



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curacláim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

# Background paper and brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Business

September 2022



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# 1. Introduction

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The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. The report records and responds to the views of teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders gathered during the four-year review about how Senior Cycle could evolve to meet the needs of all our young people. It provides strong foundations for the phased redevelopment of Senior Cycle in the coming years.

Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components – both subjects and modules – and scoping the need for new curriculum components. This paper provides a background for the review of Leaving Certificate Business and forms the basis for a consultation which will seek to elicit the views of a range of interested parties, including teachers, school leaders and students, to contribute to the development of a new specification for this subject.

This paper begins by considering the background of Business as a senior cycle subject with Section 2 presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments within both education and the world of business. Section 3 sets out how business education is currently provided for within the Irish curriculum before focusing in more detail on the current Leaving Certificate Business syllabus, while Section 4 considers business education internationally and presents an overview of five different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discuss some issues identified for consideration in the development of a new specification for Leaving Certificate Business before finally setting out a proposed brief for the development of the new specification in Section 6.

## 2. Background and context

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This section sets out some of the significant developments in the world of business over the past twenty-five years. It also outlines the policy initiatives and developments over the last decade both within education and business which are most relevant to the review of Leaving Certificate Business.

The last revision of Leaving Certificate Business took place in 1995. The current Leaving Certificate Business syllabus was introduced in 1997 and replaced the LC Business Organisation syllabus which was first introduced into schools in 1978. In replacing the LC Business Organisation syllabus, it was intended to increase the vocational dimension of the subject, to provide a context for students to build from exemplars in their own lives and apply these to the wider business environment, including the use of case studies to understand the role of enterprise and to take into account the introduction of Junior Certificate Business Studies (DES, 1996).

Since the introduction of the 1995 syllabus, the world of business and business education has seen some significant changes. The dynamic nature of the business environment means it has been impacted upon by a raft of economic, social, political, and technological developments. Since 2008, turbulent developments in the domestic and international economy have had a dramatic impact on Ireland's business and enterprise sectors. Such developments include the emergence of the Celtic Tiger, the subsequent economic downturn, Brexit, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and most recently, the instability resulting from the war in Ukraine. These events have dramatically impacted on how organisations function, on workplaces and people at work, and significantly impact on consumers and society at large. Internally, organisations are challenged to be more innovative and creative, to maintain high levels of ethics and to harness the power of digital technology as the Fourth Industrial Revolution becomes a reality.

From a curriculum perspective, there have been many significant developments. The most recent being the completion of the review of senior cycle and the publication of the [Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report](#) (NCCA, 2022). This report sets out an agreed purpose for senior cycle education and a vision for the redevelopment of senior cycle underpinned by a set of guiding principles. In line with the Framework for Junior Cycle (DE, 2015), a revised subject specification for Junior Cycle Business Studies was introduced in schools in September 2016, replacing the Junior Certificate Business Studies syllabus that was introduced in 1989. One of the main changes was the introduction of Classroom-Based Assessments as part of the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Also within the education policy landscape, the [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#) focuses on the potential of digital technology within the curriculum and places an increased emphasis on the role of digital technology in supporting and enhancing teaching, learning and assessment and in fostering the development of 21st century skills. Appropriate use of digital technology can enhance teaching and learning in the business classroom, support student skill development and also provides opportunities to engage with a wide range of topical business-related content.

Beyond education policy, a range of government policies and strategies such as the National Skills Strategy, the Trade and Investment Strategy, the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship and the Regional Enterprise Plans give some insights into the potential future direction of business nationally, while Ireland's membership of the EU and increasing globalisation significantly

impact on business in an international sense. Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework is Ireland's new National Digital Strategy. It notes that Ireland is at an industrial, economic, and societal turning point due to a number of transformational challenges and specifically focuses on the digital transformation of business thereby highlighting the importance of digital technology across the world of business (Government of Ireland, 2022).

Internationally, significant focus has been placed on the importance of skill development. The Jobs 2020 Report published by the World Economic Forum highlights the skills that young people require for future study, work and as 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, including creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

The importance of financial literacy for young people is seen as increasingly significant with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) Financial Capability and Wellbeing in Ireland study and both the draft European Commission Framework for Children and Young People and the OECD International Network on Financial Education highlighting the need for young people to become more critically aware of financial, consumer and legislative issues and underlining the importance of financial education and the development of financial resilience.

Such broad-ranging and dynamic changes mean that a revision of Leaving Certificate Business is now timely, providing an opportunity to ensure that learning in business is relevant for students in terms of their daily lives, their local community and economy and to the world of business, both nationally and internationally.

## Section summary

- Business was last revised in 1995 as part of a programme involving the revision of six Leaving Certificate subjects.
- Since the introduction of the current syllabus, the world of business has experienced significant changes particularly in terms of technology and ethics, both of which impact significantly on the world of business and those who work and consume within society.
- In terms of curriculum reform, a new specification for Junior Cycle Business Studies has been introduced, including the introduction of Classroom-Based Assessments while a complete review of senior cycle has been completed leading to the publication of the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report.
- Both national and international policy places a significant emphasis on the importance of financial education and the development of financial literacy while digital technology is seen as increasingly important in teaching, learning and assessment.
- A number of national and international strategies and policies continue to inform and impact on the dynamic world of business and provide interesting insights into the potential future direction of business, highlighting in particular the importance of advances in digital technologies and skill development.

### 3. Business in the curriculum

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This section provides an overview of business education within the Irish curriculum and outlines opportunities for business-related learning from early childhood and primary to upper secondary education before focusing in particular on Leaving Certificate Business, and the most recent Chief Examiners Report on the subject.

#### Business-related education in early childhood and primary

In early childhood education children begin to encounter and form a basic awareness of the community in which they live. While business is not a stand-alone subject within the primary curriculum, post-primary education can progress related learning that has taken place at primary level. The Primary Mathematics Curriculum develops the child's mathematical skills in the areas of problem-solving, representing mathematical ideas in different modes, and reasoning. The new Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum places an increased emphasis on learning experiences which promote financial literacy and prudence and helps children to become familiar with financial terminology relevant to their daily lives. Within the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) Curriculum, children are provided with opportunities to further develop their understanding of people living and working in the local community and beyond, companies in their local area and developing their knowledge of trade and development issues. This knowledge and understanding is further developed through the study of business subjects in post-primary education in addition to building on the skills developed in both mathematics and SESE.

#### Business education in junior cycle

##### Junior Cycle Business Studies

A new Junior Cycle Business Studies specification was introduced to schools in 2016 replacing the Junior Certificate Business Studies syllabus. The specification aims to 'stimulate students' interest in the business environment and how they interact with it. It develops skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours that allow them to make informed and responsible decisions with all of the resources available to them, ensuring their and society's well-being, while becoming more self-aware as learners' (NCCA, 2015 p.5). Business Studies includes learning outcomes for students in the areas of business, economics and accounting and is organised into three strands: Personal Finance, Enterprise, and Our Economy (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The strands within Junior Cycle Business Studies

The specification is designed to encourage students to understand the impact of business on their lives and to develop a set of foundational skills, understanding and values to engage within the business environment and for future learning, work and life, including analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and communication.

Assessment in Junior Cycle Business Studies includes a final written examination, an assessment task and two classroom-based assessments (CBAs). CBA1 involves students working in groups to carry out research, analyse the findings and prepare a report while CBA2 requires students to carry out research on a topic of their choice and make an oral presentation reflecting their perspectives on the findings.

An [early enactment review of Junior Cycle Business Studies](#) was conducted in 2019-2020. The flexibility afforded by the specification was broadly welcomed with a particular focus on the application of knowledge and analysis which was seen as giving greater focus to the relevance of business studies to students' daily lives. While learning outcomes helped to offer this flexibility, some concern was expressed about identifying the relevant knowledge, understanding, skills and values within each learning outcome. The introduction of CBAs was viewed as largely positive by both teachers and students with aspects such as the development of skills, student choice and different modes of assessment highlighted as positives. Some concern was expressed about the CBAs not having a percentage value within the final junior cycle examination and about assessment overload as more subjects were introduced. Social moderation through Subject Learning, Assessment and Review (SLAR) meetings was also broadly welcomed by teachers as part of the junior cycle assessment process.

### Other areas of junior cycle

Students also have opportunities to further develop knowledge, understanding, skills and values related to business education in other junior cycle subjects and short courses such as Mathematics, Home Economics and CSPE.

## Business education in senior cycle

Students in senior cycle have opportunities to study business-related subjects and modules across the three current senior cycle programmes: Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). In Transition Year (TY), schools have a high degree of autonomy in designing their own programme therefore business education is only a suggested area of experience for TY students.

### Leaving Certificate Established

Schools may offer Business, Economics, and Accounting to LCE students. A new specification for Leaving Certificate Economics was published in 2018 and examined for the first time in 2020<sup>1</sup>. It aims to enable students to understand the economic forces affecting their everyday lives, society, and the economy at local, national, and global levels, making them more informed as decision-makers. The current syllabus for Leaving Certificate Accounting was introduced in 1995 and is concerned with the preparation, recording, extraction, presentation, and analysis of financial information for the purpose of making economic decisions.

The current syllabus for Leaving Certificate Business was introduced in 1997 and examined for the first time in 1999 making the syllabus twenty-five years old. The current syllabus focuses on 'understanding the environment in which business operates in Ireland and in the wider world' while 'equipping students with a positive view of enterprise and its applications in the business environment, in both the public and private sectors' (DES, 1995 p. ii).

The syllabus aims to:

- contribute to a balanced and appropriate general education, leading to the personal and social development of students through a study of business and enterprise
- encourage initiative and self-reliance in each student
- develop a clear understanding of the role of enterprise, encourage the development of appropriate enterprise learning skills, and to generate in students a positive and ethical attitude to enterprise in personal, business, and public life
- develop a critical understanding of the overall environment in which business functions
- help prepare students for participation in a changing business environment for adult and working life and also as a basis for further education (DES, 1995 p. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Due to revised assessment arrangements put in place because of the Covid 19 pandemic students received calculated grades and had the option to sit the written paper in November 2020.

The syllabus contains seven units with learning for students set out in learning outcomes within each unit. The seven units are as follows:

Unit 1: People in business focuses on enabling students to understand the relationship between the principal parties in business and the dynamic nature of this relationship

Unit 2: Enterprise focuses on enabling students to understand the importance of enterprise in business and the community

Unit 3: Managing 1 focuses on enabling students to understand the importance of management in business and in the community

Unit 4: Managing 2 focuses on enabling students to understand management as it applies to the household and the business

Unit 5: Business in action focuses on enabling students to understand the stages involved in setting up a business enterprise

Unit 6: Domestic environment focuses on enabling students to understand the interaction between business firms, the local community, the Government, and the economy

Unit 7: International environment focuses on enabling students to understand the opportunities and challenges facing Irish business in the international environment.

The Leaving Certificate Business syllabus was designed to provide continuity from the Junior Certificate but can also be studied ab initio. The learning outcomes across the 7 units are in general common to ordinary and higher levels with some designated for assessment at higher level only.

### **Leaving Certificate Applied**

Students within the Leaving Certificate Applied programme undertake a mandatory module in Vocational Preparation and Guidance which includes enterprise education and preparation for the world of work. The Social Education module includes a focus on personal finance education while Office Administration and Customer Care is offered as a vocational specialism and focuses on retail, office administration and the consumer.

### **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme**

Enterprise Education is one of two modules within the LCVP. The module aims to develop creativity, resourcefulness, self-confidence, and initiative through engagement in activities such as investigating local enterprises, engaging with enterprising people, and setting up their own enterprise projects. The second module, Preparation for the World of Work offers students an opportunity to consider employment and relevant regulations and legislation (DES, 1994).

### **Transition Year**

The TY Programme Guidelines suggest business and enterprise studies as an aspect of the TY programme. Mini-company formation, consumer awareness, enterprise and/or social innovation competitions and school banks feature in the Transition Year (TY) programmes of many schools.

## Leaving Certificate Business in focus

This section explores participation rates in Leaving Certificate Business drawing on statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and provides an overview of assessment for certification and some insights into student engagement with different areas of the current Leaving Certificate Business syllabus based on the most recent report of the SEC Chief Examiner for Business.

### Student participation

Business is the most popular of the suite of three business subjects at senior cycle. Participation rates have grown in line with the increasing number of Leaving Certificate candidates annually.

Table 1: Number of students sitting Leaving Certificate Business at higher and ordinary Level 2017-2021 (SEC Annual Examination Statistics 2017-2021)

Year	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Total Candidates	Total LC candidates	Business as a % of total candidates
2021	15572	2460	18032	59852	30%
2020	15225	2676	17901	57569	31%
2019	13805	3521	17326	56,071	31%
2018	13329	3638	16967	54,440	31.1%
2017	13219	4354	17573	55,770	31.5%

Table 2: Number of students sitting Leaving Certificate business subjects 2017-2021 (SEC Annual Examination Statistics 2017-2021)

Year	Business	Accounting	Economics	Total LC candidates
2021	18032	8326	5465	59,852
2020	17901	8107	5746	57,569
2019	17326	7907	5863	56,071
2018	16967	7148	5765	54,440
2017	17573	6904	5856	55,770

### Assessment for certification

The Business examination at both ordinary and higher levels is based on a terminal written exam with one examination paper. The higher level examination is of three hours duration and has 300 marks available to candidates. The ordinary level examination is of two and half hour's duration and also has 300 marks available to candidates. Online marking was introduced for Leaving

Certificate Business in 2020 at higher level<sup>2</sup> and will be expanded in 2022 to include ordinary level also.

### **Higher Level**

The **higher level examination** consists of three sections:

**Section 1 [20%] Short Answer Questions:** Questions range over the entire syllabus and candidates respond to the questions within the answer booklet.

**Section 2 [20%] Applied Business Question (ABQ):** This is a case-study style question and is compulsory for all candidates. The ABQ has a mark allocation of 80 marks and is based on three selected units from the Business syllabus and requires students to apply their understanding of business to the case study scenario.

**Section 3 [60%] Long Answer Questions:** These questions are grouped into two sections with candidate choice. Part One involves questions related to People in Business and the Business Environment while Part Two involves questions related to Enterprise.

### **Ordinary Level**

The **ordinary level examination** consists of two sections:

**Section 1 [25%] Short Answer Questions:** Questions again range over the entire syllabus and candidates respond to the questions within the answer booklet.

**Section 2 [75%] Long Answer Questions:** Questions are grouped into two sections across the seven units with candidate choice.

### **Expectations of students at higher and ordinary level**

Students studying at ordinary level are required to 'recall and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the syllabus content' while students studying higher level are also required to demonstrate 'a greater depth of knowledge of the syllabus content; apply business terms, concepts and theories to address problems and issues; select, organise, interpret and use information supplied; evaluate evidence, make reasoned judgements and present conclusions accurately and appropriately' (SEC, 2015 p. 11).

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<sup>2</sup> As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 revised assessment arrangements were put in place. Students received calculated grades and had the option to sit the written paper in November 2020. Further revision of assessment arrangements for 2021 resulted in students having a choice between predicted grades and sitting the written examination, with the option to choose the best grade where they sat the written paper and received a predicted grade.

## Insights from the Chief Examiner's Report 2015

The most recent Chief Examiner's Report for Business was published after the 2015 examination and provides data on the popularity of each question in the examination that year. This data gives an insight into the choices made by students in the examination and provides observations from the Chief Examiner.

### Higher Level

Students generally perform well on Section 1 (Short response questions) with 74% as the average percentage mark for candidates in 2015. However, the Chief Examiner notes that 'examiners continue to express concern about candidates who do not appear to understand the requirements of the applied business question (ABQ)' (SEC, 2015, p. 11). This is significant as the ABQ accounts for 20% of the total overall marks on offer in the examination and is compulsory for all higher level candidates. In responding to the ABQ (Section 2), students are required to use their knowledge and understanding of business theory in addition to providing relevant links within the ABQ text which demonstrate understanding of the theory presented.

In Section 3, the most popular question was Question 1 which focuses on Unit 1 (People in Business) but despite this, student performance varied from 'excellent to quite poor' with many students omitting aspects of the question that require the application of evaluation skills. This is further highlighted in the 'Recommendations to Teachers and Students' section of the report where the Chief Examiner advises that students should regularly engage in critical thinking in class to develop skills in evaluation and judgment. Overall, examiners have found that in responding to the extended response questions many students presented long passages of irrelevant material which lacked 'relevant or up to date examples and/or statistics' (SEC, 2015, p24).

Questions in Units 6 (Domestic environment) and 7 (International environment) tend to be topical as they are based on the current business environment. These are consistently the least popular questions for candidates, a trend seen as broadly in line with previous examination years (SEC, 2015, p. 11).

### Ordinary Level

Students also perform well on Section 1 (Short response questions) in the ordinary level examination. In terms of the extended response questions in Section 2, Unit 1 (People in Business) is the most popular question, similar to the trend observed in higher level and once again, questions on Units 6 and 7 are unpopular with candidates.

It was noted that some students who choose the ordinary level examination faced challenges with questions that required the use of graphs and charts and in other questions it was also observed that students were not demonstrating sufficient knowledge of relevant business theory.

Data related to student choice of examination questions and the observations of the Chief Examiner provide some insights into student perspectives on different aspects of business and also regarding the development and application of relevant skills. This provides an interesting context for discussion as the new specification for Business is developed.

## Section summary

- Students have multiple opportunities to engage in business-related learning across senior cycle in the current Leaving Certificate Established, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and Transition Year.
- The introduction of the new specification for Junior Cycle Business Studies has seen a renewed focus on students understanding how business studies is relevant to their daily lives, their community, and the national and international environment.
- Junior Cycle Business Studies places a significant focus on the development of business-related skills such as analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and communication. This skill development is also supported through the Classroom-Based Assessments.
- While business is not a stand-alone area of learning in early childhood and primary education, children have opportunities to develop their financial literacy and develop a basic understanding of business in their community.
- Business is the most popular of the three Leaving Certificate business subjects in terms of student uptake. The current Leaving Certificate Business syllabus includes 7 units of study spread over 2 years. Assessment in the current business syllabus is based on a final external examination with one examination paper.
- Ordinary level students are expected to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the syllabus content while higher level students should also be able to apply business theories to address problems and issues, interpret and use information supplied and evaluate evidence to make reasoned judgements and draw conclusions.
- The higher level examination includes a case study style question where students are required to apply their understanding of business theory to a case study scenario.
- The most recent Chief Examiner's report highlights the areas of the syllabus that are favoured by students in examinations with the topical domestic and international environment units least popular. The report also underlines the need for students to further develop their analytical and critical thinking skills in order to be able to apply their learning to real business scenarios.

## 4. International trends in upper secondary business education

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This section considers the business education landscape internationally. A review of upper secondary business education in a number of jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Australia (Queensland and New South Wales) and New Zealand, illustrates the main areas of study within international curricula and offers some perspectives of upper secondary business curriculum structures and approaches to assessment. These jurisdictions were selected for review as they offer the curriculum through English, present stand-alone senior cycle business-related specifications and their approach is similar to how business education is provided for within the Irish education system at upper secondary level. In comparison, in some jurisdictions such as Finland, the study of business at upper secondary is integrated into other overarching subject areas while other jurisdictions such as France combine the study of Business Management with Economics.

The following overview of these five jurisdictions provides some useful examples of approaches that may help to stimulate discussions around the development of a specification for Leaving Certificate Business.

### Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Curriculum, set by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), provides students with a broad range of subjects for post-primary education. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) marks the end of compulsory education in Northern Ireland. At age 16, some pupils stay at school and choose to study for Entry Level qualifications, Vocational Qualifications, or the General Certificate of Education (GCE). These can be either AS or A2 units or a combination thereof. Those choosing GCE levels normally pick three or four subjects. Senior Cycle Business would equate to the AS and A2 Level courses, although aspects of it would be introduced at GCSE level in subjects such as Business Studies, and Business and Communications Systems.

Two GCE specifications are relevant to upper secondary Business: GCE Business Studies and GCE Professional Business Services. Both are available at AS and A2 levels.

### GCE Business Studies

Students undertaking the [GCE Business Studies](#) AS units explore business structures and the importance of recruiting and training a quality labour force while also investigating the role of financial information in business decision making. Students undertaking the A2 units also learn about business planning and how globalisation and sustainability impact on business (CCEA, 2016).

The GCE specification contains four units:

- Unit AS 1: Introduction to Business introduces the business world and the critical importance of quality in a competitive marketplace from recruitment to production
- Unit AS 2: Growing the Business focuses on the potential of technology within business including marketing and finance and the importance of decision making
- Unit A2 1: Strategic Decision Making focuses on business planning and the need to manage risk, including financial risk

- Unit A2 2: The Competitive Business Environment examines how businesses are affected by and react to change in dynamic technology-driven environments, including a focus on ethics and sustainability (CCEA, 2016).

### **Assessment**

There are four external assessment units, one for each unit of the specification. Assessment focuses on evaluating the student's knowledge, understanding and analysis of the content within each unit. Unseen case studies where students are required to apply their learning are widely used across all four assessment units with students' written communication skills and quantitative skills also evaluated as part of the assessment process.

## **GCE Professional Business Services**

The [GCE Professional Business Services](#) specification aims to address the skills gap in a growing area of the economy through the provision of opportunities for suitably qualified and skilled workers (CCEA, 2017). Students undertaking the AS units gain an understanding of human resources and learn about financial decision making while students who undertake the A2 units also gain insights into technology, leadership, and management in addition to project management skills and processes.

The GCE specification contains six units:

- Unit AS 1: Introduction to Professional Business Services introduces students to the professional business services environment
- Unit AS 2: Human Resource Services focuses on human resources in the professional business services environment
- Unit AS 3: Financial Decision Making focuses on supporting informed financial decision making
- Unit A2 1: Technology in Business explores security, data, social, moral, and ethical issues in technology services
- Unit A2 2: Leadership and Management considers how professional business service can support performance management, managing teams and managing change
- Unit A2 3: Project Management Skills and Processes explores the stages and processes involved in successful project management (CCEA, 2017).

### **Assessment**

There are six assessment units in total, one for each unit of the specification. Assessment is both internal (40%) and external (60%) and focuses on evaluating students' knowledge, understanding and analysis of the content within each unit. The A2 assessment units include elements of synoptic assessment which encourages candidates to develop their understanding of the subject as a whole and students are provided with opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills. Modes of assessment include a portfolio of evidence, report-writing based on primary and secondary research, case studies and written examinations.

## Scotland

At upper secondary Scottish students undertake Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) qualifications provided by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Generally, most students take National 4/5s and Highers. Senior Cycle Business would equate to the Higher Business Management course, which builds on the foundations and learning in the National 3 and National 4 Business course and the upper secondary National 5 Business Management course. It also provides the basis for progression to the Advanced Higher Business Management course. The [Higher Business Management](#) course reflects Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles and aims to give students good opportunities to build further on the attributes and capabilities of four, foundational capacities: to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.

### Higher Course Business Management

The course is designed to support students in understanding the dynamic, changing and competitive environment of industry and commerce, and the environments that organisations operate in. There is an emphasis on developing skills in research, analysis, communicating and presenting business-related information (SQA, 2018 p. 2).

The course consists of five areas of study:

- Understanding business including areas such as exploring the role of business in society, organisational growth, and decision making
- Management of marketing including understanding the different elements of marketing and the role of technology
- Management of operations including methods of production, quality control, ethical and environmental concerns, and the impact of technology
- Management of people including workforce planning, leadership, legislation, and the potential of technology
- Management of finance including sources of finance, budgeting, and the importance of technology.

### Assessment

Assessment approaches focus on 'breadth, challenge and application' (SQA, 2018 p. 9). Students are required to apply their learning in unfamiliar contexts, resolve business-related issues, research, interpret, analyse, and evaluate complex information and to communicate complex ideas and opinions from a wide range of components. The course assessment involves two components:

- An external written examination (75%) with a case study and questions assessing knowledge and understanding across the course. This is set and marked by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).
- A report-based assignment (25%) where students individually research and analyse information and produce a business report using given headings which include analysing information, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations. Students choose their own topic to research. This assignment is set and assessed by the SQA, and all marking is quality assured by the SQA.

## Queensland

Students in Queensland can study senior Business as one of a range of subjects within the humanities and social sciences suite of subjects. The subject is worth up to four Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) credits and counts fully towards the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank for progression to tertiary education.

### QCE Business

The QCE general senior [Business syllabus](#) provides opportunities for students to develop business knowledge and skills helping them to contribute meaningfully to society, the workforce and the marketplace and prepares them for roles as potential employees, employers, leaders, managers and entrepreneurs (QCAA, 2019 p. 1). During their studies, students learn about

- Business creation which focuses on the fundamentals of business and the creation of business ideas (Unit 1)
- Business growth which focuses on the establishment of a business and entering markets (Unit 2)
- Business diversification which focuses on competitive markets and strategic development (Unit 3)
- Business evolution which focuses on repositioning a business and transforming a business (Unit 4).

### Assessment

Assessment involves four components in total with 75% internal assessment and 25% external assessment. The components are broken down as follows:

- A) examination – combination response (25%)
- B) investigation – business report (25%)
- C) extended response – feasibility report (25%)
- D) examination – combination response (25%).

Instrument-specific marking guides are provided for each component with a focus on assessing the student's ability to explain, describe, evaluate, analyse, synthesise, and communicate.

Components A and B are undertaken after the completion of Units 1, 2 and 3 and are all internal assessments. Components C and D are undertaken after the completion of unit 4. The feasibility report is internally assessed while the examination is externally assessed.

Queensland also offers a [Business Studies applied syllabus at senior level](#) which provides opportunities for students to develop practical business knowledge, understanding and skills to support work and engagement in a range of business contexts (QCCA, 2019). During their studies, students learn about business practices and business functions. Assessment in Business Studies involves three components in total and is 100% internal. The marks awarded are spread across different components including a project, an extended response assessment and an examination, all of which are internally assessed.

## New South Wales

### HSC Business Studies

Students in New South Wales can study [Business Studies at Stage 6](#) as a subject within the Human Society and its Environment suite of board-developed courses in Years 11 and 12 as part of their studies for the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

The Business Studies Stage 6 syllabus provides students with opportunities to develop an understanding of how theoretical and practical aspects of business combine. Students study contemporary business issues through case studies and apply their business knowledge to problems and situations encountered in authentic business environments (NSW Board of Studies 2010 p. 5).

The syllabus includes a preliminary course with three topics:

- Nature of business which focuses on understanding the role and nature of business in a changing business environment
- Business management which focuses on the nature and responsibilities or management in the business environment
- Business planning which focuses on the process of establishing and planning small and medium enterprises

There are four further topics for the HSC:

- Operations places a focus on strategies for effective operations management
- Marketing places a focus on developing and implementing successful marketing strategies
- Finance focuses on the role of interpreting financial information in planning and managing a business
- Human resources which places a focus on the contribution of human resource management to business performance.

Both courses include a strong focus on student investigation with the HSC programme requiring students to engage in ongoing critical analysis and evaluation.

#### Assessment

Student achievement is assessed at the end of Year 11 and again at the end of Year 12 in addition to an external HSC examination.

The Year 11 assessment is school-based and must involve three assessment tasks, only one of which can be a formal examination. 40% should be allocated to knowledge and understanding of course content, 20% to stimulus-based skills, 20% to inquiry and research and 20% to communication of business information, ideas, and issues in appropriate forms. The Year 12 assessment is also school-based and must involve a maximum of four assessment tasks, only one of which can be a formal examination with a maximum weighing of 30%. Once again, 40% should be allocated to knowledge and understanding of course content, 20% to stimulus-based skills, 20% to inquiry and research and 20% to communication of business information, ideas, and issues in appropriate forms.

The external HSC examination requires candidates to integrate knowledge, understanding and skills developed through studying the Business Studies course and consists of a written paper

with objective-response questions, short-answer questions, and an extended response question in a business report format.

## New Zealand

### NCEA Business Studies

Business Studies is an area of the social science curriculum in years 11-13 in New Zealand. The study of business within the New Zealand Curriculum focuses on how individuals and groups of people organise, plan, and act to create and develop goods and services for consumption (NZMoE, 2014).

Business is influenced by and impacts on the cultural, ethical, environmental, political, and economic conditions of the day. Issues such as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation are central to both Business and Business Studies. It is anticipated that the knowledge and skills gained in Business Studies, and exposure to enterprise culture, can help shape 'creative, energetic, and enterprising' young people (NZMoE, 2020).

In Business Studies, students develop their understanding of business theory and practices in a range of relevant contexts through experiential as well as theoretical approaches to learning and through developing an understanding of how business is relevant to their own lives (NZMoE, 2014). There are five key themes within the Business Studies syllabus in New Zealand:

- Business Formation includes understanding types of business and different organisational structures
- Functions of Business includes developing a business plan, strategic planning, and innovation in business
- People in Business includes recruitment, rights and responsibilities, entrepreneurship, organisational culture, and strategic human resource management
- Business Management includes financial management, decision making, evaluation and appraisal in business and intellectual property
- Business Environment focuses on the legal, economic, and environmental aspects of business, global trends, ethical expectations, and risk management.

The syllabus is set out in the form of learning objectives for each of these themes across three levels increasing in complexity from level 7 to level 9.

### Assessment

The New Zealand Curriculum states that 'the primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching as both student and teacher respond to the information that it provides' (NZMoE, 2020).

Student achievement is assessed by teachers as having reached one of three levels: achieved, merit and excellence, and involves students demonstrating their understanding, applying their learning, and conducting research and investigations.

Students in Years 11-13 can achieve the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), a credit-based qualification at three different levels within the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. There are three different assessment standards that contribute towards NCEA qualifications: unit standards, internally assessed achievement standards and externally assessed achievement standards. The combination of unit standards, internal assessment and external

assessment for credit purposes varies, but generally, internal assessment accounts for approximately 60% of student credits (NZQA, 2020).

Internal assessments are graded by teachers and quality assured by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) using a network of full-time and part-time moderators who sample 10% of internally assessed work to ensure consistency in teacher judgements. External assessment includes a programme of national examinations run by NZQA which are externally assessed.

This consideration of a cross-section of international curricula provides a context through which the development of the new specification for Leaving Certificate Business can be considered. The directions that business curricula in other countries have taken provide an important reference point for discussing and developing the new specification for business.

## Section summary

- Many European and international jurisdictions offer stand-alone senior cycle business-related specifications with an approach similar to how Business is provided for within the Irish education system at upper secondary level. In others, the study of business at upper secondary is integrated into other overarching subject areas.
- Some jurisdictions such as Northern Ireland offer two separate specifications where one is significantly focused on understanding the domestic and international business environment (GCE Business Studies) while the other (GCE Professional Business Studies) endeavours to meet the demand for suitably qualified and skilled workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment.
- Other jurisdictions such as Queensland offer Business as a humanities subject and Applied Business Studies as a vocational alternative for students who wish to learn about business practices and business functions.
- All jurisdictions examined for the purpose of this background paper focus on the dynamic, changing and competitive business environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Across all jurisdictions explored an understanding of the theory of business is complemented by a focus on student inquiry, research, analysis, and evaluation with multiple opportunities for students to apply their learning to the world of business, including the use of case studies.
- A balance of internal and external assessment allows a broad range of student knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and attributes to be assessed using a range of different modes of assessment.

## 5. Issues for consideration

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This section sets out a number of issues for consideration in the development of a new specification for Leaving Certificate Business. These arise from the nature of the subject itself, and the influence of a wide range of ethical, technological, economic, and political factors both nationally and internationally, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper.

### Opportunities for business-related learning across senior cycle

It is vital when considering the development of a new specification for Leaving Certificate Business to be cognisant of other potential areas of business-related learning within senior cycle such as enterprise education in Transition Year, the link modules within the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and current Leaving Certificate Applied modules, including Office Administration and Customer Care and Vocational Preparation and Guidance. Synergies with areas of learning within both Economics and Accounting, the other senior cycle business-related subjects will also require consideration to ensure curriculum coherence and will help to inform the scope of the Business specification.

### The scope of the subject

The dynamic world of business and ever-changing developments in the internal and external business environment means that careful consideration will need to be given to the range of areas to be included in the specification and furthermore, how to ensure these areas remain relevant and current. The feasibility of facilitating student interest in a wide range of business-related topics relevant to students' lives (such as being a responsible consumer and understanding rights and responsibilities in the workplace), while at the same time maintaining a focus on the theory of business in the specification will require deliberation. It will be important to consider how to ensure an appropriate emphasis on developing knowledge, understanding, skills, values, and dispositions in and of themselves and through the study of Business.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis and in an ever-changing world post-pandemic, financial literacy is increasingly recognised as an important individual life skill due to an increasing level of consumer risk, digitalisation, and the increasing complexity of the financial landscape with recognition of the limited ability of regulation alone to sufficiently protect consumers. The fallout from the financial crisis has demonstrated the potential impact of low levels of financial literacy for citizens, households, organisations, and financial markets (OECD, 2012). Consequently, consideration will need to be given as to how the specification could enhance students' personal financial literacy and their understanding of business in the world around them.

The role which business plays locally, nationally and internationally will require consideration and the specification will need to integrate ethical and technological issues associated with the world of business, exploring the interaction and impact of the business environment on our broader society. Globalisation and the impact of the EU and international trading environments are also key areas of 21st century business particularly for enterprise in Ireland as the Government seek to grow and diversify the potential of fair and sustainable international trade while the dynamic nature of the business environment demands much of managers and leaders. The ability to plan

for a range of scenarios, including the unexpected, is imperative in business in the 21st century, in addition to understanding how a range of factors impact on successful outcomes.

The world of work has changed significantly, as has the way we work, and this will require some exploration during the development of the specification. The growth and development of entrepreneurship as a way of thinking and how it can foster innovation, resilience and creativity is another significant consideration as 'an individual's creative capacity to identify an opportunity and pursue it to produce new value or economic success' (DJEI, 2014 p.6) is considered a key element in the wellbeing of any prosperous economy (DJEI, 2014) and is a cornerstone of internal innovation, agility, creativity and flexibility in organisations both small and large.

## **Digitalisation and the world of business**

One of the most significant issues for the world of business, the consumer and the workplace is the disruptive nature of the digital revolution with technology displacing traditional ways of doing business and driving both transformation and innovation. Digital technology has brought advances across the world of business from communications to sales and marketing, human resources, manufacturing, information management, finance, efficiency, logistics and many other areas. While digitalisation can have many advantages in the world of business, it also brings challenges in terms of the breadth and depth of the potential of technology and the need to manage the associated risks, including growing concerns about cyber security. Arguably the greatest challenge for organisations and those that work in the business environment is how to adapt to the constantly evolving digital trends as business and society at large enters a new chapter with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In considering digitalisation, it will be necessary to explore how best to integrate an understanding of how digital technology influences 21<sup>st</sup> century business with consideration of consumers, approaches to production, the potential for innovation, and the impact on organisations themselves.

## **The significance of ethics**

Being ethical in the world of business is considered good business practice and encompasses businesses themselves and those that work within the world of business meeting both legal and ethical standards. Many organisations have corporate social responsibility programmes where they commit to being more responsible socially and environmentally, work towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and develop ethical codes of practice undertaking to abide by their own code of conduct and ethical standards. In contemporary society, organisations are engaged in a green transition with increased focus on sustainability and environmental concerns. Furthermore, they are increasingly under pressure to be more ethically aware, applying ethical standards across their supply chains and in increasingly diverse workplaces. The new specification will need to consider how to develop a deeper understanding of ethics in business and consumption and what being ethical means for organisations themselves, consumers and those who work and lead within the business environment.

## **The importance of skill development**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment requires people with a diverse skillset that can apply learning in real-life situations. This is also beneficial for young people as 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, in the world of work, in enterprise and in future training and education. Students of Senior Cycle Business could benefit from an enhanced focus on approaches to teaching and learning which help to foster innovation, creativity, and critical thinking, all of which are recognised as

fundamental in an increasingly complex and interconnected world and feature significantly in recently-revised business curricula within other jurisdictions. This would also provide an opportunity for students to build upon the skills developed in junior cycle and in particular, the skillset fostered through engagement with CBAs and furthermore help to address some of the concerns highlighted in the Chief Examiner's Report in 2015 regarding the development of critical thinking skills.

### **Assessment of Leaving Certificate Business**

The redevelopment of senior cycle from 2022 onwards will see the introduction of a second assessment component in all senior cycle subjects which will carry a weighting of 40%. This a significant change in the context of Leaving Certificate Business as historically assessment of student work was based solely on a terminal examination.

The introduction of an additional assessment component offers the potential to assess a range of skills that cannot be adequately assessed through the traditional format of the written examination paper. The new specification should endeavour to provide a range of opportunities for students to apply their learning and thereby better equip students for future life, work, training, and study.

## Section summary

- There are multiple opportunities for students to engage in business-related learning in senior cycle and these will need to be considered in the development of the new specification from a curriculum coherence perspective.
- The business environment has changed significantly since the introduction of the last syllabus which means that a range of learning will have to be considered for inclusion in the new specification while also being mindful of the recommended 180 hours of engagement.
- The scope of the subject is potentially very broad with opportunities for learning about aspects of business relevant to the students' own lives such as the development of financial literacy; the need to consider developments in business at organisational, national, and international levels, and to reflect on the important role of entrepreneurial thinking in 21<sup>st</sup> century business.
- Digitalisation has been one of the most significant drivers of change in the world of business for consumers, workers, managers and governments, and the specification should support students in understanding the potential and the impact of digital technology on the business environment.
- Ethics permeates all aspects of 21<sup>st</sup> century business and encompasses a wide range of areas such as sustainability, corporate social responsibility, ethical consumerism, supply chains and the workplace itself. It is therefore an important consideration in the study of business at this level.
- Skills such as critical thinking, evaluation, creativity, innovation and problem-solving are key within the 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment. Senior cycle business education should provide students with an opportunity to develop a broad range of skills to prepare for adult life, future study, training, and the world of work while also supporting them in playing an active role in society.

## 6. Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Business

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NCCA will establish a development group to undertake the task of developing a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Business. The work of the Development Group is, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and by the Council in the form of the brief set out below.

Leaving Certificate Business will be developed to support the realisation of the purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022). The guiding principles, as described in the Advisory Report, provide a touchstone for the Development Group as they undertake the task of preparing a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Business.

The specification will be student-centred and outcomes-based and in general terms, the specification should be broadly aligned with levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications. It will be available at both Higher and Ordinary level, and it will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 180 hours.

The specification will align to the template, agreed by Council, for curriculum specifications which will be published by NCCA in Q4, 2022 following further research on the nature and design of curriculum specifications for the senior cycle stage of education. Furthermore, the design of the specification will be informed by research conducted by NCCA, in collaboration with the SEC, on the use of additional assessment components.

The specification will be completed for Autumn 2023.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will address:

- How the specification aligns with the guiding principles of senior cycle
- How the specification can support continuity and progression, including how to connect with and build on related learning at junior cycle and in other senior cycle subjects and modules as well as future learning in life, study, entrepreneurship, further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and the world of work
- The rationale for studying senior cycle business, making it transparent and evident to students, teachers and parents and how to further widen the appeal of the subject and continue to promote gender balance in the uptake of the subject
- How the specification can support students in understanding the relevance of business to their daily lives and the relevance and importance of business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- How the specification can support the development of students' financial literacy
- How the specification can support students in developing a responsible attitude in relation to citizenship and society through a focus on ethics in the business environment
- How the specification can foster discussion and analysis of political, social, financial, and economic issues that permeate the business environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what these mean for those in business, for workers and for consumers
- How to foster an understanding of the potential and impact of digitalisation in business from a personal, organisational, and societal perspective
- How to provide multiple, diverse, and appropriate opportunities for students to achieve and demonstrate their learning

- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions
- How the specification, in its presentation, can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment, including how a focus on developing a range of relevant skills might be fostered
- How to embrace and embed technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

The work of the Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the Development Group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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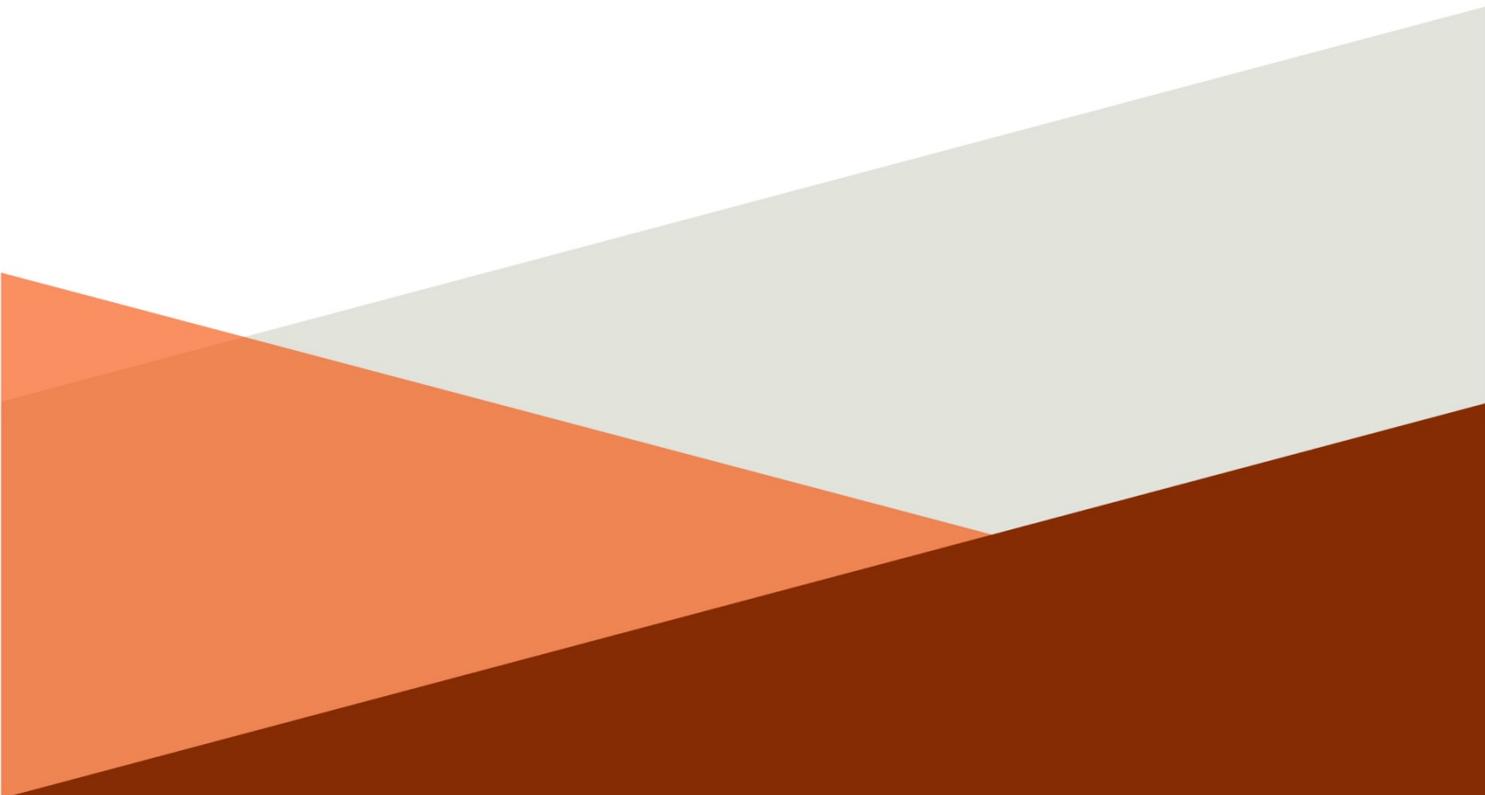
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