An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Music

For introduction to schools in September 2027.

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Senior Cycle

Senior cycle aims to educate the whole person and contribute to human flourishing. Students' experiences throughout senior cycle enrich their intellectual, social and personal development and their overall health and wellbeing. Senior cycle has 8 guiding principles.

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

These principles are a touchstone for schools and other educational settings, as they design their senior cycle. Senior cycle consists of an optional Transition Year, followed by a two-year course of subjects and modules. Building on junior cycle, learning happens in schools, communities, educational settings, and other sites, where students' increasing independence is recognised. Relationships with teachers are established on a more mature footing and students take more responsibility for their learning.

Senior cycle provides a curriculum which challenges students to aim for the highest level of educational achievement, commensurate with their individual aptitudes and abilities. During senior cycle, students have opportunities to grapple with social, environmental, economic, and technological challenges and to deepen their understanding of human rights, social justice, equity, diversity and sustainability. Students are supported to make informed choices as they choose different pathways through senior cycle and every student has opportunities to experience the joy and satisfaction of reaching significant milestones in their education. Senior cycle should establish firm foundations for students to transition to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment, and participate meaningfully in society, the economy and adult life.

The educational experience in senior cycle should be inclusive of every student, respond to their learning strengths and needs, and celebrate, value, and respect diversity. Students vary in their family and cultural backgrounds, languages, age, ethnic status, beliefs, gender, and sexual identity as well as their strengths, needs, interests, aptitudes and prior knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. Every student's identity should be celebrated, respected, and responded to throughout their time in senior cycle.

At a practical level, senior cycle is supported by enhanced professional development; the involvement of teachers, students, parents, school leaders and other stakeholders; resources; research; clear communication; policy coherence; and a shared vision of what senior cycle seeks to achieve for our young people as they prepare to embark on their adult lives. It is brought to life in schools and other educational settings through:

- effective curriculum planning, development, organisation, reflection and evaluation
- teaching and learning approaches that motivate students and enable them to improve
- a school culture that respects students and promotes a love of learning.

Rationale

Music is a universal form of human expression. It transcends linguistical, geographical and cultural barriers. Music helps us to explore and understand our identity, communicate meaning, and engage meaningfully with the world around us.

Music significantly contributes to the development of the whole person – intellectually, personally, emotionally, socially, culturally and creatively. It is a dynamic and expressive subject that encourages curiosity, creativity, communication, experimentation and self-reflection. In music, students create, perform and actively listen in an integrated way both individually, and with others. This integration provides students with a powerful means of self-discovery, supports the development of key competencies, and promotes a deeper understanding and knowledge of both the theoretical and practical aspects of music.

Music builds resilience, develops self-awareness, fosters self-confidence and cultivates a sense of wellbeing. Students learn to give and respond to feedback constructively, refining their music and craft with discipline and perseverance.

Music nurtures problem-solving and original thinking. It enables students to experiment with original ideas and develops their individuality, personality and creative voice. Students consider musical context, purpose and audience. It provides an outlet for emotional expression, helping students to navigate personal challenges and moments of celebration.

Music provides a valuable lens for understanding history, heritage and culture. In **Leaving Certificate Music**, students encounter a diverse range of musical traditions, styles, and practices from historical to contemporary. Music helps to develop an appreciation of historical, personal, political, social and cultural contexts within which it was created and experienced. This learning helps to foster an awareness and appreciation of our own history, heritage and culture, environment and ethos, while developing an understanding of other cultures.

Music inherently fosters social skills, collaboration and teamwork through the sharing of ideas, instruments, skills and reflections. Through shared musical experiences, the subject promotes social cohesion and brings people together. Students learn to listen actively, communicate effectively, and use their individual talents to support one another and work as a team. Cooperation builds mutual respect and strong interpersonal relationships. As students learn to react and respond to music, individually and with others, they cultivate empathy, patience and self-discipline.

In today's rapidly evolving musical world, digital technologies have transformed how music is created, performed and experienced. Students benefit from using digital technology to create, arrange, record, produce, edit and share music, fostering creativity and developing technical proficiency. The specification reflects contemporary practices and acknowledges that students encounter and engage with music in diverse ways.

Music can empower students to contribute meaningfully to their own communities. Engaging in music prepares students for diverse roles in the music world and for a wide range of careers opportunities. Music develops lifelong skills to engage in, appreciate and enjoy the arts beyond the classroom.

Aims

The aims of the Leaving Certificate Music specification are to enable students to:

- communicate effectively as musicians through the three integrated modes of engagement: Creating and Experimenting; Performing and Music-making; Listening, Appraising and Responding.
- develop a deeper knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of music as experienced in their daily lives and in the world around them.
- engage with a diverse range of musical styles and to deepen students' awareness and appreciation of historical, personal, political, social and cultural contexts.
- create and communicate ideas, emotions, thoughts, mood and atmosphere in a variety of contexts.
- be creative and innovative through individual and collaborative learning experiences.

Continuity and progression

Leaving Certificate Music builds on the knowledge, skills, values, dispositions that stem from learners' early childhood education through to the junior cycle curriculum and provides continuity and progression in music education although students do not need to have studied junior cycle Music in advance of studying Leaving Certificate Music.

Junior Cycle

Learning at the core of junior cycle is described in Statements of Learning, a number of which apply to music. These include the creation, appreciation and presentation of music and composition, the use of musical ideas in reflecting life and living in the community, understanding patterns and relationships in music and taking an idea from conception to realisation. Many junior cycle subjects have links with and support the learning in junior cycle Music, such as Mathematics, Visual Art, History and English. Students may also have experience of musical learning through the junior cycle short course in Artistic Performance which gives students the opportunity to engage in the arts through the planning of, and participation in an artistic performance.

The Junior Cycle Music specification aims to contribute to the development of artistic awareness, understanding, self-expression, self-esteem, imagination and multicultural sensitivity. Students develop the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to create, perform and appraise music that is both their own and the music of others. Student learning in Junior Cycle Music is achieved through three interconnected strands which enable students to explore fully their musical imagination, creativity, potential and understanding of music in context. There is an emphasis on integrating creating and exploring, participating and music-making and appraising and responding, which are essential to students learning to become musicians and realise their musical selves.

Beyond senior cycle

The competencies which students develop through engagement with Leaving Certificate Music benefits them in their adult lives in a number of ways. Students can actively contribute through participation in their local community, society and through employment. Through the two years of study, students develop many valuable transferable skills such as creativity, teamwork and communication which highlight the versatility and broad applicability of learning in Music. The study of Leaving Certificate Music can provide students with a foundation for pursuing many exciting and rewarding careers in music and the arts. These include a composer, songwriter, music educator, performer, sound engineer, conductor, events promoter, music therapist and musical director. Other potential career areas include technology, production, marketing and creative media.

Student learning in senior cycle

Student learning in senior cycle consists of everything students learn **within** all of the subjects and modules they engage with **and** everything students learn which spans and overlaps **across** all of their senior cycle experiences. The overarching goal is for each student to emerge from senior cycle more enriched, more engaged and more competent as a human being than they were when they commenced senior cycle.

For clarity, the learning which spans **across** all of their senior cycle experiences is outlined under the heading 'key competencies'. The learning which occurs **within** a specific subject or module is outlined under the heading 'strands and learning outcomes'. However, it is vital to recognise that key competencies and subject or module learning are developed in an integrated way. By design, key competencies are integrated across the rationale, aims, learning outcomes and assessment sections of specifications. In practice, key competencies are developed by students in schools via the pedagogies teachers use and the environment they develop in their classrooms and within their school. Subjects can help students to develop their key competencies; and key competencies can enhance and enable deeper subject learning.

When this integration occurs, students stand to benefit

- during and throughout their senior cycle
- as they transition to diverse futures in further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment, and
- in their adult lives as they establish and sustain relationships with a wide range of people in their lives and participate meaningfully in society.

When teachers and students make links between the teaching methods students are experiencing, the competencies they are developing and the ways in which these competencies can deepen their subject specific learning, students become more aware of the myriad ways in which their experiences across senior cycle are contributing towards their holistic development as human beings.

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.



Figure 1: The components of key competencies and their desired impact

The knowledge which is specific to this subject is outlined below under 'strands of study and learning outcomes'. The epistemic knowledge which spans across subjects and modules is incorporated into the key competencies.

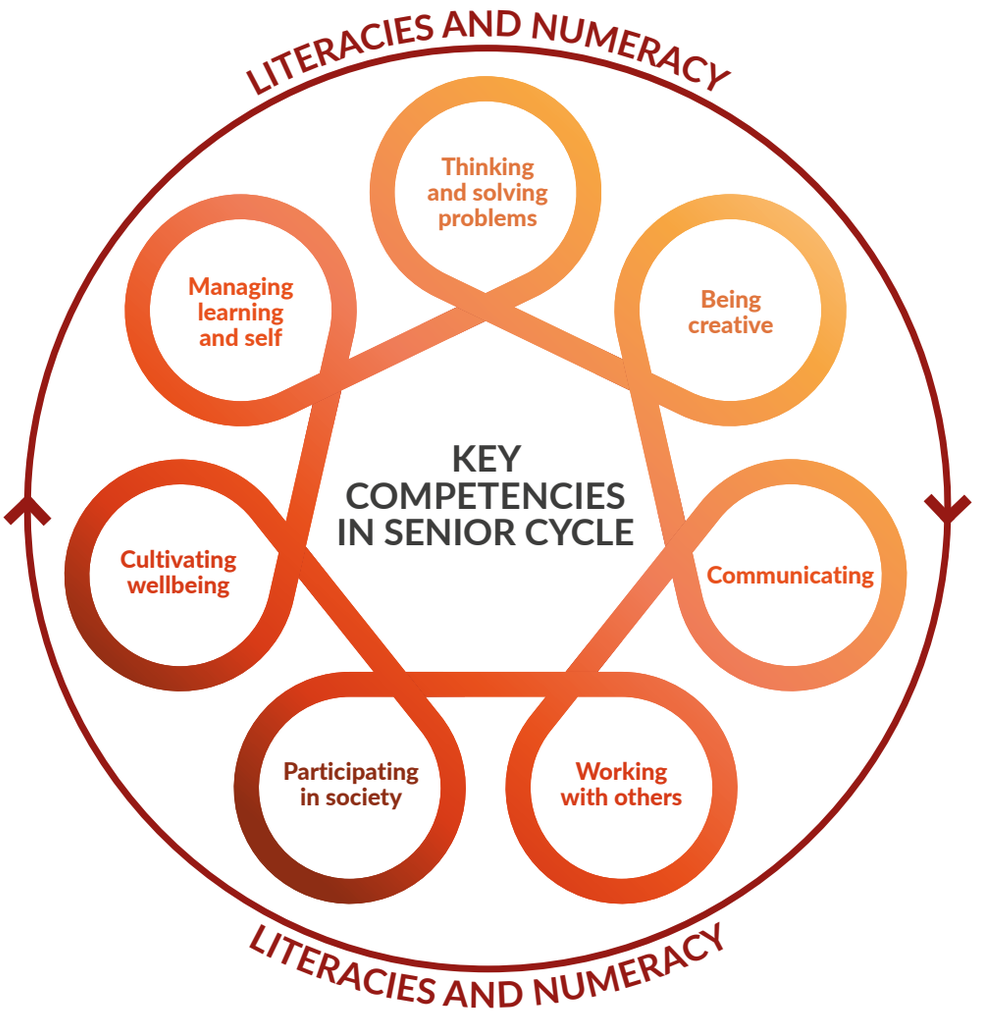


Figure 2: Key Competencies in Senior Cycle, supported by literacies and numeracy

These competencies are linked and can be combined; can improve students' overall learning: can help students and teachers to made meaningful connections between and across different areas of learning; and are important across the curriculum.

The development of students' literacies and numeracy contributes to the development of competencies and vice-versa. Key competencies are supported when students' literacies and numeracy are well developed and they can make good use of various tools, including technologies, to support their learning.

The key competencies come to life through the learning experiences and pedagogies teachers choose and through students' responses to them. Students can and should be helped to develop their key competencies irrespective of their past or present background, circumstances or experiences and should have many opportunities to make their key competencies visible. Further detail in relation to key competencies is available at **https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/senior-cycle-redevelopment/student-key-competencies**.

The key competencies can be developed in Leaving Certificate Music in a range of ways.

Being creative and making creative decisions is central to the student experience of Leaving Certificate Music. Students are being creative by participating in cultural experiences and learning from creative musical works. Students combine musical ideas that already exist to enhance their own musical concepts, ideas and creative processes. The subject provides students with a variety of opportunities to turn their ideas into actions, creating new musical ideas, creative works, performances, processes and artefacts.

Music encourages students to be curious, open-minded, adventurous and imaginative. The subject asks students to be playful and willing to take appropriate risks in the pursuit of learning. Students try different things to respond to tasks and situations. As students develop their competency in being creative, they learn to become comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, while still finding ways to move forward. Students develop internal standards about how good their own work, and the work of others, is, and they regularly reflect on their own creativity and creative process.

Communicating with music, and through music is a fundamental aspect of learning in the subject. Music exists to be performed, listened to, and shared with others. Music has the ability to communicate an idea, emotion, mood or atmosphere in ways that words alone often cannot. In Leaving Certificate Music, students communicate and develop their **literacies and numeracy** through a deepening understanding of words, symbols, numbers, language, sounds, movement, tools, media and texts. Students are engaged in active listening, viewing and reading attentively and responding meaningfully.

Music involves students communicating through the use of a variety of tools including instruments, voices, equipment, materials and technology. Students further develop their competency in communicating by being aware of the purpose and the target audience for their music and by creating, designing and composing music, artefacts and performances for these audiences.

Exposure to a variety of music and communicating music in a variety of styles encourages students to be adaptable and open to diverse perspectives. Students develop an understanding of how tone, gestures, body language and emotions affect communication. Students are encouraged to reflect on what they do well and what they could do better when communicating.

In the music classroom, students are encouraged to work with others in a range of contexts. **Working with others** involves deciding things as a group and working together to achieve shared goals. Students take on different roles, including taking the lead on occasion and they contribute meaningfully to the work of the group. This may be through creative tasks, appraising and responding activities, through performing as a member of a group, or as an audience member.

Working with others deepens understanding of group dynamics, being able to give and take, and navigating differences of opinion and approach. This competency works closely with communicating as students learn to interact ethically, understand the emotional involvement needed to work well with others and manage emotional challenges which may arise.

Leaving Certificate Music fosters the development of competencies related to **thinking and solving problems** by getting musical knowledge, ideas, theories and concepts from different places and putting them to use in the students' own work. Students explore information, patterns, trends, connections and relationships in music to gain deeper understanding and form better explanations. They think and solve problems through understanding, analysing, synthesising, evaluating, interpreting and creating. Students are open minded, speculating, looking for different points of view and exploring multiple possibilities.

Leaving Certificate Music supports students in developing the key competency **participating in society** in their schools, communities and wider society. Music offers students the opportunity to develop and express their own ideas, to investigate and explore historical, personal, political, social and cultural issues, to listen to works, and create their own musical ideas which have been inspired by personal or societal challenges.

Music encourages students to develop competencies related to **managing learning and self** and **cultivating wellbeing**. Students engage with activities which require them to make choices and set personal learning goals. Students are managing learning and self by figuring out ways to respond to complexity and uncertainty and by being flexible, adaptable and willing to learn from mistakes. The Leaving Certificate music classroom provides an inclusive and supportive space where students have a sense of meaning and purpose and can develop their self-confidence.

Strands of study and learning outcomes

The Leaving Certificate Music specification is designed for a minimum of 180 hours of class contact time. The structure of the specification is set out in two interconnected strands:

- Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas and
- Music in Context: Past and Present.

The strands should be studied concurrently, rather than in isolation or in a linear order. The learning from the two strands is mutually reinforcing. Learning experienced in Strand 1: Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas, will help to support and develop the learning in Strand 2: Music in Context: Past and Present, and vice versa.

Learning outcomes specified under both strands will not be achieved in a single learning experience. Students will build their competencies through repeated and varied encounters with different styles of music throughout their two years of study.

There are three integrated modes of engagement identified in the specification. These are:

- Creating and Experimenting
- Performing and Music-making and
- Listening, Appraising and Responding.

Each mode of engagement holds equal importance, and they are interwoven throughout the learning in the two strands. Collectively they ensure that students experience their learning in Leaving Certificate Music in an integrated way. By integrating these modes of engagement, students learn to develop and apply their competencies through the varied and flexible roles of being a musician.

Figure 3 illustrates the structure of the specification.



Figure 3: Structure of the Leaving Certificate Music specification

Modes of Engagement

Throughout their learning in Leaving Certificate Music, students experience what it means to be a musician in today's world through three integrated modes of engagement:

- Creating and Experimenting
- Performing and Music-making, and
- Listening, Appraising and Responding.

This integration provides students with opportunities to experience the complexity of roles with which a musician engages and fosters the development of a musical mindset. Together they promote deeper understanding and provide opportunities for students to learn to become musicians and realise their musical selves.

Creating and Experimenting

Creating and Experimenting focuses on the development of understanding of how music is created, constructed and communicated. Empowering communication through sound and music and nurturing the creative voice are central to learning in this specification.

Throughout their learning, students explore and experiment with musical elements by adapting, combining, and manipulating them. Musical elements include pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, timbre, texture, structure, style, tonality and instrumentation.[1] Students develop original ideas both individually and by working with others.

When creating and experimenting, students explore how rhythm, melody and harmony are constructed, and how sounds are layered and work together to create texture, structure and harmonic relationships. Students listen to and appraise existing music, developing an insight into, and an understanding of the composers' intentions. They experiment with ideas from this music to create and develop their own compositions.

Creating and experimenting with music does not happen in a vacuum. As students develop their ideas, they continually listen to what they are creating - by playing an instrument, singing or vocalising, using digital technology, or a combination of these. Learning in this way supports students to develop their ideas in real-time, mirrors the practices of professional composers and supports students in refining their musical thinking.

Creating and experimenting involves appraising, reflecting, refining, modifying and making changes to their ideas. Through this iterative process, students' ideas evolve and take shape.

Performing and Music-making

Performing and Music-making supports students to develop competencies to understand and communicate music effectively. Students perform and music-make to an audience.[2] They engage in performing and music-making both individually and with others.

Students communicate their original creative ideas and experience, interpret, adapt and arrange the music of other composers, arrangers and performers. Students develop performance skills, technical fluency and expressive control on their instrument(s) and/or voice(s) and apply these skills in rehearsed and improvised contexts.

Through performance, students interpret musical elements and communicate them with technical control and accuracy. They demonstrate an understanding of the musical context, including the musical style and the purpose and intention of composers and creators. Students gain a deeper understanding of the demands of performing as they rehearse and refine their music, reflecting on their strengths and areas for improvement. This learning supports the development of their musical perspectives, enhances performance skills, and builds confidence and resilience.

[1] These elements are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, nor do they form a checklist.
[2] An audience can consist of fellow students/peers or teacher(s).

Listening, Appraising and Responding

Listening to music widely for understanding, and for pleasure is one of the fundamental aspects of music that this specification seeks to embed. Through this mode of engagement, students develop an understanding of musical styles; composers' and arrangers' musical intentions; and the relevant historical, personal, political, social and cultural context within which music was created. Students listen, appraise and respond to music, developing and demonstrating their growing knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical contexts, and musical language.

Students develop critical listening skills when appraising and responding to music which is both their own and the music of others. They formulate, develop, express and justify their opinions about existing and original music using appropriate musical terminology.

An overview of each strand is provided below, followed by a table. The right-hand column contains learning outcomes which describe the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning. The left-hand column outlines specific areas that students learn about. Taken together, these provide clarity and coherence with the other sections of the specification.

Learning outcomes should be achievable relative to students' individual aptitudes and abilities. Learning outcomes promote teaching and learning processes that develop students' knowledge, skills, values and dispositions incrementally, enabling them to apply their key competencies to different situations as they progress. Students studying at both Ordinary level and Higher level will critically engage with music, but the context, information and results arising from that engagement will be different.

Ordinary level	Higher level
• Students engage with all of the learning outcomes listening carefully and thinking critically when recognising different musical styles, appraising and responding to music which they study and encounter. • Students will make well informed judgements and decisions about music throughout their learning using accurate and appropriate musical terminology.	• Students engage with all of the learning outcomes undertaking critical listening and thinking critically when recognising different musical styles, appraising and responding to music which they study and encounter. • Students will make highly informed judgements and decisions about music throughout their learning using accurate and appropriate musical terminology.
• Students engage with a broad range of musical knowledge, demonstrating understanding of musical elements and skills in creating and notating their own music. Students apply this knowledge effectively when creating and arranging music.	• Students critically engage with a broad range of musical knowledge, demonstrating deep understanding of musical elements and skills in creating and notating their own music. Students apply this knowledge highly effectively when creating and arranging music.
• Students demonstrate performance skills competently when communicating music. • Student understanding is supported by an awareness of the musical style, the audience and purpose of the music.	• Students demonstrate performance skills proficiently when communicating music. • Student understanding is supported by an in-depth awareness of the musical style, the audience and purpose of the music.

Table 1: Design of learning outcomes at Ordinary Level and Higher Level

Appendices 1 and 2 set out a Glossary of Action Verbs used in the specification and a Glossary of Terms used in the Learning Outcomes.

Strand 1: Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas

In this strand students develop their creative voice and realise their musical selves. Students do this by exploring, developing and expressing original musical ideas in a variety of musical styles. Students explore and express their musical creativity and imagination in both solo and group contexts. They develop a range of aural, analytical, technical, digital and notational skills as they learn to construct, organise and shape their musical ideas in response to a variety of stimuli and performance contexts. Creating musical ideas involves exploring and experimenting with musical elements including pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, timbre, texture, structure, style, tonality and instrumentation.[3]

Prescribed and unprescribed music act as a rich source of stimulus material from which students explore, select, adapt and incorporate compositional and instrumental devices in their own work. Students learn to draft, redraft and edit their musical ideas.

When creating musical ideas, students perform their ideas using instruments, voices, sound sources, digital technology or a combination of these. Realising their learning in this way develops aural awareness and ensures the creative process is engaging, meaningful and authentic for all students.

In this strand, students learn about ethical and responsible practices in music. Students learn to value and protect their music, and the music of others when creating, performing or sharing music.

Throughout their learning, students' musical literacy and digital literacy evolve in sophistication. Students use appropriate musical language and notation practices to describe, document and communicate their ideas. Students make more informed and considered decisions about their creative direction, justifying and articulating their compositional choices with increasing confidence.

Students engaging with Ordinary Level are expected to be able to create music in key signatures of up to two sharps and two flats in both major and minor keys. Students engaging with Higher Level are expected to be able to create music in key signatures of up to four sharps and four flats in both major and minor keys. Students undertaking both Ordinary Level and Higher Level should be encouraged to create, experiment, perform, listen, appraise and respond to music which extends beyond these parameters where appropriate. In addition, all students will be expected to engage with all prescribed music, including music which extends beyond these parameters.

Strand 1: Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Performance skills including: • pitch accuracy and consistency • rhythmic accuracy and consistency • appropriate tempo • technical dexterity • control of an instrument and/or voice • intonation • tone quality • expressive techniques and articulation	**1.1.** Discuss performance skills that are necessary to communicate music effectively. **1.2.** Demonstrate a range of appropriate performance skills.

[3] These elements are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, nor do they form a checklist.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
• how to perform to an accompaniment • how to contribute meaningfully, and musically, to a performance • how to maintain balance, blend and tuning • musical communication and interpretation with an appropriate sense of the chosen style • how to reflect on and refine a performance	
How to construct a single line melody for instruments and voices: • in simple time signatures and in compound time signatures • in major and minor key signatures • for a variety of instruments and voice types • using the appropriate range and capabilities of instruments and voices • using appropriate word setting/word painting • with added performing and expressive techniques • which includes a modulation[4] • using staff notation and digital notation formats • using established structures and forms • using compositional devices from prescribed and unprescribed music	**1.3.** Create and perform a single line melody for instruments and voices.
How to improvise using voice(s) and/or instrument(s) and/or body percussion and/or other sound sources. How to develop short rhythmic, melodic, harmonic fragments, or chord patterns to create musical ideas.	**1.4.** Improvise to create short musical ideas.
How to perform unfamiliar rhythmic, melodic and harmonic phrases and chord patterns: • in simple and compound time signatures • in major and minor keys • with performing and expressive techniques	**1.5.** Perform unfamiliar music at sight and through aural perception.

[4] All students engaging with Leaving Certificate Music are required to develop an understanding of modulation and its effect on musical structure and harmony. Students engaging with Ordinary Level will not be required to include a modulation in composition tasks. Students engaging with Higher Level are required to create single line melodies that demonstrate modulation to dominant in a major key, and modulation to the relative major in a minor key, and the ability to return to the original key in composition tasks.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Writing a single-line melody in the style of Irish Traditional dances: • Reel • Double jig • Slip jig	**1.6.** Create and perform a single line melody in the style of a given Irish Traditional dance rhythm, metre, or form.
Adding accompaniment to a single-line melody in keeping with the musical style including: • a rhythmic accompaniment • ostinato • sequence • imitation • a countermelody • supporting voices • a bass line • suitable chords • accompaniment styles used in prescribed music	**1.7.** Create and perform accompaniment to a single-line melody.
How digital technology can be used to create, edit, record, share and play back music including: • recording live audio/instruments/voices • performing live on instruments/voices • appropriate conditions for effective recording to take place • an understanding of microphone types and microphone placement • feedback and how to prevent it • importing sounds • inputting sounds • building a track(s) • making edits to audio: cut, move, loop and adjust sounds to improve the track • sourcing, importing sounds including samples and loops. • responsible use of sampling and permissions • adjusting volume levels, equalisation (EQ) and balancing parts • exporting and sharing music in a digital format The opportunities, limitations and challenges offered by technology in sharing music.	**1.8.** Demonstrate, using digital technology, a range of techniques for creating, editing, recording and sharing a piece of music. **1.9.** Rehearse and perform to a backing track.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Processing effects: • Reverb • Panning • Delay • Distortion • Chorus • Equalisation • Compression • Automation	**1.10.** Identify and describe processing effects in live and recorded music through auditory perception. **1.11.** Apply processing effects to original music or recordings and evaluate the impact of the effects used.
Appropriate musical language to justify their creative compositional decisions.	**1.12.** Provide a brief description of the role of the music they create and justify their creative compositional decisions.
Music copyright and how it applies to the sharing and publishing of music: • What is copyright • What does copyright protect/not protect • Performance rights • Music and reproduction rights • Public domain • Professional organisations in Ireland who manage copyright for musicians • Revenue streams for musicians and royalties • Copyright infringement	**1.13.** Explain what copyright is and why it matters in the music industry. **1.14.** Outline the steps that are needed to copyright original music.

Strand 2: Music in Context: Past and Present

In this strand, students develop an understanding of the key features and contextual influences of a wide range of musical styles. This understanding helps to shape students' ability to create, perform, appraise, and respond to music meaningfully.

Students investigate music associated with emotions, feelings, times, places, and social groups. Students share and discuss examples of music experienced at home, at school and in the wider community. They come to understand the historical, personal, political, social, and cultural dimensions of music and gain insights into the purpose, intent, and impact of music across different contexts and environments.

This strand aims to foster the curiosity, enjoyment, and pleasure that listening to, performing, and engaging with music can bring. Students engage with music from both historical and contemporary contexts. They listen to, appraise, and respond to music from a prescribed music list, as well as unprescribed music selected collaboratively by students and teachers. The prescribed music list will introduce students to music from a wide variety of musical styles, types, and genres. In addition to the prescribed music list, students will engage with other music in the classroom which will expose students to additional musical styles, types, and genres, and to music which reflects the students' own interests. Students listen to, appraise and respond to music they engage with; select and perform short extracts from this music; and use this music as stimulus material in creative tasks which are outlined in learning outcomes in this strand and also in Strand 1: Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas.

Engagement with music repertoire should begin through aural perception. Students develop a deeper and more intuitive understanding of music repertoire by focusing on critical listening, internalising sounds, structures, and patterns, learning to imitate, perform and experiment with what they hear. Students will explore, investigate, and compare how stylistic features, musical elements, compositional, instrumental and vocal techniques are applied in different ways for different purposes across different musical styles. As students learn to appraise and respond to music, they formulate responses using appropriate musical language.

In this strand, students critique both live and recorded performances and use their learning to reflect upon, inform, and improve their own music practices. It is expected that students engaging with Leaving Certificate Music would attend at least one live musical performance(s)[5] as a class group during their study of the subject.

Strand 2: Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Forming an articulate and informed response to a piece of music. Appropriate musical language to appraise and respond to music.	**2.1.** Listen to, appraise and respond to music using appropriate musical language.

[5] Live musical performance can be local or national performance as deemed appropriate.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
How to appraise, respond and compare music through aural and visual perception: • stylistic features • compositional techniques • instruments and instrumental techniques • voices and vocal techniques • performance techniques How to support their responses with evidence and reference to the music.	
The relationship between music and its context, including: • historical, personal, political, social and cultural contexts as appropriate • stylistic features of the music • styles which may have influenced composers/arrangers/performers	**2.2.** Explore the relationship between music and its context.
The main characteristics and distinguishing features of Irish Traditional dance, music and song through aural and visual perception. This includes: • stylistic features • instruments and instrumental techniques • vocal techniques • rhythmic, melodic and harmonic features Historical, personal, political, social and cultural contexts as appropriate. How Irish Traditional dance, music, and song shares connections with other music. Irish Traditional Singing: • Sean Nós • Irish folk songs Dance types to be explored: • Reel • Double jig • Slip jig • Single jig • Hornpipe • March • Polka	**2.3.** Identify and describe the main characteristics, and distinguishing features of Irish Traditional Music. **2.4.** Explore how Irish Traditional Music is influenced by and influences other music.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
The purpose of music in media, including: • to convey a feeling, mood or emotion • to tell a story • cultural significance • social and/or political purpose • use of leitmotif • use of symbolism Media to be explored: • Film and television • Musical theatre • Video games • Incidental music	**2.5.** Identify and explore the role and purpose of music in a variety of media. **2.6.** Create and perform a short piece of original music which illustrates a character, mood or atmosphere suitable for use in a media context.
Stimuli used to inspire a musical response, including: • a work of art • a mood • an event • film and television • a personal experience • a piece of music • prescribed music • text • place How to create and perform melodic, rhythmic and harmonic ideas in response to stimulus material.	**2.7.** Create and perform original musical ideas in response to stimulus material.
Considerations when critiquing a musical performance including: • musical accuracy • technical dexterity • expression and interpretation of the music • timbre • ensemble and balance • musical communication to an audience • musical style • instrumentation • technological features of a performance or use of technology in a performance, where applicable • historical, personal, political, social and cultural contexts as appropriate	**2.8.** Devise and apply criteria to evaluate live and recorded performances.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Musical activities in their local community/school community and where musical activities/events take place. Local musician(s) or groups of any style who create and/or perform in the local community/school community.	**2.9.** Research and explore musical activities available in the local community. **2.10.** Discuss how music has contributed to a local community event which the student has attended and/or participated in.
• How to notate rhythmic phrases up to four bars • How to notate melodic phrases up to four bars • How to identify and indicate common chord progressions • How to identify and indicate cadences	**2.11.** Transcribe through aural perception rhythmic and melodic phrases, and chord progressions.
The influence of • musical styles and/or • musicians and composers on music which the student creates. How to recognise and acknowledge musical influences.	**2.12.** Describe how the work of other musicians and composers has informed and influenced the student's musical ideas.
How to adapt musical features in an existing piece of music or song including: • melodic, rhythmic and harmonic ideas • established structures • tempo • time signature • tonality • underlying harmony The impact of making changes to a piece of music.	**2.13.** Collaborate with others to adapt and perform an extract from an existing piece of music or song.

Teaching for student learning

Leaving Certificate Music is student-centred in its design; it emphasises practical music-making experiences for all students. The learning in this subject is experienced through approaches which support both individual and collaborative creative music-making activities. Working with others to create, perform and appraise music, helps to expand students' musical ideas and their ability to recognise and appreciate multiple perspectives.

Music encountered in the classroom is a rich source for exploration. This music is actively listened to, critically examined and used as inspiration for students' own creative work. Pedagogies which provide students with ample opportunity to explore and experiment when creating original music are student-centred and foster creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and communicative competence. The three modes of engagement form the foundation of all experiences in Leaving Certificate Music. Students use instruments, voices, digital technology or a combination of these, as they explore and experiment with compositional techniques and features of musical styles, listening to and sharing their ideas. The use of instruments, voices and digital technology ensures that students are better equipped to reflect upon, demonstrate and refine their music in real-time.

The music classroom is a safe space where relationships are grounded in trust and respect so that students feel encouraged to express themselves and their ideas confidently and competently. Creativity thrives in the music classroom when students feel confident to experiment with a variety of approaches when creating, improvising and performing in ways that promote originality and personal expression. By facilitating creativity, students feel supported to propose alternative ideas, challenge conventions and take risks, embracing uncertainty and innovation.

Engagement in performance activities requires strategies which foster confidence, communication and inclusivity. Gradual exposure to diverse performance settings, performing individually and as a member of a group and scaffolded reflective practice help to build confidence and motivation.

Accommodating student choice, interests and existing talents in the selection of repertoire helps to support students to engage meaningfully in their learning.

Throughout their studies, students engage with, listen, appraise and respond to a wide range of music. All interaction with music begins with the development of aural awareness and critical listening skills. This foundation is deepened through exploration and analysis of notated music, where available, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of musical structure, musical elements and expression.

The nature of the support required to achieve success in the music classroom will vary from student to student as they imagine and conceive different ideas and bring their own level of understanding and prior learning to an activity. Strategies to promote and foster inclusivity include accommodating varying levels of competency, adjusting the amount of teacher intervention, and differentiating the pace and sequence of learning. Universal design for learning allows students multiple and varied opportunities to perform and present their work. By designing engaging and relevant tasks, students are motivated to learn.

Assessment in the music classroom should evaluate practical, theoretical and creative skills and should, as far as possible, integrate creating and experimenting, performing and music-making, and listening, appraising and responding. Varied formative and summative assessment strategies support student learning and provide effective feedback for student development. Ongoing teacher and peer feedback, as well as structured opportunities for reflection and refinement, are woven into the learning process and promote student autonomy. This dual approach to assessment recognises, acknowledges and rewards student learning and achievement. Assessment integration, whereby assessment is embedded within the learning process rather than treated as a separate task, maximises the use of available teaching time and ensures that all classroom activities contribute to both learning and evaluation.

Assessment

Assessment in senior cycle involves gathering, interpreting, using and reporting information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and is used for a variety of purposes. It is used to determine the appropriate route for students through a differentiated curriculum, to identify specific areas of strength or difficulty for a given student and to test and certify achievement. Assessment supports and improves learning by helping students and teachers to identify next steps in the teaching and learning process.

As well as varied teaching strategies, varied assessment strategies will support student learning and provide information to teachers and students that can be used as feedback so that teaching and learning activities can be modified in ways that best suit individual learners. By setting appropriate and engaging tasks, asking questions and giving feedback that promotes learner autonomy, assessment will support learning and promote progression, support the development of student key competencies and summarise achievement.

Assessment for certification

Assessment for certification is based on the rationale, aims and learning outcomes of this specification. Leaving Certificate Music has two assessment components: one written examination and one additional assessment component (AAC) comprising the Music Performance.

The written examination will be at Higher and Ordinary Level. The Music Performance AAC will be based on a common brief but will be assessed at Higher and Ordinary Level. Each component will be set and examined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

In the written examination, Leaving Certificate Music will be assessed at two levels, Higher and Ordinary. Examination questions will require students to demonstrate learning appropriate to their chosen level. Differentiation at the point of assessment will also be achieved through the stimulus material used, and the extent of the structured support provided for examination students at different levels.

Assessment component	Weighting	Level
Music Performance AAC	50%	Common brief. Assessed at Higher and Ordinary Level
Written examination	50%	Higher and Ordinary Level

Table 2: Overview of assessment for certification

Additional Assessment Component: Music Performance

The Additional Assessment Component (AAC) in Leaving Certificate Music directly responds to the rationale and aims of the subject, which are to develop competencies in students so that they can communicate effectively as musicians. This AAC encourages students to develop a holistic understanding of what being a musician involves.

The Music Performance AAC requires all students to perform a programme on an instrument/voice as follows:

- freely selected musical pieces/songs and
- an original musical piece/song and
- an unprepared musical test.

The design of the AAC facilitates students to evidence a broad range of learning as set out in the learning outcomes from both Strand 1, Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas and Strand 2, Music in Context: Past and Present. It requires students to apply their learning in Leaving Certificate Music in ways that cannot be readily assessed by a written examination.

Detailed guidance on the assessment process will be provided in a separate document, *Guidelines to Support the Completion of the Music Performance AAC in Leaving Certificate Music*.

Ordinary Level

Students taking Ordinary Level will be required to perform a total of **three** musical pieces/songs on an instrument(s)/voice(s).

- **Two** freely selected musical pieces/and
- **One** original musical piece/song and
- an unprepared test.

Higher Level

Students taking Higher Level will be required to perform a total of **five** musical pieces/songs on an instrument(s)/voice(s).

- **Four** freely selected musical pieces/and
- **One** original musical piece/song and
- an unprepared test.

As part of the AAC, **all students** will participate in a reflective discussion with the examiner, demonstrating insights into their creative process and the musical decisions that shaped their original piece/song.

The Leaving Certificate Music specification is designed to provide many and varied collaborative music-making and performance opportunities for students. This AAC offers students choice in whether to perform their pieces/songs (both freely selected and original) individually or as a member of a group. Where a student presents their pieces/songs as a member of a group, they will be examined and assessed on their own contribution to the group performance.

Solo and group performing may be freely mixed. The musical pieces/songs may be performed live on a variety of instruments or through a combination of voice and instruments, or with the appropriate support of digital technology.

For the unprepared test, students will choose from aural memory (rhythmic or melodic), sight-reading (instrumental/vocal/rhythmic) or improvisation. Aural memory and sight-reading tests will be eight bars long. In the case of improvisation, students taking Ordinary Level will be required to improvise for at least eight bars duration, while students taking Higher Level will be required to improvise for at least sixteen bars duration.

The AAC provides students with practical, music-making opportunities to bring the core subject learning to life through their performance. The Music Performance AAC is intended to be integrated into the natural rhythm of classroom teaching and learning.[6]

[6] It is envisaged that the AAC will take up to 25 hours to complete. Further details will be provided in the *Guidelines to support the completion of the Music Performance AAC*.

It is designed to be both motivating and enjoyable for students and to provide students with opportunities to explore musical areas and styles that interest them.

The assessment component provides students with an opportunity to apply key competencies they have developed through their engagement with Leaving Certificate Music, in particular being creative, communicating, managing learning and self, thinking and solving problems, and working with others. Students are encouraged to explore the dynamic and creative world of music. The AAC supports students to recognise the relevance of music to their lives and to their school, community and society. It has the potential to highlight future career pathways in music and in the arts more generally.

The Brief

The Music Performance AAC brief will be published annually by the SEC. The brief will be issued in term two of year one.

The AAC will be completed in term two/three of sixth year. A separate document, *Guidelines to Support the Completion of the Music Performance AAC in Leaving Certificate Music*, will provide detailed guidance on the assessment process including a range of matters related to the organisation, implementation and oversight of the AAC.

In addition, the brief will:

- set out the specific requirements for the AAC for all students,
- provide stimulus material for the original music piece/song and support students in considering areas related to the stimulus material which they may wish to explore,
- support teachers in planning for learning and teaching.

Descriptors of quality for the Additional Assessment Component in Music

The descriptors below relate to the learning achieved in the music classroom by students in the Music Performance AAC. In particular, the AAC requires students to:

- demonstrate control and accuracy of pitch and rhythm during the performance,
- communicate music pieces/songs to an audience with musical expression, fluency and interpretative understanding of the selected style and
- justify creative decisions made.

The descriptors of quality for the AAC are set out in Table 3.

	Students demonstrating a high level of achievement	Students demonstrating a moderate level of achievement	Students demonstrating a low level of achievement
demonstrate control and accuracy of pitch and rhythm during the performance	The student demonstrates excellent pitch and rhythm control and accuracy throughout the entire performance.	The student demonstrates good pitch and rhythm control and accuracy for the majority of the performance.	The student demonstrates some pitch and rhythm control and accuracy for the performance.
communicate music pieces/songs to an audience with musical expression, fluency and interpretative understanding of the selected style	A highly musical performance which demonstrates an excellent level of musicality and fluency with a strong knowledge of the music performed. The student demonstrates the ability to interpret and communicate the expressive content of their performance to an excellent degree.	A musical performance which contains some inconsistencies that affect the sense of musicality, fluency and understanding of the music being performed. The student makes a good attempt at communicating expressively, however there are moments when it is limited.	A performance where the musical demands are mostly beyond the ability of the student, there is limited understanding of the music. The student makes some attempt to communicate the expressive content of the music.
justify creative decisions made	The student demonstrates comprehensive and insightful knowledge of their own original work. The student can confidently discuss and justify the creative compositional decisions, the originality and freshness of their ideas, technical challenges and interpretative choices made.	The student demonstrates adequate understanding of their own original work. The student makes a good attempt to discuss the creative compositional decisions, the originality and freshness of their ideas, technical challenges and interpretative choices made.	The student demonstrates some understanding of, and ability to discuss their own original work. The student shows some ability to discuss compositional decisions, originality and freshness of ideas, challenges encountered and interpretative choices made.

Table 3: Descriptors of quality: Music Performance AAC

Written examination

The written examination will consist of a range of question types. The senior cycle key competencies developed through the study of Leaving Certificate Music, are embedded in the learning outcomes and will be assessed in the context of the learning outcomes. The written examination paper will include a selection of questions that will assess, appropriate to each level, the learning described in the two strands of study.

Reasonable accommodations

This Leaving Certificate Music specification requires that students engage with the nature of the subject on an ongoing basis throughout the course. The assessment for certification in Leaving Certificate Music involves a written examination worth 50% of the available marks and an additional component worth 50%. In this context, the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations, operated by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), is designed to assist students who would have difficulty in accessing the examination or communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical, visual, sensory, hearing, or learning difficulty. The scheme assists such students to demonstrate what they know and can do, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. The focus of the scheme is on removing barriers to access, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions as are assessed for all other students and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other students. The Commission makes every effort when implementing this scheme to accommodate individual assessment needs through these accommodations.

There are circumstances in which the requirement to demonstrate certain areas of learning when students are being assessed for certification can be waived or exempted, provided that this does not compromise the overall integrity of the assessment. However, some of the areas of learning in a subject specification cannot be waived because they are core to the subject specification. In Leaving Certificate Music, these areas include live musical performance of an instrument(s)/voice(s). This is because the skills developed in these areas are fundamental and integral to learning in music.

More detailed information about the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations, including the accommodations available and the circumstances in which they may apply, is available from the State Examinations Commission's Reasonable Accommodations Section.

Before deciding to study Leaving Certificate Music, students, in consultation with their school and parents/guardians should review the learning outcomes of this specification and the details of the assessment arrangements. They should carefully consider whether or not they can achieve the learning outcomes, or whether they may have a special educational need that may prevent them from demonstrating their achievement of the outcomes, even after reasonable accommodations have been applied. It is essential that if a school believes that a student may not be in a position to engage fully with the assessment for certification arrangements, they contact the State Examinations Commission.

Leaving Certificate Grading

Leaving Certificate Music will be graded using an 8-point grading scale. The highest grade is a Grade 1; the lowest grade is a Grade 8. The highest seven grades (1–7) divide the marks range 100% to 30% into seven equal grade bands 10% wide, with a grade 8 being awarded for percentage marks of less than 30%. The grades at Higher level and Ordinary level are distinguished by prefixing the grade with H or O respectively, giving H1–H8 at Higher level, and O1–O8 at Ordinary level.

Grade	% marks
H1/O1	90 – 100
H2/O2	80 < 90
H3/O3	70 < 80
H4/O4	60 < 70
H5/O5	50 < 60
H6/O6	40 < 50
H7/O7	30 < 40
H8/O8	< 30

Table 4: Leaving Certificate Grading

Appendix 1: Action Verbs

Action verb	Students should be able to
Adapt	make something suitable for new condition, use or purpose.
Apply	select and use information and/or knowledge and understanding to explain a given situation or real circumstances.
Appraise	evaluate, judge or consider text or a piece of work.
Brief description/ explanation	give a short statement of only the main points.
Collaborate	work jointly with another, or others, on an activity or project.
Create	bring something into existence; to cause something to happen as a result of one's actions.
Demonstrate	prove or make clear by reasoning or evidence, illustrating with examples or practical application.
Describe	give a detailed account of the main points of the topic, using words, diagrams and/or images.
Devise	plan, elaborate or invent something from existing principles or ideas.
Discuss	offer a considered, balanced review that includes a range of arguments, perspectives, factors or hypotheses, grounded in appropriate evidence.
Evaluate (data/ information)	collect and examine data to make judgments and appraisals; describe how evidence supports or does not support a conclusion in an inquiry or investigation; identify the limitations of data in conclusions; make judgments about the ideas, solutions or methods.
Evaluate (ethical judgement)	collect and examine evidence to make judgments and appraisals; describe how evidence supports or does not support a judgement; identify the limitations of evidence in conclusions; make judgments about the ideas, solutions or methods.
Explain	give a detailed account supported by reasons or causes.
Explore	systematically look into something closely; to scrutinise or probe.
Identify	recognise patterns, facts, or details; provide an answer from a number of possibilities; recognise and state briefly a distinguishing fact or feature.
Illustrate	use drawings or examples to describe something.
Improvise	create and perform music spontaneously or without prior preparation; to produce or make something from whatever is available.
Justify	give valid reasons or evidence to support an answer or conclusion.
Outline	give the main points, restricting to essential pieces of information.
Perform	a step in the musical process where musical ideas are expressed and shared to a listener.
Present	to bring, offer or give in a formal way; to bring before or introduce to a public forum.
Provide	offer data, work or documentation that support inferences or conclusions.
Reflect	give thoughtful consideration to actions, experiences, values and learning in order to gain new insights and make meaning.
Rehearse	practice a play, piece of music, or other work for a performance.
Research	inquire specifically, through collecting, organising and analysing evidence in order to draw conclusions.
Respond	react or reply to something, typically in speech, writing, or action.
Transcribe	write out what is heard.
Use	apply knowledge, skills or rules to put them into practice.

Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms

Term	Interpretation
Aural perception	Involves the ability to interpret and understand based on what can be heard.
Balance	The relative dynamics of sounds in a piece of music.
Chord progression	A series of chords sounding one after another to create a harmonic phrase.
Chorus (processing effect)	A processing effect that creates copies of the original sound, slightly alters the pitch and timing, and blends them back in with the original.
Compositional devices	Techniques, methods or tools used by a composer to create, vary, develop and shape their music
Compression	A processing effect used in mixing or recording where the dynamic range of a sound is reduced when it exceeds a set threshold level.
Countermelody	A melodic line that is heard alongside a main melody in a piece of music.
Culture	The ideas, customs, practices, traditions, values and social behaviour of a particular people or society.
Delay	A processing effect where the original sound is repeated at a set time interval. There is normally a decrease in volume with each repeat.
Distortion	A processing effect where the audio signal is altered by increasing the gain beyond a maximum limit causing clipping resulting in a harsh gritty tone quality.
Echo	A distinct duplication of a sound which decays over time.
Effect Automation	The process of controlling changes in audio effects over time within a digital audio workstation (DAW).
Elements	Pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, timbre, texture, structure, style, tonality and instrumentation.
Equalisation (EQ)	A processing effect where specific frequencies can be increased or decreased without effecting the rest of the sound.
Expressive techniques	The ways performers and composers shape sound to convey emotion, mood, and character in music.
Feedback	A high-pitched sound which results when a microphone or instrument picks up its own amplified output and re-amplifies it.
Imitation	The repetition of a musical idea or motif in a different voice or part, creating texture.
Improvisation	Spontaneous musical creation, often based on an existing melodic, rhythmic or harmonic fragments, or chord patterns.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical idea—such as a melody, rhythm, or harmony—associated with a particular character, place, emotion, or concept in a piece of music, especially in opera, film scores, and programmatic works.
Live musical performance	A musical performance in real time at a physical venue.
Loop	A short section of music or sample that is repeated. Commonly used in digital and electronic music.
Media	The various platforms and formats where music is used purposefully to enhance storytelling, narrative, atmosphere, mood or meaning. Media includes film, audio and audio-visual, musical theatre, video games and incidental music.
Modulation	The process of changing from one key to another within a piece of music.

Term	Interpretation
Motif	A musical idea in a piece of music.
Ostinato	A repeated pattern that can be rhythmic, melodic or harmonic and that is maintained continually in a piece of music.
Panning	The placement of sound in the stereo field.
Processing effects	A series of mechanical or technological operations on a recording process that modifies the original sound inputted.
Reverb	A processing effect where the blended reflection of sounds from surfaces gives the impression of space or environment. Can be achieved both naturally or digitally.
Sequence	A melodic, rhythmic or harmonic motif or phrase which is repeated at a higher or lower pitch.
Sound source	The means by which a sound is produced (e.g. on an instrument, by using the voice, an environmental object, an electronic device).
Stimulus	Something that inspires students to create a musical idea; a stimulus can include: a mood, an event, film and television, a personal experience, a piece of music, prescribed music, text or place.
Style	A musical type or genre that is characterised by specific features, form and structure, or a typical use of musical elements and compositional devices.
Symbolism	The use of musical elements to represent ideas, emotions, characters, or themes.
Technical dexterity	The skill and control of a performer in executing the physical demands of their instrument or voice.
Texture	How layers of sounds within a piece of music interact.
Timbre	The specific tone or sound quality of an instrument or voice, or a collection of instruments and voices.
Visual perception	Involves the ability to interpret and understand based on what can be seen.
Word painting	When music reflects the literal meaning of the lyrics.
Word setting	The way in which lyrics or text are matched to music in vocal compositions.

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