorts) of DISC's AES assessment system.
- **Continuous improvement:** Post-assessment analysis is conducted after each cycle to evaluate task performance, learner outcomes, and CEFR alignment. Findings are recorded in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) by the Head of English and Head of Quality, and inform updates to task design, rubrics, and moderation practices. This process is intended to impact both learners and staff:
 - For learners, it ensures that assessments remain fair, transparent and aligned with recognised standards, thereby supporting their progression and success in higher education.
 - For staff, it provides evidence-based feedback to refine teaching, assessment design, and marking practices, while also embedding consistency and accountability across the programme

Diagnostics and Progression

8. To ensure learners are supported effectively and can meet the required exit standards, DISC employs a structured system of diagnostic testing and progression monitoring. This system operates at several levels, moving from early diagnostics to personalised planning, and finally to progression decisions based on clearly defined CEFR thresholds:
 - **Initial diagnostics:** Learners entering the programme with an IELTS score of 5.0 or 5.5, or an equivalent publicly recognised English language qualification such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), complete a CEFR-referenced diagnostic test covering reading, reading-into-writing, and speaking. Listening comprehension is indicated during the speaking component but is not formally assessed. The outcomes provide a baseline profile of individual strengths and areas for development, which then informs targeted support.
 - **Intervention Strategy:** Based on diagnostic outcomes, an intervention strategy is initiated whereby learners are flagged for additional support.

These learners receive increased one-to-one attention, and an agreed support plan is put in place to address identified areas for development.

- **Progression thresholds:** To complete the AES module successfully and progress to undergraduate study, learners must demonstrate sustained B2+ or C1 performance across reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, including interactional and mediation competencies, as well as the effective use of communicative strategies.

Teaching, Learning and Teacher Training

9. Effective teaching and learning are central to ensuring that learners progress in line with CEFR descriptors and achieve the required exit levels. At DISC, AES classroom practice, learning design, and teacher development are explicitly informed by CEFR principles to ensure consistency, quality, and transparency. This approach combines a learner-centred pedagogy, professional staff development, and structured tools that foster autonomy and academic integrity.
 - **Teaching Approach:** Instruction is task-based and action-oriented, reflecting the CEFR view of learners as social agents who use language to complete meaningful tasks. AES teaching integrates CEFR *“can-do” descriptors* into classroom activities, ensuring that learners can apply skills such as summarising sources, engaging in seminar discussions, or producing extended written texts in authentic academic contexts.
 - **Teacher Development:** Both staff induction and ongoing in-service CPD programmes include CEFR familiarisation and calibration activities. Training covers plurilingual education, assessment literacy, the use of CEFR descriptors in lesson planning and rubrics, as well as principles of formative assessment. This enables tutors are confident in applying CEFR consistently and reliably across teaching and assessment practices.
 - **Integrity and accessibility:** Academic integrity is embedded into teaching and assessment through explicit instruction in paraphrasing, referencing, and source use. In addition, reasonable accommodations are provided where required, ensuring equitable access to learning without compromising CEFR-aligned standards or assessment validity.

Roles and Responsibilities

10. Clear allocation of roles and responsibilities is essential to ensure that CEFR alignment is embedded across curriculum design, teaching, assessment, and quality assurance. At DISC, responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy is shared across senior leadership, teaching staff, and learners themselves. The following roles have defined responsibilities:
 - **Head of Quality and Head of English:** Jointly oversee compliance with CEFR policy, ensuring alignment with QQI, TrustEd Ireland, and Council of Europe requirements. They lead annual policy review, external reporting, and integration into the broader DISC QA framework.

- **Deputy Director – Curriculum and Progression:** Maintains CEFR curriculum mapping, develops, reviews and updates assessment rubrics as needed, coordinates systematic teacher training, and oversees internal moderation and progression processes to ensure consistency with CEFR standards.
- **AES Teaching Staff:** Deliver CEFR-based teaching and learning, integrate CEFR descriptors into lesson planning and assessment, engage in CPD and standardisation activities, and contribute to moderation.
- **Learners:** Take an active role in their learning by upholding academic integrity and engaging with CEFR “can-do” outcomes to monitor, reflect on and enhance their competences and progress.
-

Monitoring and Review

11. Ongoing monitoring and review are central to ensuring that CEFR alignment at DISC remains consistent, reliable, and responsive to emerging needs. Monitoring activities provide evidence of how effectively the policy is being implemented, while review mechanisms ensure that findings lead to continuous improvement across teaching, learning, and assessment.
 - **Internal reviews:** Alignment with CEFR descriptors is checked on a termly basis through analysis of assessment outcomes, and staff moderation meetings. These checks verify that curriculum delivery, assessment practices, and learner progression remain consistent with CEFR standards.
 - **External reviews:** An External Examiner reviews a representative sample of learner work termly, with particular attention to CEFR referencing, comparability of standards, and progression outcomes. In addition, periodic peer reviews across DISC staff provide further quality assurance and opportunities for professional dialogue and reflection.
 - **Continuous improvement:** Findings from internal and external reviews are formally documented and feed into the **QIP**. Action points may include revisions to the Scheme of Work, updates to assessment rubrics, targeted staff CPD, or refinements to diagnostic and progression procedures. Outcomes of review cycles are reported to senior management and used to inform the Annual Monitoring Report.

Document Control

Document name		CEFR Alignment Policy	
Document owner		Amir Hussain	
Approved by		Academic Board	
Approval date		March 2026	
Next review date		August 2026	
Version		1.0	
Policy applies to		All staff and Students	
Related documents			
Version	Date	Update by	Details