



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.

Data protection and open data section

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Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

Presentation College Headford, Co.Galway

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

- ☐ Yes

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

Presentation College Headford

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

- ☐ Yes



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

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.

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.

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.

Yes, the rationale and aim effectively align with the holistic development of students, as outlined by the eight guiding principles of the Senior Cycle. They support students in becoming independent, self-directed learners while ensuring continuity from the Junior Cycle, fostering familiarity and progression.

The curriculum promotes inclusivity by accommodating diverse learning needs and emphasises a more sustainable approach to Geography, equipping students with the skills to critically engage with global challenges. Furthermore, it encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills, preparing students to analyse, evaluate, and apply geographical concepts in real-world contexts.

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 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.

Yes, the section effectively captures the development of key competencies in Leaving Certificate Geography. The use of interconnections in the visual representation clearly illustrates the flexible and integrative nature of the subject, allowing teachers to approach topics in diverse ways while activating multiple



competencies simultaneously. This aligns well with the interdisciplinary and skills-based focus of Senior Cycle. Additionally, the emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application ensures that students develop transferable skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom.

However, it would be beneficial to include more concrete examples of how these competencies can be explicitly assessed in both formative and summative contexts to support effective implementation.

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.

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 illustration effectively conveys the interconnected nature of the three strands, with geographical skills embedded throughout. This supports an integrated approach to learning and the development of key competencies.

However, the visual could be improved by more clearly outlining the structure and choices within the course. Greater clarity on flexibility, sequencing, and optionality would help teachers and students navigate the strands more effectively.

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.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.



The unifying strand builds on students' experiences from Junior Cycle and Classroom-Based Assessments, ensuring continuity in skill development. It provides valuable opportunities for students to apply theory in practice through research, mapping, graphing, and the use of secondary sources.

However, it is important that the research project continues to allow for primary data collection, particularly in physical geography, to maintain a hands-on, investigative approach. A key concern is the practical challenge of managing multiple individual research projects within a single class, particularly in providing formative feedback and ensuring sufficient time for meaningful engagement. Greater guidance on structuring and supporting this process would be beneficial.

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.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

The learning set out in this strand is generally well-aligned with the rationale and aims of the course, particularly in fostering an understanding of physical processes and their relevance to the Irish landscape. However, several areas require clarification and refinement to ensure effective planning for teaching and learning:

- **Clarity in Content Scope:**
 - The rock cycle section may benefit from explicitly naming key rock types (e.g., one igneous, one sedimentary, and one metamorphic) to provide clear learning expectations.
 - The reference to 'weathering and erosion' is quite broad—clarification on whether specific processes (e.g., freeze-thaw, chemical weathering, hydraulic action, abrasion) need to be covered would be useful.
 - Karst landscapes, such as the Burren, are a significant feature of the Irish landscape and are covered in Junior Cycle—explicit mention of their inclusion would ensure continuity in learning.



- **Integration of Irish Landforms:**

- The specification mentions 'landforms on the Irish landscape,' but it is unclear whether this includes famous locations like the Burren and the Giant's Causeway or if the focus is solely on fluvial, coastal, and glacial features. Greater specificity would help teachers plan more effectively.

- **Changes in Fluvial/Coastal/Glacial Content:**

- The removal of the fluvial/coastal/glacial options raises questions about the depth of coverage expected. If fluvial processes are now the primary focus, will this be reflected in extended exam questions, and will coastal and glacial processes still be referenced in some capacity?

- **Climate and Climate Change:**

- The inclusion of climate and climate change is a welcome addition, as it ensures students engage with one of the most pressing global issues without having to take Climate Development as a separate subject. This broadens accessibility and provides students with relevant, real-world knowledge.

Overall, while the strand provides a strong foundation in physical geography, greater clarity in content expectations and structure would support both teacher planning and student engagement.

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.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This is a very positive addition, as human geography may have been overlooked or rushed in the previous syllabus due to time constraints. The revised content



ensures a more balanced approach, making geography more relevant to students' understanding of the modern world.

- **Clarity for Planning & Teaching:**

- The inclusion of human settlement and a more detailed exploration of migration provides a structured and logical progression for teaching.
- Economic geography integrates well with the other topics, though additional guidance or exemplars may help teachers who are less familiar with this area.

- **Alignment with Rationale & Aims:**

- This strand supports the course's aim of developing students' understanding of the interactions between people, places, and economic systems.
- The increased focus on migration aligns well with contemporary global issues, ensuring students engage with relevant, real-world topics.

- **Opportunities for Key Competencies:**

- The focus on migration and settlement encourages critical thinking, data analysis, and decision-making skills.
- The integration of economic geography provides opportunities for inquiry-based learning, allowing students to explore concepts such as trade, industry, and development in an applied way.

- **Access & Challenge for All Students:**

- The topics are engaging and relevant, supporting accessibility for a wide range of learners.
- Economic geography may require additional teacher support materials to ensure all students can fully engage with key concepts.

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.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.



The breadth of content in the revised specification is impressive, offering students a wide range of topics to explore. However, there are concerns regarding the time available to cover these strands in sufficient detail while still integrating the unifying strand. Given the volume of material, it may be beneficial to consider the option of an elective approach, similar to the post-COVID exam guidelines where students can omit a full section.

This model allows students to focus on three strands in greater depth, ensuring they develop a strong understanding of the material rather than spreading themselves too thin across four strands. It would also provide flexibility for teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs and interests of the class while maintaining high standards of learning and assessment.

The elective option could support deeper engagement with content and foster greater mastery of key concepts, particularly in a subject as dynamic and wide-ranging as geography. This approach may also enhance student motivation by allowing them to specialise in areas they find more relevant or intriguing, without compromising on the quality of their understanding.

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.

The inclusion of fieldwork is a very positive element, offering students the opportunity to visit the outdoor classroom and gain a practical, hands-on perspective on the topics being covered in class. This real-world application of geographic concepts enhances the relevance and engagement of the subject.



However, there are concerns regarding the time allocation. If the fieldwork is worth 40% of the overall grade, yet the recommended number of hours is only 20, teachers may face challenges in balancing the time required for fieldwork with the depth needed to cover the rest of the new specification. Time and depth are crucial for students to fully develop their key competencies, and this may require careful planning to ensure a manageable workload.

Challenges for Lower Ability Students

The 'Common Brief' element could pose difficulties for lower-ability students. Similar to the 'Common Level' debate in Junior Cycle subjects, students who struggle with the more rigorous requirements of a common brief may find it challenging to perform at their best. The current field study model, with its inclusive approach, provides a fairer opportunity for all students, as it is more adaptable to varying ability levels. It ensures that students can demonstrate their competencies without being penalised by an overly rigid assessment structure.

Equity Across Schools

Another significant concern is the resource disparity between schools. Some schools may have access to modern technology and ample resources, such as laptops for field study documentation, while others may only have limited resources, which can impact students' ability to complete tasks to the same standard. A digital divide could potentially create inequities in how students engage with the AAC (Authentic Assessment Component). Schools with limited access to technology may struggle to provide an equal opportunity for students to showcase their learning in ways that are aligned with the expectations of the new curriculum.

To address this, the specification could benefit from guidance on adaptable or low-tech alternatives for schools with fewer resources. This would help ensure a more equitable approach to fieldwork, allowing all students to engage in the process, regardless of their school's technological capacity.

Supports for Successful Enactment

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

For the successful implementation of this new geography specification, several supports will be crucial:



1. Funding

Adequate funding is essential to ensure that all schools, regardless of their resources, can access the materials, technology, and fieldwork opportunities required to deliver the new curriculum effectively. Some key areas where funding would be beneficial include:

- **Fieldwork Resources:** Ensuring schools can access the necessary materials and transport for field trips and outdoor classrooms. This could include buses, permits, and equipment for activities like data collection and mapping.
- **Technology Access:** Providing schools with the tools needed for students to engage with digital components of the specification, such as laptops, software for data analysis, or online research resources. Schools with limited access to technology may struggle to implement digital aspects of the curriculum without additional funding for devices or internet access.
- **Professional Development for Teachers:** Funding for continuous professional development to ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to implement the new curriculum. This includes training in new teaching methodologies, fieldwork practices, and assessment strategies.

2. Professional Development and Training

- **Ongoing Teacher Training:** As the curriculum includes a greater focus on practical fieldwork and newer teaching strategies, teachers will need targeted, ongoing professional development. This includes not just geography-specific content, but also training in assessment strategies, such as how to support students in completing the AAC effectively.
- **Support for Teachers New to Certain Content:** Some teachers may need additional resources and training, particularly in areas like economic geography, which may not be as familiar to all geography teachers. Access to expert guidance or training workshops could help ensure all teachers feel confident in delivering all aspects of the specification.

3. Resource Materials and Curriculum Guidance

- **Teacher Resources:** Clear, accessible, and comprehensive teaching materials—such as lesson plans, sample assessments, and fieldwork guides—would support teachers in effectively planning and delivering the curriculum. This is particularly important for more complex topics,



like economic geography or climate change, which may require specialized knowledge or teaching resources.

- Student Support Materials: To ensure all students can fully engage with the curriculum, tailored support materials such as study guides, glossaries, and simplified explanations of complex concepts would be valuable. This is particularly true for students who may struggle with some of the more advanced content.

4. Time Allocation and Flexibility

- Adequate time must be allocated for fieldwork, project work, and classroom-based assessments, which may require adjusting the current timetabling or structure of geography courses. More flexibility in time allocations or the option for elective topics could help alleviate time pressure, allowing students and teachers to focus on key learning areas.

5. Support for Schools with Limited Resources

- Technology Grants or Access to Shared Resources: Schools with limited access to technology should have access to specific grants or opportunities to borrow equipment. Local education authorities could coordinate the sharing of digital resources or fieldwork materials to ensure that all students can participate equally.
- Subsidised Field Trips and Local Fieldwork Options: To make fieldwork more accessible, schools should be able to access subsidies for transport or reduced-cost trips to local sites, especially for schools in rural or underfunded areas. Alternatively, schools could be encouraged to focus on local geographical features that are within easy reach, minimising the need for expensive travel.