

## Consultation on NCCA Cycle Review

### Professional Development Service for Teachers

#### Submission

Following on from the recent bilateral meeting between NCCA and PDST on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2019, please find outlined below a summary of points for further considerations on behalf of the PDST.

#### **Introduction**

- With reference to transitions, it would be useful to highlight the building upon prior learning which acts as the springboard for Senior Cycle subjects. In this light, the transition from Junior Cycle to Senior cycle could be referenced overtly. It may also be useful to have a graphic on the continuum of learning to indicate the powerful opportunities for linkage across all the stages of student learning.
- PDST have observed in our work with schools that falling numbers in LCA and LCVP illustrate the challenge in moving parents' thinking from the established Leaving Certificate.
- The Leaving Cert exam itself promotes tactical decisions about subject choice in an effort to maximise CAO points. Therefore, certain subjects are perceived to have broader curricula or as being more difficult in which to attain high points.
- While the CAO application process is clear and well-publicised; this is not the case for Vocational Educational pathways, apprenticeships etc pointing towards the need for greater clarity and dissemination of information to build confidence in alternative pathways.
- The limits on the Vocational Subject Groups within the LCVP Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) 2019/20 signals a mismatch between intention in terms of the range of Senior Cycle Subjects and the actual choices available. Greater flexibility is needed around VSG subject choice to

qualify for LCVP. Students are faced with choosing subjects which "fit" the VSG subject groupings rather than what interests them or forfeiting LCVP altogether. The introduction of new SC subjects is not reflected on this list.

- There is a need for equitable access to work experience as many students lack the required social capital to access same.
- There is a need to stagger introduction and implementation in a more manageable fashion to ensure a smooth alignment of delivery outcomes across all the stakeholders to each subject area. The learning from Junior Cycle Reform will be an important consideration here. It is also important to note that SC reform is already well underway following PDST's CPD programme for Computer Science, LCPE, SCPE, Ag Science, Economics and there is further learning available from this ongoing work. With the PDST now looking at the introduction of Art and Classics, the review will now have to look at where it currently sits on this landscape.
- The design, research and facilitation of CPD is a crucial towards realising reform especially with reference to meeting the formalised timeframes set by stakeholders in conjunction with the teaching and learning necessary for students to engage with content and make informed decisions regarding, for example, project choices. There are signposts which signal the importance of planning carefully for enactment of change and maintaining open lines of communication.
- The provision for Career Guidance can be inconsistent across schools which implies the need for the provision of enhanced support in this area and a possible review of collaborative culture across SC subjects in relation to guidance provision in schools.
- The use of Digital Portfolios as a means of recording achievement is a welcome development. The PDST have been leading national CPD of Formative Assessment using e portfolio with all Post Primary schools since 2016 as part of the Digital Strategy for Schools and this will be an integral part of CPD support for all SC subjects.

## ***Purpose***

- With regard to the 8 principles, we would suggest that more detail is needed towards making these more explicit.
- There may be scope for the development of a school co-ordinator's role in relation to each principle e.g. a Creativity and innovation co-ordinator so that the values of Senior Cycle are upheld. Support for teachers as they await SC reform in their subject area may need to be considered given that they will have students in their classrooms who have worked with LOs across Junior Cycle. PDST's provision for Middle Leaders in the system currently supports teachers with co-ordinating responsibilities in subject depts, JCSP, TY, LCV and LCA
- The lack of an Irish policy or framework on Lifelong Learning relative to other UNESCO countries may limit the vision in this document especially at points when it references SC as helping every student towards fulfilling their potential.
- The potential role of student voice to achieve adequate choice provision may need additional consideration as it is important regarding agency and intrinsic motivation but may be without precedent in terms of curriculum on this level.
- The word 'relationships' should form a more dominant part of the conversation because if the broader vision is to be realised, relationships are central.
- Perhaps consider a language that is not always or just future-focused i.e. we need students who are equipped now for a society that is examining what it understands by diversity, that is examining what it understands by sustainability etc.

## ***A Vision for Senior Cycle Learners***

- Consider the inclusion of dispositions. Knowledge and skills cannot be acquired unless dispositions are cultivated and nurtured.
- In the paragraph on knowledge, skills and qualities, it would be useful to revisit the positioning of digital technologies to follow directly after *creativity and innovation* giving focus to the importance of digital literacy and fluency.
- Consider separating intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to give them equal significance.
- The *real world and digital world* might read better as expressed the *physical and digital world*.
- It might be worth considering the sequence of skills and qualities in a publication. If our emphasis is on the holistic development of the individual then perhaps it should lead with those personal qualities of self-respect, self-acceptance etc.
- Welcome the explicit mention of development of entrepreneurial mind-set / skills .
- Parental awareness and understanding of assessment will be most important.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

- Illustrates the importance of the quality of teaching and learning in ITE (experience of literacy and numeracy).
- Approaches that extend teacher thinking in relation to recognising the cognitive structure and its function such as working memory may need further emphasis. It is an area we are finding teachers grapple with.
- Teacher judgement and professional autonomy is pivotal to deciding the range of pedagogical approaches
- The role of the parent/guardian may need increased emphasis as school culture changes to acknowledge skills to a greater degree. If teachers are to securely offer a greater range of teaching methodologies (a neglect in this area is mentioned in page 62 of the Interim Report) parents need

more knowledge of how senior cycle is changing. This links to teacher wellbeing which in itself may be enhanced by a greater understanding of project management in light of coursework and planning for effective assessment.

- Positive that there is a parity of esteem re teaching and learning approaches.
- With reference to Teacher Collaboration, there is much to be learned from the positive CPD and implementation experiences around Leaving Cert Computer Science. We have empirical evidence on same .
- More focus on the use of Formative Assessment throughout SC. Positive that the 'rebalancing' and 'reweighting' of assessment approaches is being discussed as all too often, what gets cruet measured, gets valued more.
- It will be important to achieve a better sense of students' voice particularly in terms of their experience of teaching, learning and assessment.

### ***Pathways and Programmes***

- Challenges for smaller Post-Primary schools to offer the breadth of choice? Staff allocation models will need to be reviewed and be more flexible. We are encountering this as a recurring issue.
- Choice can also be limited at school level with subject choice/combination lines
- The wider range of options that could be achieved by adapting the pathways currently available within senior cycle and adding further options may be difficult for smaller PP schools under the current teacher allocation model.
- With reference to the bullet point:  
*explore the possibility of combining existing programmes into a single senior cycle curriculum for all students with multiple pathways and combinations available for students to choose and follow, accompanied by appropriate assessment and reporting arrangements. Does this take*

cognisance of the new LCA specifications (module descriptors)? Where do current developments such as 4 new LCA specifications sit with a single senior cycle curriculum? Access to quality work experience for LCA students to be considered here also.

- Career Guidance- Ability to provide a breadth of support that better reflects vocational pathways points towards the increased need for a strong relationship between the Career Guidance teacher and subject teachers.
- Can a student avail of modules being run in other schools local to them?
- The P-Tech Programme is mentioned in the Interim report in relation to STEM and perhaps there needs to be an emphasis on further options here.
- Additional contexts and settings might need to be included; could SC learning be extended to prisons and those students coming from off-site international setting for inclusion purposes. Third-level Adult Education academic staff have an advisory role to play here.
- Building the links between and across schools needs careful consideration.
- Important that students choosing LCVP are able to access the new subjects at SC.
- What opportunities exist for learning (which is validated) outside of the normal school calendar? What role does industry etc. play in this?

### **Curriculum Components**

- The central position of wellbeing (SPHE in particular)- Wellbeing promotion is a government priority - *A Programme for a Partnership Government (2016)* and as set out in the *Wellbeing Policy Statement* where '*the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education*' and '*Ireland will be recognised as a leader in the area of Wellbeing Promotion*'.

- Careful consideration of the accessibility of subjects is required and prior knowledge needs to be adequate enough to make flexibility effective (The transition from broad business base to Accounting as an example).
- Should Literacy or numeracy modules exist which are not examinable but support students' learning in other subjects (in a similar way to Wellbeing)?
- How does wellbeing fit into SC reform? Will a similar approach be taken as is currently taken at JC?
- Perhaps Irish has a place in Cultural Studies...

### **Assessment**

- The trust between teacher and student and the integrity and validity of assessment procedures could be at risk here depending on the arrangements put in place and in light of experiences at JC.
- Clarity is needed regarding the uses of Digital Portfolios: What part of same will be assessed with regard to content? Empirical evidence conducted by the ERC on PDST's work in this regard should be considered
- Discussion around 'rebalancing' and 'reweighting' of assessment approaches is welcomed (formative and summative approaches). But there is very little reference to formative assessment in this section. The weight of comments privileges summative assessment.
- The balance of course work across multiple subjects needs to be considered and consideration given to how course work valued by students.
- Timing of secondary assessment components is important as there is potential pressure on students and teachers.
- Can coursework which takes place outside of a school be validated by that school?

### **Priorities and Supports**

Bullet Point 1:

- Consideration will need to be given to a coherent and cohesive approach from all agencies e.g. publication of support materials, assessment information etc. Full and timely information.
- Capacity for change is a key word here but due cognisance to forward planning also needs to take place in light of having the available and qualified capacity in schools to undertake the new subjects e.g. LCCS.

Bullet Point 2:

- Consultation with CPD providers to look at Frameworks & Project Plans for CPD that are coherent to the timelines of other providers. Actively accessing inputs from services like the PDST who are immersed in this work on the ground in future fora would appear to make sense.

Bullet Point 3:

Role of Industry and TPNs could be emphasised. Role and resourcing of PLCs could be also emphasised.

**Next Steps**

Broad point here – can work already in train and happening in schools and classrooms with regard to SC reform be harnessed? Notwithstanding a SC framework being developed, the reality is that SC reform is already live in the system and a lot of knowledge and wisdom now exists at this point in time. To this end ...

- Online Survey- could this issue to the of 5-10% of the current 5th and 6th year cohorts engaging in new subjects / reviewed specs to capture real time student voice ?
- National Conferences : Related to above point in relation to “real time” experience, an opportunity for the PDST as the national support service currently designing and facilitating all CPD for both new and revised SC specs to present and share its findings and experiences on



implementation to date and the learning needs of teachers and schools. The PDST has already gathered extensive data on the impact of CPD to date and associated implementation successes / challenges.