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

Guidelines to support the Music Performance AAC

Leaving Certificate Music

November 2026

Contents

INTRODUCTION 4

ASSESSMENT FOR CERTIFICATION IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE MUSIC 5

OVERVIEW OF THE MUSIC PERFORMANCE AAC 6

PROCESS FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE MUSIC PERFORMANCE 8

Freely selected pieces 8

Original musical piece/song 11

Unprepared Tests: 15

Descriptors of Quality 17

ROLE OF THE TEACHER 18

APPENDIX A: SUGGESTED PROMPTS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN EXPLORING, DEVELOPING AND EXPRESSING THEIR ORIGINAL MUSICAL IDEAS: 20

Introduction

This document, *Guidelines for the Music Performance* provides:

- details of the nature and scope of the Music Performance as outlined in the curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Music
- guidance for schools, teachers and students on undertaking and completing the Music Performance
- information on the role of schools and teachers in supporting students with the Music Performance
- descriptors of quality for the Music Performance.

A brief for the original musical piece/song aspect of the Music Performance AAC will be published annually by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in term two of year one.

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Music which can be accessed at https://curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/senior-cycle-subjects/music/

Assessment for Certification in Leaving Certificate Music

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

The written examination will be at higher and ordinary level. The Music Performance will be based on a common brief assessed at higher and ordinary level. Each component will be set and examined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Table 1:

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

Overview of the Music Performance AAC

The Additional Assessment Component (AAC) in Leaving Certificate Music directly responds to the rationale and aims of the subject, which are to develop competencies in students so that they can communicate effectively as a musician. The design of the AAC facilitates students to evidence a broad range of learning as set out in the learning outcomes from both Strand 1, Exploring and Expressing Musical Ideas and Strand 2, Music in Context: Past and Present, and to bring this learning to life through their performance.

The Music Performance AAC is intended to be integrated into the natural rhythm of classroom teaching and learning. It is designed to be both motivating and enjoyable for students and to provide students with opportunities to explore musical areas and styles that interest them.

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

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

The development of the skills required for the Music Performance begins early in year one, through ongoing engagement with the learning outcomes in the specification. Through this engagement, students develop an understanding of how their classroom activities are intended to foster the musical knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that will underpin this AAC.

Before beginning preparation for the AAC, students and teachers should familiarise themselves with the Descriptors of Quality for the AAC which apply to the Music Performance on page 17 of this document. These Descriptors of Quality relate to the learning achieved in the music classroom by students in the Music Performance AAC. In particular, the AAC requires students to:

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

The Music Performance will be completed in term two/three of sixth year.

Students will complete their AAC in their own school, assessed by an examiner appointed by the SEC.

Table 2: Music Performance requirements for students taking ordinary and higher level

Ordinary Level	Higher Level
Live performance of **two** freely selected musical pieces/songs on an instrument/voice **and**	Live performance of **four** freely selected musical pieces/songs on an instrument/voice **and**
Live performance of **one** original musical piece/song on an instrument/voice and reflective discussion **and**	Live performance of **one** original musical piece/song on an instrument/voice, reflective discussion **and**
An unprepared test.	An unprepared test.
Total Duration: 15 Minutes	**Total Duration: 25 Minutes**

Students will not be permitted to exceed the allocated time. The entire Music Performance must be presented as a performing unit in one sitting.

Music Performance Brief

A *Music Performance Brief*, published annually by the SEC will inform the original musical piece/song aspect of the AAC. The brief will be issued in term two of year one.

The Music Performance AAC Brief will:

- set out the specific requirements for the original musical piece/song aspect of the AAC for all students
- provide a range of stimulus material for the original musical piece/song
- support students in considering areas related to the stimulus material which they may wish to explore
- support and facilitate teachers and students in planning for and preparing for the completion of the AAC.

Process for the completion of the Music Performance

This section provides an overview of the process for the completion of the AAC, which consists of:

- Freely selected pieces
- An original musical piece/song and reflective discussion
- Unprepared test.

Freely selected pieces

All students are free to choose musical piece(s)/song(s) from any musical style or tradition for this part of the AAC. Students should ensure that the pieces/songs selected support their musical experiences, interests and abilities and are reflective of what can be achieved through engagement with the learning outcomes.

Solo and group performing may be freely mixed. Students can choose whether to perform their pieces/songs individually, or as a member of a group, or a combination of both. The maximum number of students performing an examinable part on an instrument/voice is one. The maximum number of students per non-examinable part may not exceed two. Where a student selects to perform their pieces as a member of a group, they will be examined and assessed on their own contribution to the performance.

Each student's complete programme must be heard separately.

When performing with live accompaniment or with a backing track/recording, the student's contribution must be clearly heard. All aspects of a performance must be audible to the examiner.

When singing to their own accompaniment, the student may choose whether to be assessed on:

- singing only
- accompaniment only
- a combination of both.

Selecting musical pieces/songs:

In selecting musical pieces/songs students should:

- consider a range of possible music as well as music which has been engaged with as part of their classroom learning experiences
- choose music which best demonstrates their musical interests, strengths and capabilities, while providing an appropriate level of challenge
- consider the opportunities each piece/song will provide the student to demonstrate their performance skills
- compile a list of music that they have performed over their two years of study

- refine and revisit their selection as their confidence, technical proficiency and musical understanding evolve.

Rehearsing musical pieces/songs for the AAC:

The process of preparing musical pieces/songs for performance requires rehearsal and refinement. Suggested rehearsal techniques for students to consider include:

- developing consistent rehearsal habits to improve confidence and musical accuracy
- preparing for rehearsal through appropriate warm-up activities, such as singing or playing scales, arpeggios, chords or rhythmic exercises before rehearsing pieces/songs
- focusing on specific aspects or sections of music or identifying a specific part of the music/song which requires improvement
- practising regularly with a backing track or live accompanist, where appropriate. When using a live accompanist, students might consider asking the accompanist for a recording of the accompaniment to support independent rehearsal and preparation
- considering the interpretation of the musical style and demonstrating an understanding of the musical style in each piece/song
- seeking feedback regularly. Record some performances and review and share with their music teacher to identify strengths and areas for improvement
- reflecting on feedback from teachers, peers or self-reflecting when rehearsing and performing
- rehearsing challenging sections of a piece(s)/song(s). To improve the performance students might:
    - identify the part of the piece/song where a challenge regularly occurs
    - slowly practise the part immediately preceding the challenging section, the challenging section, and the part immediately after it
    - repeat, gradually increase the tempo until the desired tempo and technique is reached
    - mastering hands separately before combining can be helpful on some instruments, where relevant.

Performing musical pieces/songs for the AAC:

The Music Performance AAC is a step in the musical process where the students share their music with a listener. Approaching the Music Performance AAC students should:

- ensure that they have selected the most appropriate key, tempo, and other performance parameters for their chosen pieces/songs
- decide the order in which they will perform their selected pieces/songs during the AAC. Rehearse and practise performing their entire programme of pieces/songs in this order
- spend additional time after the performance focusing on sections of the piece/song which may still require improvement
- perform for family, peers, friends and replicate performance conditions, where possible

- try to maintain continuity during the performance. Recover from mistakes without stopping or restarting
- record some performances and review using the Descriptors of Quality. Reorder and refine the pieces/songs as appropriate
- ensure instruments and equipment are in tune and functioning properly
- ensure that the total duration of the music to be performed does not exceed examination time allocated to the AAC.

Original musical piece/song

The AAC requires all students to perform one original musical piece/song live on an instrument/voice.

The original musical piece/song will be informed by a brief. The Music Performance Brief will be issued by the SEC during term two of year one. The brief will set out the specific requirements for the original musical piece/song aspect of the AAC for all students and provide a range of stimulus material for the original musical piece/song. Students will complete all requirements outlined in the brief and then select, prepare and perform this original piece/song live. Students have freedom to create and perform an original musical piece/song of their own choosing as appropriate in responding to the requirements of the brief.

In this part of the AAC, students have the opportunity to demonstrate creating and experimenting, performing and music-making and listening, appraising and responding in an integrated way. This integration fosters a deeper understanding of the complexity of roles with which a musician engages.

This part of the examination will be based on the students' live performance of their original piece/song. Students should ensure that when exploring and developing their original musical piece/song, they create a piece/song, or an instrumental/vocal part of a piece/song, which is within their performance capabilities and can be performed confidently live during the examination.

The creation and performance of an original musical piece/song should be viewed as an iterative and reflective process rather than a linear sequence of steps. When the time comes to create and perform their original music for the AAC, students should be encouraged to see this as a continuation of classroom learning they have been engaging with from year one.

Students can perform their original musical piece/song individually or as a member of a group. If a student chooses to perform their original musical piece/song as a member of a group, the maximum number of students performing an examinable part on an instrument/voice is one. Each examinable student performing as a member of a group must make a significant contribution to the original musical piece/song. The part that they are performing in the piece/song must be music which they have created. The maximum number of students per non-examinable part is two.

There is no requirement for students to produce written notation/documentation for their original piece/song. Students are permitted to use notation, lyrics or chords etc. as a support during their performance if they wish. Students are not permitted to bring sample discussion topics or written materials into the examination.

Students are not permitted to ask another person/student to perform their original musical piece/song on their behalf during the examination.

The brief may require students to create rhythmic and/or melodic and/or harmonic elements. Those elements of the original piece/song not being performed live by the students can be performed by other musicians, or with the appropriate support of digital technology. The examinable part being performed by the student, must not be audible in the same instrument/voice in the live accompaniment or digital technology.

There is no maximum or minimum duration for the original musical piece/song once the overall allocated time is not exceeded. The duration of the original musical piece/song will be influenced by:

- ensuring that the requirements outlined in the brief are met,
- demonstration of a performance standard which is appropriate to the level being taken by the student
- the style or type of piece/song which has been created and is being performed by the student.

As students prepare and finalise their AAC, they should ensure that their entire Music Performance programme does not exceed the allocated time.

During the AAC each student will participate in a reflective discussion with the SEC examiner in relation to their original musical piece/song. Further details in relation to the reflective discussion can be found on page 14.

Exploring musical ideas:

Following the release of the brief, students should explore the stimuli, imagining and conceptualising musical ideas, in response to the requirements of the brief. At this stage students should:

- investigate the stimuli and requirements provided in the brief to develop an understanding of key aspects which are required to form part of the original piece/song
- explore and experiment with creative and performance possibilities offered by each stimuli. This may include:
    - the focus of their original piece/song: rhythmic, melodic, harmonic or a combination of these
    - instrument(s)/voice(s) that they might create their piece/song for, mindful that students are required to perform their original piece/song live during the AAC
    - musical styles and/or compositional ideas which interest them and they would like to pursue
- revisit musical ideas which they have already developed as part of their Leaving Certificate Music classroom learning experiences. In doing so, students may discover an earlier musical idea that they have created, which they would like to adapt and develop further in responding to the brief
- explore a variety of influences that can inform and inspire their original piece/song, such as prescribed and/or unprescribed music, the work of established musicians, composers or arrangers

At this point, each student's individual engagement will generate a rich pool of ideas for the subsequent creation of their original piece/song. Students should have selected the stimulus which interests, motivates and speaks to their musical interests, talents and capabilities best.

While students may be influenced by the work of other musicians and/or composers, the work they create and perform must be their own work. Students should be able to describe how the work of other musicians and/or composers has informed and influenced their musical ideas, where applicable.

Developing Musical Ideas:

The development of the skills required to create and perform an original musical piece/song will begin early in year one, through engagement with the learning outcomes in the specification. The learning outcomes provide many and varied opportunities for students to create and perform original music and musical ideas throughout their two years of study.

As students create and develop their work, they come to understand that their original piece/song will evolve over time. It may, for example, deviate in some way from their original ideas, or changes may arise throughout the development process. Students may come to realise that their original piece/song was overly ambitious, or too simple; practical considerations may lead to changes, or unanticipated setbacks may require problem solving and amendments to what was initially envisaged. Students may experience changing feelings about their selected stimulus. Working as a musician, students demonstrate patience, perseverance and self-discipline by maintaining and developing the stimulus, rather than abandoning it when alternative ideas, setbacks or challenges arise.

As students develop their original musical piece/song they should:

- consider how they will respond to the requirements of the brief and consider the style, mood and message they wish to communicate
- decide whether to perform their piece/song individually, or as a member of a group, or with the appropriate support of digital technology/accompaniment
- outline the creative goal they wish to achieve. This may include describing the role or purpose of the music they create
- adapt, combine and manipulate musical elements including pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, timbre, texture, structure, style, tonality and instrumentation to create, construct and develop their music. They may consider combining musical ideas that already exist to enhance their musical ideas
- use instrument(s), singing or vocalising, digital technology or a combination of these to realise, appraise, support and refine their ideas
- continually listen appraise, reflect, refine, modify and make changes to their original piece/song as it evolves and takes shape
- maintain a record of creative compositional decisions they make.

Expressing Musical Ideas:

The culmination of the student's work is realised in the AAC where they perform and communicate their original music live with the examiner. This is an important step in the musical process, providing students with an opportunity to realise the music which they have created.

In preparation for this part of the AAC, students will select the musical piece/song they will perform for the examination.

Students should rehearse, reflect and refine the original piece/song using a range of performance skills engaged with in the specification.

Students should find opportunities to perform their original piece/song to an audience (peers, family etc) in preparation for the AAC.

For additional guidance in relation to rehearsing and performing musical pieces/songs, please see pages 9-10 of this document.

Reflective Discussion

Each student will participate in a reflective discussion with the SEC examiner in relation to their original musical piece/song. Students may choose whether to have this discussion before or after the performance of their original musical piece/song.

As part of this discussion the student should be able to:

- demonstrate insights into their creative process using an instrument/voice (where appropriate).
- outline the musical decisions that shaped their original piece/song.
- justify the creative compositional decisions taken, the originality and freshness of their ideas, challenges encountered and interpretative choices made using appropriate musical language.

In order to prepare for the reflective discussion, students should reflect on work which they create and perform, beginning this process early in year one. Ongoing reflection will support students in recognising and understanding the impact of creative decisions made during the development process. This will help students to form articulate and informed responses to their music using appropriate musical language. Students should practise using their instrument/voice to demonstrate and justify creative decisions in preparation for the reflective discussion.

In all cases, students will complete their reflective discussion with the examiner individually.

It is extremely important that the original musical piece/song performed by the students for examination is their own work. The performance of work by any student not entirely created by that student is a significant breach of regulations and may lead to the imposition of penalties, up to and including the withholding of related results.

A robust authentication process is central to ensuring the integrity of any assessment process. School-based authentication by teachers of students' work on their Music Performance AAC is essential to the fair and equitable assessment of that work. While it is neither practicable nor necessary for teachers to witness all aspects of students' work, teachers need to be satisfied that students have carried out the work themselves. Regular, comprehensive engagement with each student's work on their Music Performance AAC will enable teachers to confidently and legitimately authenticate any work being presented for assessment.

The SEC provides detailed guidance on the authentication of assessments and the conditions for its acceptance. Information as to how this applies in the case of the Music Performance AAC will be provided in the brief, and also in other documentation which may be issued by the SEC.

Unprepared Tests:

The specification requires students to be able to perform unfamiliar music at sight and through aural perception. Students should be able to perform unfamiliar rhythmic, melodic and harmonic phrases and chord patterns.

Unprepared tests can be in simple and compound time signatures, in major and minor key signatures and include performing and expressive techniques, where appropriate.

In the examination, students will choose to perform one of the following:

- aural memory (rhythmic or melodic) or
- sight-reading (rhythmic or vocal or instrumental) or
- improvisation.

Practising Unprepared Tests:

When practising unprepared tests students could:

- practise performing to a metronome. Begin with a slow tempo and work to the required speed. This can be particularly effective for rhythmic sight-reading. Students can attempt to keep the beat/pulse internally
- identify difficult sections of the test and attempt these sections first
- create their own unprepared tests which challenge and move them out of their comfort zone
- develop consistency when performing unprepared tests, keeping the beat and avoiding stopping and restarting.

Students should seek the advice of their music teacher when identifying which unprepared test is best suited to them in the AAC.

Students may not say or sing the rhythmic or solfa names of the notes or indicate the beat vocally while performing the unprepared test for examination.

Aural memory tests:

Aural memory tests will be eight-bars duration. They will be played three times. The student responds after the second and third playings. Marks are awarded for the better attempt. A warning pip will be heard before the first playing only.

In the case of Aural Memory Melody, each test will have a high, medium and low register option. The key note and tonic chord will be played before the first and third playings only.

Sight-reading tests:

Sight-reading tests will be eight-bars duration. Single-stave melodic sight-reading tests are generic and will not be instrument-specific. Each test of this type will have a high, medium and low register option.

Students who choose sight-reading will be given appropriate time to look over the test. During this time, the student can attempt sections or parts of the test using their instrument/voice. The examiner will indicate when the student should attempt the test in full. The test may be attempted in full once only.

Rhythmic sight-reading tests may be clapped, tapped or played on an untuned percussion instrument.

Improvisation tests:

Students who choose improvisation may choose whether to improvise on a given rhythmic or melodic or harmonic phrase**.** Reference to the stimulus provided by the examiner must be apparent and evident in the improvisation.

Students taking ordinary level will be required to improvise for at least eight bars duration. Students taking higher level will be required to improvise for at least sixteen bars duration.

Descriptors of Quality

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

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

Table 3: Descriptors of Quality: Music Performance AAC

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

Role of the teacher

The teacher has an important role to play in supporting and supervising students work on the Music Performance AAC. Teaching and learning related to the AAC should be integrated into ongoing classroom practice to maximise opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes of the specification and support the development of key competencies.

The release of a brief by the SEC in term two of year one allows teachers to signpost the requirements and content of the brief from an early stage of learning in the subject. It will also facilitate teachers in planning for the integration of the AAC, as appropriate, into the natural flow of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Support may include:

- clarifying the requirements of the Music Performance Brief
- helping students to understand how the brief issued by the SEC for the original musical piece/song part of the Music Performance AAC links to the Leaving Certificate Music specification
- identifying areas of the specification that students may need to engage with in order to undertake the AAC
- ensuring students are aware of the Descriptors of Quality associated with the AAC
- offering prompts, such as those supplied on page 20 in appendix A, to stimulate and support students' planning and critical thinking throughout the process
- encouraging students to focus on the requirements of the brief and to relate their work to the learning outcomes in the specification
- facilitating access to appropriate resources
- providing appropriate access arrangements for students with additional learning needs, in accordance with the State Examinations Commission provision of reasonable accommodations
- making students aware that they must comply with any relevant mandatory regulations or requirements such as those relating to health and safety, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), accessing public or private property etc
- using feedback appropriately to promote a reflective approach to work on the AAC
- providing instructions at strategic intervals to facilitate the timely completion of the AAC
- drawing students' attention to any requirements of the AAC specified in the brief
- promoting opportunities afforded by the AAC to develop Senior Cycle key competencies

In order to facilitate the authentication process, teachers should engage regularly with students' work on the original musical piece/song aspect of the AAC. Teachers should be aware that only work which is the student's original composition can be performed for assessment to the State Examinations Commission and that each student will be assessed on an individual basis.

Where more than one student within a class is working on a similar AAC, it is important that each student takes a personal and unique approach to their work and that it can be authenticated by the teacher.

The feedback provided to students should be general and nondirective in nature. Teachers should not provide any excessive or inappropriate support to students, such as editing draft work or providing model compositions to be used in the students' evidence of learning.

Appendix A: Suggested prompts to support students in exploring, developing and expressing their original musical ideas:

To assist students in exploring, developing and expressing their musical ideas, below are a series of prompts that they may wish to use. These prompts are only indicative and are not exhaustive.

Exploring musical ideas:

- What is your initial reaction to each stimulus?
- What do I already know about this type of stimulus?
- As you explore different stimuli are you noticing different things about them?
- What sounds can you imagine when you consider each stimulus?
- Which stimulus stands out most for you and what is it about this stimulus that keeps drawing your attention?
- What message/mood/atmosphere/idea/story are you trying to communicate through your music, as appropriate to the brief?
- What style of music might best suit your ideas as appropriate in responding to the brief?

Developing musical ideas:

- Which ideas are strongest and worth exploring further and why?
- What aspects of your music matter most, and how would a listener understand this from the music?
- In what way does your original piece/song respond to your chosen stimulus?
- Were there any musical ideas which you decided to change or discard during the creation of your piece/song? Why?
- How has your understanding of the stimulus changed as you have developed your piece/song?

Expressing musical ideas

- How did you prepare to perform your original piece/song?
- What aspects of the performance are most important to you in communicating your music?
- In what way is performing an original piece of music/song different to performing an existing piece of music/song?
- What strategies could be used to overcome performing difficulties?
- What aspects of your original piece/song are you most proud of? Why?
- How has performing music which you have created influenced your understanding of the role of a musician?



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