# Written submission: Consultation on the Draft Leaving Certificate Music specification

NCCA is redeveloping Leaving Certificate Music. The aim of this consultation is to obtain the open and honest views of all stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, and other interested parties. The feedback gained from the consultation will inform the work of the development group in preparing the final specification.

NCCA would greatly appreciate your feedback on the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Music which can be found here: https://ncca.ie/media/3ofbuiny/draft-lc-music-specification-for-consultation-en.pdf

When providing feedback, observations or comments, please reference the specific section and / or relevant learning outcomes.

The closing date for this consultation is 2nd of March 2026 at 5pm.

## Data protection and open data section

NCCA is committed to protecting your privacy and does not collect any personal information about you through this written submission, other than information that you provide by your own consent. Where a respondent selects *'yes'* to the question: *Are you consenting to be listed as a respondent to this consultation*, respondents are consenting to having their name / organisation's name published in the final report as respondents to the consultation.

Where a respondent selects *'yes'* to the question: *Are you consenting for your submission to be published*, respondents are consenting to having their submission published on ncca.ie.

Any personal information you volunteer to the NCCA will be respected and NCCA will apply the highest standards of security and confidentiality in accordance with GDPR (2016) and the Data Protection Acts (1998 - 2018). Further information on the NCCA's Data Protection Policy can be found at https://ncca.ie/en/legal-disclaimer-and-data-protection/.

NCCA, as a public body operating under the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021), is required to publish publicly funded research. In accordance with this Directive, any data from this will be anonymised and aggregated and only made available after the final report is published. This is expected to be in June 2026.  All open data is made available alongside the report itself on the website www.ncca.ie

NCCA may use the data you provide in the form of quotations. Where this happens, the quote will be anonymised.

The feedback collected through this survey will be shared with the development group responsible for the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Music specification. This information will be used solely to support their work. All feedback shared will be handled in accordance with GDPR.

## Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) Formal Education Working Group

Are you consenting to be listed as a respondent to this consultation?

- o <u>Yes</u>
- o No

If yes, please enter the name you wish to have published in the final report.

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) Formal Education Working Group

Are you consenting to have the submission published on ncca.ie?

- o <u>Yes</u>
- o No

# Rationale, Aim, and Key Competencies [p. 3-5, 9-12]

**Rationale:** The rationale, (p. 3) outlines the nature of Music and the role and importance of Music in realising the purpose and vision of senior cycle**.**

**Aim**: The aim, (p. 5) outlines the over-arching purpose of the subject and the relevance and expected impact of the subject on student learning.

In your opinion, do the rationale and aim capture the overarching purpose and nature of Music; the importance of the subject in realising the vision of senior cycle and the relevance and expected impact of this subject on student learning. Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

*IDEA (the Irish Development Education Association) represents 114 members involved in Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in formal, non-formal and informal settings. We in the IDEA Formal Education Working Group, comprising 46 IDEA members, welcome this consultation process, and the opportunity to contribute.*

We broadly agree with the rationale which reflects the universality of music as a common language which unites people in a myriad of ways. Clear links are drawn to the Senior Cycle guiding principles and key competencies and the broad focus outlined affords many opportunities for teachers to embed Global Citizenship Education (GCE) within this subject.

Some of these opportunities could be made more explicit in the learning outcomes (see below). In general, the opportunities to embed GCE appear to be more implicit here than in Junior Cycle music where the link is more explicit in the learning outcomes.

From the Senior Cycle aims, the statement *"Every student's identity should be celebrated, respected and responded to"* has resonance for the music classroom, where engagement with diverse musical traditions and student voices is a daily practice. Through listening, performing and composing, music education can support GCE by fostering inclusion, intercultural understanding and respect for diversity, enabling students to value both their own identities and those of others in an interconnected world.

Using music as: *a valuable lens for understanding history and culture* is to be welcomed, however teachers need to be supported to ensure that this lens is not a Euro-centric understanding and to ensure a decolonial perspective, which encompasses the *diverse range of musical traditions, style and practices.* This needs to be ensured so that *students are thinking critically when recognising different musical styles.* Teachers also need to be supported in not reinforcing stereotypes when it comes to musical traditions.

Aligned with the aim that *music can empower students to contribute meaningfully to their own communities,* there is a significant opportunity here for students to use their voice as a means of social commentary, advocacy and solidarity which could be reflected in the prescribed material, their choice of pieces and in the AAC stimulus.

The term *community* could be understood more broadly to encompass not only local contexts but also national and global communities. In schools with wide or diverse catchment areas, defining a single local community can be challenging; therefore, opportunities should be flexible and inclusive, allowing engagement with national and global communities as well.

The ethical dimensions of music consumption and production are a particularly relevant feature of music in the 21st century and align closely with Sustainable Development/Global Goal 12: *Responsible Consumption and Production.* The students may not yet be producers of music, but they all are/will be consumers, making this a crucial area to explore. This area offers clear opportunities for deeper inclusion within the specification, especially as it reflects issues that strongly engage students, as evidenced in Junior Cycle music classrooms.

**Key Competencies:** Key competencies is an umbrella term which refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop in an integrated way during senior cycle. These competencies are linked and can be combined; can improve students' overall learning; can help students and teachers to make meaningful connections between and across different areas of learning; and are important across the curriculum.

The draft specification sets out examples of how key competencies can be developed in Leaving Certificate Music (p. 9 - 12)

In your opinion, does this section effectively capture the development of student key competencies in Leaving Certificate Music? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

Leaving Certificate Music has always and continues to support the development of key competencies through creative, communicative, collaborative, and reflective learning experiences.

While the competencies of *being creative, communicating, working with others and cultivating well-being* have obvious links to the subject, there is scope here to take a broader approach to how music can be a tool for *Participating in Society.* Aligned with this key competency, there is strong potential for a more explicit global citizenship focus in this specification.

The key competency of *Participating in Society* could be strengthened by explicitly recognising music as a means through which students engage with global issues, social justice, and collective responsibility. The specification could encourage students to explore how music responds to inequality, conflict, climate change, migration, and cultural identity, both locally and globally. By analysing and creating music that reflects diverse lived experiences and global perspectives, students would be supported to develop empathy, critical awareness, and ethical understanding.

An expanded focus could also emphasise active participation, where students use music to communicate viewpoints, advocate for change, and express solidarity with others. This

## Strands of study and learning outcomes [p.13-26]

**Course overview:** The course overview sets out the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions for students in two interconnected strands: Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas and Music in Context: Past and present. The specification emphasises a non-linear, integrated approach to learning across the two strands.

Interwoven throughout the learning in the two strands are three integrated modes of engagement: Creating and Experimenting, Performing and Music-Making, and Listening, Appraising and Responding. By integrating these modes of engagement, students learn to develop and apply their competencies through the varied and flexible roles of being a musician. A graphical representation of the structure can be found on p.14 of the specification.

The details of the two strands and the three modes of engagement are described on pages 13-26 of the specification.

In your opinion, does the structure illustrate the interconnected nature of the strands and the integrated modes of engagement in an appropriate way? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

The structure encompasses the interconnected nature of the strands and modes of engagement outlined here, however the GCE focus could be stronger and more explicit.

In Junior Cycle Music, Strand 3 '*Culture and Context*' and the learning outcomes therein provide a broad platform within which to approach the social and cultural context of the study of music. Without this focus in the Leaving Certificate specification, the work done in Junior Cycle music classrooms may not be expanded and breaks the flow from Junior to Senior Cycle in this subject.

## Strand 1: Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas (p.18-22)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

Strand 1: *Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas*, aligns closely with the rationale and aims by positioning students as active creators who engage creatively with music to explore ideas, meaning, and expression, while developing an understanding of music as a cultural, social, and artistic practice. To fully realise this aim, the choice of prescribed music and AAC stimulus material should intentionally reflect cultural, historical, and global diversity, seeking out music from a number of different cultures and communities and with gender balance. This would also align with the SC guiding principle of inclusive education and diversity.

LO 1.13 *Explain what copyright is and why it matters in the music industry* could be expanded further to inform students in understanding the ethical dimensions of music consumption and production, including fair pay, creative ownership, and responsible use of digital content. Linking copyright to Sustainable Development/Global Goal 12 would reinforce awareness of sustainable and ethical practices within the music industry, helping students recognise their role as responsible consumers and creators. A suggested re-wording to reflect this is: *Explain what copyright is and examine its role in promoting fair, ethical, and sustainable practices in the music industry.*

Embedding a GCE lens in these learning outcomes would strengthen the *Participating in Society* key competency by enabling students to explore music as social commentary, to engage with global issues, and to express solidarity with diverse communities.

## Strand 2: Music in Context: Past and Present (p.23-26)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

Strand 2 is well aligned with the rationale and aims, positioning music as a lens for understanding history, culture, and society. However, there are opportunities to more

explicitly encourage students to engage critically with diversity, context, and influence via the learning outcomes.

For example, there is clear scope for embedding GCE within the learning outcomes of Junior Cycle Music. Several Junior Cycle learning outcomes explicitly invite students to compare, contrast, and reflect on music from different cultures, places, and contexts, supporting the development of intercultural awareness and respect. Examples include:

- **J.C. LO 1.10**: *Discussing contrasting musical styles within the local school or community*
- **J.C. LO 1.13**: *Comparing interpretations of Irish traditional music and identifying wider influences*
- **J.C. LO 1.14**: *Comparing music from the same period and style by composers from different countries*

Furthermore, the inclusion of Strand 3 – **Culture and Context** in Junior Cycle Music provides clear opportunities for embedding GCE through comparative and contextual learning outcomes focused on culture and context.

By contrast, the Leaving Certificate learning outcomes do not mandate this broader GCE-aligned approach to the same extent. Within the draft specification, **LO 2.4** is the primary outcome that explicitly supports exploration of intercultural influence, while **LO 2.2** currently leaves scope for interpretation rather than requiring critical engagement with global contexts. We suggest the following alternative wording:

**Suggested rewording of LO 2.4** – *Explore how Irish Traditional Dance, Irish Traditional Music, and Irish Traditional Song both shape and are shaped by global musical traditions, by analysing similarities, differences, and connections with traditional music from other cultures.*

**Suggested rewording of LO 2.2** - *Explore how music both reflects and shapes social, cultural, political, and global contexts.*

This would strengthen alignment with GCE by shifting the focus from context as background information to music as an active social force, opening space to examine inequality, migration, climate justice, identity, and power relations.

The absence of explicit reference to musical fusion is surprising, given its importance in contemporary music. Fusion highlights how music is shaped by migration, globalisation, and cultural exchange, For example, **Afro Celt Sound System** combines Irish traditional and West African music, allowing students to explore intercultural collaboration and global connection. The inclusion of reference to fusion would support Strand 1 through creative exploration, Strand 2 through contextual listening and analysis, and strengthens the opportunity to focus on the key competency of *Participating in Society* by highlighting music as a space for dialogue and solidarity.

**Prescribed Music**

The specification makes reference to a 'prescribed music list' (p.23). Please provide feedback / observations / comments on the key considerations for the selection of this music (scope, breadth, depth).

Prescribed material strongly shapes classroom learning; a globally representative selection would support students in developing critical awareness of power, inequality, representation, and voice in music. Careful selection of prescribed works can balance access, inclusion, and appropriate challenge, ensuring all students can engage meaningfully while maintaining musical rigour and relevance.

Student motivation will be strongly influenced by the choice of prescribed music; as such, this repertoire should be inclusive, diverse in scope and depth, and reflective of the multicultural identities present in the classrooms in which it will be taught.

With this mind, we would suggest the following is considered in making this choice

- Include music from a wide range of cultures and global contexts to reflect diverse voices and experiences, ensuring a good gender balance.
- Select works that engage with social, historical, and political themes, supporting critical understanding and empathy e.g. Estonia's Singing Revolution.
- Ensure prescribed music allows discussion of ethical production, copyright, and sustainability, linking to responsible consumption e.g. Earth/Percent.
- Choose material that highlights intercultural influence and music's role in expression, social justice commentary, and solidarity. For example, Naomi Berrill (2024) 'Leave no Trace' is an example of a piece composed to inform climate action:  Leave no Trace

We recommend careful consideration of the prescribed material to ensure it aligns with the aims of the Senior Cycle Music specification, supports the development of key competencies, and reflects the principles of GCE through inclusive, diverse, and culturally responsive choices.

## Additional Assessment Component (AAC) (p.30-33)

The AAC in Leaving Certificate Music is called the Music Performance. This AAC provides students with practical, music-making opportunities to bring the core subject learning to life in ways that cannot be readily assessed by the written examination.

The Music Performance AAC requires all students to perform a programme on an instrument/voice as follows:

- freely selected musical pieces/songs and
- an original musical piece/song and
- an unprepared musical test.

Students will complete their AAC in response to a common brief, issued annually by the SEC which will set out the requirements. Students will be assessed at either

Higher or Ordinary Level. The AAC will constitute 50% of the overall marks available for the subject.

An overview of requirements for the Music Performance AAC at Ordinary and Higher Level is outlined on page 30 of the specification. The AAC is designed to be naturally integrated into the flow of teaching and learning and to exploit its potential to be motivating and relevant for students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on the AAC in Leaving Certificate Music with reference to how the AAC might motivate students, how it aligns to the learning outcomes in the specification and how it facilitates the development of key competencies.

The Additional Assessment Component (AAC) of Music Performance, and in particular the use of stimulus material for composition, offers more than a creative starting point; it creates meaningful opportunities to connect music learning with the wider world while developing key competencies such as being creative, communicating, working with others, and participating in society.

- Stimulus themes provide opportunities to engage with current global issues such as equality, identity, migration, climate change and sustainability. Through this process, students use music as a lens to explore and respond creatively to real-world challenges, aligning with learning outcomes 2.2, 2.4 and 2.12, and strengthening creative expression and communication.
- Students' choice of pieces or songs further supports this process by allowing learners to reflect their own identities and interests while engaging with diverse musical traditions and themes. This engagement with diverse musical traditions supports the development of empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking, enabling students to participate more effectively in an interconnected society.
- Collaborative music-making encourages students to work with others, listen to different perspectives, and value shared creative processes, while also providing opportunities to advocate for social justice and celebrate cultural diversity. This approach aligns with GCE principles by fostering responsibility, perspective-taking, inclusion, and active participation.

In this way, the AAC enables composition and performance to function both as an artistic process and as a platform for global awareness, advocacy, collaboration, and celebration of our diverse world, empowering students to see themselves as creative, communicative, and active global citizens.

We recommend careful consideration of the stimulus material to align with Senior Cycle aims and GCE principles, reflecting diverse perspectives and the lived experiences of students.

## Supports for Successful Enactment

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on supports that might be needed for the successful enactment of this subject specification.

**Live Performance**

The requirement within the specification for students to attend at least one live performance is a valuable and potentially transformative aspect of the course. To ensure its successful enactment, schools must be adequately supported to provide a broad, inclusive and diverse range of live performance opportunities that extend beyond Western or Eurocentric traditions. Access to performances across multiple genres, cultures and performance practices — including global, community-based and contemporary music — can significantly enhance students' musical, cultural and creative development and should be encouraged and supported.

Exposure to diverse live music experiences fosters curiosity, empathy and intercultural understanding, deepens musical appreciation, and builds creative confidence. Applying GCE principles ensures that students encounter music as a shared human expression across cultures, rather than from a single dominant perspective. With appropriate logistical, financial and community supports in place, the live performance requirement can become not merely an attendance obligation, but a meaningful, inclusive and culturally enriching learning experience.

**Music as social commentary**

Music as social commentary is an increasingly recognised area of academic study, reflecting a growing awareness of music as a tool for social critique and change. Research such as *Songs of Social Protest: International Perspectives* (Dillane et al., 2018) and *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music and Social Class* (ed. Peddie, 2021) highlights how music engages with issues of identity, power and inequality across cultures. Acknowledging music's role as social commentary within Senior Cycle Music supports its successful enactment by enhancing relevance, student engagement and critical understanding, while aligning with curricular aims and the principles of GCE.