Written submission: Consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate Geography specification

NCCA is redeveloping Leaving Certificate Geography. The aim of this consultation is to obtain the open and honest views of all stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, and other interested parties. The feedback gained from the consultation will inform the work of the development group in preparing the final specification.

NCCA would greatly appreciate your feedback on the draft specification which can be found here: Draft Leaving Certificate Geography specification

When providing feedback, observations or comments, please reference the specific section and / or relevant learning outcomes.

The closing date for this consultation is 25th April 2025 at 5pm.

Data protection and open data section

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Where a respondent selects 'yes' to the question: *Are you consenting for your submission to be published*, respondents are consenting to having their submission published on ncca.ie.

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Respondent's details

What organisation are you submitting on behalf of?

The Heritage Council

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

- o Yes X
- o No

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

Dr Eoin Ó Donnchadha, Heritage in Education Policy Development Officer, The Heritage Council

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

- o Yes X
- o No

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

Rationale: The rationale (page 2) outlines the nature of Geography and the role and importance of Geography in realising the purpose and vision of senior cycle.

Aim: The Aim (page 3) outlines the over-arching purpose of the subject and the relevance and expected impact of the subject on student learning.

In your opinion, do the rationale and aim capture the overarching purpose and nature of Geography; the importance of the subject in realising the vision of senior cycle and the relevance and expected impact of this subject on student learning. Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

For the most part, the draft text captures the overarching purpose and nature of the subject very well, though there are omissions here which we believe should be addressed. Specifically, there is room in the text to be explicit about geography's connections to heritage and the local and regional environments. In relation to geography's ability to encourage students to be future-orientated decision makers, there is potential to acknowledge that this process is often built on and informed by the past's legacy in the heritage that surrounds us today. For instance, heritage provides much of the data which students study in the subject in the form of landscapes, their natural features and resources, and the evidence they contain for human usage and development. An awareness of the past and its legacy via heritage underpins any future-orientated approach to the subject's application, and this should be acknowledged. Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge when referencing Geography's ability to facilitate students' use of geographical skills to better understand the world and shape a more sustainable future, that these processes can (and perhaps should most often) take place in students' local and regional contexts.

To succinctly capture these points, the following suggested changes to the draft text are proposed for your consideration:

1) Under "Rationale", the text reading "Geography helps students develop an informed worldview, equips them to make ethical, future-orientated decisions and enables them to better navigate our increasingly globalised world" might be amended to: "Geography helps students develop an informed worldview, equips them to make ethical, future-orientated decisions **based on an awareness of the heritage around them**, and enables them to better navigate our increasingly globalised world."

2) Under "Aims", the text reading "Students are supported to think like geographers and to apply geographical skills, to better understand the world and to contribute to shaping a more sustainable future from a critically informed perspective" might be amended to: "Students are supported to think like geographers and to apply geographical skills, **including in their own local and regional environments**, to better understand the world and to contribute to shaping a more sustainable future from a critically informed perspective".

It is positive to see that attention is being paid to "environmental heritage" as potential career path for students of Geography in the draft text.

Key Competencies: Key competencies is an umbrella term which refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop in an integrated way during senior cycle. These competencies are linked and can be combined; can improve students' overall learning; can help students and teachers to make meaningful connections between and across different areas of learning; and are important across the curriculum.

The draft specification sets out examples of how key competencies can be developed in Leaving Certificate Geography on pages 5-7.

In your opinion, does this section effectively capture the development of student key competencies in Leaving Certificate Geography? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This section does an excellent job of effectively capturing the development of student key competencies in the subject. It was particularly encouraging to see "participating in society" included in the draft text as it has particularly strong links to the subject. In terms of improvements in the text, we would advocate that consideration be given to the explicit inclusion of a reference to heritage in relation to "participating in society", as our research shows heritage is a key vehicle for engaging students with their communities, especially at local, regional, and national level. For example, the text which reads "Students also develop their capacity to exercise their voice in discussions about local, regional, national and global challenges, such as those related to the physical environment, globalisation or conflict" might be amended to: "Students also develop their capacity to exercise their voice in discussions about local, regional, national and global challenges, such as those related to the physical environment, **natural heritage**, globalisation or conflict."

Strands of study and learning outcomes (pages 8-23)

Course overview: The course overview sets out the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions for students in 4 strands (the unifying strand and 3 contextual strands). The specification emphasises a non-linear, integrated approach to learning across the strands.
The details of the strands are described on pages 8-9 of the specification.

In your opinion, does the structure illustrate the connected nature of the strands and the development of student knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an appropriate way? Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

> The structure presented here does a very good job of illustrating the connected nature of the strands.

Unifying strand: Applying geographical thinking and skills (pages 10-12)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

> This strand is quite clear and aligns well with the rationale and aims of the draft specification. In terms of improvement though, under the "key concepts in geography" section of the unifying strand, there is potential for the content to better reflect the Rationale's and Aims' preoccupations with sustainability, as well as to better embody the Senior Cycle's guiding principle of "inclusive education and diversity". These benefits might be achieved by adding "**communities**" and "**heritage**" to the list of key concepts outlined in this section of the final specification text. The inclusion of the former should be considered owing to its utility in conceptualising those groups that have "interactions" and "interconnections" with one another and with "place", "process[es]" and "systems". It also has the potential to ensure students appreciate not all communities are homogenous, and that different communities (often with different heritage) might have different levels of "power and influence" and different ways of inhabiting and impacting the landscape. Acknowledging this diversity is important for student accessibility and representation too. In relation to sustainability in particular, the use of "communities" as a key concept could facilitate consideration of, or even structured investigation into, how different communities' heritage might inform more sustainable futures in local, regional, national or international contexts. This could inspire and provide relevant data to students' planning for sustainability, facilitating them in developing key competencies such as "thinking and solving problems", "being creative", "working

with others", "communicating", "participating in society" and "cultivating wellbeing". "Heritage" itself might also be included alongside "communities" as a key concept in the final specification owing to its strong connections to the subject of geography, as well as to the concepts of "place" and "communities". It is worth highlighting that the common classification of heritage into natural heritage, built heritage and cultural heritage neatly illustrates how heritage is intimately connected to both physical and human geography, as well as the spaces where these disciplines intersect.

Strand 1: Where we live – the physical environment (pages 13-17)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This strand provides clarity and has a good alignment with the draft specifications' rationale and aims. There are, however, areas where this might be enhanced, while there are also opportunities to improve access and to facilitate the development of key competencies by making changes to the text. These are outlined below.

1) There is potential for a stronger focus on local, regional and national examples of natural heritage to be placed in the learning outcomes providing greater levels of clarity while also improving accessibility and providing greater opportunities for key competency development among students. It is very positive to see some opportunities for students to engage with natural heritage in the draft text already (e.g. consideration of one Irish and one non-Irish mountain range, which serve as illustrative examples for understanding mountain formation). Given the power of heritage (including at a local, regional and national level) to engage students and make theory and subject content more real and relatable for them, we would advocate that a greater emphasis is placed on local, regional and national examples of natural heritage in the learning outcomes for this strand. This would make the subject more accessible to students, allowing them to relate theory to tangible examples in their lives and environment, and even to apply different investigative methods to their local or regional environments. One straightforward place in the draft specification text where this might be achieved with minimal intervention is learning outcome 1.11. This reads: "identify evidence of glacial and coastal processes in shaping the Irish landscape". This might be amended to "identify, **and investigate using different methods,** evidence of glacial and

coastal processes in shaping the Irish landscape **with reference to one or more local and/or regional examples where possible**".

2) Building on the draft specification's engagement with "human consumption of natural resources", there is an important opportunity to encourage students in "thinking and solving problems". This can be achieved by empowering them to assess how heritage might inform more sustainable practices in the future. This could involve consideration of opportunities afforded by specific examples of their local, regional and/or national natural heritage, but it might equally consider how cultural heritage practices of different communities could inform more sustainable ways of life and approaches to resource consumption and management. This opportunity might be facilitated with minimal intervention by amending the text of the draft specification from "sustainable resource management responses including renewable resources and alternative technologies" to "sustainable resource management responses including renewable resources, alternative technologies, **and how the heritage of different places and communities might inform more sustainable futures**".

3) There is potential to provide greater clarity, direction and purpose to teachers and learners in relation to learning about climate change, while simultaneously providing a greater opportunity for students to prepare to participate in their society at a local, regional and/or national level by connecting aspects of this strand more directly to heritage. For example, learning outcomes "1.12 examine the risks of rising sea levels to human environments" and "1.18 investigate the impacts of climate change on physical and human environments" might be rephrased as "1.12 examine**, and consider ways to mitigate,** the risks of rising sea levels to human environments**, including local, regional and/or national examples of built or cultural heritage**" and "1.18 investigate**, and consider ways to mitigate,** the impacts of climate change on physical and human environments**, including local, regional and/or national examples of natural and built or cultural heritage**". This would encourage students to examine in a more directed and applied way climate change risks associated with tangible impacts on varied and often vulnerable aspects of their own landscapes. Likewise, it would encourage them to consider practical steps that might be taken to deal with these risks.

Strand 2: Where we live – the human environment (pages 18-20)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

This strand does a good job of outlining the learning in the area of human geography. There are, however, some improvements which could be made to the draft text to enhance clarity, alignment, access, challenge and opportunities for development of key competencies. These are outlined below.

1) Greater direction in this part of the specification with regard to local and regional examples has the potential to increase clarity for teachers and promote student engagement with the subject. For example, learning outcomes "2.1 describe how human settlements can be defined by site, situation and function", "2.2 explain the factors affecting patterns of rural settlement in Ireland" and "2.4 explain the factors affecting urbanisation" might be amended to "2.1 describe how human settlements can be defined by site, situation and function, **with reference to local, regional and national examples, historical and modern**", "2.2 explain the factors affecting patterns of rural settlement in Ireland, **with reference to local, regional and national examples of historical and modern rural settlements**" and "2.4 explain the factors affecting urbanisation, **with reference to local, regional and national examples, historical and modern**". It appears there is the intention in draft specification for teachers to use local, regional and national examples in their teaching given the text states "students study these aspects through the settings specified in the table below and through other relevant local, national and/or international settings as appropriate". However, this is not clear in relation to specific learning outcomes, and amending the text as suggested above has the potential to provide greater clarity on the issue. Concomitantly, a greater focus on local, regional, and national examples of natural, cultural and built heritage sites (insofar as they represent or relate to rural settlement and urbanisation) has the potential to increase student engagement and make the subject content more tangible and meaningful for students.

2) In relation to the strand's engagement with sustainability challenges and responses in rural communities, there are important opportunities to explicitly reference (and therefore provide clarity and direction for teachers and learners on) heritage and biodiversity. This is particularly important given the current biodiversity crisis is one of rural Ireland's most pressing challenges. One straightforward emendation of the draft text which would improve things would be to change "challenges including those related to the rights of nature, transport and other services" to "challenges including those related to **natural heritage and biodiversity**, transport and other services". Likewise, in relation to sustainable responses, there is an opportunity to guide teachers and students to consider a wider range of responses, including those pertaining to built heritage, natural heritage and biodiversity. To this end, it is suggested that a further emendation is made to the draft text. Specifically, "sustainable responses including local and national planning strategies, community-based initiatives" might be replaced with "sustainable responses including local and national planning strategies, **EU and national legislation, actions of public sector organisations and NGOs to promote sustainability, natural heritage and biodiversity, and** community-based initiatives".

3) Regarding the strand's engagement with challenges associated with urbanisation and responses to them, there are also opportunities to explicitly reference (and therefore provide clarity and direction for teachers and learners on) the important negative impacts urbanisation can have on heritage and biodiversity. A suggested emendation that would improve the matter is to change "impacts of urbanisation: urban sprawl, informal settlements, services, suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation, gentrification, zoning and land values" to "impacts of urbanisation: urban sprawl, **habitat loss, destruction and degradation of our natural, built and cultural heritage**, informal settlements, services, suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation, gentrification, zoning and land values". In relation to responses, "sustainable responses including urban planning strategies (renewal, redevelopment), ecocities and smart cities" might be enhanced so it reads as follows: "sustainable responses including urban planning strategies (renewal, redevelopment), **heritage conservation initiatives**, ecocities and smart cities".

Strand 3: How we live – the connected environment (pages 21-23)

Please provide your views on the learning set out in this strand with reference to

- clarity for planning for teaching and learning
- alignment with the rationale and aims
- opportunities for the development of key competencies and
- access and challenge for all students.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments.

There are improvements which might be made in this strand to enhance clarity for teaching and learning. These are outlined below.

1) In relation to "economic, environmental and social sustainability in Irish agriculture", there is a need for the specification to better guide teachers and students in relation to what represents sustainable practice. To this end, the specification might include issues for consideration here, such as "**management of stocking rates, manure use and chemical use to prevent environmental damage, and the provision of space for nature on farms (e.g. management of hedgerows, orchards, and wildflower margins for pollinators and other wildlife; use of traditional farm buildings for bats etc.)**".

2) In relation to "3.2 discuss the impact of EU policies on agriculture and fisheries in Ireland", it is suggested that this rephrased to "3.2 discuss the impact of EU policies **and legislation** on agriculture and fisheries in Ireland". In relation to this learning outcome, while the CAP and CFP are referenced, students should also gain an understanding of other important EU policies and legislation impacting farming and fisheries, such as the recent EU Nature Restoration Law. In fact, this piece of legislation might be considered for explicit inclusion in the final text.

Additional Assessment (AAC) (pages 26-28)

The Applied Geography Project provides an opportunity for students to apply and showcase the learning set out in the unifying strand in the context of one or more of the three contextual strands. To complete the Applied Geography Project, students will conduct an inquiry in line with the contents and requirements of the SEC brief. This will involve completing research into an area related to the contents of the brief. They will plan and carry out their inquiry. They will gather and analyse data which will contribute to their learning and facilitate them to draw and communicate informed conclusions.

Please provide specific feedback / observations / comments on the AAC in Leaving Certificate Geography with reference to how the AAC might motivate students, how it aligns to the learning outcomes in the specification and how it facilitates the development of key competencies.

The draft specification highlights there is an intention to motivate students via the Applied Geography Project. Our research shows that learning about their own heritage has significant potential to promote student engagement, including amongst students from underrepresented groups. It can also make subjects more real and relatable (i.e. applicable to students' lives). Given geography's clear connections to heritage, especially via place and community, the opportunity arises to emphasise these dimensions to teachers and learners in the final specification's description of the Applied Geography Project. Specifically, the text reading "the Applied Geography Project is designed to naturally integrate into the flow of learning and teaching, exploiting its potential to be motivating for students. Engagement with the Applied Geography Project also supports students to see the relevance of geography in their lives" might be amended to read as follows: "The Applied Geography Project is designed to naturally integrate into the flow of learning and teaching, exploiting its potential to be motivating for students. Engagement with the Applied Geography Project also supports students to see the relevance of geography in their lives. **This can be achieved by students applying the study of geography to their place or community as appropriate, whether at a local, regional, national, or international level."**

Supports for Successful Enactment

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

The implementation of the redeveloped specification could benefit from the support of various stakeholders, including those in education and those in the heritage sector (natural, built and cultural). At present the Heritage Council is developing policy and initiatives relating to heritage in education with a view to doing more to

support teachers and learners in this space. In line with our strategic plan, and as a leader in the heritage sector, the Heritage Council will continue to "support and enable heritage-based education and civic engagement that is inclusive and accessible to all" (Heritage Council, 2023, p. 41). We also intend to "strengthen existing partnerships and develop new collaborations with the educational sectors", including at post-primary level (Heritage Council, 2023, p. 41). One would envisage heritage organisations and practitioners choosing to employ some of their resources to support the implementation and delivery of a redeveloped Geography subject specification that acknowledged and appreciated heritage's connections to the subject and included learning outcomes which directly engaged students with, and encouraged them to appreciate, preserve, promote and protect those aspects of their heritage that are interwoven with the study of geography.