SEVEN SISTERS CONSERVATOIRE · GUWAHATI

Curriculum Framework Grade 1 to Postgraduate

Western music education benchmarked to Trinity College London, with an ethnomusicology strand that contextualises and formally codifies the music of Assam, the Northeast and India.

Initial–Grade 3 | Grades 4–5 | Grades 6–8 | Diploma | Higher Diploma | Graduate | Postgraduate

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Purpose and design principles

Seven Sisters Conservatoire (SSC) will offer one continuous ladder of music education — from a child's first lesson to postgraduate research — benchmarked to Trinity College London's internationally recognised syllabuses and grounded in the music of Assam and the Northeast. The curriculum has two equal goals: to give Northeast musicians globally portable qualifications, and to formally document, notate and codify Indian and Northeast repertoire so it can be taught, examined and performed alongside the Western canon.

Design principles:

- **Benchmark, don't reinvent.** Western classical, jazz and rock & pop instruction tracks Trinity's published grade and diploma requirements, so SSC learners can sit Trinity exams at any point without changing course.
- **Performance first.** Following Trinity, most assessment weight sits on performance; theory, aural and improvisation are taught as the skills that make performance better.
- **Home repertoire in every grade.** At every level, learners study, notate and perform music from Assam and the Seven Sisters states, not as an elective but as part of core study.
- **Two notations, one musician.** Learners read staff notation and the Indian sargam / Bhatkhande systems, and learn to move between them — the technical basis of codification.
- **Ethics by design.** Codifying living oral traditions means working with tradition-bearers, crediting them, and agreeing how their music is used.
- **Builds on what is already working.** The curriculum scales the model proven by the Seven Sisters International Music Workshop 2026 (26–31 October, Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra): UK conservatoire faculty working side by side with local musicians on Assamese repertoire.

What the Trinity framework tells us

Trinity's model is flexible, performance-led and open to local repertoire — which makes it the right benchmark for a conservatoire whose mission is to bring Northeast music into the canon. The Trinity syllabus hub organises exams by instrument family — brass, drums and percussion, guitar, keyboards, singing, bowed strings and harp, woodwind — each with four syllabus streams: Classical & Jazz grades, Rock & Pop grades, Music Certificates, and Performance Diplomas.

Feature	Trinity requirement	What it means for SSC
Graded exam structure	Pieces 66 marks, technical work 14, supporting tests 20	SSC mirrors the 66 / 14 / 20 weighting in its own internal assessments, including for Indian instruments
Supporting tests	Two chosen from sight reading, aural, improvisation and musical knowledge	Improvisation is a natural bridge to raga-based and folk practice
Own composition	Allowed in place of a listed piece at all grades	Learners can present their own arrangements of Assamese and NE songs inside a Trinity exam

Feature	Trinity requirement	What it means for SSC
Theory prerequisite	None for any practical grade; theory grades 1–8 run in parallel	SSC makes theory compulsory internally because codification depends on it
Syllabus validity	Classical & Jazz syllabuses no longer have fixed end dates; new material added through ongoing publication releases	Stable target for curriculum planning; an opening to propose NE repertoire for future releases
Exam formats	Face-to-face (centres in India) or digital recorded exams	Learners in remote districts can sit digital exams from SSC hubs
Performance diplomas	ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory) at RQF L4, LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory) at L6, FTCL at L7; recitals of 32–38, 37–43 and 42–48 minutes; own-choice repertoire allowed with approval	Diploma recitals can feature approved NE works and transcriptions
Other diplomas	Theory (AMusTCL, LMusTCL), teaching diplomas, Level 4 Certificate for Music Educators	Routes to train Assam's own music teachers

One rule shapes the design: Trinity syllabus formats cannot be combined — a Rock & Pop song cannot count as a piece in a Classical & Jazz exam. SSC therefore runs separate Classical & Jazz and Contemporary (Rock & Pop) tracks, with the ethnomusicology strand common to both.

What Trinity does not cover, SSC adds: Indian and Northeast instruments and vocal styles, a dual-notation literacy standard, structured ethnomusicology, and degree-level study.

The qualification ladder

The ladder runs in seven stages, from Initial to Postgraduate; each stage names its external benchmark and who awards the qualification. Grades and diplomas are examined by Trinity College London, with SSC as the teaching and preparation centre. Degrees need a degree-awarding university partner. Indian and NE instruments, which Trinity does not examine, are certified by SSC on the same grade framework.

Stage	SSC award	External benchmark	UK RQF level	Awarded by	Indicative study
Foundation	Initial, Grades 1–3	Trinity Initial, Grades 1–3	Entry 3 / Level 1	Trinity (Western); SSC (Indian/NE)	~1 year per grade, weekly lessons
Intermediate	Grades 4–5	Trinity Grades 4–5	Level 2	Trinity; SSC	~1 year per grade
Advanced	Grades 6–8	Trinity Grades 6–8 (UCAS points)	Level 3	Trinity; SSC	~1–1.5 years per grade
Diploma	SSC Diploma in Music (Performance / Teaching)	ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory); Trinity CME	Level 4	Trinity for ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory); SSC Diploma	1 year full-time or 2 part-time

Stage	SSC award	External benchmark	UK RQF level	Awarded by	Indicative study
Higher Diploma	SSC Higher Diploma in Music	LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory)	Level 6	Trinity for LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory); SSC Higher Diploma	2 years full-time after Diploma
Graduate	BMus / BPA (Music), 4-year honours	Embeds ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory) in Year 2 and LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory) in Year 4	Level 6	University partner (to be agreed)	4 years, NEP 2020 multiple exits
Postgraduate	MMus / MPA; PG Diploma in Ethnomusicology & Codification	FTCL	Level 7	University partner; SSC for PG Diploma	1–2 years

The Graduate programme is designed around India's NEP 2020 four-year undergraduate model with multiple exit points, so the SSC Diploma and Higher Diploma double as recognised exit and re-entry points into the degree. All RQF levels are UK equivalences; Indian recognition of the degree comes from the university partner.

Grades 1–8: practical curriculum

Every SSC grade follows Trinity's three components, with one SSC rule added: of the three pieces prepared each year, at least one is from Assam or the Northeast — either from SSC's graded anthologies or the learner's own arrangement, presented under Trinity's own-composition option.

The yearly cycle at every grade

1. **Pieces (66%)** — three contrasting pieces: one from the Western canon, one free choice, one Northeast piece.
2. **Technical work (14%)** — scales, arpeggios, exercises or studies; from Grade 6, orchestral extracts for strings and band parts for contemporary tracks.
3. **Supporting tests (20%)** — two of sight reading, aural, improvisation, musical knowledge. SSC trains all four; improvisation includes raga- and folk-mode exercises.
4. **Ensemble and stage practice** — not examined by Trinity, but required by SSC: choir, string orchestra, chamber groups or band every term, with at least one public performance a year.
5. **Ethnomusicology and listening** — the strand described in its own section below.

What learners achieve at each stage, by instrument family

Instrument family	Foundation (Initial–Grade 3)	Intermediate (Grades 4–5)	Advanced (Grades 6–8)
Voice (classical, contemporary)	Healthy posture and breath; singing in tune in Assamese, Hindi and English; call-and-response and Bihu-style songs	Range and resonance; art song and musical theatre; Borgeet and Jyoti Sangeet melodies sung from staff notation	Recital repertoire in several languages; ornament control (gamak, meend) notated and sung; choral leadership

Instrument family	Foundation (Initial–Grade 3)	Intermediate (Grades 4–5)	Advanced (Grades 6–8)
Piano and keyboards	Hand position, reading in both clefs, simple duets; NE melodies harmonised with I–IV–V	Baroque to contemporary repertoire; pedalling; accompanying a singer in a NE song	Full sonata movements; arranging NE songs for piano; collaborative piano for strings and voice
Bowed strings (violin, viola, cello, double bass)	Bow hold and tone; first position; folk tunes by ear and from notation	Shifting, vibrato, double stops; string-orchestra playing; Bihu rhythms in bowing patterns	Concerto movements; orchestral extracts; playing Indian ornaments on Western strings
Guitar (classical, acoustic, electric)	Chords, strumming, fingerpicking; accompanying Assamese songs	Barre chords, scales across the neck; Rock & Pop or classical stream chosen	Advanced repertoire; session skills; arranging NE popular songs
Drums and percussion	Pulse, basic kit grooves; dhol and Bihu patterns transcribed for kit	Odd metres; tala cycles (dadra, keherwa, teentaal) mapped to Western metre	Advanced kit and tuned percussion; cross-cultural rhythm composition
Woodwind and brass (on demand)	Breath, tone, first scales	Band and orchestral parts; NE melodies transcribed	Recital and orchestral repertoire

Learners choose Trinity's Classical & Jazz or Rock & Pop stream per instrument from Grade 4, because Trinity does not allow the two to be mixed in one exam.

Grades 1–8: music theory curriculum

Theory runs alongside every practical grade and is compulsory at SSC, even though Trinity does not require it, because codifying Indian music depends on fluent theory in both systems. Learners may sit Trinity Theory of Music grades; Indian theory is assessed internally by SSC. Western topics below follow the conventional graded theory progression; SSC will confirm the detail against the current Trinity theory syllabus before launch.

Grade	Western theory	Indian theory (parallel)	Codification skill
1	Note values, treble and bass clef, simple time, major keys C, G, F	Sa–Re–Ga sargam; shuddha swaras; the idea of a tala cycle	Write a four-bar NE melody in both sargam and staff
2	Rests, ties, dotted notes, minor keys, intervals by number	Komal and tivra swaras; thaats introduced; teentaal and dadra	Transcribe a sung Bihu phrase
3	Compound time, more keys, triads, simple cadences	Aroha and avaroha; ten thaats; theka of keherwa	Notate a short folk song with its rhythm cycle shown
4	Chromatic scale, all keys, chords I–IV–V, ornaments	Raga as more than a scale: vadi, samvadi, pakad	Show where staff notation loses raga information
5	Full interval names, harmonisation, phrase structure, musical terms	Ragas of Borgeet and Jyoti Sangeet; Bihu taal forms	Harmonise a NE melody without breaking its mode
6	Four-part harmony, modulation, binary and ternary form	Dhrupad and khayal forms; the Carnatic system in outline	Arrange a folk song for a mixed ensemble
7	Chromatic harmony, counterpoint, sonata form, analysis	Rhythmic design: tihai, layakari; NE asymmetric metres	Analyse a recorded NE performance and score it

Grade	Western theory	Indian theory (parallel)	Codification skill
8	Advanced harmony and counterpoint, orchestration basics, composition	Comparative modal theory: raga, Western modes, pentatonic systems of NE tribal music	Produce an edited, performable score of a traditional piece

Beyond Grade 8, learners can take Trinity's AMusTCL and LMusTCL theory diplomas within the Diploma and Higher Diploma.

Instruments on demand

SSC opens a new instrument class once there is a viable cohort and a qualified teacher; the grade framework stays the same whatever the instrument. Two groups are offered on demand:

- **Further Western instruments** examined by Trinity — flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, harp, drum kit and others in Trinity's brass, woodwind and percussion syllabuses. These follow the Trinity grade requirements directly.
- **Indian and Northeast instruments** not examined by Trinity — for example tabla, sitar, bansuri, harmonium, and Assamese instruments such as dhol, pepa, gogona, toka, xutuli, khol and taal, and other instruments of the Seven Sisters states. SSC certifies these itself, using the same 66 / 14 / 20 structure so the certificates are comparable.

How an SSC grade works for an Indian or NE instrument:

Component	Weight	Content
Repertoire	66%	Three items: a traditional composition, a contemporary or film piece, and a cross-cultural item played with a Western instrument or ensemble
Technique	14%	Instrument-specific technique (e.g. bols for tabla, alankars for bansuri), set out per grade with tradition-bearers
Supporting tests	20%	Two of: playing by ear, improvisation in a set raga or folk mode, reading the SSC dual notation, and knowledge of the instrument's history and makers

Each Indian/NE instrument syllabus is written with a recognised master of that tradition and reviewed by SSC's academic board before it is offered. Certificates state clearly that they are SSC awards, not Trinity qualifications.

Diploma, Higher Diploma, Graduate and Postgraduate programmes

Above Grade 8, the curriculum shifts from exam preparation to professional formation: each programme ends in a public recital and a written or research component on Northeast music.

SSC Diploma in Music (Level 4 benchmark)

- **Pathways:** Performance (prepares for Trinity ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory)) or Teaching (prepares for Trinity Level 4 Certificate for Music Educators and ATCL Instrumental/Vocal Teaching).

- **Core modules:** principal study (one-to-one); recital preparation for a 32–38 minute programme; ensemble; AMusTCL-level theory and history; Ethnomusicology I — Music of Assam and the Northeast; introduction to fieldwork and transcription.
- **Capstone:** ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory) — a recital including at least one approved NE work or transcription, with a programme-planning statement, plus the AMusTCL theory paper.

SSC Higher Diploma in Music (Level 6 benchmark)

- **Core modules:** principal study; 37–43 minute recital at LTCL (Practical) standard; chamber music and orchestral or band practice; LMusTCL (Theory)-level analysis; Ethnomusicology II — Indian art music and its encounter with the West; arranging and editing for performance; pedagogy practicum teaching SSC Foundation learners.
- **Capstone:** LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory) — a recital and the LMusTCL theory paper, plus an edited score and recording of one traditional NE piece for the SSC archive.

Graduate: BMus / BPA (Music), four-year honours

Offered with a UGC-recognised university partner, on the NEP 2020 four-year model.

Year	Focus	Exit award if leaving
1	Principal study, theory in both systems, ensemble, Music of the Northeast	UG Certificate
2	Recital repertoire to ATCL (Practical) / AMusTCL (Theory) standard, history of Western and Indian music, fieldwork methods	UG Diploma (aligned to SSC Diploma)
3	Specialism: performance, composition, music education or ethnomusicology; community music placement	Degree (3-year)
4	Final recital to LTCL (Practical) / LMusTCL (Theory) standard; honours dissertation or research project on NE repertoire	Honours / Honours with Research

Postgraduate

- **MMus / MPA (with the university partner):** FTCL-standard recital (42–48 minutes, with detailed programme notes as Trinity requires at FTCL); advanced performance practice; a major codification project.
- **PG Diploma in Ethnomusicology and Codification (SSC):** one year, for working musicians, teachers and archivists — field recording, transcription, notation standards, editing, cultural-rights ethics and digital archiving.
- **Research:** doctoral supervision is a later stage, once the university partnership is established.

Ethnomusicology strand: contextualising and codifying Indian music

The ethnomusicology strand runs through every stage, so that by Grade 8 every SSC learner can place a piece of Indian or Northeast music in its context, explain how it differs from Western practice, and notate it faithfully. It covers three repertoires — classical, folk and popular — and studies each both on its own terms and in its exchange with the West.

Stage	Theme	What learners study	What learners produce
Foundation (Initial–G3)	Listening to home	Bihu songs and rhythms; lullabies and work songs; the sound of dhol, pepa, gogona and toka; songs from each of the Seven Sisters states	A sung and notated song from their own family or community
Intermediate (G4–5)	Raga, tala and mode	Borgeet of Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva; Sattriya music; Kamrupi and Goalpariya lokgeet; Hindustani and Carnatic basics; why staff notation cannot hold everything a raga does	A two-notation transcription with a short note on what was lost
Advanced (G6–8)	Encounters	Jyoti Sangeet and Bishnu Prasad Rabha's songs as early synthesis; Bhupen Hazarika's songs and his exchange with Paul Robeson; our beloved Zubeen Garg's crossover popular music; Manipuri Sankirtana; Khasi, Mizo and Naga choral and folk traditions	An arrangement of a NE piece for their own instrument or ensemble, with programme notes
Diploma	Ethnomusicology I: Music of the Northeast	Fieldwork method, interviews, recording, consent; music, identity and language across the region	A field recording and transcription deposited in the SSC archive
Higher Diploma	Ethnomusicology II: India and the West	The violin's adoption into Carnatic music; the harmonium; Western hymnody in Khasi and Mizo choral singing; Ravi Shankar, Yehudi Menuhin and the 1960s exchange; Indian film music and Indipop; A. R. Rahman	A lecture-recital on one cross-cultural exchange
Graduate	Theory and method	Major ethnomusicological thinkers; organology; music and nation-building in Assam; the global Assamese diaspora as a music community	Honours dissertation on a NE tradition
Postgraduate	Codification	Notation standards, critical editing, digital archiving, cultural rights	A critical edition or a contribution to the SSC Notation Guide

What "formally codify" means in practice. Codification is not replacing oral tradition with staff notation. It means creating agreed, authoritative written and recorded versions of pieces, with the performance practice that notation cannot capture recorded alongside, so the music can be taught consistently, examined fairly, published, and performed by musicians who did not grow up inside the tradition.

Codification outputs

The curriculum produces four lasting public assets, each built up by learners and faculty as part of their study rather than as a separate project.

1. **Seven Sisters Graded Anthologies** — graded books of Assamese and Northeast pieces arranged for voice, piano, strings and guitar at Initial to Grade 8 standard, usable in Trinity exams under the own-composition and own-choice options, and offered to Trinity for consideration in future repertoire releases.
2. **SSC Notation Guide** — a public dual-notation standard (staff plus sargam) with agreed symbols for gamak, meend, NE vocal ornaments and tala cycles, so transcriptions made by different people read the same way.
3. **Seven Sisters Music Archive** — field recordings, transcriptions, edited scores and contextual notes, catalogued and openly searchable, with access levels set with each community.

4. **Teacher resource packs** — lesson plans for schools in Assam using the anthologies, aligned to NEP 2020's emphasis on arts integration.

Ethics and rights. Every item is collected with documented consent from performers and communities, credits tradition-bearers by name, and records any limits on use. Where pieces are published or recorded commercially, a share of proceeds returns to the source community. Songs by known composers (for example Bhupen Hazarika or Zubeen Garg) are arranged only with permission from the rights holders.

Faculty, assessment and delivery

SSC delivers through a hub-and-spoke model: a flagship centre in Guwahati, district hubs, and partner schools, with visiting international faculty concentrated in intensive residencies like the 2026 workshop.

Element	Approach
Faculty	Resident Assam-based teachers for weekly lessons; masters of Indian and NE traditions for those instruments and the ethnomusicology strand; UK conservatoire faculty for residencies, masterclasses and online mentoring — building on the 2026 faculty of Andrew Bernardi (violin/viola), Matthew McCombie (piano), Jonathan Few (cello) and Anando Mukerjee (voice)
Teacher development	Local teachers take Trinity's Level 4 Certificate for Music Educators and ATCL/LTCL teaching diplomas, so capacity stays in Assam
Delivery	Weekly lessons and theory classes at hubs; two residencies a year; online lessons and digital Trinity exams for remote districts
Internal assessment	Termly progress reviews using the 66 / 14 / 20 weighting; annual SSC certificate for Indian/NE instruments
External assessment	Trinity face-to-face or digital exams for grades and diplomas; university assessment for degrees
Quality assurance	SSC Academic Board with external members from UK and Indian institutions; annual review of syllabuses, results and learner feedback
Access	Bursaries for learners from low-income families and remote districts; instrument lending library

Sources

- Trinity College London — Music Performance Exam Syllabuses
- Trinity — About our Graded exams
- Trinity — Music Performance Diploma Requirements
- Trinity blog — Professional music qualifications beyond grades