



**Submission being made on behalf of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)**

IDEA welcomes the review of senior cycle education. The review offers an opportunity for us all to generate a shared vision for senior cycle and to shape a curriculum and educational experience that meets the needs of all learners for years to come.

IDEA have actively engaged with stakeholders such as the Department of Education and Skills, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Teaching Council in previous years in relation to formal education.

Senior cycle review comes at a time where we are facing various global challenges, such as climate and biodiversity breakdown. Though these challenges are great, they highlight that education reform is essential to Irelands' future as a safe, strong, prosperous, sustainable, socially cohesive and just society.

**About IDEA:**

**The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)** is the national network for Development Education in Ireland and a leading voice for the sector. IDEA represents over 70 members involved in the practice, promotion and advancement of Development Education in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Together they work to strengthen Development Education in Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role it has to play in achieving an equal, just and sustainable future. IDEA's 2019-2023 Strategy promotes the essential role of Development Education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Vision:**

IDEA's vision is a world where all people are active global citizens.

## **About Development Education**

Development Education is a direct and active educational response to the issues of inequality and injustice that characterise the world we live in. It is an approach to education that encompasses knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and action.

Development Education is driven by its **core values and attitudes – justice, solidarity and empathy** – and has at its heart a transformative agenda to challenge the structural causes of poverty and inequality and instilling a clear sense of global citizenship in learners. It also, therefore, entails a critical action component to put learning into practice in our everyday lives. Development Education is underpinned by **key skills of critical thinking and analysis, of being able to question and challenge the messages and information we receive every day**. It is also characterised by core methodologies, namely participative and learner-centered approaches to teaching, which value the acquisition of skills and knowledge above getting the 'right' answer.

Significant investment from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (through Irish Aid) supports the integration of Development Education in the formal education sector. The collaboration between IDEA, Irish Aid and the Department of Education and Skills in this area has continued to strengthen as evidenced by the co-launch by the two departments of the Global Education Network of Europe's report on Global Education in Ireland. In addition, various partnerships have been established in relation to the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014-2020, of which IDEA is on the advisory committee, the Irish Aid Development Strategy 2017-2023, and the Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 -2020).

In the context of this submission, Development Education is used as an umbrella term which includes Global Citizenship Education, Education for Sustainable Development, and related fields, and encompasses the work of various civil society organisations and other actors in education in advancing active global citizenship among the Irish public. Consequently, in this submission we use the terms Development Education, Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development interchangeably.

## **Senior Cycle and coherence with policy and research**

In order for the review of senior cycle to be as comprehensive and coherent as possible, we advocate that it should be explicitly linked to commitments on international agreements, existing government policy and initiatives that the Irish Government has committed to as well as any relevant research carried out, such as:

- Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015);
- Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 -2020, and the successor plan which will be developed in 2020The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (Department of Education and Skills, 2014-2020 and any other relevant follow on);
- Irish Aid Development Education Strategy, 2017-2023;
- National Youth Strategy, 2015-2020 and any successor strategy;
- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020 and any other relevant follow on;
- Education for Sustainable Development: A study of opportunities and linkages in the primary and post-primary curriculum, NCCA 2018.

## **Purpose of Education and Senior Cycle Education**

IDEA advocate for a senior cycle experience that nurtures respect for all, builds a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helps learners become responsible and active global citizens, able and willing to contribute to the wellbeing of people and planet.

We feel an experience should be created to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, respectful inclusive and secure world.

The work of IDEA and its members is to advance global citizenship, sustainable development and development education in Ireland; to help young people develop the core competencies which facilitate them to actively engage with the world, and help to make it a more just and sustainable place. It is a form of civic learning that involves students' active participation to address global issues of a social, political, economic, or environmental nature (UNESCO).

The UN's Global Education First Initiative notes, "It is not enough for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies." According to the UN, Global Citizenship Education provides the

understanding, skills and values students need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the 21st century, including climate change, conflict, poverty, hunger, and issues of equity and sustainability. These same educational outcomes prepare students to be successful in the workplace of the 21st century as well (UNESCO).

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 aims to ensure that by 2030 “all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”. Ireland has committed, along with all UN member states, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, and therefore has made an international commitment to map progress about the extent to which (i) global citizenship education, (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in: (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and, (d) student assessment.

In light of IDEA’s support for Global Citizenship Education, target 4.7 and the SDG’s generally, IDEA’s FEWG response to the senior cycle review documentation is as follows:

IDEA agrees in particular that senior cycle education should be inclusive and aim to support students to fulfilling their full potential.

IDEA strongly agree that the educational experience at senior cycle should support young people to exercise their citizenship throughout their school life and beyond. It should equip students for diverse and sustainable futures so that they can embrace full, active citizenship and participation in society as well as the economy as they learn and as they make the transition to life beyond school.

### **Aims and vision for Senior Cycle**

- Should build on previous educational cycles/phases, Junior Cycle in particular, building on key skills and statements of learning as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle, and principals for JC such as inclusive education, choice and flexibility and engagement and development should be reflected in a new framework for Senior Cycle
- Allow all learners to reach their full potential and prepare them to succeed in life now and in the future by offering an inclusive experience with various pathways for learners

- Build a transformative agenda to challenge the structural causes of poverty and inequality and instilling a clear sense of global citizenship in learners.
- Develop a critical action component to put learning into practice in our everyday lives.
- Develop balanced, rounded members of society who are able to benefit from lifelong learning and self-development, and who take a democratic, responsible and active role at a local, national, global level.
- Prepare learners for a globally connected and interdependent world, and for every learner to have the knowledge, skills and competencies, values and attitudes to actively engage in society and sustainable economic activity.
- Senior Cycle will be a vehicle for social justice, collective and planetary wellbeing.
- Aim to respond to students' individual talents and so enable them to fulfil their potential, at the same time improving qualification levels and reducing drop-out rates at second level and beyond.
- Adequately prepare learners for their post-senior cycle destinations, including apprenticeship training, college, community living, university, or the workplace.
- Support learners for sustained employment and to meet the needs of a growing and rapidly changing world of work.
- Develop participative and learner-centered approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, which value the acquisition of skills and knowledge above getting the 'right' answer.

### **A vision for senior cycle learners: Knowledge, skills and qualities:**

Higher order thinking and critical thinking has been identified as important to any future senior cycle as part of the consultation process. Higher-order and critical questioning should be explored at senior cycle and learners should be able to develop those skills. Critical thinking is a fundamental pillar of Development Education. Development Education provides an important frame of reference for this aspect of the Senior Cycle as well as providing strong examples of adaptable good practice in this area.

IDEA welcomes qualities such as resilience, empathy, responsibility, creativity and teamwork being identified as important at senior cycle. Resilience and responsibility are currently key indicators in the Wellbeing Guidelines at junior cycle and progression from this should be made into senior cycle.

The NCCA's audit, carried out in 2018, from a sustainable development perspective, on the study of opportunities and linkages for ESD in the primary and post primary curriculum and the findings associated with this audit should be considered as part of this review.

The approach taken in this study was to use the mapping of curriculum frameworks against UNESCO's key competencies for sustainability, and the identification of opportunities for teaching and learning about the Sustainable Development Goals at curriculum syllabus/specification level as a way of:

(1) identifying existing good practice

(2) making recommendations to ensure future curriculum review and development takes appropriate cognisance of ESD.

Please see some of the recommendations below:

The NCCA should:

- Strengthen the ESD related components in existing curriculum framework documents (e.g. senior cycle key skills) and include these in new frameworks as they are developed.
- Ensure alignment between framework documents and specifications at different levels and between levels, this is particularly relevant in the context of planned developments at primary and senior cycle levels.
- Carry out more frequent reviews, especially when a new specification has gone through initial cycles, integrating and revising ESD skills and content in specifications as appropriate, and ensuring that all students, regardless of the level at which they engage with the course, have similarly comprehensive opportunities to encounter these skills and content.
- Carry out further research into the process of implementing curriculum specifications with an ESD focus, ensuring the inclusion of the voices of teachers, students and other stakeholders in the process.

Senior cycle should allow learners the space to continue to develop values and attitudes. Values and attitudes such as empathy, solidarity, justice and a commitment to human rights, together with intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities as mentioned during this review, should adequately enable learners to actively participate in society and make informed decisions now and in the future.

Sustainability and global citizenship should feature more heavily here. Education for Sustainable Development and the necessarily knowledge, skills, values

and attitudes to allow and empowers learners to live more sustainably should underpin any experience at senior cycle. This will allow learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.

Global citizenship must be included in the life skills listed in the third bullet point. Global citizenship will be an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill. It cannot be assumed or taken for granted, but requires a specific focus within the Senior Cycle. To equip student for an increasingly interconnected, interdependent and globalised world, the Senior Cycle needs to prioritise global citizenship.

**IDEA recommends the following key priorities for the NCCA in relation to the process of the review:**

- Place Development Education, including global citizenship and sustainable development, at the heart of the Senior Cycle.
- Clearly link development education and wellbeing as one way of ensuring curriculum alignment between junior and senior cycles
- Bring further coherence across the various review initiatives, ensuring that there is coherence with primary and junior cycle.
- Implement adequate CPD for teachers and school leaders, where appropriate liaising with civil society organizations and individuals with relevant expertise
- Continue the process of co-constructing a senior cycle experience with key stakeholders, from learners, teachers, support staff, school leaders, and the various education support agencies and organisations that can enhance the senior cycle experience.
- Communicate clearly about the senior cycle review journey to all key stakeholders, including ensuring that we celebrate the successes that we have on the way

**Curriculum Components**

Existing subjects should be maintained, but the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes will need to be reviewed and changed as appropriate and relevant.

Priority should be given to interdisciplinary topics when renewing the curriculum areas, namely global citizenship, sustainable development, and wellbeing. These three transversal themes mentioned above should be reflected in all curriculum areas/modules where applicable. This will build on key statements of learning at junior Cycle and various elements that have been integrated to curriculum areas at junior

cycle, such as sustainability as included in Science and Geography at junior cycle. This will allow for progression for learners from junior cycle to senior cycle.

Support should be given to all schools, particularly to smaller schools to offer a range of curriculum areas, modules and learning experiences for learners.

IDEA agrees that learners should have a breadth of curriculum experiences to choose from. We feel this breadth should be offered through all of senior cycle and it should not be Transition Year alone that students are facilitated to access a more diverse range of learning experiences. Engagement with civil society must be a crucial aspect of this. Civil Society engagement enables learners to learn through action, to engage with local and other communities, and to build real life experiences and learning into the heart of every community in Ireland. The revised senior cycle should enable and encourage the 'permeable classroom' that reflects and engages with the whole of society.

Post-primary education increasingly incorporates themes of equality, justice and sustainability and this should be considered and reflected as part of senior cycle review. This is particularly evident through the work of the NCCA in the new Junior Cycle Framework Statements of Learning and emerging subject specifications such as Business Studies and Visual Art. It is also apparent in changes to existing Leaving Certificate subjects particularly in Economics and Agricultural Science; and in new specifications like Politics and Society. As Development Education becomes an integral part of curricula, teachers will need support for their subjects, as well as for cross-disciplinary initiatives.

Recommendation 7 (p.15) of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014- 2020 requires:

#### Recommendation 7

The DES and NCCA should ensure that ESD principles are integrated into all relevant primary and post primary curriculum areas as the curriculum is reviewed, where this is appropriate. This includes the primary school curriculum, the new specifications for the Junior Cycle Student Award [Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement], and the senior cycle curriculum.

## **Equality and access to education at Senior Cycle -creating various pathways for success**

The availability of a range of pathways, tailored to learner needs and their aspirations for the future, should be central to senior cycle.

IDEA advocate for a senior cycle experience where learners continue to determine their upper secondary pathway(s) in collaboration with guardians and adequate advice (early intervention) from schools/career/pathway guidance to ensure informed decisions can be made outlining all possible pathways and the prospects that may be available to all learners and offered by all schools. This guidance needs to be timely. Early intervention is essential to ensure informed decisions can be made to facilitate learners with the best choices for them. Development Education is operational in formal, non-formal and informal education. It encompasses activity in early childhood, primary and second level, in the youth sector, community development, adult education and across lifelong learning. Therefore, the Development Education sector must be a crucial actor in the revised senior cycle, providing, as it does, existing pathways between formal, non-formal and informal education, and with the potential to utilize and expand upon these existing pathways in order to deliver the goals of the revised senior cycle and serve as a means of easing the challenges of transition for learners moving between sectors.

Support for pathway decision-making and planning is critical for schools and this support will need to be offered by the NCCA and any associated education bodies.

Curricular areas that comprise academic qualifications (Leaving Certificate)-subjects should remain as options for learners with the possibility of choosing from a menu of vocational options, such as those currently on offer in LCA and LCVP.

In relation to Transition Year, as a key part of the current senior cycle, IDEA recommends that this remains part of senior cycle. Giving learners the opportunity of an optional year between the lower and upper secondary phases had been welcomed to date. This year has helped to prepare learners for entry to upper secondary education and allowed them to remain engaged and motivated to succeed. However, IDEA feel there is a lack of progression in the experience of learners in TY into 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year. IDEA recommend that the type of experience offered during TY, along with the menu of options available in terms of modules and learning experiences should be available in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year.

Further options in the areas of technical, vocational, creative and professional learning should be offered for learners throughout senior cycle. In particular, development

education, global citizenship and sustainable development need to be included within these.

### **Assessment and Reporting**

IDEA agrees that further development is necessary and that existing assessment arrangements experienced in LCA, LCVP, T Y and LCE need to be reviewed. We agree that the possibility of utilising portfolios, interviews, task completion and accumulation of credits in aspects of senior cycle assessment should be considered. In particular, the 'action' elements of learning should be enabled and encouraged through revised assessment arrangements. For example, the value of learners engaging with civil society should be reflected in the assessment criteria and processes. Perhaps more formative methods of assessment should be considered along with summative assessment. We agree that a combination of additional assessment components e.g. oral and practical assessment methods should be included in curricular areas, modules and learning experiences where relevant.

We recommend that assessment and reporting needs to be more inclusive and diverse. Incorporating broader reporting arrangements to ensure that the range of learning experiences, talents and abilities displayed by students at senior cycle are reflected and reported on. This will also build on the reporting mechanisms currently in TY, LCA and junior cycle and ensures consistency throughout the secondary learner experience. However, care would need to be taken in revision of assessment arrangements to ensure that school assessment schedules are not put under undue pressure and weighing of marks should adequately reflect the efforts required on behalf of both students and teachers.

### **Priorities and supports**

1. Development of knowledge, skills and qualities identified in the review
2. Removal of ring-fencing
3. Development of flexible pathway through senior cycle
  
4. Exploration of broader reporting
5. Exploration of provision of options in areas of technical, vocational, professional and creative learning
6. Exploration of curriculum components
7. Inclusion of broader curriculum components such as life skills and lifelong learning
8. Other: Placing development education, global citizenship and sustainable

development at the heart of the revised senior cycle, thus facilitating meaningful and integrated participation and engagement by teachers and students

**How important are the following supports to facilitate a future senior cycle?**

- Appropriate CPD: Very important
- Time for collaboration and development: Very important
- Long-term planning for change (systemic, leadership, local): Very important
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of change: Very important
- Development of schools as Professional Learning Communities: Very important
- Develop additional career guidance supports for students: Very important
- Create supports for schools and Principals to manage change: Very important