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Background paper and brief for the development of Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies

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1. 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. The report records and responds to the views of teachers, students, parents and stakeholders gathered during the four-year review about how Senior Cycle could evolve to meet the needs of all our young people. It provides strong foundations for the phased redevelopment of Senior Cycle in the coming years.

Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components – both subjects and modules – and scoping the need for new curriculum components. The Advisory Report informed the Minister’s plan for the redevelopment of senior cycle, which includes the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate subject of *Drama, Theatre and Film Studies* in September 2024. This paper provides a background for the development of the subject and forms the basis for a consultation which will seek to elicit the views of a range of interested parties, including teachers, school leaders and students, to contribute to the development of a specification for this new subject.

This paper looks at the three domains outlined in the title of this subject and identifies the areas of overlap and differentiation. Secondly, it gives an overview of where drama, theatre and film already form part of the curricular offerings across early childhood, primary and post-primary in Ireland. Thirdly, the paper looks at the international context to examine how these domains are taught, assessed and accredited elsewhere and the considerations that the development of such a specification will encompass before finally setting out a proposed brief for the development of the specification.

2. Background

Ireland has produced notable international talents in the disciplines of drama, theatre and film and yet drama, theatre or film do not feature as formal subjects for recognition or accreditation in the Leaving Certificate Established in Ireland. The announcement by the Minister for Education in March 2022 that a new subject, Drama, Theatre and Film Studies, would be introduced to the Leaving Certificate programme can be traced to the findings in the *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report* (NCCA, 2022) which highlighted the need for additional opportunities for students in senior cycle in the creative arts.

Internationally there is an increased emphasis on the fostering of creativity and related development of critical thinking skills. The OECD publication, *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: what it means in school* (Vincent-Lancrin *et al.*, 2019) outlines the reasons why creativity and critical thinking are essential for innovation, wellbeing and the good functioning of democratic societies. In Ireland recent government policies have echoed this focus. The Arts in Education Charter (Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and Department of Education and Skills, 2012) sets out the central role of the arts in education at all levels. The educational concerns in the cultural policies for the creative arts in Ireland have tended to focus on the development of skill sets and alignment of the education sector to the needs of the film and television industry (Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2019). Each of these areas, the development of creative and critical thinking skills, and the development of skillsets for further progression in the Arts, will be central to the considerations and deliberations during the development of this specification.

This paper considers where this new subject may sit within the curriculum at senior cycle and begins by looking at the three domains outlined in the title and identifying the areas of overlap and differentiation, as clarity on what is meant by the three terms in the title is needed to frame the later discussion.

What is drama?

History of drama

Drama has a long history. As early as the writings of Plato and Aristotle, the origins of drama in antiquity have been traced. In these early writings there is no clear distinction between drama and poetry as both were meant to be performed, but even from this early stage drama was linked with educating audiences. The early tragedies and comedies of Greek origin existed alongside the traditions of using drama in religious festivals to educate the populace. The themes and narratives observed in popular drama were not without criticism and Plato denounced the use of imitation in drama as, in his view, it could lead to the encouragement of vices in the population.

Similar worries about theatre as a place of ill repute and drama as an inciter of evil were held by the post-Roman church, leading it to ban drama and subsequently theatres were closed, however, the early medieval church rediscovered the power of drama to edify its congregation, and this saw the emergence of liturgical dramas, known as the Miracle plays. During the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I in England, drama and by extension theatres were successively banned and unbanned until closed for good by Cromwell. For the rest of Europe, the evolution of drama was quite different with the popularity of *Commedia dell'Arte* in Italy, satire in France under Molière and the

golden age of Spanish theatre. By the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century new drama and theatre forms evolved with more political and existential considerations than was previously evident with the emergence of movements such as Theatre of the Absurd, Epic Theatre and later, Theatre of the Oppressed. It also saw the evolution of dramatic methods developed by key artists such as Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht and Michael Chekhov. Each of these eras and influences in the development of drama, acting and theatre are the subject of focus in different ways in drama curricula across jurisdictions.

Drama in education

The place of drama in education was emphasised by Comenius in 1650 who felt that all knowledge could be explored through drama. Early education theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky recognised the socially constructed nature of learning and the crucial cognitive, sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic learning that happens through play. But in the western tradition, with the introduction of compulsory schooling, drama, particularly contemporary drama, was not considered central to education. The only exceptions were made for the inclusion of dead vernacular writers such as Shakespeare and Marlowe or traditional dramatic texts in Greek or Latin (O'Toole, Stinson and Moore, 2009). But drama has always been present in the periphery of curricular provision. Speech and drama education evolved from elocution in British-influenced school systems around the world, often aimed at 'correcting' dialects and improving diction. School productions, shows and concerts have long been integral to school life as celebration or school promotion. Drama as pedagogy, where dramatic play is used to explore themes or develop competencies, influenced by early works of Caldwell Cook (1919) and Finlay Johnson (1907), gained popularity in some places.

Many of the influences in the development of drama as a curricular subject can be traced to developments in the United Kingdom. Drama education saw an increase in popularity from the 1960s with the work of writers such as Peter Slade (1954, 1966) and Brian Way (1967) where dramatic play was seen as a progressive form of education pedagogy and as intrinsic in the field of language development. In the absence of a national curriculum, drama as a subject in the United Kingdom evolved significantly from the 1960s to the 1980s along the lines of process drama, following the influence of key thinkers such as Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton (Heathcote and Bolton, 1995) and later Cecily O'Neill (O'Neill, 1982) and Jonathan Neelands (Neelands, 1984). Drama in this form, drama-in-education, was a learning medium with a goal to create experiences for students where human interactions could be understood, explored and reimaged. This 'process drama' has several distinctive characteristics: it is improvised; episodic; often negotiated; all participants are involved in the making as characters within; never linear; and, crucially, happens without an audience (O'Toole, Stinson and Moore, 2009).

Since 1988, with the introduction of the National Curriculum in the UK, drama as a subject has moved from this purely process focus and examination boards now specify key authors or texts to be studied and presented as part of the curriculum. Even though there has been a shift to a more formal study of text-based drama in the UK, process drama still has a key role to play in the curricular provision of drama in the UK and elsewhere. In Australia, drama as a subject was introduced in the 1980s and follows this 'process drama' tradition and it is seen as a key area of learning in the Arts, along with dance, music and visual art. A full exploration of the ways drama in the curriculum is approached in different jurisdictions can be found in Section Four, but these three ways that drama can be conceptualised as process, pedagogy or product are central to discussions on what we mean by drama.

What is theatre studies?

There is a well-documented tension between the use of the terms 'drama' and 'theatre' in the literature. 'For many, *drama* represents the practice and *theatre* the building. For others, *drama* is the amateur practice of the art, and *theatre* the professional execution. For more, *drama* refers to the literary dramatic text, and *theatre* the lived representation of those words' (Finneran, 2016, p. 110). Added to this, is the inclusion of new terms such as 'applied drama' or 'applied theatre' that make negotiating this territory more problematic (McCarthy, 2018).

What can be agreed is that drama is 'doing'. It is an aesthetic engagement that involves a combination of emotion, intellect, body and imagination and results in a collaborative, creative activity (Hussey, 2017). It is reflexive and involves a "pedagogy of surprise" (Hussey, 2018) where planning is necessary, but outcomes are uncertain and unexpected (Edmiston, 2021).

Theatre studies brings awareness to the concept of performance as the theatre space is where improvised or formal scripts are enacted and staged for an audience. The study of theatre can include aspects of bringing action to a stage including character development, movement, gesture and voice, in addition to the physical aspects of staging such as lighting, props, scenes, soundscape, and costume. Theatre also has a history which continues to influence in terms of the genre and forms developed (miracle plays, Elizabethan theatre, Theatre of the Absurd, etc.) and the methods of bringing those genres to the stage (Stanislavski, Brecht, Chekhov, etc.). The specification for drama and theatre studies would have to consider the balance between these aspects of collaborative, exploratory, aesthetic engagement with drama and the history, context and technical aspects of the art form articulated in theatre studies.

What is film studies?

The history of film is shorter than the history of drama, but it has changed dramatically as an art form over that short history. Emerging in the late 19th century, the first films were filmed in black and white, silent and lasted only a few minutes. Widely regarded as the first commercial screening, the Lumière brothers' screening of their short films in Paris in 1895 marked the beginning of the production of film for audiences. Film production companies were founded across the world, and cinema film developed differently in different contexts. By the early 1910s, production companies were founded in Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Japan and each in their context, produced films that evolved differently.

The development of technology has changed the experience of film over its history. Early films were short, but by 1906 a sixty minute feature film was possible. By the late 1920s sound was introduced and in the 1930s a limited number of colour films were produced. From the beginning, special effects formed part of the language of film and the early works of George Méliès in the 1890s featured a mix of animation and camera tricks to create a fantasy narrative. This use of editing, camera shots and technology has continued to develop over the past century to the point where entire landscapes and characters can be produced digitally and added to the live action of the film (Elsaesser, 2016). This post-production stage, which includes editing and addition of effects and soundtrack, are distinctive to film and mark it as a decidedly different medium to the immediacy of drama. Film is crafted to produce an artefact that will be the same on repeated

viewing, even though the audience may perceive different aspects of the film. A dramatic performance will always have variation as it happens in the moment within a specific context.

Film has adapted and changed traditional narrative genres such as comedy, tragedy, romance and fantasy, and has created a new language around how these genres are depicted or perceived on film. The work of key directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Hitchcock, Werner Herzog, Akira Kurosawa, François Truffaut, Stanley Kubrick, among many others, influenced the way film was produced and interpreted. In addition to narrative format, film has developed as an art form with experimental cinema or avant-garde cinema existing alongside traditional narrative formats. The study of film can also incorporate documentaries, biopics, short films and animation.

The study of film will often include an overview of the historical development of film and the works of key directors / producers / cinematographers / soundtrack producers / and so on. The technical aspects that are incorporated into the production of film are often the subject of specialised study. Film developments outside the western/English language canon will include the exploration of the work of Asian, African and European filmmakers. The study of film history, context, theory and technologies is usually accompanied by an application of the knowledge and skills in the collaborative production of a film project.

Within education, film is seen as part of a wider view of communication media which includes television, radio, animation, and in more recent years social media, podcasting and digital production. Film studies was introduced into the curriculum in the UK in the 1960s as a means of including the study of popular culture for students and broadened to include television and other media by the 1980s. The existence of the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) and the production of their journal *Screen*, provided materials and support for teachers undertaking the teaching of this subject (Bolas, 2008). The ubiquitous nature of visual media in the lives of students has led to increased calls internationally for the inclusion of a critical analysis of the communication of information through the media. Further examination of the approaches to film studies internationally can be found in Section Four.

Section Summary

The terms drama and theatre are not without contention. While there are areas of overlap, they can be viewed as distinct disciplines. Drama involves the combination of the emotional, physical, intellectual and imaginative capabilities of the students involved in a collaborative, creative activity. Theatre involves the introduction of an audience and has a long history of staging, the technical and historical aspects of which may form part of the study.

Drama in education is often perceived as process, pedagogy or product, or a combination of all three.

Film studies is a distinct discipline and involves the production of a visual art form for audience viewing at a later date, as opposed to the immediacy of dramatic performance. The technical aspects of film making such as lighting, costume, soundtrack or direction, may have similar intentions to dramatic staging but are utilised differently. The study of film will usually include the historical and contextual considerations along with the development of technical awareness and expertise.

3. Place of Drama, Film and Theatre Studies in the curriculum in Ireland

While drama, theatre and film have not formally existed in the curriculum for the Leaving Certificate Established, they have been a fundamental aspect of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the primary curriculum. There are short courses available at junior cycle, it has often formed part of a school's Transition Year Programmes and there is a Drama module descriptor in Leaving Certificate Applied as part of Arts Education. The study of dramatic texts has been an integral part of the English curriculum at junior and senior cycle. The study of dramatic texts can also be found in Gaeilge, Classical Studies and Modern Foreign Languages. Film has been studied at junior cycle in media studies in English, and as a comparative text in Leaving Certificate English and in LCA English and Communications. Some theoretical knowledge of theatre studies can only really be seen in the specifications for junior cycle English and in the curriculum for Leaving Certificate English. The provision in each of these areas will be outlined below.

Aistear

In *Aistear*, the curriculum framework for early childhood, learning through play is described as including many aspects of drama including role-play, pretend play, fantasy play and make-believe; engaging with props, costumes, puppets; and engaging gestures and voice to tell stories. Children are encouraged to explore the world through engagement with drama along with other art forms such as music, dance, song, poetry and visual art. Drama is evident throughout *Aistear*, as children's experiences of learning through play frame the construct of the learning and interactions envisaged in the curriculum.

Primary Curriculum

The 1999 Primary Curriculum saw drama as central to the experience of the Arts in primary schooling. Arts education in the primary curriculum is divided into three branches: drama, music and visual art, and the curriculum outlines how students should be involved in three interactive activities: looking at, responding to, and making of the art form (Department of Education and Science and NCCA, 1999). The documentation states that drama in the curriculum 'explores themes and issues, creates a safe context in which to do so, and provides opportunities to reflect on the insights gained in the process' (ibid, p. 3) which reflects the 'process' view of drama. The experience of drama across the curriculum, however, is more aligned to the 'pedagogical' view of drama, in the use of specific drama techniques such as hot-seating, teacher-in-role and role playing in the teaching of other competencies (Cregan, 2019), or in the 'product' view of drama in the production of the Christmas concert or school play, and the process view of Drama as a distinct subject getting a limited time allocation (McCoy, Smyth and Banks, 2012). The study of film has not been part of the primary curriculum to date, but the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020) that was recently available for consultation, does allow for the inclusion of film along with digital media in the curriculum area of Arts Education.

Junior Cycle

At junior cycle, engagement with drama and film may be experienced by students in a number of ways. In the English curriculum, students explore dramatic texts and films to develop awareness of different genres and styles. The use of short film is encouraged to develop awareness of different editing and directorial choices made to progress the narrative. The list of prescribed texts for study includes a list of dramatic texts spanning Irish and international playwrights, and film texts including foreign language film and animation.

Students may also experience drama, film or theatre studies through one of a number of short courses available to study. The short course in Artistic Performance gives students the opportunity to engage in the arts through the planning of and participation in an artistic performance. This course is assessed through a Classroom-Based Assessment of the group performance and rewards technical control, creativity, interpretation and teamwork. The performance includes the option of staging of a school play or musical or scripting, editing and filming a screenplay.

The Irish Film Institute developed a short course on [film](#) designed to be used by schools as part of their junior cycle provision. This course is devised across three strands: exploring, creating and sharing film where students gain an understanding of the language of film through watching selected films, apply this learning to filmmaking projects and share these with their peers (Irish Film Institute, no date).

Transition Year

Schools are free to devise their own programmes for Transition Year students and traditionally in many schools the Transition Year was the site of the annual school dramatic production. Some schools have also developed units in drama and film studies that allow students to devise and present work in these art forms. There are a number of Transition Year units available for study on the NCCA website including: Reading the silver screen; Media and communications; and, Moving image.

Leaving Certificate Applied

Within the English and Communications module, students study film as part of *Module 3: Communication in Media*, and drama in *Module 4: Express yourself*. Film studies is placed within a module that also examines media and advertising, and audio, visual and print media. Students are introduced to concepts such as intended audience and examine the impact of colour, imagery, sound, typography and symbolism in the media in general. The study of film includes an introduction to concepts and terminology specific to film as well as an exploration of film genres. English and Communications is a core mandatory element of LCA and so is experienced by all LCA students.

The Drama module descriptor has a process drama focus and aims to develop students' social, communication and dramatic skills as well as an understanding and appreciation of theatre. The modules outline a range of drama techniques and methods to be explored by the students including tableau, improvisations, hot-seating, and thought tracking, in order to develop

awareness of characterisation, narrative form and stagecraft. The students must attend a dramatic production as well as prepare and perform a rehearsed piece as part of the key assignments. The module encourages collaborative work, ensemble pieces and self-reflective evaluation. Drama is an optional module within the Arts Education provision of LCA and students may be offered modules in either drama, dance, visual arts or music. In 2020, there were 1,100 LCA students taking the Drama option from a possible cohort of 6,223 (data.gov.ie, 2020).

Leaving Certificate Established

The study of dramatic texts has remained central to Leaving Certificate English and there are a selection of drama texts that can be chosen for close single text study or as part of a combination of texts in the comparative study. The comparative study also allows for the inclusion of one of a selection of films from a prescribed list as part of the comparative work. For many of the students taking higher level, the experience of drama will be found in the study of a Shakespearean play, as the study of one Shakespearean text is mandatory at this level.

The focus of the study of dramatic texts is on the written text and doesn't include any physical embodiment of performance. The thematic analysis, character study, and dramatic conventions form part of the study of drama in English and in the comparative study additional considerations of cultural context, literary genre and author intent may also be considered. The study of film within the comparative section is also considered under these headings.

While there are opportunities to access dramatic texts and film texts within the English curriculum, the focus remains on the written or visual text and opportunities to consider performance, theoretical underpinnings, place within a historical canon of that genre, stagecraft, theatrical impact, actor or directorial choices are limited. While the syllabus for LC English states students should be able to 'Engage in interpretative performance of texts' (Department of Education and Science, 1998), it is not a focus of the syllabus.

Extra-curricular drama and theatre

Drama has formed part of the extra-curricular life of schools at all levels through the production of school musicals, plays or concerts from primary school right up to post-primary level. Some schools have access to drama teachers to provide drama specific education and there are numerous partnerships between schools and local drama practitioners supported by the Creative Arts in Schools initiative. Outside of school provision, there is also a highly successful resourced provision of Youth Theatre throughout the country supported by the Arts Council and local authorities.

Film as an extra-curricular activity has gained increasing popularity in schools. Projects such as *Fresh Film* supported by the Arts Council, encourages young filmmakers to make films and empowers them as artists and the IFI schools programme works to promote the study of film at second level. These projects follow on from the successful *Fis* initiative at primary level.

Further and higher education opportunities

Despite the absence of specifications in Drama, Theatre or Film in senior cycle, there are numerous courses at various levels in these disciplines that are available to students after they leave school. These disciplines, how they are combined and how they are approached vary across the institutions.

Some courses focus on development of dramatic performance and consist of an intensive actor development course over three years following a similar structure to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) model. These courses also focus on development of training for stage managers, designers and technical stagecraft. There are institutions that offer courses in performing arts, technical stagecraft or drama from short courses up to degree or post-graduate level.

Drama and theatre studies in universities have a balance of focus on practical drama and theoretical underpinnings and history of the art form. In some universities these courses can be taken as a single honours degree or combined with another discipline for a joint honours qualification or consist of degree courses in performing arts combined with other disciplines such as music, dance, English or other arts subjects. Some courses range from a focus on specifically drama studies and performance, to opportunities to focus on specific aspects such as theatre practice or writing for stage and screen. The Technological Universities also have a range of courses in performing arts, technical stagecraft and drama, theatre and film theory and practice.

Some institutions combine drama with concurrent education degrees and allow students who are studying education to include drama with another discipline as part of their studies.

At this level, film is often incorporated into a broader course on media, including digital media, creative media, communications media, media production, or multimedia. Under this focus, film is combined with critical awareness of the multiple means of communication and allows for the introduction of new mediums of communication within the course of study. These courses are often found in the university sector and in Technological Universities and can lead to qualifications that span both arts and science disciplines.

Section Summary

Drama can be found in the curriculum at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels. Drama is often considered in one of three ways: as a process, pedagogy or product.

As a process, drama is used to explore themes, encourage empathic engagement, develop skills in critically analysing situations/relationships/events and imagining them differently.

As a pedagogy, drama is used in education to introduce students to learning in different subjects by using dramatic techniques, conventions and approaches. As a product, drama is seen in the production of school plays or musicals, liturgical services, or other events, much of which is evident in Transition Year.

Drama, theatre and film are studied in the English curriculum at junior and senior cycle but the focus here is on the narrative forms rather than an in-depth analysis of the context, conventions, history or technical considerations of either drama or film. Drama as a subject does have a module in the LCA programme and LCA English and Communications has a significant focus on film studies as part of media communications.

There is a considerable array of opportunities available for students who wish to follow further or higher education courses in the areas of drama, theatre or film and students can focus on the analysis, performance or technical routes.

4. International Perspectives

The subject as described: Drama, Theatre and Film Studies, does not form part of the provision at upper secondary in any of the range of jurisdictions examined. The disciplines of Drama and Theatre Studies often co-exist in curricular documentation, and Film Studies is often coupled with media or communications. These subjects are often found within a suite of subjects known as Arts education which usually includes dance, drama, music and visual art. In order to gain an overview of what the provision of this subject may look like, where these subjects are designed to fit within the curriculum, what is generally included in the syllabus and how they are assessed in these jurisdictions is outlined below.

The range of jurisdictions examined includes England (including various examination boards Eduqas, Cambridge, AQA), Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ontario (Canada), Queensland (Australia), New South Wales (Australia), Victoria (Australia), New Zealand, International Baccalaureate and the Australian curriculum (which territories are free to accept and adopt or not). These jurisdictions were chosen to give a sense of the range of approaches used in other countries but also to identify the similarities that are present throughout. In all of these jurisdictions, drama was offered as a subject as part of the arts education provision at lower secondary. At upper secondary there was some level of specialisation and some jurisdictions offered performance focused drama courses, theatre studies courses, film studies courses and/or media studies courses that included film.

Drama and Theatre Studies in other jurisdictions

Where does it sit in the curriculum?

Drama and/or theatre studies is most often described as part of a suite of subjects in Arts education in other jurisdictions. Many jurisdictions define their curriculum provision in terms of compulsory areas of study and electives. Arts education is mostly found as an elective at upper secondary. One point to note is that in all of the jurisdictions examined, compulsory education is from kindergarten to year 10, approximately equivalent to senior infants to third year of secondary school in Ireland (around 16 years of age). Curriculum authorities in jurisdictions such as New South Wales, Queensland, Ontario, Wales, England and New Zealand present a broad curriculum from K-10. In this broad curriculum Arts education often includes: music, visual art, dance, media arts and drama.

Senior cycle is roughly equivalent to upper secondary education elsewhere. In all jurisdictions, students have access to Drama as a subject at lower secondary, and so there is often some degree of specialisation offered in upper secondary. This means that some courses offer specialisation in performance arts, stage craft, scriptwriting, technical/ historical/ cultural theatre studies. In Victoria, Australia for example, there are separate courses available for Drama and Theatre Studies with Drama focusing on performance styles, ensemble and solo performance, while Theatre Studies focuses on modern and pre-modern theatre styles, producing theatre and presenting interpretations. In the International Baccalaureate however, the course at the diploma level is described as Theatre rather than Drama, while in the middle years programme drama is situated as part of the arts discipline along with visual art, media, music and dance where students must choose one visual arts discipline and one performing arts discipline.

As the key concepts in drama/ theatre studies have been introduced at lower secondary, the specifications at upper secondary build on these competencies. In New South Wales for example, students of Drama in year 9 and 10 will explore areas such as: Brecht and political satire; anatomy of a script; structure, background and characters from melodrama; Greek theatre history, context, masks and chorus. This allows students of Drama in years 11 and 12 to further examine theatrical traditions and performance styles building on earlier knowledge. These traditions and styles, and the social, historical and cultural context, are taught experientially through improvisation, play-building and acting.

What is in the curriculum?

The curriculum specifications researched indicate the broad scope of the subject. Drama/theatre is presented as an intersection between lateral thought and practice, where the human experience is interrogated by investigating, communicating and embodying stories, experiences, emotions and ideas, where students develop a range of interrelated drama skills to complement the knowledge and processes needed to create dramatic action and meaning (Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2019). Drama connects students to multiple traditions of drama practice across social, cultural and historical contexts and through the devising and performing of drama they develop skills as creative and critical thinkers (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2019a).

In the specification documents, Drama is described as often containing similar elements:

- the development of foundational performance skills;
- awareness and experience of the process of making or devising drama/theatre; and,
- theoretical and historical knowledge of the art form.

In Ontario, Canada these areas are described as: Foundations; Creating and presenting; and, Reflecting, responding and analysing. In New South Wales, Australia, in year 10 these are described as: Making drama; Performing drama; Appreciating drama. The year 11 and 12 course calls these areas: Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting; Elements of Production in Performance; and Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles. In Northern Ireland they are described as: Devised performance; Scripted performance; Knowledge and understanding of drama. In the International Baccalaureate they are described as Theatre in context; Theatre processes; and, Presenting Theatre. The similarity and level of international agreement on these divisions and areas of focus could be beneficial in the development of a specification in this area.

In the development of performance skills, students will typically engage in exploration of dramatic forms, use a variety of sources to generate ideas for drama activities and presentations, explore dramatic conventions and use drama techniques to develop insights into events, emotions, relationships, beliefs and themes. Drama aims to provide a safe space for students to engage in and reflect on these activities. These activities may lead to the devising of a dramatic piece for performance. Often the development of these skills overlap with an awareness of stagecraft.

The experience of the process of devising or producing a theatre performance forms a central tenet of all of the specifications examined. Students can engage in the process in a number of ways. For instance, in the GCSE Drama specification in Northern Ireland, students may engage in this devised performance as performers or designers. Those engaging in the design aspect may focus on the costume, lighting, multimedia, set or sound design (Council for the Curriculum

Examinations and Assessment, 2017). The GCE subjects available in Northern Ireland follow international trends toward specialisation and there are subjects available in Performing Arts and Moving Image Arts both available at AS (180 hours) and A2 (360 hours) levels. The Performing Arts syllabus has units on developing skills and repertoire, planning and realising a performing arts event, planning for employment and performing to a commission brief (CCEA, 2016b). The Moving Image Arts syllabus has units on: realist and formalist techniques and the classical Hollywood style; critical response; creative production and research and advanced critical response (CCEA, 2016a). Some specifications, such as the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) specification for Theatre Studies examines in detail the various roles of actors, directors, designers (costume, light, sound, props etc.) as well as script writing, dramaturgy¹ and theatre technologies. Students will critically examine theatrical productions and use these insights to inform their own decision-making.

Knowledge of the historical and theoretical underpinnings of the art form can be found in each of the specifications examined. Specifications vary as to what areas of the history of drama or theatre are focused on, but areas such as Realism, Magical Realism and Australian Gothic are present in the Queensland syllabus; origins of drama conventions in Greek theatre, liturgical drama in medieval Europe, Shakespearean drama are outlined in the Ontario syllabus. Whereas the Victorian Theatre Studies syllabus requires students to study three or more styles from the modern era including: Epic theatre, Constructivist theatre, Theatre of the Absurd, Political theatre, Eclectic theatre, Verbatim theatre, Immersive theatre (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2019b).

Central to the descriptions of drama and theatre in the curriculum across all jurisdictions is the importance of ensemble work. Through exploration of themes within groups and devising of dramatic pieces, students work collaboratively to present and share their work. In working together, students can develop knowledge and skills across a range of play-making techniques (researching, improvising, scripting, editing, rehearsing, etc.) and production areas (costume, lighting, make up, props, puppetry, sound design, etc.).

Some of the syllabus documentation specify drama texts to be used, others specify eras, epochs or styles to be represented in the course of study. For some jurisdictions, the specifications outline general guidelines and separate examination boards specify the examination criteria and drama texts to be used (England, Scotland and Wales).

¹ The dramatic composition and representation of the main elements of drama on the stage, can include an exploration of the context of the play, consideration of the representation of race, gender, social context, ideology etc.

How is it assessed?

As an arts subject with a focus on performance and the development of skill, an examination of the various ways drama and/or theatre studies are assessed can provide interesting insights into the opportunities and challenges of this subject. Arrangements for assessments vary across jurisdictions. In Queensland, year one has at least two opportunities for formative assessment and year two consists of four summative assessments: three internal and one external. The three internal assessments include a performance, project on a dramatic concept and a practice -led project and the external assessment is a written examination worth 25%.

In New South Wales, assessment at Year 10 is 100% teacher-assessed and can include inquiry-based research, assignments, projects and performance. On balance holistic judgements are made with reference to a standards-referenced framework. Teachers plan and devise assessment arrangements to capture the learning of the students and the results are reported in the School Certificate of Achievement. For the post compulsory Year 11 and 12 courses, taught over 120 hours per year, the assessment components are spread over both years. The school-based assessments over the two years include group and individual tasks in making, performing and critically studying – only one of which in each year can be a formal written task with a maximum weighting of 30%. The external examination consists of a written paper worth 40 marks, a group performance worth 30 marks and an individual project worth 30 marks. The school-based assessment and the external assessments are combined to provide the final assessment marks for the students. The individual project allows students to focus on one of five areas that reflects focus of study for the student. They are: critical analysis; design; performance; scriptwriting; or video drama.

The International Baccalaureate has three external assessment tasks (Solo theatre piece, Director's notebook and research presentation) and an internal assessment task (Collaborative project) worth differing percentages depending on the level the students are undertaking. A sample of the variety of the structures and assessment approaches found across some of the jurisdictions is illustrated in the following table.

Jurisdiction and where Drama/Theatre sits on the curriculum	Overview of learning	Assessment
Queensland, Australia Senior Secondary The Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Drama • Film, television and new media • Media Arts • Music • Visual Arts 	Share Reflect Challenge Transform	Units 1 and 2 Formative Units 3 and 4 summative Students complete a total of 4 summative assessments: 3 internal one external Internal summative assessment: Performance 20% Project: Dramatic concept 20% Project: Practice led project 35% External: Examination: Extended response 25%
International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme The Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Music • Film • Theatre • Visual Arts 	Theatre in context Theatre Processes Presenting Theatre	External assessment tasks 1: Solo theatre piece 35% 2. Director's notebook 35% ² 20% 3. Research presentation 30% 20% Internal assessment task 4. Collaborative project 35% 25%
Victoria, Australia VCE Performing Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Drama • Music • Theatre studies 	Drama: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing performance styles • Australian identity • Devised ensemble performance • Devised solo performance Theatre Studies: Pre-modern theatre styles and conventions Modern theatre styles and conventions Producing Theatre Presenting an interpretation	VCE Drama: Written examination (external) 25% Solo performance (external) 35% Coursework 40% School assessed VCE Theatre studies: Unit 3 and 4 School based assessment 45% End of year monologue examination: 25% (external) Written examination: 30% (external)

Table 1: Drama and Theatre Studies provision in a sample of jurisdictions

Film studies provision in other jurisdictions

While film may be considered similar to theatre in that it is a visual art form designed for an audience, the conventions, history and process of producing the art form are very different.

Where does it sit in the curriculum?

The study of film across jurisdictions most often appears as part of Media Arts subjects. The level of engagement with film, film history and theoretical underpinnings varies as the focus often includes other creative media and critical digital literacy. Film studies is sometimes included within a broad understanding of communications media. In these courses, film is one strand along with other strands such as advertising, television and radio. There are an increasing number of courses that allow space for new media such as podcasting, games development and animation. Unlike Drama and Theatre Studies, film does not tend to exist as a stand-alone subject at lower secondary. It is usually considered part of the broader study of media and appears across subjects at lower secondary level.

What is in the curriculum?

The curriculum in film studies tends to consider three areas: the history and context of film; the language and analysis of film; and the development, production and technologies of film.

The history and context of film tends to cover a broad sweep of the development of film from the late 1890s to present day, generally focusing on certain epochs to consider the key films and directors of the time as examples of a context. The studies also consider film outside the western canon, such as African, Asian and Middle-Eastern film development. The subject content listed for the GCE A level in Film Studies by Eduqas includes specialist study areas of: American Film since 2005; Silent Film; Hollywood 1930-1990 and Experimental Film (Eduqas, 2019). In this case, the curriculum specifies the broad areas to be studied and the relevant examination board lists the prescribed texts for study.

The specification in Film, Television and New Media available for study in Queensland, has a much broader focus than just film. This specification uses an inquiry learning model to develop critical thinking skills and creative capabilities through the exploration of five concepts: technologies, representations, audiences, institutions and languages (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), 2019). This broader focus allows for an examination of audience and critical analysis of constructs, language, symbols and representation to develop critical digital literacy and foster creative engagement.

In Northern Ireland, the subject Moving Image Arts is available to study for GCE at AS and A2 level. This subject includes units on realist and formalist techniques and the classical Hollywood style; critical response; creative production and research: advanced portfolio; and, Advanced Critical Response.

How is it assessed?

Across the jurisdictions examined, where film studies was present as a subject, assessment followed the focus of the course specification. Where there was an emphasis on the technical skills developed in the production of film, assessment focused on the evidence of this skill development; where the focus of the course was on the historical and theoretical underpinnings of the subject, assessment focused on evidence of this learning sometimes through extended writing or presentation of the application of this knowledge in an individual or collaborative project.

Some courses in film studies focus on the technical aspects of film making such as directing, lighting, sound, editing, and film technologies. In the case of Victoria, film studies is part of the vocational education provision, has a specific vocational training element and is accredited through the acquisition of training certificates.

In Northern Ireland, the four units in Moving Image Arts are assessed in different ways and the weighting allocated depends on whether the units are assessed as AS or A level. Assessment for Unit 1 includes the production of a 3-4 minute narrative film or 1.5-2 minute animation and is teacher assessed and externally moderated. Unit 2 is an online examination on film clips, set and marked by CCEA.

The variation of approaches can be seen in the table below:

Jurisdiction and subject title/s	Overview of learning	Assessment considerations
Queensland, Australia Film, Television and New Media	Foundation Story Forms Participation Identity	Internal assessment (75%): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study investigation 15%• Multi-platform project 25%• Stylistic project 35% External assessment: extended response 25%
Victoria, Australia VCE VET Creative and Digital Media	Certificate in Creative Industries: Includes electives in design, lighting, music, props, scenic art. Certificate in Screen and Media: Includes electives in digital animation, camerawork, digital assets, sound tracking.	Assessed as competent Complete scored VCE VET assessments Complete end of year examination
International Baccalaureate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading film• Contextualising film	Textual analysis (external) 20% Comparative study (external) 20% Film portfolio (Internal) 25%

Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring film production roles • Collaboratively producing film 	Collaborative film project (internal) 35%
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Table 2: Film studies provision across a sample of jurisdictions

Section Summary

In international jurisdictions, drama and theatre studies are placed within the suite of subjects known as Arts education along with dance, music and visual art. Film studies, where it is provided, is a separate subject and often contains reference to broader media and includes critical digital literacy and communications.

These subjects are practical and a large proportion of the syllabus specifications detail skill development and practical applications of those skills through performance and design projects.

The subjects also place an emphasis on the historical context of the development of the art form and the theoretical underpinnings of the art form. Students engage with this knowledge through intensive study of key proponents of the context and theory and apply that knowledge in their work.

Teaching, learning and assessment in other jurisdictions recognise the collaborative nature of these art forms and therefore ensemble work and group projects are fundamental aspects of the curriculum design.

5. Issues for Consideration

In light of the discussion in the preceding sections, the following considerations will need to be subject to discussion during the development of the specification and in the planning for implementation of this subject.

Scope and structure of the specification

Given the difference between the drama/theatre studies and the study of film, the first consideration will be how to create a coherent, structurally sound specification that attempts to intertwine these two disparate elements, drama/theatre and film, in a way that will be of benefit to students in their future lives. The combination of these two disciplines, and the absence of focused study of these areas at junior cycle, will mean that the conceptual breadth and scope of the specification will need to be the subject of discussion before consideration can be given to the structure of the specification.

Skills development and collaborative learning

The development of skills, personal growth and collaborative learning is central to drama and theatre specifications in other jurisdictions, it is also present in some studies of film. How this development, growth and collaboration can be incorporated into the specification so that it can be meaningfully engaged in by students, facilitated by teachers and authentically assessed to recognise the very different learning present in the drama/ theatre/ film studies classroom will be the subject of discussion and consideration.

Resources

The study of film requires additional thought and consideration on the focus of the study and the resourcing necessary. A focus on the history and context of film, allowing students to consider the broad epochs of film history and in-depth study of the work of key artists in the field will require consideration of the licencing and accessibility of the films required for study. This has been a continuing difficulty in the English classroom as DVDs and the means for playing them are no longer ubiquitous and streaming services rarely accessible on school broadband. A focus on the technical aspects of film (camera shots, sound recording, editing, props, scenic artistry, production, direction, etc) will require consideration of the resources necessary for schools to offer the subject in senior cycle.

This is particularly important in light of findings from an ESRI study based on the data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal study, which found that the extent to which young people can choose the current arts subjects (visual art or music) for Leaving Certificate varies by the type of school they attend. The provision of these arts subjects (visual arts and music) is most prevalent in fee-paying schools and least prevalent in DEIS schools (Smyth, 2020).

Capacity

There will be a need for considerable upskilling in these areas. The capacity necessary for engaging in drama in the classroom is not easily attained and studies of one-off professional development to foster these capacities have shown them to be less than effective or sustainable (Stinson and Freebody, 2006). There are teachers in the system however, who have experience

and expertise in teaching drama or producing theatre outside the curriculum, or teachers who have extensive knowledge and expertise in the area of film.

Assessment

As with all subjects within the realm of the performing arts, the assessment of this specification should align with the authentic engagement with the individual and group learning outcomes and be designed to capture the learning and skill development of the students across the various domains. This will combine a number of assessment components to validly capture this learning. The delineation between the internally assessed and externally moderated elements and the externally assessed elements will be the subject of discussion and consideration in the development of this specification.

6. Brief for the development of Senior Cycle Drama, Film and Theatre Studies specification

NCCA will establish a development group to undertake the task of developing a curriculum specification for the new subject, Leaving Certificate Drama, Theatre and Film Studies. The work of the development group is, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and by the Council in the form of the brief set out below.

Leaving Certificate Drama, Theatre and Film Studies will be developed to support the realisation of the purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022). The guiding principles, as described in the Advisory Report, provide a touchstone for the Development Group as they undertake the task of preparing a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Drama, Theatre and Film Studies.

The specification will be student-centred and outcomes-based and in general terms, the specification should be broadly aligned with levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications. It will be available at both Higher and Ordinary level, and it will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 180 hours.

The specification will align to the template, agreed by Council, for curriculum specifications which will be published by NCCA in Q4, 2022 following further research on the nature and design of curriculum specifications for the senior cycle stage of education. Furthermore, the design of the specification will be informed by research conducted by NCCA in collaboration with the SEC, on the weighting, timing, and assessment of components additional to the written examinations.

The specification will be completed for Autumn 2023.

More specifically, the development of the specification will address:

- How the specification can support continuity and progression including how to connect with and build on related learning at junior cycle and in other senior cycle subjects and modules as well as future learning in life, study, further and higher education, apprenticeships and traineeships, and the world of work
- The rationale for studying senior cycle Drama, Theatre and Film Studies, making it transparent and evident to students, teachers, and parents
- How the specification can support students in understanding the relevance of drama, theatre and film to their daily lives and the relevance and importance of the skills developed in the drama, theatre and film classroom for life in the 21st century
- How the specification can support the development of students' performance skills, personal development and technical expertise
- How the specification can balance the development of performance skills with the knowledge, history, context and theory underpinning the disparate areas envisaged in the subject title
- How to provide multiple, diverse, and appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in the different fields in the specification to allow multiple means of engagement and representation for the students

- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions
- How the specification, in its presentation can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment including how a focus on developing a range of relevant skills through inquiry-based teaching and learning might be promoted through engagement with the theory underpinning the specification
- How to embrace and embed technology in teaching, learning and assessment
- How equity of access to the learning can be incorporated into the specification
- If prescribed film or dramatic texts will form part of the specification and how the selection will be managed
- What resources will be necessary for the provision of the specification to ensure the integrity and equity of the specification is maintained, that it will have a broad appeal for students and schools and that it will encourage a gender balanced uptake.

The work of the Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the Development Group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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