Senior Cycle Review

Advisory Report

2022

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List of Acronyms

CAO   Central Applications Office
CPD   Continuing Professional Development
DE   Department of Education
DFHERIS   Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ESRI   Economic and Social Research Institute
IGC   Institute of Guidance Counsellors
L1LP   Level one learning programme is a programme for a specific group of students with general learning disabilities in the range of lower functioning moderate to severe and profound categories.
L2LP   Level two learning programme is a programme for a specific group of students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories.
LCA   Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year Leaving Certificate available to students who wish to follow a programme with a strong practical and vocational emphasis.
LCE   Leaving Certificate Established is the leaving certificate course followed by the majority of students in senior cycle.
LCVP   Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme is designed to give a strong vocational dimension to the Leaving Certificate (established) and is followed by some Leaving Certificate Established students if they fulfil certain criteria.
NCCA   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE   National Centre for Guidance Education
OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an intergovernmental organisation with 36 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
SEC   State Examinations Commission
SEN   Special Educational Needs
TY   Transition Year is an optional year that can be taken by students after junior cycle before starting senior cycle
VET   Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

Education often seeks to conserve what is most important, most valued and most needed for future generations. It seeks also to provide each generation with the capacity to cope with change and with what the future brings. Striking a balance between conservation and change in shaping our collective future to an agreed purpose and vision requires ongoing collaboration and discussion. In this context, this Advisory Report is less a set of specific and fixed proposals than a plan and approach towards the redevelopment of senior cycle. It expresses a clear purpose, vision and principles for a redeveloped senior cycle, and outlines priorities, a sequence of work and next steps for the process that lies ahead.

Conservation and change in senior cycle

Senior cycle has undergone some developments in recent years. These include: research into the student experience of senior cycle education; developments in subjects and programmes; the introduction of a wider range of second assessment components in Leaving Certificate subjects; changes to the Leaving Certificate grading system; and common, wider and more inclusive entry routes for students and adult learners who wish to transition into higher education courses. Existing subjects and modules have been revised and new subjects such as Politics and Society, Computer Science and Physical Education are being introduced on an ongoing basis.

While these developments have had some impact, senior cycle, structurally, has experienced more conservation than change. The last structural changes to senior cycle curricula and programmes took place more than 20 years ago and since then, much has shifted in learning, schools, education systems, the wider society and in the national and global environment. In this context, the senior cycle review (2016–2020) which this Advisory Report draws upon, offered valuable opportunities to reflect on enduring and evolving elements of senior cycle education.

Structural changes to senior cycle were last made in the mid-1990s. Many Leaving Certificate subject syllabi were revised and the curriculum was diversified to include the Leaving Certificate Applied (as a ring-fenced alternative programme) and the Leaving Certificate

Vocational Programme (as a Leaving Certificate programme with a vocational orientation). Transition Year, formally, became part of an optional three-year senior cycle.

In the years since then, other curriculum changes have taken place in earlier phases of education. A new curriculum framework for early childhood education, *Aistear*, was introduced in 2009. The Primary Curriculum, introduced in schools in 1999, is currently the subject of review and redevelopment. Since 2014, changes at junior cycle have taken place, with a Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) introducing a wider range of curriculum components and assessments to facilitate broader learning. The Framework places a renewed focus on learning in the area of wellbeing; improved provision for students with special educational needs (Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes); and a broader form of reporting and certification through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

Unplanned, emergency changes to education were thrust upon society in 2020 and again in 2021 as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of schools and other educational settings worldwide during this pandemic heightened awareness of the centrality of education in the lives of children and young people and of the professionalism of those who work in this area. It resulted in a renewed appreciation for the vital role that schools play in the collective wellbeing of our societies. The impact of, and in time perhaps influence of, the Covid-19 pandemic on many aspects of education is as yet unknown. However, current and future research into the impact of the pandemic will be consulted on a continuing basis to inform senior cycle redevelopment in the years ahead.

In an exceptional response to a challenging and unprecedented set of circumstances arising from Covid-19 restrictions, there were two significant, temporary changes to the senior cycle phase of education: the postponement of the 2020 state examinations on health and safety grounds; and the creation of calculated grades and accredited grades processes in 2020 and 2021, as a basis for recognizing students' achievements and facilitating the current selection process (the points system) for entry to higher education. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration in addressing this challenge and a range of other issues arising during the

pandemic should continue to be a fundamental feature of the process ahead as the review of senior cycle ends and the redevelopment of senior cycle begins.

Society, culture, the economy and technology

Beyond schools and the world of education, much has been changing in the wider contexts of society, culture, the economy and technology. Increasing diversity, recognition of multiculturalism, changing family structures, social inequities and social movements co-exist alongside technological changes and public health challenges which are having a deep impact on our personal, social and working lives, in a perhaps more invasive and profound way than ever before.

These broad societal changes impact upon and unfold within classrooms, throughout our schools and in other educational settings. Education and learning play vital roles within our society and many people look towards education as an important site for sense-making, stability and social cohesion. People may also look towards education as a source of innovative thinking, in the face of an uncertain and potentially quite different future for subsequent generations.

Wider phenomena also impact the lives of young people at this stage of education. Among these are the increasing possibilities and effects of globalisation and a growing awareness of the need to create more sustainable and just economies that meet the needs of the present, without compromising the needs of future generations and the natural world. A welcome focus on protecting and enhancing human health and wellbeing, and on countering disinformation, is increasingly evident in many democratic societies and communities worldwide and our education systems exist against a backdrop of geopolitical developments, alignments and influences, some of which impact, directly or indirectly, on education itself.

Review of Senior Cycle

The review of senior cycle took place within this overall context. As the various reports cited in Chapter 1 outline, the review looked at all aspects of the current senior cycle to:

- revisit the vision, aims and purposes of this stage of education with a changing context in mind
- begin to consider the impact, strengths and weaknesses of each of the existing senior cycle programmes
- explore the role that a range of curriculum components can and should play at senior cycle
- look at the flexible, inclusive and varied learning pathways (linked to developments in further education, traineeship and apprenticeships) that may be needed to ensure that every student can experience an enjoyable, meaningful and useful senior cycle education
- consider whether the approach to assessment needs further broadening, and examine what richer and wider forms of reporting and certification might offer
- consider what should and could be carried forward from developments at junior cycle
- consider how changes to arrangements for students' transition to the next stages of life, education and work could be modified and adjusted to better meet the needs of every student
- explore broader questions, such as the ideal balance to be achieved between school autonomy and prescription in the curriculum offered at senior cycle
- explore the potential for diversifying sites of learning at senior cycle.

The need to strike a balance between conservation and change as we shape the future was substantially reflected in the responses of participants and stakeholders in the review of senior cycle, particularly in discussions about purpose, vision and principles. Many discussions focused on what needed to be held on to, and what would provide the necessary continuity for students in their learning, as much as what needed to change. For example, there was relatively little support for mandating a two-year or three-year senior cycle, with schools and students valuing flexibility in this regard. There was recognition that Leaving Certificate examinations, set and administered by the State Examinations Commission, which are seen as enjoying widespread public trust and support, should continue to feature in assessment arrangements. There was an acceptance, if sometimes a reluctant one, that the role played by assessments at senior cycle in

providing a basis for entry into higher education through the CAO points system may need to continue in some form but that future review and changes to the CAO system should at a minimum take account of new developments and flexible learning pathways in a redeveloped senior cycle.

In these contexts, aspects of senior cycle education can provide a basis for new and potentially significant developments to this phase of education. For example, a revised CAO system might recognise a wider range of learning pathways; an adjusted number of appropriately weighted components in subjects might broaden assessment in significant ways. These developments could ease student and societal concerns that so much currently hinges on a few weeks of examinations at the end of senior cycle.

A meaningful, relevant, enjoyable and useful curriculum for every student was, above all else, what participants and stakeholders sought. They recognised that, currently, the distribution of wealth and life chances in society is closely connected to access to, participation in and the outcomes of all stages of education, including this final stage of post-primary education. The view was that the next generation of students, for whom learning will be a continuous feature of their adult and working lives, will best be served through the provision of more flexible learning pathways at senior cycle. Such pathways would enable students to discover what they want to do, as they build on their strengths in ways that will serve them well both during senior cycle and into the future. Flexible pathways would also give them the facility to develop their own compasses in learning and to ultimately be their own navigator, with support from the adults around them.

There is a shared ambition for all of our young people, and for those returning to education, to emerge from senior cycle with what they need for adult life; to have engaged with and experienced a wide range of pedagogies; and to have further enriched their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. Of course, to work towards and achieve this kind of vision of senior cycle education, there are many aspects of what we currently do and what we could do that require further review, re-evaluation and redevelopment. The actions and next steps related to these are set out in Chapters 2 and 4.

At the outset of the review of senior cycle, there was an awareness of the major challenges involved in setting out advice or a programme for the redevelopment of a stage of education as intrinsic to the experience of Irish education, culture and society as the senior cycle and the Leaving Certificate. Much emphasis was placed on finding ways to ensure the achievement of a shared vision for this stage of education, a common belief and buy-in to what may need to change and an agreed platform on priorities and on the scale and scope of developments to take place. Paying equal attention to how the review and subsequent work would take place as to what the particular outcomes might be was seen as important in arriving at a platform for redeveloping senior cycle that would be shared and trusted by stakeholders and could be relied upon to provide the basis for action that genuinely meets the needs of every learner at senior cycle for years to come.

In other words, the way we do things may be just as important as what is proposed to be done. The next stage of work in redeveloping senior cycle aims to build on and take a similar approach to the review of senior cycle, consisting of an extensive range of research, deliberations, consultations, reports and communications with stakeholders on all aspects of review and redevelopment.

Overview of chapters in this report

Chapter 1 features an extensive section on *Purpose, vision and principles*. This chapter is a central element in the proposed approach to the redevelopment of senior cycle. The shared vision for senior cycle articulated in this chapter provides the basis which will guide further work on specific developments. Agreement on the purpose, vision and principles outlined in this chapter is fundamental to advancing the redevelopment of senior cycle. Review findings are summarised to highlight the connection between the findings of the review and the purpose, vision and guiding principles which provide the bedrock for redeveloping senior cycle and form the basis for the first section in the incremental development of a Framework for Senior Cycle.

Chapter 2 is titled *Realising the vision for senior cycle* and sets out lines of further work and development that NCCA, in collaboration with stakeholders, will undertake in three key aspects of senior cycle:

- *pathways and flexibility* that should be available to schools, other educational settings and students to meet the needs of all learners
- *curriculum components* (subjects and modules) that can be combined to create varied and coherent pathways and provide flexibility
- *assessment, reporting and transitions* that are fit for purpose in aligning with the varied pathways, flexibility and curriculum components envisaged and that can support a smooth and effective transition from senior cycle to adult life, further and higher education, and the world of work.

Chapter 3 describes *Conducive conditions*. This chapter most clearly reflects the balance being sought between the what and the how in senior cycle redevelopment. It advises that attention to key, conducive conditions is central to the realisation of the shared vision and purpose for a redeveloped senior cycle set out in Chapter 1. These conducive conditions include: shared purpose, vision and principles; continuing use of research, data and information; a strong focus on stakeholder engagement, planning and collaboration across a wide range of schools and organisations; effective communication; the securing of resources; judicious timing and pacing of change; provision for enhanced professional support and learning; and the alignment of complementary policies.

Underpinning the focus on conducive conditions is the belief that an area as fundamental and challenging as the redevelopment of senior cycle can only come about through the concerted action and collective involvement of education system stakeholders, who must have continued involvement in generating ideas and building capacity for change. Meaningful collaborations with a range of partners will be essential. It will be necessary to build on existing partnerships and to develop new ones.

Chapter 4 sets out a plan for redeveloping senior cycle in three stages, which overlap and build upon each other. Redevelopment work will focus on enhancing senior cycle for future generations of students. Stage one of redevelopment will identify the most appropriate curriculum and assessment arrangements for a redeveloped senior cycle. Stage two will identify

and develop pathways through a redeveloped senior cycle. Stage three will build on the work of the previous stages, leading to the publication of a Framework for Senior Cycle. Stakeholders and schools will continue to be central to this process throughout.

An approach towards the redevelopment of senior cycle

As can be seen from the sequence and content of its chapters, this Advisory Report proposes an approach towards the redevelopment of senior cycle, with a clear purpose, vision and principles in mind and with priorities, a sequence of work and next steps outlined. It is a plan for redevelopment across a number of aspects of senior cycle rather than proposals in specific areas themselves. A framework describing a redeveloped senior cycle in its entirety will be incrementally developed and articulated. But, at this point in time, it is necessary to undertake further work, research, investigation, trialling and consultation on various aspects of the redevelopment.

We expect much from senior cycle and the Leaving Certificate, as a stage of education that

- serves every student on an equitable basis
- helps every student in senior cycle to become more autonomous and independent, and more fully themselves, with views and perspectives on their lives and on society
- acts as a protective source of personal and social wellbeing for students
- provides a foundation for the kind of learning and teaching we want to see in schools and other educational settings and for further developing the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions which help young people emerging from school, and those returning to education, to meet the demands of adult life
- enables young people's meaningful engagement in society, shaping the society of the future and contributing to the labour market and the economy
- provides a basis for students to transition to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and the world of work
- helps our young people as they enter an adulthood where global challenges such as sustainability and climate change; technological developments; social and economic trends; and public health concerns can have very local and personal impacts. Such

challenges require cross-generational problem-solving, collective ingenuity and motivation if they are to be meaningfully and effectively addressed.

Although it is a major challenge for any stage of education to fulfil all of these roles, this is what the redevelopment of senior cycle aspires to.

For a redeveloped senior cycle to assist schools and other educational settings in meeting the kinds of demands and challenges emerging in the modern world, it will need to continue to be much more than a perceived sorting mechanism for who goes to higher education, who proceeds to further education and who joins the workforce. It will need to better cater for students making their journey along all these learning pathways and in the process benefit every student more equitably. It will need to assist schools and other educational settings in continuing their role as centres which embrace a culture of learning and growing and education, where students, teachers and the entire school community are cared for and where every student can experience meaningful learning and achievement.

Overview of the senior cycle review process

For readers unfamiliar with the review process, the remainder of this chapter provides background information about the recent review of senior cycle education. The graphic below details the phases and timeline of senior cycle review.
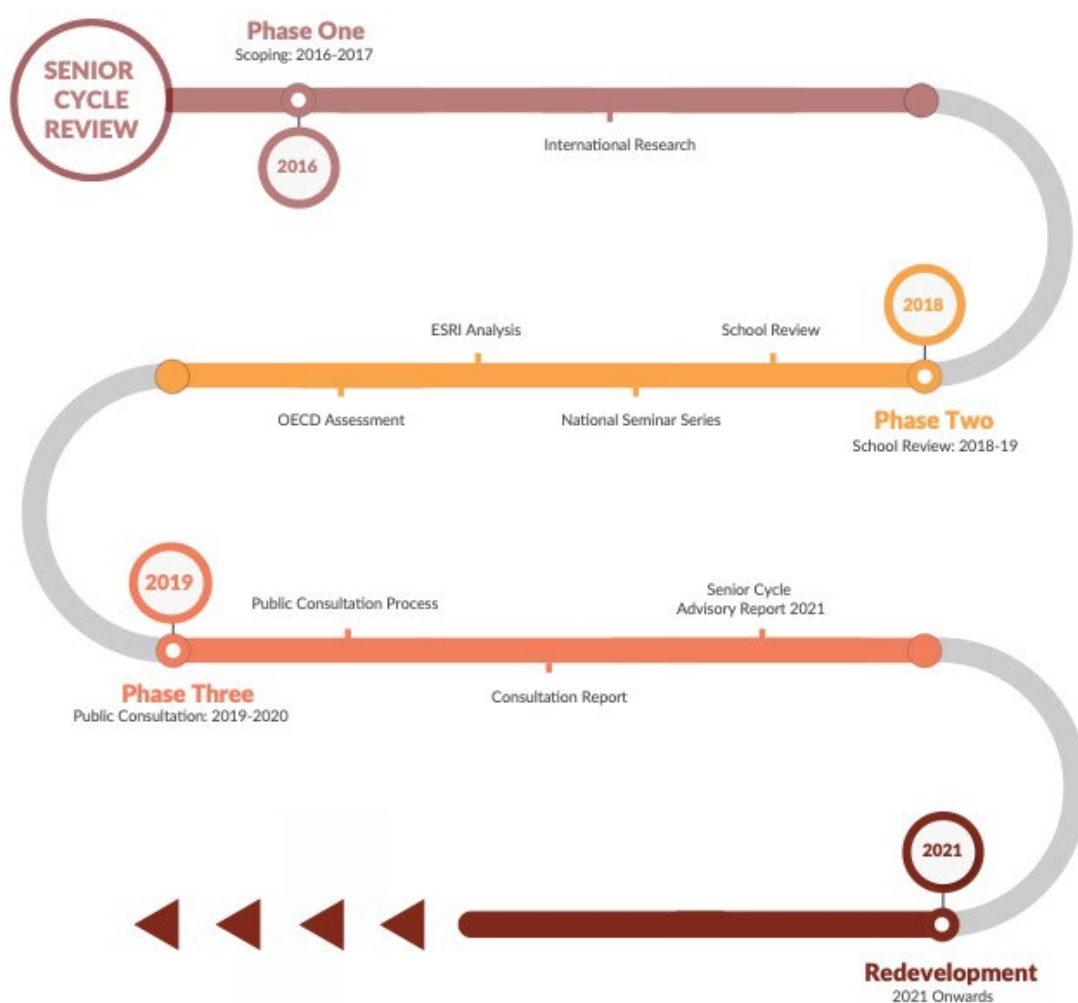

Figure 1: Senior cycle review and redevelopment

Each phase included a range of publications, which are outlined and linked below.

Phase 1: Scoping and international research (2016/2017)

Areas to be explored in the review were established. Research into upper secondary education in nine jurisdictions was conducted and a report arising from this comparative study was published.

Read more: Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions Overview Report (NCCA, 2018).

Research reports into Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme were completed. A wide range of research was consulted throughout the review process.

Advice was sought from stakeholders, curriculum developers and education policy advisors in Ireland, Wales, the Netherlands and the OECD about the process for conducting the review.

View more: Jan Van Den Akker presentation 2018 on approaches towards and experiences of curriculum review in the Netherlands.

Beatrice Pont (OECD) presentation 2018 on education and educational change across a range of countries, including Ireland.

Phase 2: School review and national seminar series (2018/2019)

Teachers, students and parents in a representative cross-section of 41 schools nationwide took part in a review of existing senior cycle purposes, pathways and programmes. Feedback from this review was analysed and reported on by the ESRI.

Read more: Student, Teacher and Parent perspectives on senior cycle education (ESRI, 2019).

All review materials were available online. Nine additional schools participated using online supports and their submissions fed into the interim report of the review of senior cycle education.

Teachers, students and stakeholders discussed feedback emerging from the review in a series of national seminars in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Athlone, Sligo and Waterford.

Read more: National Seminar series feedback summary (NCCA, 2019).

Review feedback to date was then analysed and emerging themes and areas for further exploration were identified. An interim report was compiled to inform the public consultation.

Read more: Interim report of review of senior cycle education (NCCA, 2019).

OECD education policy advisors conducted an assessment of the senior cycle review process.

Read more: Ireland Senior Cycle Review: An OECD assessment (OECD, 2020).

Phase 3: Public consultation and advisory report (2019/2020)

A consultation document which summarised areas for further exploration emerging from the review was compiled to inform the public consultation.

Consultation included 4,300 responses to the online consultation survey; 12 focus groups; 21 bilateral meetings; a consultation forum and a wide range of written submissions. These were analysed and compiled into a consultation report.

Read more: Senior Cycle Review: Consultation Document (NCCA, 2019).

Senior Cycle Review: Consultation Report (NCCA, 2019).

A senior cycle advisory report was compiled.

Read more: Senior Cycle Advisory Report (NCCA, 2021). This is the document you are reading.
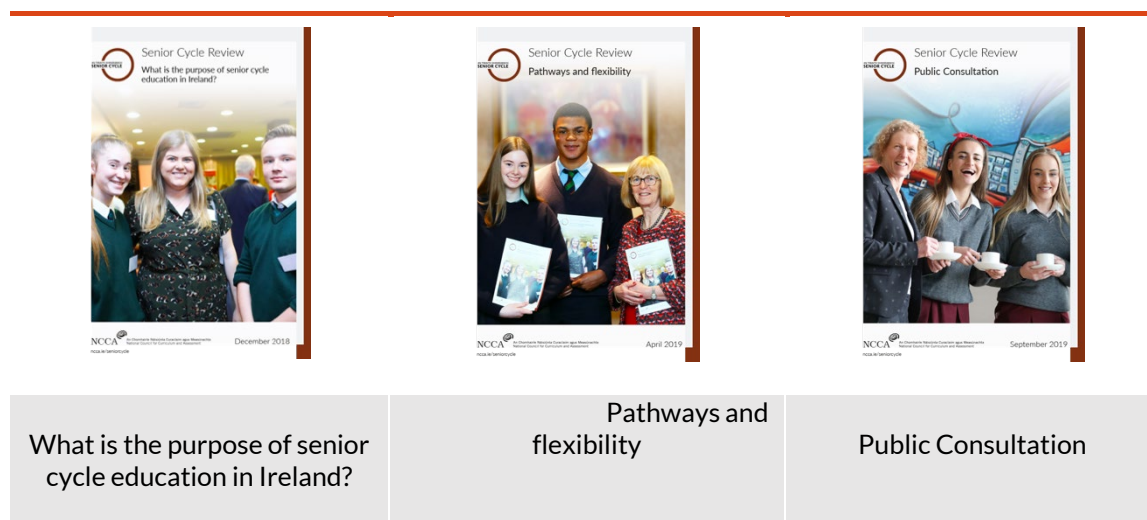
COMMUNICATIONS

Communication and consultation with schools and stakeholders were prioritised throughout this process. This included making all review materials available on NCCA.ie throughout the review and creating a series of update bulletins which were shared online and posted to schools and to a wide range of stakeholders.

Read more: Bulletin 1: [What is the purpose of senior cycle education in Ireland?](#)

Bulletin 2: [Pathways and flexibility in senior cycle](#)

Bulletin 3: [Senior Cycle Review: Public Consultation](#)

Senior Cycle Bulletins

What is the purpose of senior cycle education in Ireland?	Pathways and flexibility	Public Consultation

Figure 2: Senior cycle review bulletins

NCCA and stakeholder groups raised awareness of the review at various stages during the process, through conversations with teachers, parents and 2,500 students as part of the school review. Awareness of, and participation in, the review was also enhanced via the national seminar series in seven locations; two consultation events in Croke Park; 21 bilateral meetings and 12 NCCA hosted and stakeholder co-hosted focus group meetings nationwide. A range of

digital tools was used by NCCA and stakeholders to communicate with schools and the public, including social media and an online survey which received 4,300 responses. A total of 48 written submissions were received on behalf of organisations (available here), with 38 additional submissions on behalf of individuals and 191 submissions from third-level students. The scope of collaboration and participation in the review of senior cycle is presented visually below.

2016-2020

Comhoibriú agus rannpháirtíocht in Athbhreithniú ar an tSraith Shinsearach

Collaboration and participation in Senior Cycle Review

Phase One: Scoping 2016-17

9 Research from jurisdictions

Phase Two: School Review 2018-19

41 Schools + 9 additional schools

7 National Seminars
616 attendees

2 ESRI Research Papers

OECD Assessment

Phase Three: Public Consultation 2019-20

Written Submissions
38 on behalf of individuals
48 on behalf of organisations
191 from 3rd level students
1126 email petition

Online Survey
4,300 responses

Consultation forum
CROKE PARK
135 attendees

12 Focus group events

21 Bilateral meetings with stakeholders

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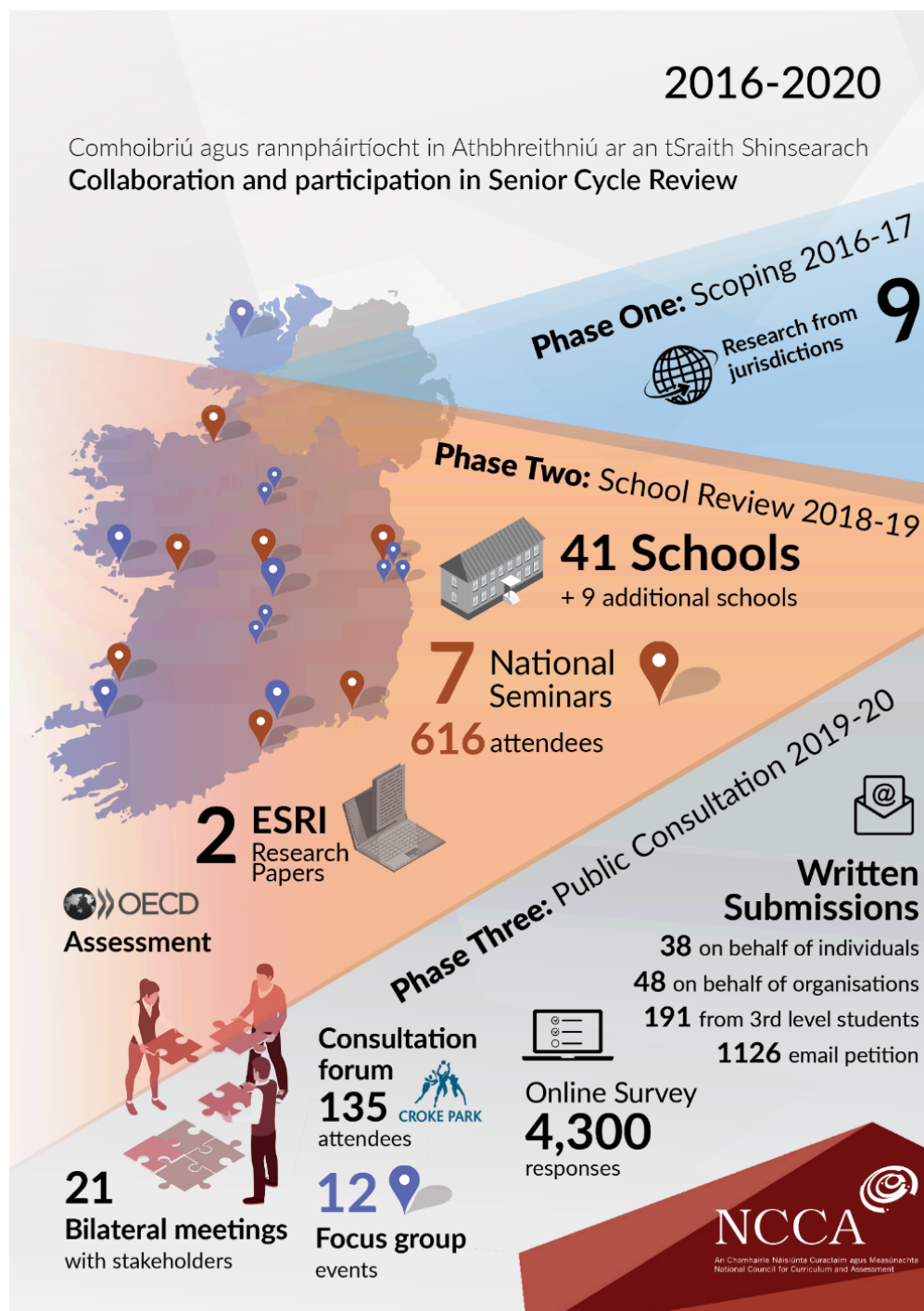National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Figure 3: Collaboration and participation in the review of senior cycle

Chapter 1: Purpose, vision and principles

This chapter identifies the purpose of senior cycle and outlines a vision for a redeveloped senior cycle. It establishes guiding principles for schools and other educational settings to use as they plan and design their senior cycle provision in a redeveloped senior cycle. It is envisaged that stakeholders and collaborative partnerships across agencies, including NCCA development groups, will use these guiding principles as a touchstone as they work to support the redevelopment of senior cycle education in the years ahead. Chapter 1 also outlines the importance of the integrated development of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in teaching, learning, assessment and reporting, building on students' development across their education and learning to date. This chapter provides the basis for the development of the first section of a Framework for Senior Cycle in the coming years.

The purpose of senior cycle education

The review of senior cycle devoted significant time to exploring philosophical questions relating to the purpose of education generally and senior cycle education specifically.

In essence, the educational experience at senior cycle should:

- continue to educate the whole person

- help every student to become more enriched, engaged and competent, as they further develop their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an integrated way

- serve collective as well as individual purposes in schools and other educational settings and in the wider society

- help students to access diverse futures, by providing firm foundations for transition to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment; and participation in civic society and adult life.

VISION FOR SENIOR CYCLE EDUCATION

Senior cycle education will be redeveloped in the coming years to contribute to realising the following vision.

Senior cycle education cultivates learning and contributes to human flourishing. It recognises the whole person, contributing to students' growth and maturity, to their continuing intellectual, social and personal development and their overall health and wellbeing.

Students' knowledge, skills, values and dispositions continue to develop in an integrated way across their time in senior cycle. Senior cycle provides flexibility to create varied pathways through senior cycle, in schools, educational settings, and other sites of learning, offering opportunities for broad learning and increased specialisation.

Throughout senior cycle students are supported as they navigate varied learning pathways, take ever-increasing responsibility for their own learning and strive to make wise, informed choices which will serve them well in adult life and facilitate access to a range of diverse futures.

Every student has access to participate in schools, communities and society as they embrace individual and collective roles in civic society and the economy, while seeking a sustainable future for all.

In outlining a vision for a redeveloped senior cycle, it is recognised that this phase of education is somewhat distinct from early childhood and primary education, and junior cycle. Students in senior cycle make choices which reflect their evolving sense of self as they approach adulthood and begin to orientate themselves towards life beyond school. Relationships with teachers are established on a more mature footing and learning happens in environments where students' increasing independence is recognised. Flexibility thus becomes very important as young people strive to make meaningful choices about their lives and futures.

The realisation of this vision for a redeveloped senior cycle education can be assisted by

- a set of guiding principles for schools and other educational settings to use as they plan and design senior cycle provision

- an integrated approach to further developing knowledge, skills, values and dispositions which contributes to making students more engaged, enriched and competent as learners and as human beings

- teaching, learning, assessment and reporting approaches which support students' holistic development and help students to access diverse futures

- a review of certification and transition arrangements from senior cycle, to support every student in their transition from senior cycle to life beyond school.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This section sets out the senior cycle review findings related to the question of what should be most valued in senior cycle, followed by eight guiding principles which arise from these findings.

Review findings: what we value in senior cycle

Students should experience the curriculum in contexts which contribute to creating mature relationships, nurturing school cultures, and collective wellbeing. Students develop many skills, values and dispositions through their relationships and through all of their experiences in education and in their wider lives. These are important for their learning, their wellbeing and their sense of self.

The senior cycle curriculum must value and cultivate inclusive education, empowering every student to learn. It must recognise and affirm all talents and abilities and address the learning needs of every student. It must support students to use their minds well and be open to new and deep learning experiences and possibilities. It must further develop a solid and integrated foundation of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. It must value and focus on challenge and engagement; higher order, critical and creative thinking; and personal and interpersonal development, including self-directed and independent learning and reflection on learning. It must lay a strong foundation for life and for lifelong learning.

The senior cycle curriculum must be flexible to facilitate exploring possibilities and increased specialisation and must value equally the variety of learning experiences and pathways students pursue during senior cycle and beyond. To enrich and extend student learning, the senior cycle curriculum must connect to prior learning, to life beyond school and to other learning environments. It must have meaning for students and connect to their lives, their communities, civic society and the interconnected wider world and must support transition to diverse futures.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

The guiding principles set out below emerge from these review findings. They are intended as a guide and support for schools, other educational settings, stakeholders and the wider education system as senior cycle is redeveloped, with the aim of enhancing the educational experience of all who undertake learning in senior cycle. They overlap and intersect in schools and other educational settings. They are not presented in any particular order of priority and should be viewed in their entirety.

Guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle

Wellbeing and relationships

Students' experiences in school, in other educational settings and in the wider society contribute directly to their overall wellbeing and to their holistic development. Students' experiences throughout senior cycle are supported in the relationships students have with teachers, peers, parents and other significant adults.

Inclusive education and diversity

The educational experience in senior cycle is inclusive of every student, valuing and respecting diversity and the contribution each student can make. Every student has enjoyable experiences in and meaningful outcomes from senior cycle education

Challenge, engagement and creativity

Students experience a challenging, engaging and high-quality education, with opportunities for new and deep learning and for critical, creative and innovative thinking.

Learning to learn, learning for life

Students develop greater independence in, and understanding of, how they learn; deepen their capacity to meet the challenges of life within and beyond school; and have second-chance opportunities for learning and assessment.

Choice and flexibility

Senior cycle facilitates broad learning and increased specialisation. It provides flexibility and coherence for students as they combine learning in a variety of ways, navigate their personal pathway through senior cycle, and pursue diverse futures.

Continuity and transitions

Students build on their learning to date and are supported as they develop and pursue their chosen pathways, and as they transition to adult life.

Participation and citizenship

Students participate in schools, communities and society, exercising their rights and responsibilities as local, national and global citizens in ethical and sustainable ways.
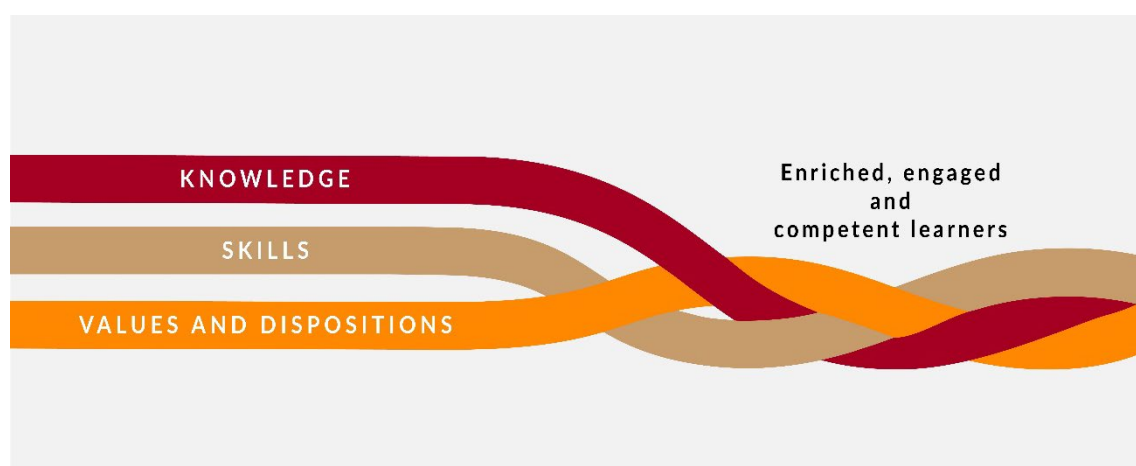
Learning environments and partnerships

Partnerships and collaboration across schools, with families, communities, and with other learning environments, including online, enrich and extend student learning and expand the possibilities open to them.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, VALUES AND DISPOSITIONS

Knowledge, skills, values and dispositions are interconnected. During senior cycle, students build upon their educational experiences of early childhood education, primary schooling and junior cycle, extending and deepening their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an integrated way.

Figure 4: Integrated development of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions

Knowledge, skills, values and dispositions can be described and categorised in a variety of ways. Further research and discussion to develop a shared understanding of each, along with the recognition that they overlap and intersect, and build on students' education to date, will be important as senior cycle is redeveloped. While each term is outlined separately below, a redeveloped senior cycle will place emphasis on the overlap and intersection of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions, as they are encountered, further developed, and enacted in specific contexts and through the use of varied pedagogies. It is this awareness of overlap, intersection and integration which empowers students to become more engaged, enriched and competent as learners and as human beings.

Knowledge

Knowledge can be described as '*encompassing established facts, concepts, ideas and theories'*, including '*theoretical concepts and ideas as well as practical understanding based on the experience of having performed certain tasks'*[1]. A useful categorisation of knowledge organises it into four types: disciplinary, interdisciplinary, epistemic and procedural. Disciplinary knowledge, organised by subject disciplines or knowledge domains, can be an essential foundation and can help students to develop and acquire other types of knowledge and skills. Interdisciplinary knowledge enables students to identify connections and transfer concepts, skills and ideas across disciplines, potentially generating new insights, ideas or understanding. Epistemic knowledge refers to knowing what knowledge is; knowing what you know and can do; and how that learning came about. Finally, procedural knowledge refers to understanding how a task is performed, often by working through structured processes, and this can support students in solving complex problems. Students learn, use and leverage a range of skills, values and dispositions in the process of further expanding, deepening and demonstrating their knowledge and understanding.

Skills

Skills can be described as '*the ability and capacity to carry out processes and to be able to use one's knowledge in a responsible way to achieve one's goal*[2]. A useful categorisation of skills organises skills into three types: cognitive and meta-cognitive skills (for example, critical thinking, creative thinking and self-regulation); practical and physical skills (for example, using materials and tools, new information and technological devices); and social and emotional skills (for example, empathy, responsibility and collaboration). Skills, alongside knowledge, values and dispositions, are developed and used in an integrated and co-ordinated way, often in response to a specific task or demand or to work towards a particular goal.

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[1] OECD (2019), *Future of Education and Skills 2030*, Concept note: knowledge for 2030, p3.
[2] OECD (2019), *Future of Education and Skills 2030*, Concept note: skills for 2030, p4.

Values and dispositions

Values can be described as *'the beliefs that a person holds about what is desirable – for themselves and for society more generally'*[3]. Dispositions can be described as *'the tendency for a person to act in a certain way in given circumstances'*[3]. Dispositions are linked to values, as people are often disposed to act in a certain way because of their underlying values and beliefs. Dispositions are also connected to skills. One shorthand description of dispositions is having *'a will as well as a skill'*[3] to attempt or achieve something. Dispositions are equally connected to knowledge, as the thinking and learning dispositions that students develop have the potential to enrich their learning as they engage with knowledge across various disciplines. There are many ways of organising and categorising values and dispositions, which can encompass personal, social, societal and human values and dispositions, for example.

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[3] McGuinness, C. (2018), *Research-Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*, NCCA research report, https://ncca.ie/media/3500/seminar_two_mcguinness_paper.pdf

Review findings

Students should further develop their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an integrated way throughout their senior cycle, building on their learning to date. Subjects are a good way of organising knowledge into curricular components, as are thematic units or modules. The knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that students continue to develop, across the curriculum, should encompass:

- critical and creative thinking, information processing and higher order thinking

- communication and literacy, including traditional, information and digital literacy

- numeracy and thinking mathematically to make sense of data and solve problems

- creativity and imagination to create new ideas and resolve tensions and dilemmas

- understanding their own and others' learning, through self-directed/independent learning, collaboration/teamwork and reflection

- independence in learning, making wise choices and taking responsibility for their educational journey as they transition to adult life

- planning and taking individual and collective action

- learning to critique, challenge, protect and transform systems at local, national and global level

- learning more about building and maintaining relationships

- social and emotional skills including empathy and self-acceptance, patience and resilience, respect for others, compassion and responsibility, self-management and perseverance.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students' knowledge, skills, values and dispositions develop through engagement with a range of pedagogies in specific contexts, throughout their time in education and through their relationships with teachers, parents/guardians, peers and significant adults.

Students in a redeveloped senior cycle will continue to have opportunities to acquire new knowledge and to build upon and deepen their existing knowledge. They will have opportunities for increased specialisation, as appropriate to this phase of education, as they begin to orientate themselves towards their future adult lives, through both traditional subject disciplines (which will continue to play an important role in a redeveloped senior cycle) and through other curriculum components, such as modularised and/or interdisciplinary components.

In the process of redeveloping senior cycle, an integrated approach to knowledge, skills, values and dispositions will inform both the design of subject specifications and modules and approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting. Further deliberation will take place to review and identify the skills, values and dispositions that students will build upon from earlier stages of education and/or those they should develop during senior cycle through engagement with knowledge across various subjects and modules. This deliberation will include consideration of the kinds of teaching, learning, assessment and reporting approaches which can support the integrated development of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

Part of this process will include revisiting review feedback and the existing key skills of both junior and senior cycle, alongside consideration of how the guiding principles of senior cycle articulated above can inform the values and dispositions which can be developed within and across subjects and modules. This will be considered as part of senior cycle redevelopment work, which will include generating a brief for the review and development of senior cycle curriculum components, as outlined in Chapter 2 below.

TEACHING, LEARNING, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Teaching, learning and assessment approaches; school culture; prior experiences in education; and individual, familial and societal factors all contribute towards helping students to further develop their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions and contribute in varying degrees towards their overall wellbeing. Familial and societal factors are fundamental - and undoubtedly impact on young people's engagement with, readiness for and access to learning. However, quality teaching, learning, assessment and reporting approaches in senior cycle and an inclusive school culture also profoundly impact on students' holistic development and wellbeing. All of these factors significantly influence students' overall experience of senior cycle education and the range of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that students continue to develop during this phase of education.

While attending to the current realities and needs of students, senior cycle also begins to orient students towards, and lays a foundation for, their adult lives. Students should further develop their capacity for independent and self-directed learning, with appropriate scaffolding, throughout senior cycle. Teaching, learning and assessment approaches should focus on developing understanding and higher order thinking and also contribute to personal and interpersonal development. Students should be encouraged to ask questions, to listen and to discuss, as they experience and embrace a range of learning methodologies and formative assessment practices, as appropriate, with the aim of further developing and deepening their understanding, their critical and creative faculties and their agency as learners.

Students need to experience a close alignment between the curriculum they are following, and the teaching, learning, and assessment approaches being adopted to support their learning. Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment intersect with and influence what is valued and reported in senior cycle education. Senior cycle teaching, learning, assessment and reporting should provide every student with a good foundation for their adult life as they transition to a range of diverse futures. Each of these areas is explored in more detail in Chapter 2 and will be explored further in ongoing work on senior cycle redevelopment. All of the advice and the areas for action outlined below seek to realise the purpose of senior cycle education through teaching, learning, assessment and reporting which:

- continue to educate the whole person

- help every student to become more enriched, engaged and competent, as they further develop their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an integrated way

- serve collective as well as individual purposes in schools and other educational settings and in the wider society

- help students to access diverse futures, by providing firm foundations for transition to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment; and participation in civic society and adult life.

Chapter 2: Realising the vision for senior cycle

This chapter considers three major aspects of senior cycle education: pathways and flexibility; curriculum components; and, assessment, reporting and transitions. Each of these sections gives a summary of the broad themes that emerged during the review and the areas that were viewed as needing further research and development. Underpinned by the purpose and vision for senior cycle articulated in Chapter 1, each section then outlines how this vision can be realised in schools and educational settings. The final heading in each section is *Areas for Action*. This sets out the key work to be undertaken to facilitate this realisation. These actions are sometimes dependent on other actions set out throughout the chapter and will rely on the continuation of the collaborative process utilised in the review of senior cycle.
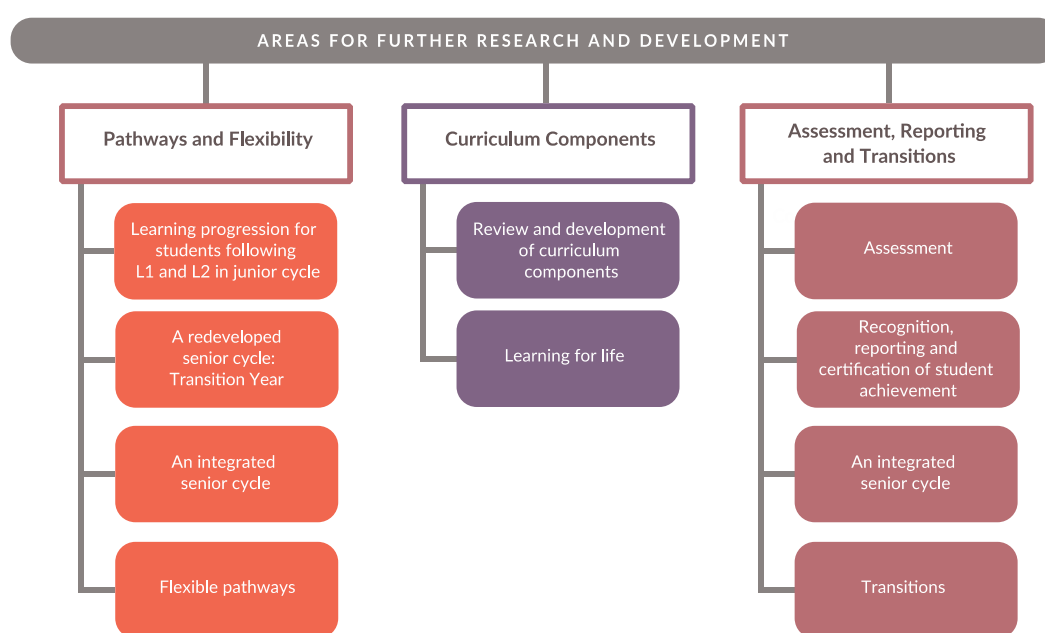

Figure 5: Realising the vision for senior cycle: areas for further research and development

Pathways and flexibility

The guiding principles for senior cycle outlined in this report underpin the development of individual pathways and flexibility for students. The development of pathways and flexibility aims to more meaningfully support the guiding principles of a redeveloped senior cycle, namely wellbeing and relationships; inclusive education and diversity; challenge, engagement and creativity; learning to learn, learning for life; choice and flexibility; continuity and transitions; participation and citizenship; and learning environments and partnerships.

Senior cycle is currently comprised of four programmes: Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) and Transition Year (TY). The key strengths of these existing programmes were identified in the review and included modular learning (LCA, LCVP, TY), varied modes and methods of assessment (LCE, LCA, LCVP, TY) and a broad range of subject areas. Transition Year was seen as providing a valuable opportunity for students to further develop a range of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions without the pressure of external state examinations.

On the other hand, the challenges of the existing senior cycle were also identified. These include lack of parity of esteem across programmes, the absence of specific vocational options and insufficient flexibility for schools and students due to the ring-fencing of programmes. In some cases, the choice of curriculum components and programmes on offer within a school can be restricted by the school context, such as the size of the school or its geographical location.

It was also noted that students engaged in Level One and Level Two Learning Programmes at junior cycle have limited age-appropriate and peer-appropriate opportunities for progression within the current senior cycle. The review established that a senior cycle for *all* students, which offers a range of different learning pathways could involve, for example:

- reducing the ring-fencing of existing programmes

- combining the most effective elements of existing programmes into a redeveloped senior cycle for all, with multiple pathways and combinations available for students and schools

- scope the provision of further options in the areas of technical, vocational, creative and professional learning[4]

- providing follow-on learning for students who complete Level One and Level Two Learning Programmes in junior cycle

- developing the range of off-site learning opportunities currently in use and those with potential for further expansion

- exploring and developing the potential of online learning opportunities.

Successful enactment of changes in senior cycle will require complementary changes in the systems and elements which affect senior cycle, such as, for example, the certification, transition and matriculation arrangements which help students to access diverse futures beyond school.

Consistent and structured career guidance is also seen as a key element in supporting access to, and understanding the possibilities of, new learning pathways as they are developed. The provision of more flexible options and the related choices involved will require greater levels of guidance to enable both students and parents to make informed choices.

Actions to support the development of diverse and flexible pathways for senior cycle students are set out in the tables below under the following headings:

- Progression for students following Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programmes in junior cycle

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[4] Quality technical and vocational education and training (TVET) helps develop the individual's knowledge of science and technology in a broad occupational area requiring technical and professional competencies and specific occupational skills… "technical and vocational education" is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. (UNESCO, 2002)
The term 'professional learning' encompasses the range of professional pathways available in the new apprenticeship model that includes biopharma, finance, logistics and ICT. 'Creative learning' includes opportunities for creativity in existing and potentially new areas of the curriculum and in creative arts.

- A redeveloped senior cycle: Transition Year (TY)

- An integrated senior cycle

- Flexible pathways

Each table sets out an overview of the review findings, an overarching vision for a redeveloped senior cycle and the proposed series of actions to be undertaken by NCCA in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders to achieve this vision.

LEARNING PROGRESSION FOR STUDENTS FOLLOWING LEVEL 1 OR LEVEL 2 LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN JUNIOR CYCLE

Review findings

The introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes in junior cycle was viewed as a very positive step towards greater inclusivity and was enthusiastically welcomed by schools, students and parents.

Students currently following Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programmes in junior cycle do not have access to appropriate learning at senior cycle. Namely, learning that is age-appropriate and peer-appropriate and that contributes holistically to students' social, personal and intellectual growth and development.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Opportunities to progress, consolidate and transfer learning would be available for students of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes. The level of the National Framework of Qualifications to which the curriculum components involved would be aligned might vary as appropriate. The components themselves, such as modules of learning, would be age-, peer- and learning needs-appropriate and contribute to students' intellectual, social and personal growth and maturity.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- develop a series of modules for students in senior cycle who follow a Level 1/Level 2 Learning Programme at junior cycle.

A REDEVELOPED SENIOR CYCLE: TRANSITION YEAR

Review findings

Transition Year is viewed as a valuable programme for students that offers opportunities for personal, social and academic development and experience of adult and working life. The local autonomy afforded to schools in the development of their TY programme was viewed as a positive feature of TY. However, there was also some concern around equity of student access to the programme, and the activities and opportunities for learning and development within TY. Transition Year provides a valuable opportunity for students to further develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions without the pressure of external state examinations.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Schools would still be able to offer Transition Year as a stand-alone programme taken in fourth year. But work will also take place to identify those features of the existing Transition Year, e.g. specific modules, that, in a redeveloped senior cycle, every student could potentially benefit from. Schools who decide not to offer the Transition Year as a stand-alone programme could have the option, within set parameters, of including these features in their two- or three-year senior cycle.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

-   conduct an audit of the Transition Year programme to identify the most effective aspects of existing programmes and curriculum components in TY to explore how these could be incorporated into pathways in a redeveloped senior cycle

-   develop a revised programme statement for Transition Year, including parameters for its development and operation.

AN INTEGRATED SENIOR CYCLE

Review findings

The programmes currently offered in senior cycle are valued for the contribution they make to the personal, social and cognitive development of students. The Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) currently limit student access to the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The lack of progression options for students taking the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and the ring-fencing of the programme within senior cycle has impacted on its value. All students would benefit from opportunities to access valued curriculum components from across the current variety of programmes.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

In the context of a curriculum for all, ring-fencing would not be a strong feature of the redeveloped senior cycle. In the period leading up to the introduction of a redeveloped senior cycle, ring-fencing of existing programmes, where feasible, could be reduced or removed. In a redeveloped senior cycle, the most effective aspects of the current programmes could be integrated into a single senior cycle. Redevelopment will take place with cognisance of the many different contexts and settings where senior cycle is experienced.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- advise on the discontinuation of the Vocational Subject Groupings for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

- conduct a curriculum audit of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes in schools and other educational settings to identify the most effective aspects of existing programmes and curriculum components and explore how these aspects could be incorporated into pathways in redeveloped senior cycle

- report on the implications of removing ring-fencing for Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS

Review findings

Students in senior cycle should have access to a range of flexible curriculum components to create a learning pathway which facilitates access to a variety of progression routes. They should have opportunities to combine different types of learning, including vocational, technical, professional and creative learning (see footnote p. 34).

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students and schools would be able to avail of a number of learning pathways. These could include pathways similar to those that currently exist which lead to further and higher education opportunities. However, within the context of a curriculum for all, there could also be other valued pathways that open up opportunities for study and progression in areas related to apprenticeship, traineeship, further education, and the world of work. Redevelopment will take place with cognisance of the many different contexts and settings where senior cycle is experienced.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- conduct further research and develop proposals for a range of diverse learning pathways that encompass the opportunities arising from the concurrent developments in the FET and Higher Education sector in collaboration with Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), SOLAS and relevant stakeholders

- work with schools to explore the implementation of proposed flexible options including the potential of offsite learning

- explore the potential of online learning environments to enhance flexibility

Curriculum components

The development of flexible learning pathways will require complementary developments in curriculum components in senior cycle to facilitate flexibility and choice and to offer opportunities for progression for every student.

The review acknowledged the centrality of subjects in addition to the opportunities offered by modular learning of the kind already available in senior cycle. The current range of curriculum components is also recognised as a positive aspect of the existing senior cycle. However, some inequity of access to the range of curriculum components was highlighted due to school programme options, school size, location or other factors. In addition, the review highlighted the need for curriculum components to remain relevant through regular review and updating. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was seen as an important area of learning for senior cycle and there was support for developments in this area in line with the actions contained in NCCA's Review of RSE (2019).

The review of senior cycle established that this stage of learning should recognise and contribute to the growing independence, autonomy and emerging adulthood of students. Therefore, it should provide a curriculum and learning environment that fosters the development of a disposition towards lifelong learning in addition to supporting the transition to life beyond school.

Throughout the review, learning for life was consistently suggested as an area for future development but there was little consensus on what learning for life would constitute, specifically, within senior cycle. As outlined in Chapter 1, feedback on aspects of learning for life can be captured under various headings:

- practical and physical skills such as: digital and communication skills; personal development; developing personal capacity, such as learning to cook and look after oneself; and promoting health and wellbeing
- cognitive and metacognitive skills such as: critical thinking, creative thinking, awareness of one's own learning and learning to learn

- social and emotional skills such as: empathy, self-efficacy, responsibility and collaboration.

The review indicated that many of these skills and dispositions can be embedded across the curriculum. It also noted that some are already available in existing curriculum components such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as part of SPHE; physical education (PE); social education (available in LCA); the practical achievement task (available in LCA); and the link modules (available in LCVP) in addition to the range of opportunities within the TY programme.

There were mixed views on what could reasonably be expected from senior cycle, in this context, with many noting the important role played by societal and familial factors. However, there was overall consensus on the value placed on the skills for life gained through work experience, voluntary work or civic engagement. Most participants expressed the view that every student should have the opportunity to experience such learning and that curricular components should also support the development of values and dispositions to live sustainably and contribute to a democratic society. In addition, participants noted that approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in senior cycle could support the development of cognitive, metacognitive, social and emotional skills. These have been identified as important skills for transition to further and adult education and training, higher education, the world of work and adult life. These skills, values and dispositions will be articulated in the work ahead on curriculum, assessment and reporting.

The review established that a senior cycle for every student, offering a range of learning pathways, should be developed. This requires the development of curriculum components which can meet the needs of students in terms of range, continuity, consolidation, progression and transition. This may involve work, for example, in the following areas:

- reviewing the current list of curriculum components to consider which should remain/be added/be discontinued within the overall context of supporting diverse and flexible learning pathways
- exploring how students could combine curriculum components to facilitate greater flexibility and breadth of experience while also allowing for increased specialisation

- exploring the overall volume of learning/curriculum components/time that should be associated with different pathway options in senior cycle
- providing Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the SPHE programme in all schools
- exploring the practical challenges and resource implications, particularly for schools, in offering to all students a wide range of curriculum components that can be combined in a coherent way
- exploring how provision for learning for life can be enhanced and developed as a significant area across senior cycle and prioritising these areas for further development.
- considering the range and form of appropriate materials (e.g. specifications, guidelines, exemplification) to be provided by NCCA to support schools, teachers and students working with curriculum components that facilitate flexible learning pathways through senior cycle
- ensuring broad alignment of the curriculum, and inclusion of the qualification arising from it, within the National Framework of Qualifications.

It is envisaged that the curriculum components included in a senior cycle programme of study may fall into several categories:

- subjects as they are currently experienced by students
- modules such as:
    - the pre-vocational type modules currently experienced by students in the Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes
    - school-developed modules or units as currently experienced by students in Transition Year
    - modules providing suitable progression opportunities and experiences for students currently following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes
    - technical, professional, vocational, creative or enterprise modules, which may sometimes be developed in collaboration with external bodies or agencies.

Offering a broad curriculum and enhancing learning opportunities for students within senior cycle may pose challenges in some schools and educational settings. To address the practical

challenges in offering an expanded range of curriculum components, redevelopment of senior cycle will require further exploration of the use of offsite and online learning, the development of comprehensive and accessible digital solutions to facilitate flexible access to learning, and the exploration of other sites of learning.

Senior cycle, while continuing to offer a broad curriculum, should also support increased specialisation by students as they orientate themselves towards adult life and select subjects and modules in a combination suited to their particular needs, interests, passions and future plans beyond school. In this context, a consistent and structured whole-school approach to career guidance will have an important role to play as both students and parents will require enhanced levels of guidance to make informed choices about the various options available.

In a redeveloped senior cycle where individual flexible pathway opportunities are available for students, coherence and progression must be balanced with choice. In order to achieve coherence, schools will need to be provided with guidance, including parameters for the development of senior cycle pathways using the range of curriculum components suggested above. Central to this will be the incremental development of a Framework for Senior Cycle, a process which will involve ongoing consultation with schools and stakeholders.

Actions to support the development of curriculum components in senior cycle to facilitate flexibility and choice and offer opportunities for progression for all are set out in the tables below under the following headings:

- Review and development of curriculum components
- Learning for life

Each table sets out an overview of the review findings, an overarching vison for a redeveloped senior cycle and the proposed series of actions to be undertaken by NCCA in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders to achieve this vision.

REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

Review findings

Curriculum components in senior cycle should be reviewed and updated where appropriate and regular scheduled review should take place to ensure that the curriculum remains up to date and relevant. Students should have more flexibility in their choice of curriculum components and should have the option to combine a range of curriculum components to support more flexible learning pathways. The development of curriculum components should provide for an integrated approach to the further development of students' knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students could have access to a range of curriculum components (subjects and modules) in their learning pathways. These components would be regularly reviewed and updated. Students would experience learning in different areas depending on the choices they make, the ways in which they combine different subjects and modules, and how the school organises learning across the span of senior cycle. Across the full span of their senior cycle, every student would have opportunities to further develop a range of skills and dispositions which support their knowledge and understanding within and across curriculum components. Students would be supported by the provision for guidance in their decision making.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- review existing curriculum components and scope the development of new and/or more flexible curriculum components

- publish a schedule identifying and prioritising senior cycle curriculum components and areas for review

- generate a brief for the review and development of senior cycle curriculum components

- outline the range and form of appropriate materials (e.g. specifications, teacher guidelines, sample materials and exemplification) to be developed and provided by NCCA to support schools, teachers and students who are working with curriculum components.

Review findings

Students in senior cycle should be supported in developing a range of skills for life. These skills should include practical and physical skills, cognitive and metacognitive skills, and social and emotional skills.

Students could experience these skills through physical education; community work, voluntary work or work experience; civic education or education for sustainable development; creativity, the arts and culture, intercultural education; and other additional skills for life that meaningfully support students' holistic development. Learning in these areas should be available to every student and should aid their transition to life beyond school.

Every student in senior cycle needs appropriate relationships and sexuality education which includes topics relevant to the students' age and stage of learning. School-based Relationships and Sexuality Education is an important part of education at senior cycle.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students in senior cycle would have opportunities to develop a range of skills, values and dispositions across the curriculum to support them during their time in school and in progression and transition to life beyond school. Learning in senior cycle would integrate these skills, values and dispositions across the curriculum and prioritise areas for action to support students in embracing life beyond school, including their rights and responsibilities as local, national and global citizens in ethical and sustainable ways. Students will have opportunities to access RSE through a revised SPHE course which will be developed for all students in senior cycle and which will be inclusive, holistic and student-centred, seeking to meet the changing needs of students.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- undertake curriculum audits to report on how learning for life is currently provided for within senior cycle curricular components and develop additional components where necessary

- develop interim guidance for the teaching of senior cycle SPHE/RSE

- develop a revised, integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE, including senior cycle

- review guidelines for intercultural education.

Assessment, reporting and transitions

To realise the purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle, assessment and reporting arrangements must be closely aligned with developments in other areas. The development of flexible learning pathways for all students, and the curriculum components to facilitate these, will require the development of appropriate assessment, reporting and transition arrangements.

The views emerging from the review on current assessment arrangements at senior cycle were wide and varied. On the one hand, there was recognition of the public support and trust attached to the current, external mode of assessment and the contribution this makes to the role played by Leaving Certificate results as a basis for the points system that allocates places in higher education to students. The wide range of assessment practices currently in evidence in Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme was seen as capturing student learning in a variety of ways. The growing use of additional assessment components in Leaving Certificate Established subjects was also viewed as a broadly positive development. On the other hand, many participants saw some of the current arrangements in Leaving Certificate Established as offering very limited scope in assessment practice, contributing directly to negative backwash effects in teaching and learning at senior cycle, and increasingly contributing to unacceptable levels of stress among students as they approach their final school leaving examinations.

The limited scope of reporting student achievement in Leaving Certificate Established and the difficulties experienced in utilising Leaving Certificate Applied reporting for transition purposes were also identified in the review. It was suggested that the recognition and reporting of student achievement should be broad enough to support transitions and be meaningful for the student both during senior cycle and in the future.

In considering the way forward, many suggested the exploration of a variety of ways in which some of the negative impact of the current assessment and reporting arrangements could be mitigated. For example, by:

- broadening the scope of assessment and examination approaches in a redeveloped senior cycle through the inclusion of tasks, questions and items that would allow students to display a wider range of learning

- extending further the use of and, as appropriate, increasing the weighting of, additional assessment components

- exploring the timing of examinations, particularly whether all written examinations need to take place within a narrow window at the end of sixth year and how to support second-chance opportunities for assessment

- investigating the potential of online assessment and the use of developing technologies in assessment at senior cycle, in line with potential developments in curriculum components

- renewing the focus on formative assessment and how the continuum of assessment supports student learning

- developing reporting arrangements that provide a basis for recognising wider forms and areas of learning at senior cycle, particularly in the context of new and emerging learning pathways

- scoping the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) [5] and ways it could support students in their transitions to life, work and/or further education and training

- reviewing the existing CAO points system with a view to its alignment with the range of emerging developments in assessment and reporting.

The identification of ways to achieve this balance between conservation and change echoed an earlier theme in the review, of finding ways at senior cycle to reduce the singular emphasis on the Leaving Certificate examination and the examination period in June. It was seen as important to encourage the view that senior cycle can and should be about more than

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[5] The recognition of prior learning (RPL) describes a process used to evaluate skills and knowledge gained through life outside of formal education and training in formal, non-formal and informal learning for the purpose of recognising life achievements against a given set of standards or learning outcomes http://rpl-ireland.ie/about/what-is-rpl/

examinations and an excessive emphasis on and status for progression to higher education. It is also consistent with the quality of alignment being sought between assessment and reporting arrangements in the future and the purpose and vision of senior cycle education as set out earlier in this report.

Actions to support the development of appropriate assessment, reporting and transition arrangements in senior cycle are closely aligned with the previous two sections of this chapter. These actions are set out in the tables below under the following headings:

- Assessment
- Recognition, reporting and certification of student achievement
- Transitions

Each table sets out an overview of the review findings, an overarching vison for a redeveloped senior cycle and the proposed series of actions to be undertaken by NCCA in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders to achieve this vison.

ASSESSMENT

Review findings

Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Established is seen as overly focused on the final weeks of senior cycle, which impacts negatively on many students. Where subjects include additional assessment components, these are seen as appropriate and valuable and their extension to all subjects, as appropriate, should be pursued. In all subjects and modules, assessment methods should be closely aligned with intended learning and should support students in demonstrating the full range of their learning in an appropriate way. The potential of technology to diversify the range of assessment methods and items in use should be considered.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students would experience a variety of assessments appropriately spaced across the two or three years of senior cycle. Assessment methods, items, component weightings and timing could be developed to achieve greater alignment with the flexible learning pathways within a redeveloped senior cycle. The assessment changes introduced would aim to reduce the focus on the final examination period in June and the stress experienced by students associated with this time. These changes could also allow for access to second-chance opportunities for assessment in senior cycle.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- audit current assessment and examination arrangements across senior cycle in terms of the methods used, their timing, and the availability of second-chance opportunities for assessment

- publish research on the impact of changes to the weighting and timing of additional assessment components in Leaving Certificate subjects

- publish research into the potential of technology to support greater diversity in approaches to assessment across senior cycle

- collaborate with the State Examinations Commission and other relevant stakeholders to advise on changes to assessment methods, components and arrangements, as appropriate, arising from the audit and research conducted.

RECOGNITION, REPORTING AND CERTIFICATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Review findings

Broader reporting of student achievement was seen as potentially valuable as it can provide a wider picture of student learning in a range of areas across senior cycle and is focused on more than student achievement in a particular range of subjects and modules. Research on the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle, in particular that aspect looking at changed reporting arrangements for the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), should inform future developments in senior cycle.

In a redeveloped senior cycle

A wider picture of student learning and achievement in subjects and modules could be recognised, recorded and reported on. The reporting arrangements could take account of needs arising from the development of new learning pathways and progression to further, adult and higher education and training and the world of work. Qualifications gained from a redeveloped senior cycle will be included within the National Framework of Qualifications.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- audit current approaches to reporting across the four programmes in senior cycle

- work with stakeholders to develop the scope and form of reporting in a redeveloped senior cycle, recognising as appropriate a wider and fuller range of student achievement and experience in this context

- publish research into the potential of technology to support online certification and reporting in the context of broader reporting arrangements in a redeveloped senior cycle

- collaborate with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and other relevant stakeholders to determine the inclusion of senior cycle within the National Framework of Qualifications.

Review findings

Senior cycle should support students as they make the transition from school to adult life and a range of diverse futures. The focus on the Leaving Certificate Established as the main pathway through senior cycle should not remain the sole focus. Senior cycle should serve all students and all transitions more effectively, whether the learning destination is higher education, further education, adult education, apprenticeship or working life

In a redeveloped senior cycle

Students will have a strong foundation for transition to a range of diverse futures including further education and training, adult education, apprenticeships, higher education and the world of work. Results of assessments, where relevant and as appropriate, will continue to provide a basis for selection to higher education through the CAO points system, but that system should be reviewed and revised to reflect changes introduced in a redeveloped senior cycle. Prior learning could be recognised to support students/adults returning to senior cycle, and recognise formal, informal and non-formal learning to aid transitions beyond school to a range of diverse futures.

Areas for action

Redeveloping senior cycle will require NCCA to:

- collaborate with relevant organisations and structures to ensure coherence across stages of education and to support lifelong learning and transitions to life beyond school

- advocate for and support a review of the CAO points system by the relevant government departments and stakeholders with a view to ensuring that it is reflective of and responsive to a redeveloped senior cycle

- collaborate with relevant stakeholders to scope how the recognition of prior learning can assist and enhance the experience of senior cycle and transitions beyond senior cycle.

The areas for action set out in this chapter, which are often interdependent, will form different strands of work that will take place over three stages in the coming years. These stages will

overlap and build upon each other, which means that some of the areas for action commenced in stage one of redevelopment will continue to inform the process throughout, while other areas for action may need to be adapted or added in light of findings and decisions from earlier stages.

A more detailed overview of the sequence and iterative nature of the planning for this redevelopment work is set out in Chapter 4 and the conditions conducive to supporting this work are now explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Conducive conditions

This chapter of the report considers, in generic and systemic terms, the conditions that are likely to be most conducive to successfully working towards and realising the vision and purpose of a redeveloped senior cycle. It draws upon what has been learned over the years about these conditions in the context of educational change in Ireland, what has been learnt in recent years and continues to be learnt from junior cycle developments and the learning that has been taking place through the review of senior cycle. In the latter context, work undertaken with an OECD Educational Development Team as part of the senior cycle review has also been noteworthy[6].

Experiences nationally and internationally, identified in the OECD report, suggest that it is important to pay close attention to conducive conditions for educational change. A range of contextual and systemic factors could influence the realisation of the purpose, vision and guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle. These contextual and systemic factors include factors related to curriculum and assessment; school culture and leadership; professional learning; planning, collaboration and support; stakeholder engagement and communications; and societal expectations and influences.

The importance of paying attention to conducive conditions is consistent with an idea discussed at the launch of Phase 2 of the review of senior cycle in 2018. At the time, there was much recognition and appreciation of the emphasis placed on working towards generating a shared vision, a common belief and buy-in to what needs to change at senior cycle, along with an agreed platform on priorities and on the scale and scope of development that would be appropriate. It was suggested that achieving this probably involved paying as much attention in the review, and the plans and thinking that would follow, to **how** things are done, how matters are progressed as much as to **what** the outcomes of the review would be. As the post-review stage of work on the redevelopment of senior cycle is now reached, and the purpose, vision and guiding principles

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[6] An OECD Assessment of the Senior Cycle Review http://www.oecd.org/ireland/education-in-ireland-636bc6c1-en.htm (OECD, 2020)

of a redeveloped senior cycle have been established, the presentation here of conducive conditions for change further emphasises the importance of shared attention to the *how* as well as the *what* in the next stage of redevelopment.

Figure 6: Conducive conditions for the redevelopment of senior cycle

Shared vision and purpose

The importance of a clearly understood and shared vision and purpose for senior cycle education, in response to which redevelopment and change can evolve, cannot be overemphasised. Collectively, we all need to know the vision and purpose we are working towards to sustain belief in it and to persist with the redevelopment journey over a period of

time. The first chapter of this report sets out the vision and purpose, as it emerged from the review. It is guided by eight principles aimed at further guiding and supporting schools, stakeholders and others working on the redevelopment of senior cycle. The review devoted much time and discussion to articulating, consulting on and refining a shared vision and purpose for senior cycle education. Continued support for this and a willingness to work towards realising this vision in practice, is an essential conducive condition for the redevelopment of senior cycle.

Research, data and information

The continued use of research, data and information that provides evidence for decision-making related to particular developments being considered or introduced is an important lever for change. As evidenced in the opening chapter of this report, different forms and pieces of research provided a basis for many of the deliberations and consultations that have already taken place throughout the review process. Equally, other chapters of the report and plans in relation to redevelopment set out in them, highlight a need for continued research activity, data collection and information gathering as different areas of redevelopment are progressed. For example, data and information will help to clarify what should be retained from existing senior cycle programmes. Research on the implications of increasing the weighting for additional assessment components in Leaving Certificate subjects and high-stakes examinations will be needed. Yearly reports from an independent multi-dimensional research study exploring the impact of the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle in schools will inform senior cycle redevelopments at each stage in the process. The evidence base that research can provide is an important contributory element which is conducive to redevelopment and change.

Stakeholder engagement

Senior cycle education is one stage on a continuum of education stretching from early childhood through primary, post-primary, further and higher education and life-long learning. There are numerous interlinking and complex relationships between this stage of education and other

education institutions, the world of work, wider societal influences and expectations, and the changing needs of a student cohort. The vision set out for senior cycle in this report will require long-term planning and collaboration with educational stakeholders to ensure a cohesive system that recognises the learning of every student and enables meaningful transitions to a range of diverse futures.

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial, foundational condition that underpins successful developments in education at all levels. The roles and contributions that educational agencies and stakeholders can make and agree to make, needs to be built in to planning for the redevelopment of senior cycle. In any area of development, but particularly in an area as complex as senior cycle, the need to move from mere stakeholder involvement to real stakeholder engagement is paramount. The ideal form of engagement here will come to centre on the direct contribution, assistance, support and collaboration of the stakeholders, on the actual roles that specific stakeholders can play being identified and agreed in the plans for curriculum and educational change involved.

Unless they are based on a collective initiative, developments at senior cycle can only be partially successful. A pre-condition for the level of engagement being sought here is that of mutual trust among stakeholders, not always easily achieved, but clearly what must be pursued, a pursuit that goes hand-in-hand with the idea of a shared vision and purpose for senior cycle education. A positive starting point in this context is Irish education's strong track record of stakeholder involvement and engagement as highlighted in the recent OECD report on the review of senior cycle (2020). The value and importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement was underlined throughout the pandemic as stakeholders worked together to address the challenges and the range of issues that arose. This should continue to be a fundamental feature of the process ahead as senior cycle review moves into a phase of senior cycle redevelopment as a Framework for Senior Cycle is incrementally developed.

Communication

Usually, a substantial contributor to mutual trust among those working on redevelopment and change is dialogue. Clear messaging and effective communication that leads to shared and agreed understandings, language and approaches in relation to the developments underway, is

essential, both at national and at school level. Much effort was made during the review process to create the conditions for communication between students, teachers, school management, parents, stakeholders and the general public around the areas under discussion. Similar and further efforts need to be made during redevelopment and implementation. In particular, the importance of developing strong lines of communication between education agencies, stakeholders and parents, and the importance of promoting public dialogue about the redevelopment of senior cycle was strongly emphasised in the review. This was seen as a critical, conducive condition for achieving a shared platform for change.

Securing resources

The importance of securing the resources needed to introduce and enact redevelopment of senior cycle is also critical, particularly at stages of the redevelopment process and during implementation where structural, technological, programme and staffing developments may be involved for schools of widely varying sizes and contexts. Planned multi-annual funding of developments in junior cycle have been put in place in recent years and a similar approach at senior cycle will be an important conducive condition for the change involved.

A further area of support emphasised by participants in the review was that of guidance. As the range of curriculum options available to senior cycle students increases, so the need will grow for a consistent, structured guidance and information service for students and parents to provide timely support for the successful navigation of redeveloped pathways and curriculum components.

Timing and pacing

The importance of achieving a close fit between the timing and pacing of changes at senior cycle and the realities of school and system capacity was emphasised as a condition for redevelopment by many participants in the review. Time is needed for the curriculum development work and processes undertaken with stakeholders by NCCA. Time is needed for teachers to reflect on and share experience and expertise so that developments can be critically

engaged with, embedded in thinking and enacted in practice. In all NCCA consultations, and certainly in the review of senior cycle, the importance of clarifying and agreeing the careful timing and pacing of the introduction of redevelopments was emphasised. In addition, the importance of taking account of the demands that ongoing developments at junior cycle place on schools at this time was also raised. Equally, it was suggested that these concerns need to be balanced with the welfare and needs of students currently in the system.

A realistic timeframe will be built in to planning and preparation for the various areas of redevelopment. Some aspects of the change suggested can be achieved in the medium term with little inconvenience and some benefit to schools, while other areas of redevelopment will take place to a longer timeframe. Timing and pacing need to be considered in the context of, and closely aligned with, shared understanding and agreement of the changes underway, system capacity, resource availability and the readiness of schools. In this way, careful timing and pacing represents a major contributory, conducive condition to redevelopment of senior cycle.

Enhanced professional support and learning

Teachers and school management will be at the heart of the redevelopment of senior cycle, so a further conducive condition for any change involved will be professional support and capacity building. This encompasses the initial preparation of teachers, the continuing professional development (CPD) that teachers experience, teacher beliefs about their roles in relation to curriculum and assessment, the preparation of school managers as leaders, and school culture. It also includes the alignment of school inspections in the context of educational change and potentially the nature of engagement with, and oversight of, textbook developers and publishers.

During the review of senior cycle, particular emphasis was placed on how essential the provision of ongoing professional learning is in supporting teachers and school leaders in mediating and realising curriculum developments. In this context, the model of, and approaches to, CPD are important. With the introduction of much educational change in Ireland in recent years, a lot has been learned about the forms of professional learning needed to provide strong foundations and

good conditions for developments in learning, teaching and schools. For optimal effectiveness, CPD should:

- be timely and appropriate

- be planned for and provided on a continual and well-resourced basis

- be mostly school-based or network-based with opportunities for collaboration

- place a focus on overall capacity-building in tandem with support for specific curriculum change

- offer good alignment with the overall direction of development/change

- build on the importance of processes of mutual adaptation and local enactment of framework and curricula.

Continuing professional learning along these lines is conducive to meeting ongoing needs at individual, school and system levels, and contributes towards increasing levels of professionalisation overall.

Policy alignment and coherence

The alignment of policy in linked and relevant areas, and the coherence that this can lead to, is also a key conducive condition for development. The potential for successful introduction of change is greatly increased where policies in related areas such as those of professional learning and development for teachers and school leaders, or the content of initial teacher education programmes are closely aligned with planned curriculum developments. The review of senior cycle highlighted the need for this level of policy coherence and system coherence through the design, steering and implementation of a redeveloped senior cycle. Concurrent developments in the education sector, such as the SOLAS FET Strategy 2020-24 and the DHFERIS Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023, should be considered in endeavouring to achieve policy coherence across related areas.

The conditions most likely to be conducive to the redevelopment of senior cycle set out above are neither independent of each other nor exclusive of other conditions. There are many ways in which continuing use of research, data and information; a strong focus on stakeholder engagement; effective communication; the securing of resources; judicious timing and pacing; provision for enhanced professional support and learning; and the alignment of complementary policies all interact. Over time, these can be mutually influential in realising the shared vision and purpose for a redeveloped senior cycle.

The purpose, vison and guiding principles outlined in Chapter 1 give a solid foundation for the redevelopment of senior cycle. Chapter 2 details areas of work in developing flexible pathways, curricular components, and enhancing assessment, reporting and transition arrangements, while this chapter sets out conducive conditions which will support the redevelopment of senior cycle. If recent times have taught us anything, it is that plans evolve and change as conditions demand. The fourth chapter therefore sets out the stages and envisaged timeframe for the redevelopment of senior cycle and the incremental development of a Framework for Senior Cycle.
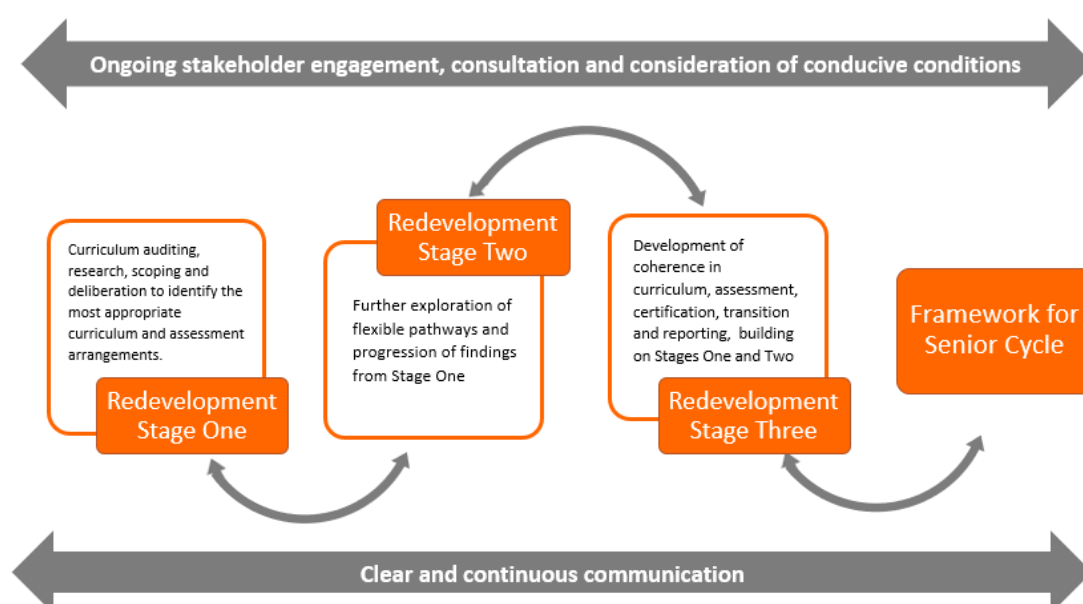
Chapter 4: Redeveloping Senior Cycle

This final chapter sets out a plan for redeveloping senior cycle in three stages. This redevelopment will seek to enhance the educational experiences of future generations of students in their senior cycle years, striking a balance between conservation and change so that every student can experience meaningful learning and achievement in a redeveloped senior cycle. The bedrock for this redevelopment is the shared purpose, vision and guiding principles which emerged from the review of senior cycle, as set out in Chapter 1.

With this in mind, it is timely to reiterate the purpose of a redeveloped senior cycle; to continue to educate the whole person, to help every student to become more enriched, engaged and competent, to serve collective as well as individual purposes and to help students to access and embrace diverse futures, civic society and adult life. The redevelopment of senior cycle aims to realise this purpose for every student, building upon and continuing the spirit of collaboration and open dialogue across multiple organisations, agencies and schools which was such a marked feature of the review of senior cycle (2016–2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic provides opportunities to think deeply about what education is for, about its purpose in our lives, in our families, in our communities and in our wider society. The consensus on the need for changes to senior cycle education which emerged from the review has been strengthened by the major challenges presented by the pandemic. It has heightened awareness of inequities of access, participation and achievement in education which makes the redevelopment of senior cycle proposed by this advisory report all the more vital. It will undoubtedly take time for the full impact and implications of Covid-19 for society broadly and for education specifically to be articulated, debated and understood. In this context, it is envisaged that lessons to be learnt from this crisis will be monitored, debated and where appropriate, incorporated into the redevelopment of senior cycle. An independent multi-dimensional research study exploring the impact of the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle in schools is underway and yearly reports from this research will inform senior cycle redevelopments at each stage in the process.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, the areas for action detailed under the three headings of Pathways and Flexibility, Curriculum Components and Assessment, and Reporting and Transitions, will form strands of work that will take place across three stages over the coming years. Although they are presented as a sequence of redevelopment, these stages are interdependent; they overlap and build upon each other. Therefore, some of the areas for action commenced in stage one of redevelopment will continue to inform the process throughout, while other areas for action may need to be adapted or added in light of findings from earlier stages, as represented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The incremental redevelopment of senior cycle

Ongoing engagement coupled with clear lines of communication will be essential. As the redevelopment progresses, emerging findings and decisions may indicate further areas of work which are needed. Conditions conducive for change, as set out in Chapter 3, will need to be monitored, discussed and planned for by the relevant stakeholder organisations, so that

preparation for changes can take place in parallel to redevelopment work and can continue to be supported when a redeveloped senior cycle is in place, and into the future.

REDEVELOPMENT STAGE ONE

The initial stage of the redevelopment of senior cycle will build on the findings of the review and on the purpose, vision and guiding principles outlined in chapter 1, to identify the most appropriate curriculum and assessment arrangements for a redeveloped senior cycle. The first strand of this work will be a curriculum audit, informed by the review findings, of the curriculum components and assessment and reporting procedures within the current senior cycle programmes.

The audit will inform much of the work in this, and subsequent stages. For example, it will identify the implications of removing the ring-fencing of the LCA programme and help identify the most effective aspects of the existing programmes including TY that could be incorporated into redeveloped senior cycle pathways, explored in more detail in stage two.

The second aspect of this work will include research, scoping, and deliberation. This will include further research on knowledge, skills, values and dispositions, exploring how they can build upon earlier phases of education and be embedded within the senior cycle curriculum. Considerable attention will be given to identifying the nature of curriculum specifications and the necessary support materials. There will be an exploration of online, blended and offsite learning. Research into additional assessment components, weighting and timing of assessments will be initiated, along with exploration of reporting arrangements. The potential of technology to support assessment and certification will also be considered.

Some areas of work identified in the review will be progressed as part of NCCA's Plan of Work 2021. These include the review of Intercultural Guidelines; the publication of a revised SPHE specification; the removal of the LCVP vocational subject groupings as a prerequisite for access to LCVP modules; the exploration of flexible pathways with relevant stakeholders, including SOLAS; and the development of pathways for students following Level One and Level Two Learning Programmes at junior cycle.

It is envisaged that through collaboration, at the end of this stage NCCA will publish:

- A position paper on curriculum and assessment, which will include:

    - an outline of the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions integral to curricular components, the nature of curriculum specifications, a description of new and/or more flexible curriculum components and a schedule for the redevelopment of subjects and curriculum components in senior cycle

    - an outline of the formative and summative nature of assessment, including a consideration of the weighting, timing, components and modes of assessment and reporting that are appropriate to all elements in senior cycle.

The outcomes of this stage of redevelopment work, and the outcomes of stage two, will contribute further to the development of a Framework for Senior Cycle.

REDEVELOPMENT STAGE TWO

Building on the work of stage one, this second stage of redevelopment will see the further exploration and development of the pathways available to senior cycle students.

In working with stakeholders on the exploration of flexible pathways, the key activities are likely to include, but are not limited to, looking at pathways from school to Further Education and Training, developing apprenticeship taster modules and identifying and developing modules that could become an integrated part of redeveloped senior cycle programmes in schools and in FET.

This stage will progress the findings from stage one on the implications of the removal of ring-fencing from senior cycle programmes; the implementation of pathways for students following Level One and Level Two Learning Programmes at junior cycle; and the publication of a revised TY Programme statement.

It is envisaged that through collaboration with stakeholders the stage will end with the publication of:

- A position paper on pathways available for students in senior cycle which will include:

- an outline of the flexible pathways available for students, including information about how the various curricular components can be combined and incorporated into a redeveloped senior cycle

- the implications of new and flexible pathways for schools and for transition arrangements.

REDEVELOPMENT STAGE THREE

The third stage of redevelopment will build on the previous stages and move towards the publication of a Framework for Senior Cycle. The focus of this work will be on developing coherence in curriculum, assessment, certification, transition and reporting arrangements. Central to this stage will be continued collaboration with the SEC, CAO, QQI, DE, DFHERIS, HEA, SOLAS and other relevant stakeholders on matters relating to certification, reporting and transitions.

The collaborative engagement with stakeholders will involve working closely with schools and other educational settings, will consider and plan for the conducive conditions which can support implementation, and will serve to support the development plans for the introduction of a senior cycle framework. This framework will outline a redeveloped senior cycle which can realise the purpose, vision and guiding principles for this stage of education described in Chapter 1.

Conclusion

A redeveloped senior cycle grounded in a shared purpose and vision, guided by clear principles, informed by research, shaped by schools and stakeholders, and responsive to the needs of our young people, is a solid bedrock on which to build. As with any process of change, it will be vital to identify and explore the many ways this redevelopment can be supported, consistently and with a common purpose always in mind. The redevelopment work, and progress within the strands of work set out across the stages will need to be communicated clearly throughout the process.

Due to the scale, scope and importance of this work, ascribing set time parameters is challenging. However, it is envisaged that each stage will take between 12 and 18 months to complete, with some overlap between stages.

Finally, a deep appreciation of teachers and schools, of their importance for and impact upon our young people during the senior cycle phase of their education, should animate and inform the work ahead, as a wide cross-section of education stakeholders embark upon the redevelopment of senior cycle education together.