



NCCA

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

Report on the consultation on the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Drama Film and Theatre Studies

June 2024

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Introduction

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

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Tranche 1 subjects will be completed in 2024 for introduction to schools in 2025. The development of the specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies is included in Tranche 1.

The draft Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies specification was made available for national public consultation from 2nd February – 5th April 2024. The aim of this consultation was to seek the open and honest views of the public in relation to the curriculum and assessment arrangements in the new draft specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies. The key areas of focus within the consultation were

- Rationale, Aims and Key Competencies
- Strands and Learning Outcomes – clarity and coherence
- Specified Areas of Learning
- Additional Assessment Component
- Supports needed for successful enactment.

The responses to the consultation indicated a very positive perspective on the specification overall. Almost all contributors expressed a sense of great excitement and anticipation for the introduction of this new subject, and were keen to be involved in it, in some capacity. The very practical and applied approach taken to the specification was very warmly received, with strong endorsement for the inclusion of Applied Creative Tasks (ACTs). While teachers were of the strong view that it would be a very useful way to teach practical and performance skills, as well as the principles underlying drama, film and theatre, students were particularly heartened by the idea that they would not be sitting behind desks all the time, and that they would “learn how” and not just “learn about” the making of film and theatre. Further clarification was sought on the relationship between the ACTs and the Additional Assessment Component (AAC) and, while they broadly welcomed the inclusion of specified areas of learning, most had strong concerns about the lack of choice in this area.

The potential benefit of an Additional Assessment Component (AAC) was also welcomed as was the weighting of 50%, although some contributors stated that it should be worth more. In particular, the practical and collaborative approach to the AAC was seen to be very appropriate for the arts-based nature of the subject.

The requirement for students to attend at least one live theatre performance and one film screening was strongly welcomed by most, as attendance at arts-based events was viewed as an integral part to the learning process. Teachers and students in particular, also welcomed the fact that schools could choose their own live performance/ screening as this would allow for student and teacher choice and voice. In addition to this, there were concerns raised about the challenges associated with resourcing student attendance at these performances.

The following sections of this report will elaborate in more detail on aspects of this general feedback. Section One provides an overview of the consultation process. Section Two provides insights into the feedback from the consultation while Section Three presents key considerations and conclusion.

Section 1: Consultation Process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022). The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2023) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Methodological approach

The consultation for the review of Drama, Film and Theatre Studies included multiple modes of engagement during the nine-week consultation period:

- An online survey
- Online submissions
- A range of school-based focus groups to capture insights from teachers, students, and school leaders
- A public consultation event.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, online submissions, and attendance at the public consultation event. In terms of the school-based focus groups, a representative sample was selected from the 28 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies developments. The eight schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place between February and March 2024 and involved focus group meetings with students and teachers interested in Drama, Film and Theatre Studies and with school leaders, as detailed in Table 1. Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the focus groups, while parental consent and student assent was sought for school visit participants under the age of 18.

A written record of all discussions was made during focus groups and school visits. Data gathered through focus groups and school visits were anonymised, and all data from the consultation were stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2023). The privacy of all contributors has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation.

A thematic approach was used to analyse the feedback and was framed by the guiding themes of the consultation. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered. The consultation feedback is presented in Section Two of this report.

Consultation responses:

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

Mode of consultation	Overview of participants	Numbers
E.g. Online survey	Teachers, students, third level educators, parents/ guardians, independent drama teachers, arts and industry professionals,	60
Written submissions	Teachers, third level educators, independent drama teachers, arts and industry professionals, researchers, NGOs, researchers, others (not specified)	28
School visits	Teachers interested in teaching the subject, students from 2 nd – 6 th year interested in the subject, school leaders	8 schools 66 students 33 teachers 13 school leaders
Regional focus group sessions	Teachers, third level educators, Arts and industry professionals, government advisory bodies and government agencies,	24

Table 1: Levels of engagement across the consultation

The next section explores the feedback gathered throughout the consultation across the various modes of consultation.

Section 2: Feedback from the consultation

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The feedback has been grouped into the following areas:

- Overall impressions of the draft specification
- Manageability of the learning set out within the draft specification
- Nature and role of the portfolio
- Specified areas of learning
- Additional Assessment Component
- Continuous Professional Development and resourcing

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

Overall impressions of the specification

This aspect of the consultation gained insights into the Rationale, Aims and Key Competencies in Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

Rationale and Aims

The rationale was seen as appropriate for this subject. Participants commented that it clearly set out an ambition for the subject that would make it attractive for students. It was considered as strongly reflecting the creative nature of the subject and the iterative ways of working in the arts world. The applied focus of the subject was also viewed as very appropriate for the nature of drama, theatre and film.

We welcome the introduction and overarching ambition of this subject, as it fulfils a need in Irish senior cycle education and will play to the strengths of many students who have an interest in drama, film, and theatre studies. The rationale is clear and all-encompassing regarding the value of this opportunity for these students.

(Written submission)

The stated Aims for the subject were affirmed and seen as positive and appropriate for the subject at this age and stage of learning, and as capturing the most important themes in the specification and in Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatres Studies more generally.

The highly practical focus of the specification, as articulated in both the Rationale and Aims, was welcomed by all, in addition to the focus on the development of a range of competencies relevant to arts-based subjects. There were some suggestions to review the language used with a view to augment the focus on performance while some contributors expressed a desire for a specific reference to the Irish film and theatre industries.

Key competencies in Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies

Contributors in the consultation noted the potential of the learning set out in the draft specification to foster a range of student key competencies including Being Creative; Cultivating Wellbeing; Thinking and Solving Problems and Managing Learning.

It is clear to see that the Key Competencies of Senior Cycle have been greatly considered in this new subject and I can see that all of them will be achieved through effective engagement with the course.

(Written submission)

Some contributors were of the view that there could be more emphasis given to organisation skills and self-discipline as these are core skill requirements within the creative industries, while others thought that this was more appropriate as a pedagogical approach and should not feature in specific learning outcomes.

Clarity and manageability of the learning set out within the draft specification

On the whole, contributors were of the view that the structure of the specification is very clear and manageable, allowing for students to learn about and through the making of theatre and film.

I love the strands. They are so creative and collaborative.
(School leader, school focus group)

Furthermore, the overall relationship between the three strands was viewed as appropriate, as the practical learning in strand 3 is achieved by engaging with the learning outcomes in the other two strands.

Strands 1 and 2 (Creative Process and Critical Response Process)

The language of the strands was welcomed on the whole, with the Creative and Critical Response Processes viewed as very positive.

*...the focus on collaboration as a key component of the creative process mirrors the collaborative nature of the arts industry and prepares students with essential social and professional skills for their future careers.
(Online submission)*

The learning outcomes within the first two strands were very positively received, with many contributors expressing the view that these strands offer students the opportunity to engage in an iterative process of learning about the various disciplines while doing them.

*The learning outcomes are detailed and well-articulated, covering a broad spectrum of competencies. For example, outcomes like CP1a (generate ideas for creative projects) and CP2g (develop a collaborative, ethical, and creative learning environment) illustrate the specification's commitment to both the creative and collaborative aspects of the arts. The balance between "students will be able to" and "students will learn about" columns ensures a comprehensive learning experience that encompasses both practical skills and theoretical knowledge.
(Online submission)*

While the inclusion of learning outcomes focusing on the use of performance skills was broadly welcomed, concern was expressed that some aspects of this discipline were perceived as missing from the specification such as acting, performance, musical theatre and technical skills. Many contributors expressed the view that the specification would be strengthened by the inclusion of learning outcomes which explicitly refer to the teaching of performance and technical skills, and that these could be incorporated as foundational skills, similar to the foundations of critical response in strand 2.

In particular, the use of the term "present" was also not favoured by many as it was viewed as being too much about presenting, rather than performing or producing.

*Why is performance not included here, especially when discussing drama/theatre? and what is meant by presentation? Is it a PowerPoint? How will students present their work, surely if it's drama based- they perform it in front of an 'audience' i.e. teacher/class?
(Online survey response)*

Furthermore, the absence of a learning outcome which refers to the explicit teaching and learning of the basic language of film was noted by some contributors and it was suggested that this could be included in Strand 2, Critical Response Process.

In addition, the inclusion of reflection within the creative and critical response process was a source of concern by some, who were of the impression that there is an overemphasis on this element in these two strands, particularly given its place in the centre of both processes. It was suggested, therefore, that the role of reflection and its articulation within the strands be reconsidered.

Too much emphasis on reflection/evaluation - why not concentrate on the doing/skills and knowledge building. (online survey)

Applied Creative Tasks in Strand 3

The inclusion of Applied Creative Tasks (ACTs) received a very enthusiastic response by almost all contributors, as it was viewed as a very practical way for students to learn about and through creative endeavours.

*...the curriculum for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film, and Theatre Studies has been thoughtfully designed to be both student-centred and practice-oriented, which I find to be highly beneficial. The emphasis on practical experience through the integration of Applied Creative Tasks (ACTs) stands out as an effective method for embedding learning in real-world contexts. This not only boosts engagement and understanding among students but also accurately reflects the processes involved in the arts industry. By using ACTs to engage students with critical and creative processes, the curriculum aligns perfectly with the objectives of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills.
(online submission)*

The number of tasks (three) was viewed very favourably by most contributors, with some commenting that it offers students a chance to create work collaboratively, in a low-stakes environment and to learn from this process. Many were of the belief that this will encourage a vibrant and engaging classroom environment and will work well in the classroom and as a lens for teaching and learning.

There were some queries about the relationship between the ACTs and the AAC, and requests that this be clarified in the specification. In addition, there was a concern by a small number that, because neither the ACTs nor the Portfolio are being assessed, this might limit the engagement with it.

*It is likely that without any summative assessment component assigned to the Applied Creative Tasks there will ultimately be a lack of active engagement in the portfolio/rehearsal process.
(Online survey)*

Nature and Role of the Portfolio

In general, the inclusion of a portfolio was received very positively, with many contributors commenting on the associated benefits; that it is a good way to get students to think about the creative process in particular; it allows them to keep a track of their learning and encourages them to engage meaningfully with the thinking about the making of theatre and film.

The emphasis on ongoing formative assessment facilitated by the portfolio is particularly commendable. It supports continuous feedback and adjustments, which are crucial in the iterative and subjective processes characteristic of learning in the arts.

(Written submission)

There were divided views on the role of the portfolio; while some contributors expressed the view that it should form part of the assessment weighting, others were happy for it to remain part of the learning space. There was a strong desire for support in the form of Portfolio Guidelines with clear guidance on the purpose of the Portfolio, the kind of materials that might be included in the Portfolio and its alignment with the Applied Creative Tasks (ACTs) and the Additional Assessment Component.

Some concerns were raised over the use (and over-use) of 'reflection', and a number were concerned that it could become a 'tick the box' exercise, if not integrated meaningfully.

I like the idea of a portfolio... It is something they need to constantly engage with throughout the process but can break flow when you have to stop to write a reflection. I would feel maybe voice recordings of rationale might help students to reflect in action so I would like to see this being something they could submit in a multimodal way. (Survey response)

Specified Areas of Learning

On the whole, the inclusion of specified films and pieces of theatre to engage with was positively received, as teachers and students expressed the view that it would give them a focus and starting point for engaging with the work of established practitioners

Being able to focus the learning on a film or piece of theatre is a good idea.
(School leader, focus group)

It was suggested that it would be very helpful if the specified drama could include recorded performances so that students wouldn't be reliant on written texts. It was furthermore noted by a number of contributors that the choice of films and theatre would be very important and should include the availability of theatre productions and films by Irish practitioners and in the Irish language.

*It is important that material from Irish language drama and theatre be represented in the new course.
(Written submission)*

While a focal point for engaging with the work of established practitioners was well received, many of the responses to the consultation on this section expressed the view that there is a lack of clarity on the nature and format of the engagement with the cinematic and theatrical works. Contributors were also of the view that, notwithstanding the general support for set pieces of theatre and film, the absence of choice in the set genre and set text for film and drama was a source of great concern.

*I think a variety of set films and plays would be beneficial as the array of different styles are too huge to study something in one text for film and drama. Maybe a prescribed list of options like English would be more beneficial and maybe studying excerpts from various genres would be beneficial also. Looking at the bigger picture through the lens of one set work could be very limiting.
(Online Survey response)*

While some said that it would demand students to engage with films or plays they might not otherwise see, others feared the lack of choice would limit the uptake of the subject, the enthusiasm of teachers, student achievement, and risk a lack of diversity.

*One play and one film not only restricts the breadth of exposure to diverse narrative forms, genres, and cultural perspectives but also risks presenting a narrow view of what is considered valuable or worthy of study within the arts. Such a limitation may inadvertently prioritise certain narratives over others, potentially marginalising lesser heard voices and perspectives.
(Online survey)*

Additional Assessment Component

Overall, there was positive feedback about the Additional Assessment Component, with many favouring the fact that it is a very practical assessment that will allow students to apply their learning from, in particular, the Applied Creative Tasks.

The creativity in practice component sounds very exciting and students will like that it can be completed in collaboration but graded individually. It also offers an open space for student voice and taking agency as a learner.
(Online survey)

With respect to the weighting and overall practical nature of the AAC, many contributors were of the view that 50% weighting was appropriate while some expressed the view that the practical component should be worth more than the written examination.

I like the fact that there is 50% weighting given to practical elements. I hope and believe the concept is open enough to allow for diversity in student skills and interests. You need to have potential for an actor, director, script writer, set/costume/prop/lighting designer to showcase their learning and abilities.
(Online survey)

It was acknowledged by some contributors that the assessment of practical and collaborative work will be challenging. Many cited other jurisdictions and other related areas, such as drama exams, where it is done successfully

There's no doubt about it – assessing group performance is a challenge. But with a good set of rubrics and when everyone is clear about their role, it's actually quite easy. You just need to be clear about the assessment criteria
(Teacher, focus group)

There was also strong concern that the descriptors of quality for the AAC were heavily weighted in favour of reflection and that it would be important that more value be placed on the final performance/production. There was also widespread concern about the proposal that students would film their drama performance for the AAC, instead of having it assessed live by an examiner visiting the school, as is the case for other arts-based subjects.

In terms of the grading or assessing of work, our main concern is how evaluators or assessors would 'grade' theatre work without seeing it live. A digital recording, however high quality, is not the same as seeing a piece of theatre live. The whole point of theatre is its liveness. (Written Submission)

The concern about assessing drama via film was also seen as particularly problematic for those who wish to perform, as acting skills for theatre and film are very different.

The kinds of skills you need to act for film are very different when you're acting for the stage. We call it big and small acting. In theatre, you do big gestures so the audience can see it. On film, the camera can zoom in. How can you assess student's performing on the stage if it's filmed? What are you actually being judged on? (Student, Focus Group)

Continuous Professional Development and Resourcing

The most common support identified as necessary for enactment was the upskilling of teachers through CPD. Notably, while many teachers stated that they had some knowledge or experience in either drama/theatre or film, most did not have experience of both disciplines and admitted that they would need upskilling in at least one of the areas, if not both.

Ongoing Effective CPD surrounding practitioners, styles, genres etc needs to be provided as one would not be familiar with the likes of Stanislavsky, Chekov, Adler etc if you did not study them in college... This CPD needs to be facilitated by trained educators in the field of theatre and film in order for it to be fully effective. (Survey response)

A range of areas were identified as crucial to successful professional learning, including:

- Integrating the Applied Creative Tasks into everyday teaching and learning
- Supporting teacher understanding of how to engage with the learning outcomes and associated details in the 'students learn about' column
- Supports related to the specified areas of learning
- The meaningful integration of the DFTS Portfolio

In addition to this, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of the appropriate resourcing of this subject so that no student would be disadvantaged.

Ensuring that students have online access to a wide range of plays, films, and scripts democratizes the learning process. It allows students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds to engage with essential materials without the barrier of cost or geographical limitations. This is particularly important in a field where exposure to diverse works can significantly impact a student's understanding and appreciation of the arts.

(Online submission)

The necessary resourcing required would allow students to attend a live theatre performance and a cinema screening and for schools to acquire the appropriate equipment (hardware and software); to buy copies of plays/ films and to obtain subscriptions to online film and theatre platforms and taking field trips to local theatres/ film sets.

This will be very expensive. Buses cost a fortune nowadays, particularly when you're in a rural school like ours. We need to be careful that no school or student is excluded from this because of financial constraints. Schools will need support to fund this, if students are expected to go to the theatre and cinema at least once.

(Teacher, focus group)

Coupled with this were frequent calls for teaching and learning resources, which would complement CPD provision. A digital repository of relevant ideas, resources and examples of Applied Creative Tasks was frequently mentioned and a range of supports in the form of exemplars and sample papers were also viewed to be critical by many teachers and school leaders.

Exemplars and sample papers would really help to make spec clearer as to what exactly is expected of the students. Too many vague terms leave teachers unclear as to what constitutes a strong response to the assessments.

(Online Survey response)

Other Comments

Overall, there was a great sense of excitement about the subject and the draft specification. Many of the students, teachers and school leaders who engaged with the consultation were very keen to study or teach the subject in the future.

The appendices were seen by contributors as being very helpful, with many commenting positively on the definitions in Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms. It was noted by some that certain definitions would benefit from greater explication or clarity while the definition of storytelling in Appendix 2 was received positively and seen as particularly helpful.

Section 3: Considerations and Conclusion

Considerations

Overall, the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies was very well received and the consultation fulfilled its objective of initiating discussion and debate on key aspects of the design of the subject of Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

The consultation did yield some feedback which will be considered by the development group when finalising the specification for Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

Issues raised for consideration in this context include:

- The need to clarify some elements within the creative and critical processes, including the role of reflection
- The request to provide further clarity for a small number of learning outcomes and the inclusion of learning outcomes which focus on the explicit teaching of performing and technical skills
- Consideration of the need for student and teacher choice in the specified areas of learning and the inclusion of Irish language productions
- How to provide greater clarity around the AAC including the 25 hours allocated to the completion of the component; the timing of the release of the brief; the assessment of drama and expectations of students when recording pieces of drama and submitting them digitally
- The need to clarify the relationship between the ACTs and the AAC
- Further consideration of some definitions in Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms.

Conclusion

The consultation process was very informative. The engagement of those who participated in the consultation is acknowledged and NCCA is grateful for the open, honest, committed, experience-based and expert feedback received. Consultation feedback indicates there are very positive views on the draft specification, while acknowledging that provision of professional learning, supports and resources are fundamental to successful implementation. The high level of teacher input to the consultation is gratefully acknowledged and the positive response from teachers indicates a sense of optimism and excitement about the introduction of this new arts-based subject.

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Appendix One: List of Contributors

Association of Irish Musical Societies

Conradh na Gaeilge

Disappear Here Film Festival

Dr Kate McCauley for Drama in Education team in School of Arts Education and Movement at DCU St Patrick's campus

Fíbin Teoranta

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)

Irish Film Institute (IFI)

Just Forests

Mungret Community College

National Parents Council (NPC)

Nerve Centre

Sacred Heart School, Tullamore, Co Offaly

School of Education, University of Galway

Screen Producers Ireland (SPI)

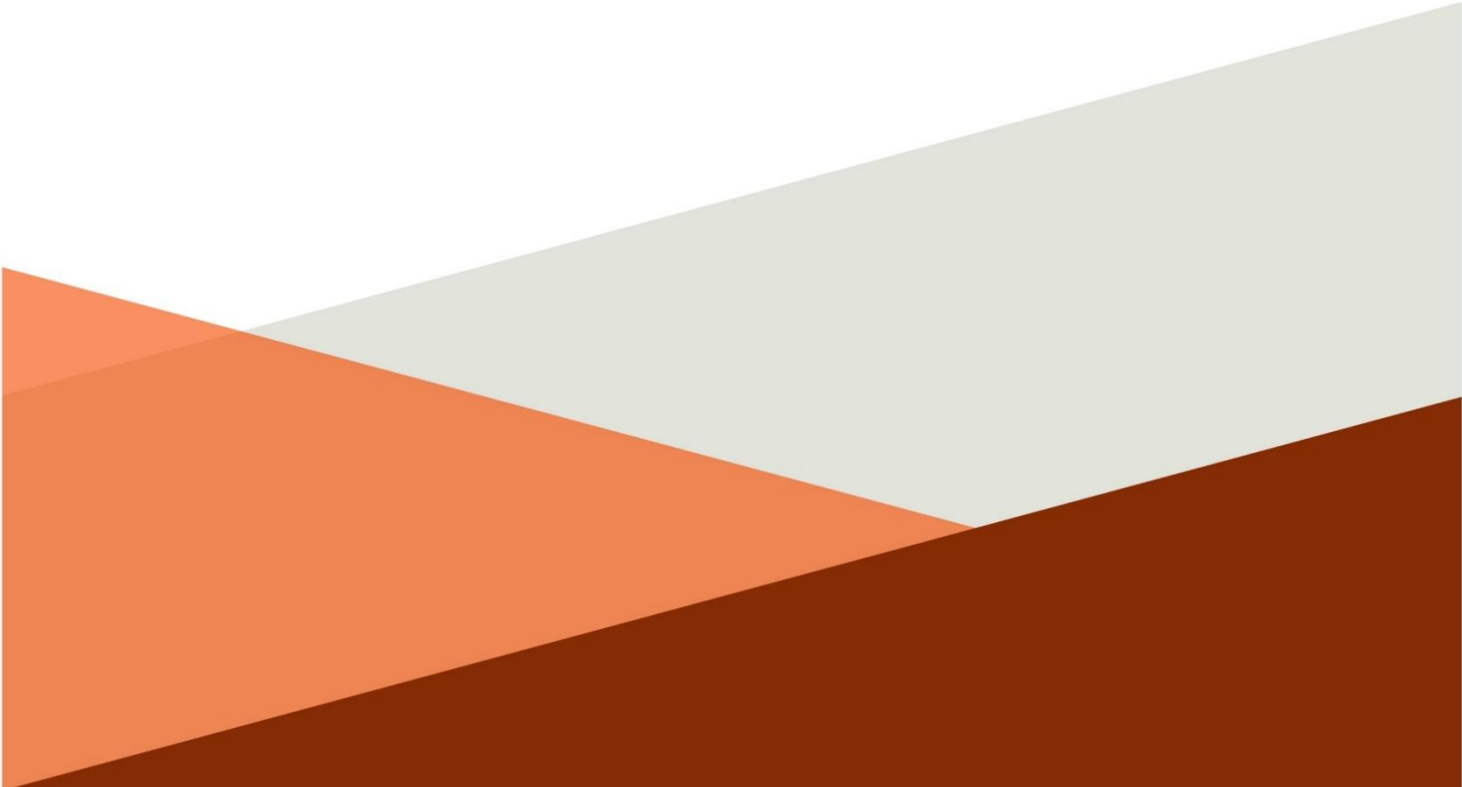
The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon

The Lir Academy, Trinity College Dublin

The Association for Drama Education in Ireland

The English Department of an Educate Together School (School not identified)

WorldWise Global Schools (Irish Aid's Programme for GCE)



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