



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

# Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the Development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies

December 2022

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## Introduction

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To inform the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies as part of the broader redevelopment of senior cycle, a Background Paper and Brief for the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies was published. This Background Paper was approved for consultation by Council on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and the public consultation ran from September 5<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The Background Paper provides an overview of the current context in which the development of LC Drama, Film and Theatre is taking place. It then looks at the history and definitions of drama, film and theatre studies. It also looks at the place of drama, film and theatre studies within the Irish primary and post-primary curriculum, as well as further and higher education opportunities. The paper includes an overview of drama, film and theatre studies education internationally and presents how this curriculum area is offered in a range of different jurisdictions before concluding with some issues which were identified for consideration in the development of a new specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies. Finally, it sets out the brief for the development of the LC Drama, Film and Theatre Studies curriculum.

The aim of the consultation on the Background Paper was to seek the views of interested parties in relation to the ideas and issues set out in order to inform the work of the Development Group in developing the LC Drama, Film and Theatre Studies specification.

This report on the consultation presents an overview of the consultation process, followed by a summary of feedback received, and explores key findings from the consultation for the work of the subject Development Group as they progress their deliberations on developing a new subject specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

## Section One: Consultation process

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Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022). The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2019) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

### Methodological approach

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies included multiple modes of engagement during the eight-week consultation process:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- Regional focus group sessions
- Focus groups to capture student perspectives, including engagement with second and third level students.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, written submissions, and regional focus group sessions. An open call to all schools invited expressions of interest to support the student voice aspect of the consultation, and participating schools were chosen at random from the list of applicants. The perspectives of second level and third level students were also captured through focus groups. The survey and written submissions facilitated the collection of data from a wide cross-section of respondents, while the face-to-face events supported more extensive discussion and exploration of the issues for consideration.

Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the consultation with parental consent and student assent sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. A detailed written record of all discussions was made during focus groups and school visits. Data gathered through focus groups and school visits was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2020). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation as listed in Appendix A.

A thematic approach was used for data analysis and was framed by the issues for consideration set out in the Background Paper. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered. The findings of this analysis are presented in Section Two of this report.

## Consultation responses

Four focus groups were held regionally in Dublin (2), Cork (1) and Galway (1). 24 people, comprising of post-primary teachers, third lecturers and industry representatives, participated in these focus groups.

50 responses were received through the online survey categorised as follows:

**Table 1 : Participants in Online Survey**

Participant Details	Number*
Post-primary teacher	11
Pre-service teacher	0
Drama facilitator	6
Theatre specialist	2
Film specialist	6
Primary teacher	0
Principal/ deputy principal	1
Second level student	19
Third level student	6
Parent/ guardian	2
Teacher educator	2
Third level lecturer/ researcher	4
Other	7

\*Where participants identified in more than one category, they have been listed in all.

Four schools supported student participation in the consultation with 8 focus groups undertaken with students in Transition Year, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Years. A total of 77 students took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> level student voice aspect of the consultation. Further engagement with third level students captured the perspectives of 8 individuals.

Eleven submissions were received and are listed in Appendix A.

## Section Two: Feedback from the consultation

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This section presents an overview of the findings from the consultation. The consultation focused on exploring the issues for consideration as outlined in the [Background Paper for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies](#) (pp.24-25):

- Scope and structure of this specification
- Skills development and collaborative learning
- Resources
- Capacity
- Assessment of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

Other areas which were not directly consulted upon, but which were considered relevant to the development of the subject by those participating in the consultation, are also presented in this section.

### Scope and structure of this specification

The introduction of this new subject was strongly welcomed, with many participants saying they were delighted that the areas of drama, film and theatre are to be included in the senior cycle curriculum. When asked about the structure of the course, participants expressed a very strong preference for a subject specification that promoted active student engagement and 'doing' like Music or Art, rather than a theory-based subject with a focus on 'learning about'.

All participants agreed that the specification will need to provide a section dedicated to teaching the foundations in all three disciplines which will, in turn, inform future learning. One student summed this up by saying:

*'If you only do the things you're interested in, you'll never expand your horizons. You might think you want to do acting or directing but then do lighting or costumes and discover you're really good at it. Everyone should have to learn the basics in all aspects of theatre and film.'* (Second level student, focus group)

Many respondents commented that students should be able to embrace all aspects of the subject during the learning, teaching and assessment process, and be allowed to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in an area of interest to them, including directing; operating a camera; creating set, lighting or costume designs, rather than being confined to performing.

*'The majority of second-level students considering further study in the performing arts have too narrow a focus, often based solely on acting as a profession. It is important that the new subject opens up their thinking in terms of future careers as stage managers (or floor managers and assistant directors), sound and lighting technicians, designers, producers, script writers.'*  
(Written submission, Lir Academy, Trinity College Dublin)

A number of participants suggested that the specification could be structured by focusing on narrative storytelling. One submission offered an explanation for the value of this approach:

*'This would allow the subject to offer shared foundational learning blocks including acting, script writing, visual design and technical production. These learnings would then be applied to both theatre and film production outputs at a more advanced level.'* (Written Submission, Lir Academy, Trinity College Dublin)

Another suggestion for a coherent and structurally sound specification was to use drama as a unifying strand which can then inform ways of understanding film and theatre. It was also suggested that a theme-based approach would be effective. Some of the suggested themes included power, cultural identity and personal identity. Following on from an engagement with all the foundational aspects of the course, it was seen as important that students would then be able to specialise in one particular aspect of the course, perhaps by doing a project in that area, for example by writing, directing or performing in a scene (for the screen or for theatre).

While most students welcomed the breadth offered by a subject encompassing drama, film and theatre studies, teachers, third level lecturers and industry professionals felt that combining the three disciplines in a single subject posed a risk of the quality being compromised and challenged the divergence from international practice.

*'...to combine these subjects would result in an overcrowded curriculum, which would not be possible to complete in a two-year cycle and would compromise the integrity of both [drama and theatre versus film] subject areas'.*  
(Association for Drama in Education in Ireland, online survey)

There was much discussion on the place of theory and practice within the specification, with most feeling that a combination of the two would be very important within the specification, and that each would inform the other.

With respect to theory, students were particularly interested in learning about the history of theatre and film and about various dramatists over the ages, although they felt that rather than writing lengthy essays, they would prefer to learn to comment on, critique work and apply their knowledge and understanding to real-life examples. And while it was felt that theory should inform practice and vice versa, most felt that the emphasis of this specification should be on the practical elements. As one student commented:

*'We learn by doing. There's no point in telling us how to operate a camera or use lighting rig. We need to use it, to experience it.'* (Third Level Student, focus group)

Industry knowledge and understanding was felt to be an important part of student learning with many highlighting the importance of the learning and teaching about the practicalities of working in the theatre and film industries.

*'An exploration of the breadth of roles and the range of pathways should ideally form part of the curriculum. The message that the screen industry isn't just for*

*creatives such as writers and directors is important. A broad range of roles exist that students may not be aware of, including in finance, logistics, admin and a variety of crew roles.' Written submission (Fís Éireann/ Screen Ireland)*

Also related to the experiential nature of the subject, an overwhelming number of participants stressed the importance of students having the opportunity to experience drama, film and theatre in an authentic way. Theatre visits were felt to be very important; to view productions as well as having the opportunity to be involved in an amateur or professional production. A number of industry professionals felt that students would benefit greatly by working with film and theatre companies in their local community.

## **Skills development and collaborative learning**

*'There should be a focus on developing skills rather than polished skills'  
(Second level student, focus group)*

The need to develop transferable skills was viewed as essential to this subject, with particular emphasis on the skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration/ working with others, reflection and creativity.

Many participants thought that critical thinking is a skill that should be fostered in all young people, as it is a skill that is very important in the creative and artistic industries. It was also felt that this subject can help students develop into adults who will be critically aware of what they read, see, watch and produce. Some participants saw opportunities for the development of critical thinking when students learn to respond to and analyse pieces of drama, film and theatre, while others suggested that critical thinking skills are best developed when students are actively engaged and 'doing'. Media literacy was also identified as a skill related to critical thinking and it was felt that this subject should offer students the chance to develop this skill.

*'Media literacy is an essential skill in the 21st century, and a capacity to read film through a theoretical lens is a good basis for this...To be truly media literate involves developing understanding of appreciation, critique and production' (Emergent Limerick Filmmakers, online survey)*

Problem-solving was also mentioned in discussions. When describing the value of this in the drama classroom, one teacher remarked on the importance of problem-solving skills:

*'Problem solving is one of the important skills. I remember dress rehearsals where lighting wouldn't work as well as we thought, and we'd have to change it. Students have to be able to respond to things like that and adapt to it.'  
(Teacher in public consultation, focus group)*

The skills of collaboration and working with others were viewed as very important for this subject, with many commenting that they are at the heart of the film and theatre industry. It was therefore felt that these skills should be reflected in the learning outcomes in the specification, in classroom pedagogy, in project work and in all forms of assessment.

A large majority of participants also highlighted the importance of students having opportunities to use and hone their reflection skills, following on from the introduction of this skill into subjects at junior cycle level. The use of portfolios or a 'Director's Notebook' was seen as a very practical way to allow students to reflect meaningfully and to respond, in an individual way, to collaborative or group tasks. As one written submission noted:

*'the emphasis of practical projects should be on the process and not outcome... [and] a significant portion of assessment weighting should be based on learning and reflection on collaborative projects, reflecting the nature of working in the film industry' (Written submission, Fís Eireann/ Screen Ireland)*

## Resources and capacity

On the whole, there was wide recognition of the opportunities and challenges that this new subject will pose. Resourcing, capacity and teacher professional development were all seen as essential for the successful implementation of this specification.

The majority of participants felt that it would be important that an appropriate dedicated space would be provided in the school for the learning and teaching of this subject, like other practical subjects such as Art, Music and Home Economics. While many agreed that the minimum requirement for the learning and teaching of drama and theatre would be a "black box" (a space free of desks and chairs with enough room to move around in and make noise), others felt that a lighting rig and sound system would also be important. Some participants were of the view that space was a less important consideration for drama and theatre, with more experimental forms of theatre emerging in modern drama:

*'Modern theatre takes place in old cattle sheds, in tunnels. You don't need all this stuff. The people work on it together and produce something. It's about an expression of something rather than perfection' (Third level student, focus group)*

It was agreed that the learning and teaching of film will require more resources than drama and theatre such as appropriate filming equipment, tablets/ computers and editing software. It was also strongly felt that access to streaming services will be needed so that students can be exposed to various film and theatre productions. Access to scripts and theatre databases was viewed as very important and a number of teachers and industry professionals offered suggestions for paid/ subscription-based resources and free resources that are widely available.

It was also suggested that links with the community would be an excellent support and resource to support the implementation of the subject, and schools should explore the building of relationships between local theatre and film companies and the theatre/ film industry in general.

Because most teachers said that they do not yet have the appropriate expertise in at least one of the three areas (often the practical aspects of filmmaking), many of them felt that sufficient training and support will be critical if the subject is to be competently and confidently delivered. A large number of participants also stressed the importance that training be offered by industry

experts, with an appropriate balance on theory and practical elements during this professional development.

With respect to capacity, it was also suggested that qualified drama teachers who are currently teaching drama as an extra-curricular subject or through drama schools might be given the opportunity to train and become qualified as teachers of the subject.

## Assessment of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies

Across the consultation, there was broad support for a wide range of assessment components. Some of the suggestions were:

- Project work such as a research project
- Devising and sharing of work, either by means of a performance or working behind the scenes
- An oral/ viva-style examination
- The creation of a portfolio or a 'Director's Notebook'
- A written examination.

Most participants felt strongly that the specification should offer students the opportunity to engage with the theory and practice of drama, film and theatre, with a greater emphasis being on assessment of practical aspects, meaning that a written exam would not be the dominant form of assessment.

It was also felt that assessment should allow for individual or group activities, as appropriate, although there were different views on the best ways to do this. While the potential of working collaboratively was highlighted as a strength by both teachers and students, as well as third level and industry professionals, there were mixed views about the most appropriate way to conduct collaborative activities used at the point of assessment. Some students and teachers said they would like something similar to the assessment of the Leaving Certificate Music practical exam (performance) whereby students can take part in a group performance, but they are individually assessed.

Some discussion took place about which assessment components should take place in the classroom/ school setting. It was felt that the most appropriate way to assess practical work would be through students "showing" their learning. Devising short films or plays was felt to be a way that students could work together and still have individual responsibilities such as planning, writing, performing, directing, producing, designing or being involved in technical aspects such as sets, lighting, sound and costume.

A number of respondents also spoke about the option of a research project which would allow students to research and present (orally or in writing) the work of, for example, dramatists, directors, screenwriters.

With respect to school-based assessment, many students and teachers agreed that they would be comfortable with this but felt that it would be important to have an external person moderate the assessment process. It was suggested that performances could be recorded for the purposes of external moderation, which could then take place at a later date. It was also suggested that a type

of oral assessment could take place in the school, and that this could be recorded for moderation purposes. It was envisaged that the oral examination could include a conversation and/ or reflection about what a student had learned from the process of doing a piece of work or a project they had been involved in.

When discussing the final examination, some suggestions were made regarding possible modes of assessment. A number of participants suggested that this could allow students to demonstrate their ability to critique a piece of work in a very practical way.

*'Could they watch a scene from a film or play for the exam and then respond to it. That would allow students to draw on their theory and practical experience and then review it or comment on particular aspects.'*  
(Second level student, focus group)

A comment from a theatre company summed up the main considerations about the assessment of a practical subject:

*'In Western Australia the biggest downfall I found was that all the assessments in the course were group based whether these be devising or scripting yet, the final performance exam was an individual task. I always found it strange, students spend 5 years learning to collaborate and work together only to complete final exams individually, which is a completely different skill set on its own.'*  
(Survey respondent, Barnstorm Theatre Company)

## Other relevant comments

The role and use of texts on the curriculum was the subject of some commentary by many participants, with some commenting that it would be very important to learn to understand, appreciate and analyse a range of historical and modern texts. Some raised a concern about this, commenting that there should not be an undue focus on the literary study of texts because students will already have the opportunity to engage in and be assessed on their understanding of texts during the course of Leaving Certificate English. Others felt that, if there is a list of prescribed, suggested or indicative texts, it should be comprehensive and span a range of genres, to allow for teacher and student choice.

A number of participants also mentioned the importance of including documentaries and radio dramas, noting that both are a valid form of film and drama, respectively.

*'What about documentaries or radio drama? I love them and I'd like to study them. They are as valid as films or stage plays.'* (Second level student, focus group)

With respect to texts, there was concern that there could potentially be an overlap between Drama, Film and Theatre Studies and other Leaving Certificate subjects such as English, Gaeilge, Classical Studies and Ancient Greek and Latin. The Irish language was seen as an important consideration in this specification. The inclusion of Irish language texts was viewed as important

to some and an aspect that would need to be given due thought and consideration. Feedback also highlighted the many funding opportunities available for Irish language theatre and film productions which is often not availed of due to a lack of expertise or awareness in this area.

It was also noted that the film directors mentioned in the Background Paper were exclusively male and it was hoped that the specification would be more diverse and inclusive in this regard.

## Section Three: Key findings for subject development

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The findings of the consultation indicate that the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies is timely and widely welcomed, and that the Background Paper and Brief for the development of the subject provides a comprehensive overview of the issues that will need to be considered by the Development Group. This section of the report identifies some key findings for the development of the subject arising from the consultation.

### Scope and structure

The Development Group will need to be mindful to create a coherent, structurally sound specification that attempts to intertwine the elements of drama, film and theatre, while ensuring appropriate breadth and depth of content and challenge. In doing so, the balance of theory and practice will need to be considered, as well as the ways that students can learn about the diverse pathways and opportunities available within these industries.

The Development Group will need to consider how learning outcomes can provide opportunities for students to engage with the local community as a way of encouraging authentic collaboration with and an appreciation of the artistic and creative sector.

### Opportunities for skills development and collaborative learning

The learning outcomes set out in the new specification should provide opportunities for students to develop skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, reflection and creativity while also requiring students to apply this knowledge and understanding in a meaningful way, develop critical awareness and engage in evaluation where relevant. Students of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies should have an opportunity to continue to develop a wide range of skills relevant to their daily lives, the world of work, further study and training and working in the ever evolving and dynamic worlds of theatre, film and drama.

### Assessment

The design of the assessment components in Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies offers significant potential for the subject. The Development Group will need to consider how best to assess the different disciplines within the subject, while allowing enough flexibility for students to focus on a particular area of interest. The assessment of the theoretical and practical aspects of the specification will be an important consideration in the assessment design as well as the role of collaborative and individual work. With due consideration given to the above aspects, the development of valid, reliable, and equitable assessment components will support students in demonstrating their understanding of theatre, film and drama and applying the practical skills they have developed.

## Conclusions and next steps

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The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies generated rich discussion and lead to useful and thoughtful feedback from multiple perspectives. The quality of the responses to the consultation demonstrated significant engagement with the Background Paper and the thoughtful and considered opinions and suggestions offered indicate the extent to which there is considerable interest in and support for the introduction of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies as a new subject in senior cycle.

NCCA would like to thank all of those who participated in focus groups, completed the online survey, or made a written submission. Furthermore, NCCA are grateful to the school leaders who facilitated teachers in participating in the focus group events and to all of those who supported student participation in the consultation.

This report has presented an overview of the range of views and perspectives across the consultation process. The findings presented in this report will provide direction and guidance for the Development Group who were recently convened to undertake the task of developing a new specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies. This Development Group will continue their work, informed by the findings outlined in this report, and it is anticipated that a draft curriculum specification will be available for public consultation in Q3, 2023.

## References

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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2022) Strategic Plan 2022-2025 available <https://ncca.ie/media/5515/strategic-plan-2022-2025.pdf> [accessed 2 November 2022]

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2020) Data Protection Policy <https://ncca.ie/media/4630/ncca-data-protection-policy.pdf> [accessed 3 November 2022]

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019) Research Strategy available <https://ncca.ie/en/publications-and-research/research-strategy/> [accessed 4 November 2022]

## Appendix A

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As part of the consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies, the following organisations requested to be identified as having responded to the online survey:

- Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair
- The Department of Theatre
- Lightbulb Youth Theatre
- Emerging Limerick Filmmakers
- Barnstorm Theatre Company
- North Presentation Secondary School
- Young Irish Film Makers CLG
- Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University of Limerick
- Media and Communication Studies Department, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
- Pam Golden Drama
- Coláiste Lorcáin
- Screen Producers Ireland
- Association for Drama in Education Ireland (ADEI)
- Department of Media and Communication Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
- Beech Hill College
- National Talent Academy for Animation

During the consultation ten written submissions were received from the following groups and organisations:

- COGG (An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta)
- Coláiste Choilm, Cork
- Department of Media and Communication Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
- Derrada Drama School
- Dr. Fiona Brennan, Theatre Historian and Researcher
- Irish Film Institute (on behalf of the Irish Film Institute; Media Literacy Ireland; IADT; Dublin International Film Festival; Dept of Film and Screen Media, University College Cork; Creative Arts and Media, Atlantic Technological University; Fresh Film; Young Irish Film Makers; First Cut Youth Fil [sic] Festival & Cork Young Filmmakers Programme; Huston School of Film, University of Galway; Broadcasting Authority of Ireland),
- Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT),
- Screen Ireland,
- The Lir, National Academy of Dramatic Art at Trinity College,
- UCD Creative Futures Academy/ UCD School of English, Drama and Film.



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