Written submission: Consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate Geography specification

NCCA is redeveloping Leaving Certificate Geography. 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 which can be found here: Draft Leaving Certificate Geography specification

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

The closing date for this consultation is 25th April 2025 at 5pm.

Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

IDEA Formal Education Working Group

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

- Yes
- No

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

Yes: IDEA FEWG

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

- **Yes**
- No

Rationale, Aim, and Key Competencies (pages 2-7)

Senior Cycle Guiding Principles	
Wellbeing and relationships	Choice and flexibility
Inclusive education and diversity	Continuity and transitions
Challenge, engagement and creativity	Participation and citizenship
Learning to learn, learning for life	Learning environments and partnerships

Rationale: The rationale (page 2) outlines the nature of Geography and the role and importance of Geography in realising the purpose and vision of senior cycle.

Geography is the study of the Earth, its peoples and the interactions between them. It is a multifaceted science and humanities discipline which uses qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the physical and human world. The study of Leaving Certificate Geography equips students with relevant and transferrable knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. Through their study, students become more geographically literate and are enabled to understand the interactions, interconnections and implications of decisions that shape our natural and human environments. They are supported in analysing and evaluating economic, environmental and social challenges and responses to these challenges. In studying Leaving Certificate Geography, students engage with key concepts. They learn to relate their personal geographical experiences to a variety of scales. Students are empowered to actively engage with and apply their learning, through the development of geographical thinking and skills. They pose geographical questions, plan, implement and evaluate geographical inquiries. They analyse, synthesise and communicate real world data and information. Geography supports the development of skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. These skills enable students to come to evidence-based decisions and judgements, and to identify and apply creative and sustainable responses to complex geographical challenges. Geography helps students develop an informed worldview, equips them to make ethical, future-orientated decisions and enables them to better navigate our increasingly globalised world.

Aim: The Aim (page 3) outlines the over-arching purpose of the subject and the relevance and expected impact of the subject on student learning.

The aim of Leaving Certificate Geography is to develop students' understanding of the Earth and its people, and their interest in and appreciation of the real-world significance of geography. Students are supported to think like geographers and to apply geographical skills, to better understand the world and to contribute to shaping

a more sustainable future from a critically informed perspective. More specifically, Leaving Certificate Geography enables students to:

• identify, analyse and critically evaluate the interactions between physical and human processes

• develop, use and apply geographical thinking and inquiry skills

• develop understanding of concepts that are key to the discipline of geography

• understand the complexity of forces that impact at a variety of scales

• engage with data and information from a range of reliable sources

• use evidence-based decision-making and judgements to explore creative and sustainable responses to economic, environmental and social challenges.

In your opinion, do the rationale and aim capture the overarching purpose and nature of Geography; 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.

It's very good to see the rational of students becoming more Geographically literate and are '*enabled to understand the interactions, interconnections and implications of decisions that shape our natural and human environments'.* We feel there is an opportunity to integrate themes such as Global Responsibility, social justice and sustainability here.

It's also welcome to see that '*Students are empowered to actively engage with and apply their learning, through the development of geographical thinking and skills'.* We advocate for the inclusion of 'informed action'.

We suggest clearly defining what is meant by the '*development of skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving'.* This could be expanded by stating that students will be invited to critically assess power dynamics, economic inequalities and historical contexts.

We suggest linking the Sustainable Development Goals to global ethics to help '*students develop an informed worldview [equipping] them to make ethical, future-orientated decisions'.* By connecting the SDGs here students will be encouraged to consider equity, human rights and environmental justice.

'The aim of Leaving Certificate Geography is to develop students' understanding of the Earth and its people, and their interest in and appreciation of the real-world

significance of geography'. We suggest adding to this that students will be invited to critically assess global challenges like climate change and inequality, fostering an understanding of global interconnections and the shared responsibility of global citizens in addressing these issues.

In the aims of the Geography course it is stated that students *'use evidence-based decision-making and judgements to explore creative and sustainable responses to economic, environmental and social challenges'.* We suggest the inclusion of 'global challenges' to highlight the connection we all share on our planet.

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.

From the spec:

In their study of Leaving Certificate Geography, students are supported to develop the competency of participating in society through engagement with issues of relevance to young people, such as land-use or migration. They develop and express their own ideas based on evidence, while understanding the impact of choices. Students also develop their capacity to exercise their voice in discussions about local, regional, national and global challenges, such as those related to the physical environment, globalisation or conflict. This builds their capacity to critique and challenge the status quo, to advocate and influence the shaping of transformative responses towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

The draft specification sets out examples of how key competencies can be developed in Leaving Certificate Geography on pages 5-7.

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

It is wonderful to see the emphasis on 'participating in society' and inclusion of many themes which are at present current topics in our society . It is encouraging

to see language like ‘express own ideas based on evidence’, ‘use their voice in discussions’ and ‘challenge the status quo’.

Strands of study and learning outcomes (pages 8-23)

Course overview: The course overview sets out the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions for students in 4 strands (the unifying strand and 3 contextual strands). The specification emphasises a non-linear, integrated approach to learning across the strands.
The details of the strands are described on pages 8-9 of the specification.

- Applied geographical thinking and skills (unifying strand)
- Where we live – the physical environment (Strand 1)
- Where we live – the human environment (Strand 2)
- How we live – the connected environment (Strand 3)

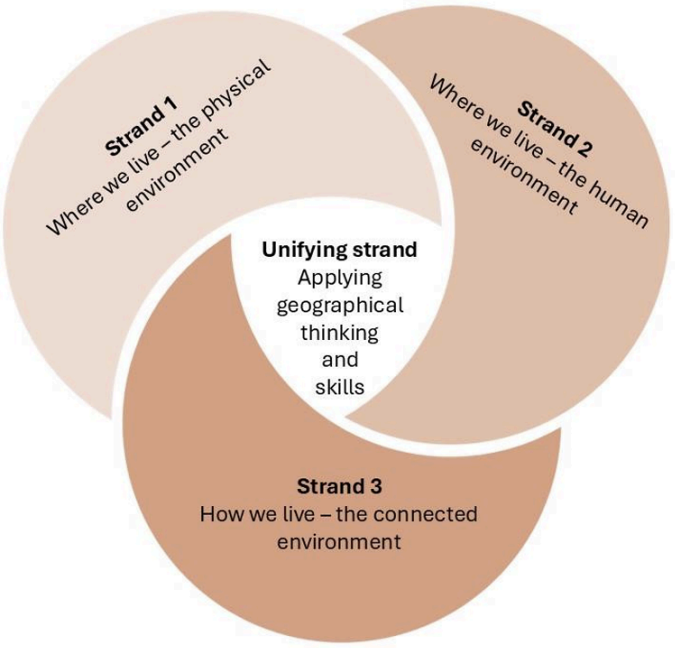


Figure 3 Leaving Certificate Geography strands.

In your opinion, does the structure illustrate the connected nature of the strands and the development of student knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an appropriate way? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

The diagram is useful as it shows the interconnectedness of the course and how we live in the world.

Unifying strand: Applying geographical thinking and skills (pages 10-12)

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.

A summary is provided here:

Geographical Knowledge and Inquiry: Students develop an understanding of geographical knowledge, how it is generated, and its real-world applications in addressing economic, environmental, and social challenges through inquiry.

Geographical Thinking and Skills: Students learn to apply geographical thinking, including using inquiry methods to economic, environmental, and social planning.

Key Geographic Concepts: Students gain understanding of key geographical concepts like interactions, patterns, sustainability, and power..
Geographical Inquiry and Data: Students engage in fieldwork and research to analyse information.
Effective Communication and Ethics: Students learn to evaluate and communicate their findings using maps, graphs, charts, and other formats, while considering ethical and legal issues such as cultural awareness and appropriate citation.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

In Geographical Knowledge and Inquiry, students can explore global issues like climate change, migration and inequality. It is heartening to see that students are using critical thinking and inquiry methods; we notice that there is space here to recognise, through data, the interconnectedness of global systems and how we can go about providing solutions using Geographical thinking. We notice that students will have the opportunity to understand key Geographical concepts like patterns and sustainability. There is an opportunity here to explore the inequalities in our world and the shared responsibility we have to create a just world. In

Fieldwork and research there is an opportunity to encourage students to use data to advocate for human rights and global equity.

Strand 1: Where we live – the physical environment (pages 13-17)

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.

Here is a summary:

Tectonic Processes: Students study the processes of plate tectonics, volcanic activity, and earthquakes, evaluating their impacts (positive and negative) and exploring management strategies for these natural hazards in both Global North and Global South settings.

Natural Resources: The strand covers the rock cycle and examines the challenges of managing natural resources such as minerals, fossil fuels, and forests, along with sustainable responses to these challenges.

Surface Processes: Students learn about fluvial, coastal, and glacial processes, including landforms in Ireland and management strategies for issues like flooding, erosion, and coastal risk, using both hard and soft engineering techniques.

Atmosphere and Weather: This includes the structure of the Earth's atmosphere, weather systems such as depressions and anticyclones.

Climate and Climate Change: Students explore different climate zones and their effects on physical environments, particularly in Ireland, and investigate the impacts of climate change as well as global responses like the Paris Climate Agreement.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

There is an opportunity across all strands to incorporate learning related to the SDGs. Much of Trócaire's work in the post-primary realm focuses on engaging young people with the SDGs in a way that is meaningful to them. It strikes us as unusual that the SDGs seem absent from this subject specification.

We see an opportunity for the inclusion of the human impact when studying the tectonic impact on geographical areas and perhaps comparing the impacts on Global North and South Communities.

When exploring fossil fuels, there is an opportunity to include the effects on the environment on the over-use of fossil fuels along with examining sustainable alternatives. In addition it would be welcome to see the impact of mining on communities in the Global South as well as interrogating what the demand is for and how this demand on resources affects communities.

When students are examining fluvial processes there is an opportunity to include environmental justice and mitigation for future strategies. When studying about atmosphere and weather there is a chance to explore the effect and impact of weather on humans, on agriculture and the trends associated with migration. We advocate here for the emphasis on the connectedness of our world.

When studying Climate Change we encourage the use of the phrase 'Climate Justice' to work in alignment with the Leaving Certificate Climate Action and Sustainable Development course. It is good to see references to Climate agreements such as the Paris Climate agreement. Perhaps there could be more Global examples as we must work together to have a just and sustainable world.

Strand 2: Where we live – the human environment (pages 18-20)

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.

In Summary:

Human Settlement Patterns: Students study rural and urban settlements in Ireland and the physical and human factors influencing these patterns. They also explore sustainable responses to the challenges facing rural and urban communities.

Urbanisation: Students explore the factors driving urbanisation, such as globalisation and employment, and its impacts like urban sprawl and informal settlements. They also examine sustainable responses to urbanisation, including urban renewal, ecocities, and smart cities, with examples from both Ireland and the Global South.

Population Growth and Distribution: Students learn about the factors influencing population size and distribution, such as healthcare, food, conflict, and natural resources, in both local and international contexts. They explore the characteristics of populations in Ireland and other regions, and policies impacting population changes like birth rates, aging, and rural depopulation.

Migration: Students investigate the social, economic, and environmental factors affecting migration, including colonial history, conflict, climate change, and policies. They explore the impacts of migration on both host and donor countries, with a focus on Ireland, including issues like diversity, economic contributions, and employment.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

When exploring human settlement patterns and finding sustainable responses to the challenges facing rural and urban communities we suggest the addition of the idea of fostering a culture of global responsibility in achieving sustainability.

It is excellent to see the inclusion of urban renewal, eco-cities and smart cities. When discussing population growth and distribution, we advocate for examples to be used by the Global North and South. Examples from the Global North and South could be be used when exploring population growth and distribution.

When studying migration, while it is very important to study the social, economic and environmental factors affecting migration, the inclusion of colonial history, climate change and policies is welcome. Students should be encouraged to see the wealth in inclusive societies that prioritise human dignity.

Strand 3: How we live – the connected environment (pages 21-23)

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.

In Summary:

Agriculture and Fisheries: Students study the importance of agriculture in Ireland, the impact of EU policies like the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and the evolving nature of agriculture, including sustainability practices and changing agricultural methods.

Tourism: Students explore tourism trends in Ireland, including patterns of visitor numbers, revenue, and the impacts of mass tourism, especially in the Mediterranean. They also examine the future of tourism and sustainable alternatives to mass tourism.

Globalisation and Trade: Students investigate the factors influencing globalisation, such as multinational corporations, trading blocs, and technology, as well as the mobility of economic activities. They also assess the impact of globalisation on specific industries in Ireland.

Development and Geopolitics: Students engage with development models and measures, including the Human Development Index (HDI), and explore the Government of Ireland's humanitarian assistance. They also study geopolitics, focusing on water scarcity, territorial disputes, and the four freedoms of the European Union, alongside geopolitical tensions and responses.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

When exploring Agriculture and Fisheries, there are opportunities to examine food security, food as a weapon of war, food/agriculture sustainability and fair trade. We advocate for the importance of global solidarity in ensuring a sustainable and just global food system. There are opportunities here to look at

government policies on trade and the role of governments in shaping equitable, ethical and sustainable agricultural practices.

When examining Tourism, we suggest the inclusion, if not already part of the syllabus of the impact of tourism on local communities and resources; natural and other resources.

If not already included, when exploring Globalisation and Trade, include equitable trade practices.

We are delighted to see the inclusion of Geopolitics and Development. This section is wide in scope and will need to be supported by relevant and ongoing CPD; there is a risk here that a textbook could highlight one model of development/territorial dispute etc.

When studying humanitarian aid, students could be invited to explore the challenges of poverty, climate change and inequality and how the Global North and South are interconnected though these challenges. There is room here to connect the SDGs to the challenges and mitigation of these challenges. We feel that there is room too, to include discussion about peace and the importance of solidarity when addressing conflict/territory/resources.

Additional Assessment (AAC) (pages 26-28)

The Applied Geography Project provides an opportunity for students to apply and showcase the learning set out in the unifying strand in the context of one or more of the three contextual strands. To complete the Applied Geography Project, students will conduct an inquiry in line with the contents and requirements of the SEC brief. This will involve completing research into an area related to the contents of the brief. They will plan and carry out their inquiry. They will gather and analyse data which will contribute to their learning and facilitate them to draw and communicate informed conclusions.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on the AAC in Leaving Certificate Geography 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.

There is an opportunity within this brief to have student explore current global issues as they do in the Junior Cycle CBA for Geography in the news.

Supports for Successful Enactment

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

Ongoing relevant CPD for teachers imperative when dealing with current issues of which the students will come to the classroom with some (and not always accurate) knowledge.