



NCCA

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

Report on the consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification



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Introduction

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in [Equity and Excellence for All](#) (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Tranche 2 subjects will be completed in 2025 for introduction to schools in 2026. The redevelopment of the specification for Leaving Certificate Physical Education is included in Tranche 2.

The draft Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification was made available for national public consultation from February 24 to April 25, 2025. The aim of the consultation was to elicit a wide range of perspectives from the public and a wide range of stakeholders in relation to the curriculum and assessment arrangements in the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Physical Education. The feedback from the consultation supports the development group to finalise the specification.

The key areas of focus within the consultation were:

- Rationale and Aims
- Key competencies
- Course structure, strands and learning outcomes, including clarity and coherence
- Additional assessment component (AAC)
- Supports needed for successful enactment.

The responses to the consultation indicated a very positive perspective on the specification overall. There was a strong endorsement of the approach taken regarding the structure and organisation of learning within the specification.

The stated Rationale, Aims and the elaboration of key competencies for the subject were affirmed but caution was expressed in relation to ensuring the aims are realistic and not overly aspirational. The three strands of study were welcomed and viewed as relevant and meaningful for students. There was a strong level of support for the guidance provided in the 'Students Learn About' column but some concerns in relation to manageability of the learning expectations across the specification.

A recurring theme was the role and position of performance in the curriculum. There were mixed views on the role of Leaving Certificate Physical Education supporting performance of physical activities, and while performance is valued in principle, the experience of how this is embedded in teaching and learning differed.

The proposed AAC, Physical Education Project, was in general welcomed by participants. However, some participants called for more clarity in relation to timelines and expectations.

Access to resources were raised as essential supports for the successful enactment of the curriculum.

The following sections of this report will elaborate in detail on the points raised above. Section One provides an overview of the consultation process; Section Two sets out the findings of the consultation and Section Three summarises the considerations and conclusions.

Section 1: Consultation Process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, settings, education interests and others. The following section presents an overview of the approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2023) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Approach to consultation

The consultation for the review of Physical Education included multiple modes of engagement during the eight-week consultation period:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- A public consultation event
- School visits with focus groups conducted in a cross section of schools to capture the insights from teachers, students and school leaders.

Participants self-selected to respond to the online survey, make a written submission and attend the public consultation event. In terms of the school-based focus groups, a cross-section of schools was selected from the 38 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in Leaving Certificate Physical Education developments. The eight schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place between February 24 and April 25, 2025 and involved focus group meetings with students and teachers of Leaving Certificate Physical Education and with school leaders, as detailed in Table 1. Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the focus groups, while parental consent and student assent was sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. A written record of all discussions was made during focus groups and school visits. The privacy of all contributors to the consultation has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation or individual has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation. All data from the consultation has been stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2023). In accordance with the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021) any data from this consultation will be anonymised and aggregated and made available alongside the report on the website www.ncca.ie

The online survey was provided in both English and Irish allowing each participant to select their preferred language and was distributed through MS Forms on the ncca.ie website. The survey was framed around the key areas of focus outlined in the introduction.

The public consultation event and the school visits concentrated on the same areas of focus as the online survey and provided opportunities to further explore and probe those areas through conversation. The school-based focus groups helped to gain deeper insights on the draft specification from students and teachers and to gain insights into the perspectives of school leaders.

The written submissions were guided by the same areas of focus as the online survey, school visits and focus groups, and allowed for the exploration of areas of particular of interest to organisations and interested parties.

Consultation responses

Responses were collected across the various modes of engagement and provided multiple opportunities for public engagement. Table One below provides an overview of levels of engagement across the consultation.

Mode of consultation	Overview of participants	Numbers
Online survey	Post-primary teachers, school leaders, third level educators	36
Written submissions	See Appendix 1	3
A public consultation event	Post-primary teachers, school leaders, third level educators	40
School visits	Post-primary teachers, school leaders, students in senior cycle.	81

Table 1 – Overview of modes of consultation

Section 2: Feedback from the Consultation

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The consultation focused on draft Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification and the findings can be grouped under the following headings:

- Overall impressions of the draft specification including the rationale and aims
- Strands of study and learning outcomes
- Physical activity
- Assessment
- Supports for successful enactment.

The information gathered in response to the questions posed throughout the consultation has been used in the commentary on each theme in this section.

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

Overall impressions of the draft specification

Overall, participants across the consultation welcomed the draft Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification, indicating positive views on the proposed changes. The approach of students experiencing all learning outcomes and ensuring they can address a range of relevant, current and meaningful topics and trends was broadly welcomed. Participants identified that the proposed changes enables teachers to draw on what is happening currently in the world of physical education and sport, and to integrate them into classroom learning. The relevance of the learning set out in the draft specification and the emphasis on inclusion, enjoyment, lifelong participation and ethics was commended.

Recognition of the continuum of performance from participation for enjoyment to competitive performance was welcomed. Teachers welcomed the student-led approach, focusing on developing well-rounded physical education rather than elite performance. It was noted that recognising students' abilities across the continuum of participation was valued and that there was a place and a value for the recognition of young people's abilities in sport.

The specification's structure was well-received and the balance in the number of learning outcomes across the three strands was also welcomed, reflecting that all strands of study contribute equally to students' overall understanding and appreciation of the subject. The integration of the key competencies throughout the learning outcomes was welcomed and it was felt this better facilitated their realisation and not seen as an add on to the learning.

The Rationale and Aim of the draft specification were well-received. Participants acknowledged that they reflect the nature of Physical Education, encompassing physical activity performance and participation as well as the broader holistic development of health, wellbeing and lifelong

engagement for students in physical activity. The Rationale and Aim were particularly welcomed for recognising Physical Education as valuable beyond sport and relevant to all students, not just high performing athletes.

However, some concerns were raised about the challenge of integrating the practical and the theoretical elements of the learning outcomes and while an emphasis on engagement in a broad range of physical activities was welcomed, the challenge of ensuring the appropriate balance between physical activity-based learning and desk-based learning was noted.

It was welcomed for its clear alignment between the Rationale, Aim, the strands, and the assessment components, and in relation to supporting students' physical proficiency. This was also noted in specific feedback in relation to the strands of study which will be discussed below.

Strands of study and learning outcomes

The overall structure of the strands was received extremely positively, with participants welcoming the move from two strands within the current specification (2018) to three strands, with the removal of the rotating prescribed topics (such as Gender and physical activity, and Physical activity and inclusion) that feature currently. There was welcome for current topics and trends being weaved across the learning outcomes, rather than being optional. Participants indicated that this positive feature enabled them to draw on current topics in the media and wider community as part of teaching and learning. In that way, the structure was regarded as supportive of both student and teacher engagement, offering a flexible yet comprehensive approach for curriculum planning. This revised structure was seen as offering a more balanced and integrated progression through areas of learning, helping to distinguish between skill development, physical performance, and wider social and psychological influences on physical activity participation. Participants welcomed the clear progression from learning in Junior Cycle Physical Education.

The inclusion of the "Students Learn About" column was praised for providing helpful context and support for teachers when planning for learning outcomes. Some respondents also noted improved clarity in relation to the expectations of what students should learn in the specification. However, this was contrasted with concerns raised in relation to the manageability of learning within the recommended minimum of 180 hours. While the learning outlined in the strands was considered valuable, respondents strongly advised ensuring the specification is manageable within the given time allocation.

Participants highlighted the coherency evident throughout the specification and reiterated the importance of the continued reflection of the Rationale, Aims and key competencies in the learning outcomes and that there was the alignment between the 'Students learn about' and 'Students should be able to' column across the specification.

Physical activity

The physical activity areas (Games, Aquatics, Dance etc.) generated much discussion amongst participants. In the main, participants welcomed the consistency and alignment of the physical activity areas with the current specification. They also welcomed the removal of Personal Exercise and Fitness (PEF) as a stand-alone physical activity area recognising that the key components of PEF are now integrated throughout the learning.

Nevertheless, within the draft specification it is stipulated that students must engage '*with five physical activities*'. There was confusion around this reference to five physical activities. Some participants interpreted this as an expectation for students to develop a high level of performance in five different activities. Participants indicated that it wasn't clear that the intended purpose of this reference was to ensure students were provided with a breadth of experiences across different physical activities and not necessarily at the high level of performance. Participants highlighted that an expectation of engaging with five physical activities may place undue pressure on students and teachers. The feedback suggests a need for clearer guidance on the role and expectations of physical activity within the specification, particularly in relation to how many activities are required and the extent to which students should engage in the activities.

Based on the consultation feedback, physical activity and the role of performance (i.e. a young person having the opportunity to showcase their ability) were seen as essential and valued elements of the draft Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification. Participants welcomed the reference to participation and the importance of active engagement in physical activities across the specification. Participants strongly recommended that teachers and schools need flexibility within the specification to adapt physical activities to ensure that all students can benefit from and access a meaningful learning experience in PE. Adapted physical activities were seen as being of utmost importance.

Participants highlighted the importance of enabling student choice to foster engagement and to ensure that the specification was as inclusive as possible, noting that a broad and flexible activity list can best support a diverse student population. However, concerns were raised about the challenges of ensuring that learning is meaningfully demonstrated through school-based activity over the two year experience. Many teachers expressed difficulty in monitoring and assessing students who rely heavily on club or external participation in their physical activities, which may not align directly with the Leaving Certificate Physical Education learning outcomes. Participants noted that it is difficult for teachers to have oversight of students' development of skills where their engagement in an activity is consistently happening outside of the school setting. The consultation also emphasised the need for clarity around how performance should be integrated into the learning experiences, ensuring it reflects more than extra-curricular endeavours. Across the consultation, while participants recognised the need to encourage students to engage actively in their chosen physical activity and appreciate student choice as an important principle of senior cycle education, they also flagged the need for balancing this with ensuring that all students access equitable, curriculum-based learning experiences which, they indicated, need to remain a key consideration as the specification is introduced to schools.

Assessment

Consultation feedback on assessment, and particularly the Additional Assessment Component (AAC), reflected both strong support for the assessment of students' practical skills and concern about the enactment considerations such as clear expectations, timing and access to facilities. Many participants welcomed the AAC as a meaningful opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning in context, particularly through planning, engagement, and skill execution. However, there were concerns raised around the expectations of the AAC, including uncertainty about the format, the role of performance and the manageability.

There were mixed views expressed about the performance component of the AAC. Some participants discussed the opportunity for students to engage in their performance component outside of the school setting. However, discussions also raised valid concerns around the practicalities of teachers being able to authenticate work that they are not overseeing first-hand. Feedback emerging from the consultation indicates that the specification needs to provide further clarity on the requirements of the AAC.

Teachers expressed concern about equity, particularly for students with limited access to facilities, equipment, and external coaching.

Participants commented on the performance component of the AAC. Although student choice was valued and allowing students to showcase their abilities was important, there was general consensus that a balance must be achieved between student choice and an equitable, manageable approach for planning for teaching, learning and assessment.

Some participants also raised concerns around the practicalities of video-based assessment, including workload, ICT skill requirements, and data protection implications. The importance of ensuring that the SEC-issued brief supports an authentic and meaningful practical experience was noted during the consultation. Participants emphasised the potential of the brief to provide structured focus areas, flexibility for schools and clarity of expectations for students. Furthermore, participants emphasised the need for comprehensive and accessible assessment guidelines. These should clarify expectations regarding the format of submissions to the SEC (e.g., written, video, or blended), and define clear guidance in relation to expectations.

While the AAC is viewed as a valued aspect of the Leaving Certificate Physical Education curriculum, participants commented that success depends on the provision of supports, particularly in the design of the brief and the accompanying assessment guidelines which must clarity to teachers. These will be essential in ensuring consistency, promoting authenticity, and enabling all students to demonstrate the learning in Leaving Certificate Physical Education.

Supports for successful enactment

The consultation identified a clear need for comprehensive supports to enable the successful enactment of the Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification. Participants reported the importance of subject specific teacher professional learning, particularly in areas such as assessment. Participants also noted that professional learning should focus on inclusive education and further support teachers through the provision of resources to enable all students to access and benefit from the subject. The lack of facilities and equipment in some schools was highlighted as a barrier to equitable enactment. Additionally, participants called for accessible and detailed guidance materials, including planning templates and clarification on assessment expectations. Whole school support, including appropriate timetabling and guidance on scheduling the AACs, was also seen as essential to fully realise the Aim of the specification in practice.

Section 3: Considerations and Conclusion

Considerations

Overall, the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Physical Education was very well received and the consultation fulfilled its objective of initiating discussion and debate on key aspects of the specification. Feedback gathered was subject to much deliberation by the development group when finalising the specification. This included:

- Ensuring the specification is coherent, accessible, and clearly structured.
- Addressing concerns about how fully the Aim can be realised in practice, especially when learning risks becoming too theoretical or desk-based.
- Clarifying expectations around physical activity, particularly in relation to the number of activities students should engage in, the extent to which they should engage, and the balance between performance and participation.
- Ensuring that the role of performance is framed in a way that supports inclusive, school-based learning experiences rather than relying on external participation in outside activities.
- Reviewing the learning outcomes to ensure clarity of expectations, with particular emphasis on the use of consistent and purposeful action verbs to support both understanding and practical enactment in the classroom.
- Maintaining alignment between the Rationale, Aim, strands, learning outcomes, and assessment components.
- Ensuring there are clear expectations, manageable formats, and comprehensive guidance for the AAC, and that the AAC is achievable and equitable.
- Consideration of appropriate supports for enactment.

Conclusion

The consultation process was very informative. The engagement of those who participated in the consultation is acknowledged and NCCA is grateful for the feedback received. Consultation feedback indicates there are very positive views on the draft specification, while acknowledging that provision of equitable resourcing, and clear, flexible assessment expectations are crucial for the specification's successful enactment.

References

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Appendix One: List of Contributors

Written submissions:

- The Heritage Council
- The Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI)

Contributors to online survey:

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