

Irish Board musical theatre



Syllabus
2025-2026



Irish Board of
Speech & Drama

Inspiring confidence & imagination



Irish Board of
Speech & Drama



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Introduction

From the music halls and operettas of the early 20th Century, through the golden age of the 1940s and 1950s Hollywood musicals, and the musical blockbusters of the 1970s and 1980s, to *Billy Elliot*, *Legally Blonde* and *Wicked*, musical theatre has provided energetic entertainment and an alternative lens through which momentous events and popular culture have been experienced.

For young people, musical theatre provides not only a varied and exhilarating outlet for creative expression but also an activity through which key artistic skills may be learned.

The Irish Board's Musical Theatre syllabus provides young people with a sense of progression and challenge; encouraging them to acquire specific skills, engage with story, mood and genre; experience different styles of musical theatre and appreciate the history and development of the art form.

For candidates entering the group exams, the syllabus provides a framework for young people to perform as a team, learn valuable skills, and to display their creative talents and abilities in a secure and encouraging environment.

For candidates entering as solo and duet performers the syllabus is broad enough to allow them to explore works that inspire them while encouraging them to understand and develop particular technical and interpretive skills which will provide them with a stepping stone to further professional training.

There are no set pieces (although we can suggest pieces if required) so teachers have free rein to use their repertoire for exam purposes. Irish Board exams are easy to organise with a minimum of red tape. Our examiners are professional, experienced, positive, encouraging and affirming and the Irish Board itself is well known for being helpful, flexible and responsive.

Don't hesitate to contact us. We look forward to working with you.

Irish Board

musical theatre

EXAMINATIONS

Guidelines for Musical Theatre Examinations

(These guidelines form an integral part of the syllabus requirements and should be read in conjunction with them)

The Nature of the Musical Theatre Syllabus

The Irish Board Musical Theatre syllabus facilitates students to develop a range of appropriate skills which are required for musical theatre performance.

We suggest that teachers use the structure of the syllabus to encourage their students to practice and experiment with different styles, and pieces from different genres and eras, in order to enhance their learning experience and their appreciation of the historical development of Musical Theatre as an art form.

At the more senior levels, it is expected that candidates will present a balanced programme, incorporating contrasts of style, mood and genre.

Eras/Genres

In some of the Intermediate and Senior exams, reference is made to different eras and genres. Although these are subject to alternative categorisations, we have identified such eras and genres as follows:

Eras

- Music Hall, Variety or Vaudeville (19th or early 20th Century)
- British light opera and musical theatre (early 20th Century)
- Early 20th Century American musical theatre
- 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s American, British and European musical theatre
- Late 20th and early 21st Century American, British and European musical theatre
- Contemporary musical theatre (2010s)

Genres

- Operettas
- Book musicals
- Musical comedies
- Rock musicals
- Concept musicals
- Juke-box musicals
- Disney and animated musicals
- Musical TV series

Choice of Pieces

The Irish Board does not set particular pieces to be performed in any of its examinations. We expect that at junior levels, teachers will choose pieces that are age appropriate, that intermediate and senior level pieces will be chosen in collaboration with students and that pieces generally present an increasing challenge to students as they progress through the examination levels.

Dramatic Context

In Musical Theatre there is an understanding that, for the most part, songs are performed in the context of an unfolding story or theme. Students are expected to know and understand the context within which the songs are placed. In the examinations, candidates are expected to demonstrate these contexts through characterisation and an understanding of the physical and emotional situation of the character(s) being portrayed.

Simple costumes and hand props can aid characterisation and are encouraged but are not assessed for marking purposes.

Adaptation of Material/Libretto

Spoken pieces should be performed in character.

Extracts from plays and musicals, spoken as part of the examination requirements from Junior Three on, may be from the libretto or may be devised by the candidate(s). If taken from the libretto, the extract may be edited and/or adapted from any part of the show to suit the examination requirements. We advise against a solo performer attempting to perform what is essentially a duet or dialogue where the other character must be imagined and her/his lines are not spoken.

In the context of a thematically linked programme at the senior levels, it is expected that the candidate(s) will link the pieces in an appropriate and creative manner.

In group examinations, where a spoken element is required by the syllabus, it is not expected that all members of the group will speak. However, it is expected that all group members will engage theatrically in the performance.

Presentation

As with a stage performance where a performance begins with the opening of the curtain or the entrance of the performers onto the stage, the examination starts the moment the candidates enter the examination room. Performers should find their places promptly and in silence. For group examinations at Kindergarten and Preliminary levels, it is understood that candidates may require some assistance with their entrance and this will be permitted. In group exams, from Preliminary Two, general presentation will form part of the assessment.

It is expected that each performance will be preceded by an announcement that indicates the title of the song, the show from which it is taken and its composer/lyricist. At Senior levels, it is expected that candidates will provide more information about the pieces being performed or the themes being explored.

For solo and duet exams from Intermediate One, candidates are expected to bring to the examination written notes, as specified in the syllabus. These should be legible and neatly presented in a folder or binder, and will be returned to the teacher following the examinations.

The keys of pieces may be changed if necessary in order to accommodate the vocal range of the performer(s) or to protect the voice(s) from strain.

In duet exams, interaction between the candidates is expected and each candidate should play a part of equal or near equal length.

Discussion

In solo and duet examinations, the examiner will discuss with the candidate(s) the choice, context, meaning, characterisation, interpretation and performance of the songs chosen, in accordance with the syllabus. The examiner will expect candidates to be able to enter into discussion in relation to these items in the context of their performance. As candidates progress through the levels, it is expected that candidates will be able to demonstrate greater levels of understanding not only of the pieces performed and their dramatic content and context, but also of the technical and interpretive skills used in their performance. The precise content of the discussion will be at the examiner's discretion and she/he may not cover all elements of the syllabus requirements.

For group examinations, although opportunities for meaningful engagement between the examiner and members of the group may be limited by the size of the group, it is still expected that group members will have an understanding of the piece(s) they are performing and will be able to articulate this if required.

Accompaniment

Candidates may use live or recorded accompaniment for their exam. When live accompaniment is used, the accompanist (who must not be the candidate's parent, guardian or teacher) must leave the exam room following the performance of the prepared pieces. An assistant (who must not be the candidate's parent, guardian or teacher) may operate equipment for recorded accompaniment but must leave the exam room immediately after the prepared pieces have been performed. The use of backing tracks with vocals is not permitted.

The use of microphones is not allowed.

Assessment

In solo and duet exams, the distribution of the potential marks awarded is as follows:

	REQUIREMENT 1	REQUIREMENT 2	DISCUSSION
Preliminary One	100	-	-
Preliminary 2	90	-	10
Junior 1	80	-	20
Junior 2	80	-	20
Junior 3	80	-	20
Junior 4	50	30	20
Intermediate 1	50	30	20
Intermediate 2	50	30	20
Intermediate 3	50	30	20
Intermediate 4	50	30	20
Senior 1	50	30	20
Senior 2	50	30	20

In the Proficiency examination the potential marks to be awarded are as follows:

50% for requirement 1, 15% for requirement 2, 15% for requirement 3 and 20% for discussion.

In group exams, the distribution of the potential marks awarded is as follows:

	ANNOUNCEMENT & PRESENTATION	REQUIREMENT 1	REQUIREMENT 2	REQUIREMENT 3
Kindergarten	-	100	-	-
Preliminary One	-	100	-	-
Preliminary 2	10	90	-	-
Junior 1	10	90	-	-
Junior 2	10	90	-	-
Junior 3	10	90	-	-
Junior 4	10	60	30	-
Intermediate 1	10	60	30	-
Intermediate 2	10	60	30	-
Intermediate 3	10	60	30	-
Intermediate 4	10	60	30	-
Senior 1	10	60	30	-
Senior 2	10	60	15	15

Marking and Awards

70% will be required to pass any examination; 75% - 79% will be awarded a Merit; 80% - 84% will be awarded Honours; 85% - 89% will be awarded First Class Honours; 90% - 100% will be awarded a Distinction.

A certificate will be awarded to each candidate achieving 70% or over. Each candidate in the Musical Theatre solo and duet examinations achieving a mark of 80% or above will receive a certificate and an Irish Board Performance Medal.

In the Musical Theatre Proficiency examination, a medal will be awarded to each candidate achieving a mark of 85% or above.

The pass mark for the Diploma of Associate in Musical Theatre Performance examination is 75%.

Musical Theatre Syllabus

(The Guidelines for Musical Theatre Examinations form an integral part of this syllabus and should be read in conjunction with it)

GROUP EXAMINATIONS

Kindergarten *Suggested ages: 3-5*

Announce and sing an Action Song or Nursery Rhyme with suitable movement and/or dance (maximum time: 4 minutes)

Preliminary One *Suggested ages: 6-7*

Announce and sing an Action Song or Nursery Rhyme with suitable movement and/or dance (maximum time: 5 minutes)

Preliminary Two *Suggested ages: 6-8*

Announce and sing an Action Song or Nursery Rhyme with suitable movement and/or dance (maximum time: 5 minutes)

Junior One *Suggested ages: 7-9*

Announce and perform a song or selection from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with choreographed movement/dance (maximum time: 7 minutes)

Junior Two *Suggested ages: 8-10*

Announce and perform a song or selection from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with choreographed movement/dance (maximum time: 7 minutes)

Junior Three *Suggested ages: 9-11*

Announce and perform a song or selection from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with choreographed movement/dance, the song/selection to be preceded by a short (maximum one minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the group, to be performed with appropriate characterisation and movement (maximum time: 8 minutes)

Junior Four *Suggested ages: 10-13*

- 1 Announce and perform a song or selection from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with choreographed movement/dance, the song/selection to be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the group, to be performed with appropriate characterisation and movement (maximum time: 8 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance (maximum time: 2 minutes)

Intermediate One *Suggested ages: 12-14*

- 1 Announce and perform two contrasting songs from musical theatre productions, musical films, musical animated films or musical TV series (contrast may be in style, era, mood, tempo or genre) with appropriate choreographed movement/dance (maximum time: 8 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance (maximum time: 2 minutes)

Intermediate Two *Suggested ages: 13-15*

- 1 Announce and sing two contrasting songs from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, one written prior to 1970 and the other written in or after 1970, with appropriate choreographed movement/dance (maximum time: 8 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance (maximum time: 2 minutes)

Intermediate Three *Suggested ages: 14-16*

- 1 Announce and perform two contrasting songs from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement/dance. Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines) (maximum time: 8 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance (maximum time: 2 minutes)

Intermediate Four *Suggested ages: 15-17*

- 1 Announce and perform two contrasting songs from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement/dance. Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines). One of the songs must be preceded by a short (maximum two-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the group, to be performed with appropriate characterisation and movement (maximum time: 10 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance, to music from a musical theatre production or musical theatre film of your choice

Senior One *Suggested ages: 16-18*

- 1 Announce, introduce and perform a thematically linked musical theatre programme comprising three items from musical theatre productions and/or musical films. The programme must include singing, speaking/acting and choreographed movement/dance and contain some element of contrast (in mood, style, era or genre) (maximum time: 10 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance, to music from a musical theatre production or musical theatre film of your choice

Senior Two (Final) *Suggested ages: 16-19*

- 1 Announce, introduce and perform a thematically linked musical theatre programme comprising three items from musical theatre productions and/or musical films. The programme must include singing, speaking/acting and choreographed movement/dance and contain some element of contrast (in mood, style, era or genre) (maximum time: 10 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short choreographed dance, to music from a musical theatre production or musical theatre film of your choice
- 3 Announce and perform a two-minute prepared group improvisation based on the theme of your musical theatre programme

Musical Theatre Syllabus

(The Guidelines for Musical Theatre Examinations form an integral part of this syllabus and should be read in conjunction with it)

Solo and Duet Examinations

Preliminary One *Suggested ages: 5-7*

Announce and sing one Action Song or Nursery Rhyme, with simple actions (maximum time: 2 minutes)

Preliminary Two *Suggested ages: 6-8*

- 1 Announce and sing an Action Song or Nursery Rhyme, with simple actions (maximum time: 2 minutes)
- 2 Discuss with the examiner what the song is about

Junior One *Suggested ages: 7-9*

- 1 Announce and sing a song from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with simple actions/choreographed movement (maximum time: 3 minutes)
- 2 Discuss with the examiner what the song is about and the mood of the song

Junior Two *Suggested ages: 8-10*

- 1 Announce and sing a song from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with simple actions/choreographed movement (maximum time: 3 minutes)
- 2 Discuss with the examiner what the song is about and the mood of the song
- 3 Be able to describe the character who sings the song in the production

Junior Three *Suggested ages: 9-11*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing a song from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with actions/choreographed movement, the song to be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the candidate(s) (maximum time: 4 minutes)
- 2 Discuss with the examiner what the song is about and the mood of the song
- 3 Be able to discuss your character with the examiner

Junior Four *Suggested ages: 10-13*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing a song from a musical theatre production, musical film, musical animated film or a musical TV series, with actions/choreographed movement, the song to be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the candidate(s) (maximum time: 4 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short dance (of any style) of your choice OR announce and perform a short (maximum two minutes) dramatic selection of your choice with suitable characterisation and movement)
- 3 Discuss with the examiner what the song is about and the mood of the song
- 4 Be able to discuss your character with the examiner

Intermediate One *Suggested ages: 12-14*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two contrasting songs of your choice from musical theatre productions, musical films, musical animated films or musical TV series (contrast may be in style, era, mood, tempo or genre) with appropriate movement (maximum time: 7 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short dance of your choice OR announce and perform a short (maximum two-minutes) spoken selection with suitable characterisation and movement (this selection may be either taken/adapted from the libretto of the work from which one of your songs was taken, or devised, based on the character portrayed by you in one of your songs)
- 3 Bring to the examination brief notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the type/category of the songs performed, the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and be able to discuss these items with the examiner

Intermediate Two *Suggested ages: 13-15*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two songs of your choice from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, one written prior to 1970 and the other written in or prior in or after 1970, with appropriate movement (maximum time: 7 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short dance of your choice OR announce and perform a short (maximum two-minutes) spoken selection with suitable characterisation and movement (This selection may be either taken/adapted from the libretto of the work from which one of your songs was taken, or devised, based on the character portrayed by you in one of your songs)
- 3 Bring to the examination brief notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the type/category of the songs performed, the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and discuss these items with the examiner

Intermediate Three *Suggested ages: 14-16*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two contrasting songs of your choice from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement. Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines) (maximum time: 7 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a short dance of your choice OR announce and perform a short (maximum two-minutes) spoken selection with suitable characterisation and movement (This selection may be either taken/adapted from the libretto of the work from which one of your songs was taken, or devised, based on the character portrayed by you in one of your songs)
- 3 Bring to the examination brief notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the type/category of the songs performed, the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and be able to discuss these items with the examiner
- 4 Be able to follow simple stage directions

Intermediate Four *Suggested ages: 15-17*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two contrasting songs of your choice from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement. Please note the following:

Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines).

One of the songs must be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the candidate(s), performed in character.

One of the songs must include a short dance break or incorporate an element of choreography.
(maximum time: 10 minutes)

- 2 Bring to the examination brief notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the type/category of the songs performed, the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and discuss these items with the examiner
- 3 Be able to discuss how to create and sustain a character when performing
- 4 Be able to follow simple stage directions

Senior One *Suggested ages: 16-18*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two contrasting songs of your choice from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement. Please note the following:

Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines).

One of the songs must be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the candidate(s), performed in character.

One of the songs must include a short dance break or incorporate an element of choreography.

(maximum time: 12 minutes)

- 2 Bring to the examination brief notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the type/category of the songs performed, the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and discuss these items with the examiner
- 3 Be able to explain the importance of effective breath control when performing, and describe and demonstrate an exercise designed for this purpose

Senior Two (Final) *Suggested ages: 16-19*

- 1 Announce and, in character, sing two contrasting songs of your choice from musical theatre productions and/or musical films, with appropriate movement. Please note the following:

Each song must be chosen from a different era/genre (see Guidelines).

One of the songs must be preceded by a short (maximum one-minute) piece of dialogue either from the production, or devised by the candidate(s), performed in character.

One of the songs must include a short dance break or incorporate an element of choreography.

(maximum time: 12 minutes)

- 2 Bring to the examination comprehensive notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the composer(s) and librettist(s), the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and spoken piece(s) and be able to discuss these items and your performance with the examiner
- 3 Taking one of the pieces performed in your programme, be able to discuss your ideas about staging, costume and make-up

Proficiency Examination in Musical Theatre (Solo only) *Suggested ages: 17-20*

- 1 Announce, introduce and perform a thematically linked musical theatre programme comprising three items from musical theatre productions and/or musical films. The programme must include singing, speaking/acting and choreographed movement/dance and contain some element of contrast (in mood, style, era or genre) (maximum time: 12 minutes)
- 2 Announce and perform a song from a musical theatre production or musical theatre film of your choice, the performance to incorporate simultaneous singing and dancing/choreographed movement
- 3 Announce and perform a one-minute prepared improvisation based on one of the characters represented in your thematic performance
- 4 Bring to the examination comprehensive notes on the show(s) from which the songs were taken, the composer(s) and librettist(s), the character(s) being portrayed, the context, subject and mood of the songs and be able to discuss these items and your performance with the examiner
- 5 Discuss with the examiner the compilation of your programme, how you prepared the programme for performance, your vocal preparation, and the various techniques used in your performance

Diploma of Associate (Musical Theatre Performance)

The Irish Board's Diploma of Associate (Musical Theatre Performance) syllabus provides those who wish to progress further in Musical Theatre with the opportunity to explore the genre and develop their skills.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate a significant level of technical and interpretive skills in the key musical theatre elements of singing, acting and choreographed movement/dance.

Eligibility

The candidate must be at least 18 years of age on the date of the examination.

Requirements

1. Introduce and perform from memory a thematically linked programme consisting of 5 performances including:
 - *three songs from published Musical Theatre works, at least one of which must have been written prior to 1960*
 - *two spoken items from published Musical Theatre works, and/or published plays*The programme must include singing, speaking/acting and choreographed movement/dance and contain a significant element of contrast (in mood, style, era and/or genre). The duration of the programme, including introduction, linking script, setting up and clearing away must not exceed 20 minutes. (70%)
2. Submit a Portfolio (of not more than 1500 words) containing a comprehensive study of a character of your choice from a published Musical Theatre work from any period.
The portfolio should contain:
 - *information about the composer/author/librettist, period in which the work is set, genre, historical/social context*
 - *a summary of the plot*
 - *a description of the character and the character's relationships with others in the work*
 - *ideas about staging, costume and make-up*
 - *comprehensive notes on how you would convey the character convincingly through voice, movement and gesture*The Portfolio must be submitted with the entry form for the examination and will form the basis of a discussion with the examiners. (20%)
3. Discuss with the examiner(s) your musical theatre experience and future plans. (10%)

75% is the mark required to pass the Diploma of Associate (Musical Theatre Performance)

Irish Board of Speech & Drama Examination Regulations

- 1 Applications for examinations are accepted on the condition that candidates will be examined in accordance with the requirements of the current syllabus.
- 2 All entries must be made through the online booking system. Each entry must be accompanied by the correct entry fee. Entries and fees must reach the Irish Board of Speech and Drama at least six weeks before the proposed date of the examination. The Irish Board reserves the right to refuse entries which do not comply with these conditions.
- 3 The person submitting the entry must complete an agreement to abide by the regulations of the Irish Board.
- 4 The minimum number of candidates for the recognition of an examination centre is 20. By agreement and arrangement, an examination centre may comprise more than one physical location.
- 5 Examination fees will not be refunded.
- 6 A candidate who has been entered for an examination in one centre may not be examined in a different centre.
- 7 A list of candidates' names with the type and grade of their examinations must be provided at least two weeks prior to the date of the examination.
- 8 Each candidate is responsible for the supply of all equipment, props, costumes and so on required for his/ her examination.
- 9 70% will be required to pass any examination; 75% - 79% will be awarded a Merit; 80% -84% will be awarded Honours; 85% - 89% will be awarded First Class Honours; 90% -100% will be awarded a Distinction. The pass mark for all Diploma examinations is 75%.
- 10 A certificate will be awarded to each candidate achieving a pass mark or over in an examination.
- 11 One Irish Board Centre Medal will be awarded in each examination centre as defined in Regulation 4, above, save for the exceptions below.
- 12 In the Acting Performance and Musical Theatre examinations, a certificate will be awarded to each candidate achieving 70% or over. Each candidate in the Acting Performance and Musical Theatre solo and duologue examinations achieving a mark of 80% or above will receive a certificate and an Irish Board Performance Medal. Acting Performance and Musical Theatre candidates are not eligible to receive an Irish Board Centre Medal in respect of their Acting Performance and Musical Theatre examinations.
- 13 In the Grade Proficiency, Public Speaking Proficiency, Acting Proficiency and Musical Theatre Proficiency examinations, a medal will be awarded to each candidate achieving a mark of 85% or above.
- 14 The Irish Board of Speech and Drama welcomes candidates with particular needs. Candidates requiring particular provision, for example, sight reading in a large format or on a coloured background must notify the Irish Board at the time of entry.





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