



Consultation Report on the draft specification for
Junior Cycle Music

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1. Introduction

The draft specification for Junior Cycle Music was approved for consultation by Council in February 2017. The aim of the consultation process was to hear the views of a wide range of key stakeholders, interested individuals and organisations on the draft specification.

The draft specification sets out the proposed rationale, aim, strands, learning outcomes and assessment components for the subject. It also situates the subject within the wider junior cycle developments with specific links to the key skills framework and progression between primary and senior cycle education. The consultation was designed to gather feedback on the extent to which these sections were successful in capturing the purposes of Music at junior cycle and to hear different perspectives on the specification as a whole.

The consultation process consisted of different elements:

- an online questionnaire administered through Survey Monkey
- submissions from a variety of organisations and interested groups
- some focus group sessions

Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire was open from 14th February 2017 until the 31st March 2017. A total of 87 respondents completed the online questionnaire with 81% of respondents identifying themselves as post-primary music teachers. The other respondents were third level lecturers/researchers (7%), teacher educators and pre-service teachers.

Written Submissions

Six written submissions were received

- Post Primary Music Teachers Association (PPMTA)
- The Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC)
- Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
- Createsound.ie
- Arts Council of Ireland
- Society for Music Education in Ireland

In addition, a focus group was arranged on March 1st, and in attendance were music teachers and representatives from the following organisations:

- Contemporary Music Centre (CMC)
- Society for Music Education in Ireland (SMEI)
- Society for Musicology in Ireland (SMI)
- Music Generation
- Bristol Institute of Modern Music (BIMM)
- Arts Council
- Createsound.ie
- Trinity College, Dublin
- Academy of Popular Music

- Irish Film Institute (IFI)
- The Journal of Music in Ireland (JMI)

There were additional focus group sessions arranged with pre-service teachers in Dublin City University (DCU) and University of Limerick (UL). Several branches of the Post Primary Music Teachers Association (PPMTA) held local branch meetings , and submitted reports from these meetings.

The Consultation Report

The following report is based on an analysis of the views on the draft specification expressed by respondents through the various consultation tools and events. The material is dealt with in terms of the themes that developed through the consultation. Selected quotations from respondents are used, where appropriate, to clarify the views being expressed.

2. Feedback from the consultation

There is broad consensus that the draft specification is welcomed. This is evidenced by the comments and feedback generated through the consultation process. The initial impressions of the draft specification are very positive. There is support for the notion that this specification will engage students and that it is sensitive to the fact that students are from diverse backgrounds and have different levels of cultural sensitivities and abilities. There is broad welcome for the shift away from a system of rote learning to an experience that will be more student-led and engender a much more holistic approach and experience in classrooms. Many comments reflect an excitement about this specification as this will allow for the 'opening up' of methodologies for exploring and creating with music, and that this will provide teachers with the opportunities to become actively involved with curriculum development and the production of new and interesting resources.

In contradiction to these comments, are the concerns that are raised in some of the feedback. These concerns are mostly centred on seeking guidance on the music genres and styles that should be covered, with specific references to an absence of learning outcomes that target the teaching of Irish Music. While there is broad welcome for the amount of teacher autonomy that this specification allows to teachers, there is recognition that this could be daunting for some teachers and that not all teachers would approach or read the specification in the same way.

A Continuous Professional Development programme will be provided by Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) to support the introduction and implementation of this specification.

2.1 Rationale and Aim

The response to the rationale and aim is positive. Many comments indicate a support for the notion that the specification seeks to use musical skills that will connect to other subjects and support the transfer of important competencies and skills to other areas of learning. There is consensus that the aim reflects everything that unfolds throughout the specification.

Respondents are in favour of terminology such as “authentic’ and “original”, but there are some suggestions offered to replace the term ‘artistic awareness’ to ‘musical awareness’. There are further suggestions that the last sentence in the aim should be reframed to consider a ‘diverse range of musical cultures’ and not only ‘contemporary musical cultures’. There was a suggestion that the connection between music-making and positive mental health should have a place in the aim too.

Suggestion to include music’s contribution to the pursuit of meaning-making, well-being and identity-formation, while serving as a pathway to cultivating humanity. Consideration may also be given to include the terms: enjoyment, self-knowledge and self-growth in the specification.

Society for Music Education in Ireland (SMEI)

In summary, while the response to the rationale and aim is positive, some consideration should be given to addressing the suggested amendments and additions.

2.2 Course structure

The layout of the draft specification has been established in line with other subject specifications being developed across junior cycle. The draft specification divides the course into strands and elements. Strands describe how the subject is organised, outlining briefly the context of the learning for students in each section of the course. Elements focus on the goals of the learning process, that is, the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and values. The response to the course structure is mostly favourable, but there are some concerns raised.

On the positive side,

We welcome the structure; it allows for the inclusion of music technology and more closely aligns with current industry practices.

Createsound.ie

Some teachers saw the terminology used as a challenge and completely different to the current language used:

The rebranding of our previously existing strands of listening, performing and composing, is a little frustrating and will take teachers quite a while to transpose.

Music teacher

Some felt that a graphic might help to explain the structure of the course in a way that would ensure that the interconnectedness of the strands would be made clearer.

I found this section of the specification a little difficult to follow, however I can see clear links to work we already do using the current Junior Cert syllabus in the three elements Creating and Exploring, Participation and Music Making and Appraising and Responding. It might help to have some sort of graphic representation of how the elements link into the strands.

Music teacher

There is a concern expressed in a very small number of the online responses about the potential for confusion because of the combination of nouns and verbs in the naming of the strands, and that this may make the structure difficult to decode and understand.

Concerns raised in the feedback will be noted and the presentation of the course structure will be addressed by exploring alternative visual representations and through further discussion on the naming of the strands.

2.3 Strand 1: Procedural Knowledge

Respondents to the online questionnaire agree or strongly agree that Strand 1 would support:

- the development of musical literacy (76%)
- the development of aural skills (84%)
- students knowledge of musical elements (71%)

Broadly speaking, teachers feel that this strand is reflective of what they are already doing. There is support for the use of terminology such as 'improvisation' and 'recording', and that the content of this strand is very 'forward thinking'.

The language used represents a step forward from some existing curricula, in that there is flexibility in application

Music teacher

Regarding the links that music can provide to the local community:

There seems to be a nice link to music in the community but could this limit the student depending on where they live and what access they have to music(s) locally.

Music teacher

There is broad support for the way that ICT could be used in this strand:

There is a strong emphasis on active student participation; the use of ICT in this area could add to the learning and strengthen students' understanding of terms.

Music teacher

We like this strand as we can see ways how music technology can be incorporated to support experimentation of musical elements and the core building blocks.

Createsound.ie

One respondent replied that this strand 'goes to the core of what we want kids to be', and that this 'looks ambitious, looks fantastic'. Other respondents suggest that this will get students creating at a much earlier stage as there is no real formula or rules to what can be explored. There is favour for the notion that the students also need to work together in this strand.

There are some concerns as to how some learning outcomes would be realised and what is exactly meant by some of the verbs that form the stem of the learning outcome. A glossary is provided at the back of the specification, and this will assist teachers with this challenge.

When considering the learning outcomes of this strand, a small number of respondents questioned the place of dictation in this structure. This quote summarises this issue:

While aural skills will be developed through performing, composing and listening activities, ear-training tasks such as dictation appear to take somewhat of a back seat, with students now required to dictate melodic phrases of only two bars in length

SMEI

There are a small number of responses where clarification is sought on the term 'procedural knowledge'. A more developed explanation of this term will be necessary to ensure teachers and students are clear on this terminology. One respondent provided such an explanation, and this should be considered for inclusion in the specification:

Procedural knowledge is the product of procedural learning or experiential learning. Students learn music through engaging in, reflecting upon and evaluating their musical experiences. Through this process (and with the guidance of the teacher) students develop a range of musical skills (technical, aural, analytical, notational etc.) and tacit knowledge becomes conscious leading to musical understanding.

Third level lecturer/researcher

2.4 Strand 2: Innovate and Ideate

As with the previous strand, Strand 2 is broadly well-received. Respondents to the online questionnaire agree or strongly agree that Strand 2 would support:

- students' development of creativity and imagination (75%)
- the development of students' skills at decision making and critical thinking (66%)
- students' understanding of how sounds can represent and communicate feelings (72%)
- students' appreciation of how music can be created in response to wide variety of stimuli (75%)

There is support for the inclusion of cross curricular elements in this strand, and support for the use of the term 'create' instead of the word 'compose'. One respondent acknowledges that composing and inventing music is the most difficult skill, and these learning outcomes are good at 'inviting people in'. There was a comment that improvisation is not mentioned in this strand, and as this strand is all about innovation, this exclusion seems erroneous. There is support for the language in the learning outcomes (such as 'identify' and 'discuss') as this will foster 'intellectual engagement' among the students.

There is support for the notion that this strand will encourage and promote group work:

This strand encourages group work, a critical factor in many musical projects. The integrated and open nature of media to be used recognises the ever evolving nature of creative music activity in the 21st century.

Music teacher

The learning outcomes for this strand will support students in their development to be innovative and inventive. The student is being encouraged to respond to music and create their response through music and to appraise that response and its context.

AOIC

There is support for the integration of technology into this strand:

In terms of composition and performance, it seems the language used allows for the incorporation of music technology where appropriate. In our experience, this is very much in line with the way a huge amount of today's musicians go about creating music, so we are glad to see perhaps more scope for bringing this relevant activity into the classroom.

Createsound.ie

There are concerns raised as to how teachers and schools might need to be resourced to successfully navigate this strand:

I like the idea of composing music to accompany a film clip or sequence of images, however it will be important that schools have access to the relevant software and training for music teachers in advance.

Music teacher

There was also a concern raised on the difficulty of gaining access to live music:

Access to live performances and the cost of attending same or having musicians come to the school must be taken into account.

Music teacher

2.5 Strand 3: Culture and Context

In general, Strand 3 is welcomed as evidenced by the online responses and the feedback from the various focus groups. This quote supports what this strand is trying to achieve:

Exploring the why of music is very important for the development of critical thinking and innovation in students. Music is not prescriptive by nature and the study of music as a subject should reflect this fact. Music means many things to many people and the draft spec is trying to address this.

Music teacher

Respondents to the online questionnaire agree or strongly agree that Strand 3 supports:

- students' awareness of the purpose and intent that impact on the creation of music (66%)
- students' understanding of how music provides social and political commentaries on cultures and people (65%)
- students' understanding of stylistic features in different historical and contemporary eras (66%)

Broadly speaking, there is support for the facility that this strand offers to engage in cross-curricular activities, and the opportunities to engage meaningfully with technology. Some comments reflect the fact that this strand allows the freedom to integrate technology and resources as they become available, thus 'allowing the spec to stand the test of time' (Music teacher).

Along with the other alternative applications referenced, acknowledging the computer game angle in the 'participating and music making' element is welcome as this often represents the holy grail for music producers

Createsound.ie

Of concern is the lack of specificity and prescription of different musical genres and styles. This point is raised with particular reference to Irish Music in several responses and summarised in this quote:

The draft specification implies that it is possible that the inclusion of Irish traditional music will be optional, rather than compulsory, with its inclusion being dependent on individual teachers and schools' decisions

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Also of concern to one respondent is the lack of a specific reference to the place of women in the music world:

There were no female composers even mentioned in the old course, I hoped to see specific mention of women in the new specification. If we neglect to mention women specifically then we are buying into a culture of ignoring the role of women in Irish society.

Music teacher

There is clarification sought on some of the terminology in the learning outcomes; this includes the suggestion that we need to move away from the language of 'compose' and 'perform' if we are looking for the ethos to change. There are further suggestions to change the term 'composer' to 'artist or songwriter', as culturally in Ireland, a composer is a classical composer. There are mixed feelings on the term 'jingle', some saw this as a 'belittling' word, while others saw it as relevant to the world of our students, but the term 'ringtone' is acknowledged by many respondents as being dated already.

3. Feedback from the consultation: Assessment

The assessment for certification in Junior Cycle Music is based on the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of this specification. Assessment for certification is provided for at Common Level. Assessment of Music will comprise two Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs): *Composition Portfolio and Programme Note*. A practical examination (worth 30% of a student's marks) and the written examination (worth 70%) will be administered and marked by the State Examinations Commission.

The introduction of CBAs is part of the broader junior cycle reform. CBAs allow students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and skills and their ability to apply them in ways that may not be possible in an externally assessed examination. CBAs are assessed by the students' teachers and reported on to students and parents/guardians during junior cycle and in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

3.1 CBA 1: Composition Portfolio

This classroom-based assessment is welcomed, with 70% of the online respondents agreeing that this CBA is either effective or highly effective.

This is a fantastic classroom based activity and hopefully will serve to engage students better.

Music teacher

There is agreement that this offers great scope for creativity and the exploration of composing skills, and that this is the best way to assess the skill of composition, as this gives the students the opportunity to represent their learning.

In my experience, recurring cycles of classroom based assessments involving critical peer response help to move the students' focus from a 'performed musical product' to the act of musical creation itself and the joy of owning and molding (sic.) musical ideas.

Third level researcher/lecturer

Most respondents are in favour of the freedom to experiment, explore, take risks and favour the notion that students have a choice in what they present for assessment purposes.

This revised suggestion holds a lot more room to explore and expand, giving students opportunities to write songs, instrumental pieces, jingles, ringtones and opens the doors to actual creativity, rather than following rules. I believe that changes to enhance musicianship (and composition), musicology and performance strands in schools will have a better effect on students choosing to pursue further studies in music at third level.

Music teacher

The variety of methods of presentation is a brilliant idea, acknowledging that composing is not a paper exercise. I like the idea that composing could be tackled in class in a number of distinct tasks.

Music teacher

Of concern to some respondents is the timing of this CBA (end of second year). The concern is that the end of second year is too early as the students won't have developed a portfolio that will best showcase their work.

2 years is not enough time, and this would be better at the end of third year. And part of their performance exam should be to perform a piece that they have composed themselves.

Music teacher

There is a worry that teachers will just leave it at that at the end of second year and not develop these skills further throughout the third year of their junior cycle. There is also a slight concern about the reductionist potential of the student reflection, and for teachers to be aware that the students are reflecting in many other curricular areas.

how much time might be used up writing reflections on the process and could the process of composing suffer because too much time is spent documenting.

Music teacher

For some respondents, clarification is needed on the approaches to the portfolio that will be accepted.

More clarification needed on the type of portfolio, scrapbook, or folder style vs digital portfolio. Do you include performances of the compositions for example.... students are composing in 2.6, is this type of composition to be included?

Music teacher

The assessment specification that will accompany the subject specification will clarify these concerns, as will the planned samples of student work that will be published in the future.

3.2 CBA 2: Programme Note

In general CBA 2 is welcomed. 65% of the online respondents find this to be either effective or highly effective. This CBA is welcome, as it encourages students to engage with their practical assessment programme, gives an 'anchor' to the performance, and is an important connection to the real world.

Providing a programme note that is flexible in its content will ensure that students are thinking about and trying to understand the performance of the piece they are performing.

Music teacher

If background information is explored and presented in preparation for an upcoming musical performance, then the whole experience becomes more complete; the presentation illuminating the actual performance and vice versa.

Third level lecturer/researcher

Clarification is sought on the format of the presentation of the programme note with questions on whether this can be an audio recording, and can it be expanded to include clips of the pieces to be performed or other pieces by the same composer/songwriter?

Giving freedom in that programme note to respond to the specific piece is important as different pieces can need a very different type of programme note to be a true aid to learning.

Music teacher

There is further clarification sought on the procedure for preparing a programme note for a performance that has a collaborative aspect to it. These points will need further discussion by the development group.

Of concern with some respondents is a fear that this may become an English test rather than a Music one, and that guidelines will be needed on the range of vocabulary and the literacy requirements.

Some respondents are seeking clarification on how traditional players will compile a programme note as:

most traditional tunes don't have composers and background notes which would fill a classical players programme note. Is there scope to discuss the famous exponents who played the tunes, or their experience of learning the tunes?

Music teacher

This is a concern that will need some further discussion with the development group, and these details can be provided in the assessment specification.

3.3 Final examination

As part of the online questionnaire and throughout the focus group sessions, participants and respondents were asked for their views on the weighting of the practical exam (30%), their level of agreement on the number of pieces to be performed for this practical assessment (3) and their opinions on the length of the written examination (1 hour).

Generally, there is a positive response to the proposed weighting of 30% for the practical examination and many comments reflect this.

The weighting is correct; 30% will be a struggle for some students and will be relatively easy for others. It will challenge those that are not as advanced in this area, whilst still allowing for a student who is very accomplished here to showcase that and be rewarded appropriately in the marks weighting.

Music teacher

In the focus group discussions, other options were proposed and these broadly speaking went from 30% to 40%. The feedback from the online consultation is largely in favour of the 30% weighting. There are a small number of respondents who favour the practical exam moving in line with the Leaving Certificate Music examination, where the practical is awarded 50% of the overall marks.

30% does not reflect the amount of work the student will put into this aspect of the course; I view music as a practical subject, therefore I strongly feel that 60% would be fairer percentage.

Music teacher

Regarding the practical examination, music is a unique subject, in that many students across the country acquire the skills and the learning for this activity outside the classroom, and this is of concern to some respondents.

There already is a divide in classrooms of those who do music in the classrooms and those who do music outside: a higher % for the practical will exacerbate this and make it more divisive.

Music teacher

There is support for the number of pieces to be performed for the practical examination; some respondents note that any more than three pieces is a challenge for some students to accomplish.

Within the teacher focus groups, there was clarification sought on the role of technology in the practical examination. Interesting questions on the notion of what defines an 'instrument' were raised, and this will need clarification in assessment guidelines.

Regarding the written examination, there was very little reaction to the proposed move to a one-hour examination, but what is very clear is that teachers are seeking clarification on the structure and content of this written examination.

4. Other comments and suggestions for improvement

Respondents to the online survey and participants at focus group sessions were asked for further comments and suggestions that they did not yet get the chance to express. The comments that are expressing concerns are largely centred on the notion of allocation and availability of resources and the provision of appropriate and adequate teacher training; and some further clarity on the nature and content of the written examination. A snapshot of these comments are provided below:

I think it is important to engage with active members of the music sector, ensuring schools expose students to people like performers, composers, conductors, arts administrators, sound engineers etc. This gives students an idea of the type of direction they might face if they choose such a path, and allows them to make an informed decision. I really do think that this revised curriculum structure holds a lot of positives to change the way music is approached in schools today, and I'd like to hope that it encourages and develops music education for the better.

Music teacher

My fear is that less popular styles of music will be sidelined/marginalised, in favour of the 'popular' choice of music which the majority of students would naturally choose.

Music teacher

I'm also concerned about the unpacking of the specification. The way I choose to unpack it can and will be different to the music teacher in another school. Will we as teachers get enough training to unpack it successfully, without missing anything important?

Music teacher

I feel more resources would need to be provided to music classrooms.

Music teacher

In general I think the spec will allow for a strengthening of musical cultures in schools by taking account of the diversity of music as experienced by our students every day. The spec is aiming to recognise and reward initiative and innovation and this should be welcomed. I believe that this spec will allow teachers to invest in music education and not just teach music. This is a brave step forward, and once implemented should result in a greater appreciation of the study of music by students and lead to an increase in the numbers of students who avail of the opportunity to study music.

Music teacher

5. Messages from the consultation

It is evident from the consultation that the draft specification is welcome. The consultation process was very affirming of the work of the NCCA Development Group for Junior Cycle Music. This section of the report looks at ways in which progress can be made on some of the issues raised.

5.1 Areas for further consideration

The consultation process revealed some constructive and considered concerns about sections of the specification. Addressing these concerns will be the immediate focus of the development group. The following are areas to be considered:

- *Rationale and Aim:* The text of the aim should be considered to incorporate the suggestions offered
- *Structure:* Some respondents are seeking further clarity on the relationship between the three strands, and the use of a diagram could be explored to support this concern

- *Strand 1:* There is a need to further explain the term ‘procedural knowledge’ as this term is new to the lexicon of this subject
- *Strand 2:* The development group should consider the inclusion of improvisation to this strand
- *Strand 3:* Some of the terminology in this strand needs further consideration in light of comments regarding the application in the classroom and interpretation by students and teachers
- *CBA 1: Composition Portfolio:* Clarification is sought on the approaches to the portfolio that can be explored and how this assessment connects to the composing experiences within the learning outcomes
- *CBA 2: Programme Note:* The development group will need to discuss further how students who present as part of a group performances will provide their programme note; and how traditional players will provide this programme note as this is not typical practice in traditional music settings
- *Practical examination:* The development group will need some further discussion on the role and the place of technology in the practical examination
- *Written examination:* Clarification on the content and the structure of this examination is needed

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who completed the online questionnaire, sent in submissions and attended focus groups. The themes emerging from these responses will inform the work of the Music Development Group.

Appendix 1

Written Submissions

Post Primary Music Teachers Association (PPMTA)

The Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC)

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Createsound.ie

Arts Council of Ireland

Society for Music Education in Ireland

Appendix 2

Focus Group attendees

Contemporary Music Centre (CMC)

Society for Music Education in Ireland (SMEI)

Society for Musicology in Ireland (SMI)

Music Generation

Bristol Institute of Modern Music (BIMM)

Arts Council

Createsound.ie

Trinity College, Dublin

Academy of Popular Music

Irish Film Institute (IFI)

The Journal of Music in Ireland (JMI)

