



**NCCA**

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

# Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of Leaving Certificate Climate Action and Sustainable Development

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## Introduction

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To inform the development of Leaving Certificate Climate Action & Sustainable Development (LC CASD) as part of the broader redevelopment of senior cycle, a Background Paper and Brief for the development of this new subject was prepared. This Background Paper was approved for consultation by Council on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and the public consultation ran from September 5<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The [Background Paper](#) provides an overview of the current context in which the development of LC CASD is taking place, an exploration of the historical context and current position of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD<sup>1</sup>) as a concept and area of learning directly related to this new subject, including the area of climate action. An overview of where climate action and sustainable development are currently integrated into the Irish curriculum is presented. The paper looks at some international jurisdictions to explore how these areas of learning are taught and assessed. The implications of various policy imperatives and national initiatives are considered in light of some of the opportunities and challenges facing the development of a new subject like Climate Action and Sustainable Development, before finally setting out a brief for the development of the specification.

The aim of the consultation on the Background Paper was to seek the views of interested parties in relation to the ideas and issues set out in order to inform the work of the Development Group in developing the LC CASD curriculum.

This report on the consultation presents an overview of the consultation process, followed by a summary of the feedback received, and explores key findings from the consultation for the work of the subject development group as they progress their deliberations on a new subject specification for LC CASD.

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<sup>1</sup> ESD empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education that enhances cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning. It is holistic and transformational and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself. (UNESCO, 2021, in DE, 2022, p.6)

## Section One: Consultation process

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Consultation is a key principle of NCCA's work where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, other education settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022).

The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during the consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in [NCCA's Research Strategy](#) (2019).

### Methodological approach

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of Leaving Certificate CASD included multiple modes of engagement:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- Regional focus group sessions
- Focus groups to capture student perspectives, including engagement with recent school leavers.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, written submissions, and regional focus group sessions. An open call to all schools invited expressions of interest to support the student voice aspect of the consultation, and participating schools were chosen at random from the list of applicants. The perspectives of second level and third level students were also captured through focus groups. The survey and written submissions facilitated the collection of data from a wide cross-section of respondents, while the face-to-face events supported more extensive discussion and exploration of the issues for consideration.

Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the consultation with parental consent and student assent sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. A detailed written record of all discussions was made during focus groups and school visits. Data gathered through focus groups and school visits was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2020). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation (Appendix A).

A thematic approach was used for data analysis framed by the issues for consideration set out in the Background paper. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered. The findings of this analysis are presented in the next section of this report.

## Consultation responses

Four focus groups were held regionally in Dublin (2), Cork (1) and Galway (1), with 26 participants across the four focus groups.

72 responses were received through the online survey categorised as follows:

**Table 1: Respondent demographic<sup>2</sup>**

Responding as:	Number
Post-primary teacher	31
Pre-service teacher	3
Second-level student	4
Third-level student	4
Parent/guardian	4
Teacher educator	5
Third-level educator/researcher	22
Other	14

'Other' respondents included:

- Representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Councillors and members of local authorities
- Representatives of professional bodies
- Practitioners in the fields of development education (DE) and global citizenship education (GCE).

Four schools supported student participation in the consultation with eight focus groups undertaken across the schools – 1 junior (a mix of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year students) and 1 senior (a mix of TY, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year students) in each school. A total of 40 students took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> level student voice aspect of the consultation. Further engagement with recent school leavers captured the perspectives of five participants.

42 written submissions were received from interested parties, from individuals in second and third level education and from the NGO sector, as well as submissions from those listed in Appendix A.

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<sup>2</sup> \* Some respondents identified as responding from multiple perspectives, e.g., parent/guardian and teacher educator, hence the discrepancy between total number of respondents (72) and the total responses to the 'I am responding as' question (87).

## Section Two: Feedback from the consultation

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This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The consultation focused on exploring a number of issues for consideration as outlined in the [Background Paper](#) (pp. 21-26), namely:

- Scope and structure of the specification
- Learning within and outside the classroom
- Student voice and action
- Pedagogies to support learning
- Assessment.

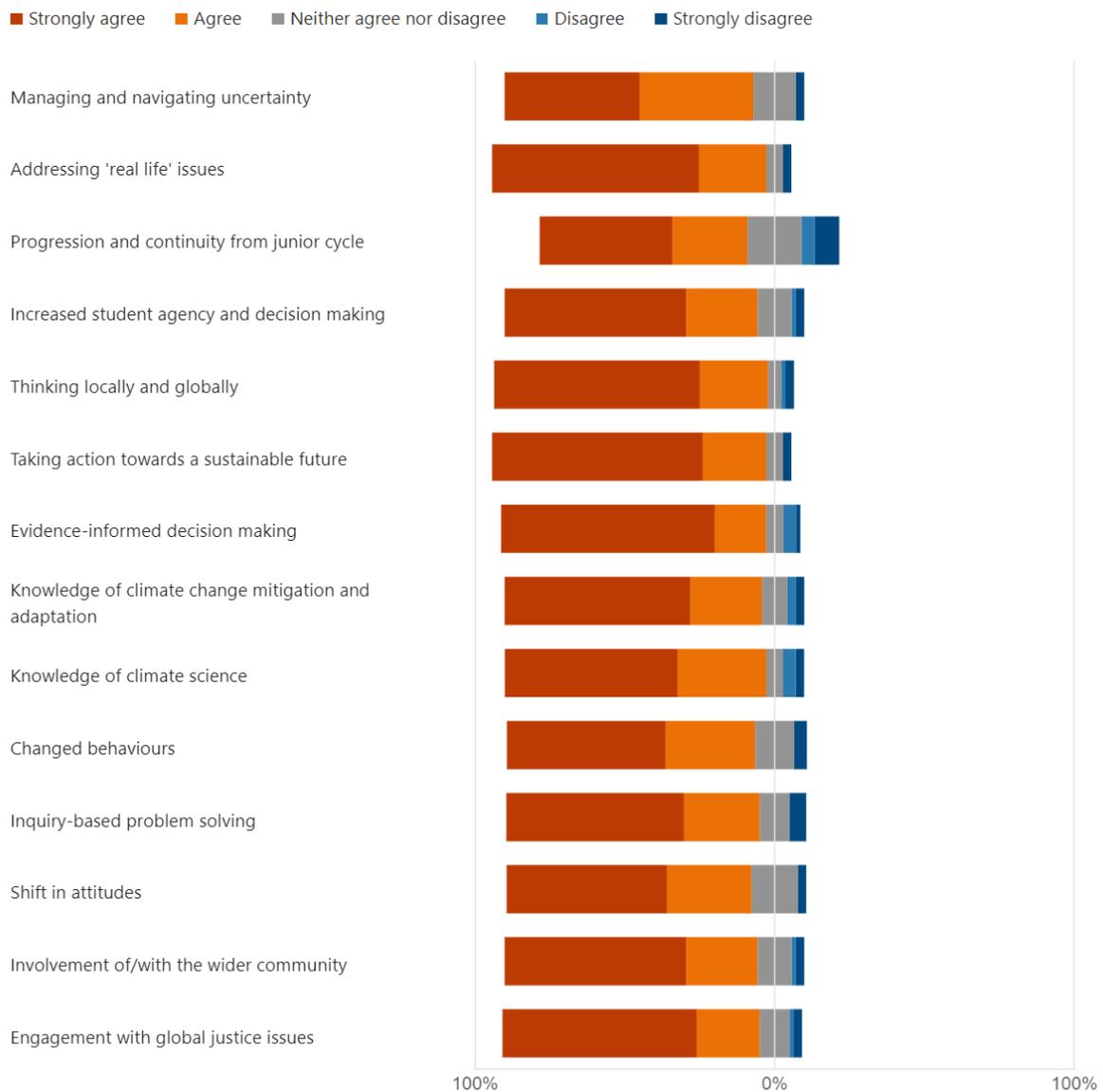
Other areas which were not directly consulted upon, but which were considered relevant to the development of the subject by those participating in the consultation, are also presented in this section of the report.

### Scope and structure of the specification

The Background Paper highlights the potential to define a new subject that stands distinct from but also relates, connects to, and complements other subjects and areas of learning in the curriculum. At the same time, the Background Paper acknowledges the need for clarity and boundaries around what is and is not included, the need to avoid inappropriate duplication from other subjects and unnecessary overcrowding in the curriculum. One way to help this is to ensure clarity of rationale and purpose in this subject, and as such part of the consultation involved asking participants their thoughts on what the purpose of Leaving Certificate Climate Action and Sustainable Development might be, what might set this subject apart from other subjects in the curriculum and also how it might be organised. A number of themes emerged from the consultation in relation to the scope and structure, which are integrated with ideas on purpose.

Survey respondents were invited to consider the degree to which teaching and learning in LC CASD could enable students in a variety of areas, shown below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Responses to survey question: To what degree do you think teaching and learning in this subject should enable the following, in relation to climate and sustainability matters?**



As the data shows, there was strong agreement that students should have opportunities to manage and navigate uncertainty, address 'real life' issues, take action towards a sustainable future, think locally and globally, and engage with global justice issues. Acceptance of these ideas was reflected in feedback from a large cross section of participants in the consultation.

### Climate science and climate literacy

Climate science and climate literacy were welcome suggestions in the scope of the subject. It was suggested that LC CASD should provide opportunities for developing a strong knowledge base through an environmental science lens around the causes of climate change and opportunities for change in an Irish context and beyond. Students should engage with data, scientific facts, principles, and models to understand climate change and its effects, e.g., changing weather

patterns, flooding, drought, and habitat destruction. A variety of areas were suggested as providing an appropriate context for learning about climate change and its effects, including biodiversity, land and ocean systems, agriculture, energy, fast fashion, transport, human movement, and water. There were also suggestions that students would benefit from learning about related careers in the area of CASD. Some feedback noted that climate science is regularly updated, and it would be important that the subject does not date and can integrate future developments. Knowledge of climate change mitigation and adaptation was welcomed, but it was noted this should align with knowledge of climate loss, damage and debt as conversations globally move from mitigation and adaptation alone.

As new approaches, technologies and expertise in sustainability continue to emerge, it may be helpful to incorporate an aspect of 'sustainability literacy' into the subject, increasing student understanding of new terminology and demystifying potential jargon. It was noted that increased climate knowledge and climate literacy alone does not necessarily lead to pro-environmental attitudes or changes in behaviours. Students also need to understand how systems interact, decide on the most appropriate actions for a given environmental situation and see a measurable gain or impact from the actions taken.

## Sustainable Development

Feedback revealed different views on the concept of sustainable development (SD), and the need for balance of SD with climate action in the subject. There were different views on what constitutes the pillars, or dimensions, of SD. The environmental and economic dimensions of SD were commonly cited, whilst there were differing perspectives on including cultural, political, and social dimensions. Some observed that specific to understanding climate action, psychological, behavioural, and social factors should be considered. The importance of looking at the intersection of the different dimensions across scales was noted, extending to students' connections with nature, their understanding of natural systems, an emphasis on ecosystems and biodiversity.

Some observations were made on the concept of SD. For example, on completion of the course, students should not believe that constant economic growth is a panacea for societal challenges. They should engage critically with the concept of sustainable development, including dominant aspects such as economics, and think about alternative models (e.g., circular economy, wellbeing economies, bioeconomy) for a sustainable future, as well as thinking critically about what a sustainable future means. In doing so, students could generate their own understanding of sustainable development, deciding what is required for life to thrive on earth within planetary boundaries.

There were conflicting views on the place of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within LC CASD. Some respondents believed the subject could be framed around the SDGs, further increasing policy coherence for SD. Others argued that the goals would date the specification and, thinking beyond *ESD 2030*, we should focus our ambitions on the plans and initiatives that will succeed the SDGs. Other suggestions, and perhaps an alternative to organising the subject around the SDGs, was to create space for students to critique the goals, reflect upon them, and consider how to engage with them in the context of a broader range of SD themes and concepts. Many concepts were suggested throughout the consultation which could be appropriate for students to engage with, including sustainable cities and communities, green technologies, the

marine environment, the built environment, clean water, the economy, food security and natural resource management.

## A focus on action

*'The subject needs to be actionable – it needs to have movement, engagement, developing and/or enacting change in the school environment and the community' (Stakeholder, focus group).*

Some views were expressed that an emphasis on action could be a unique component of the subject, allowing students to develop skills to deal with the uncertainty and complexity of sustainability and climate challenges and serving as an antidote to the eco-anxiety young people can experience. If students can become more aware of what they can do as individuals, feeding into collective action in their schools, local communities and beyond, then action can bring value in responding to global challenges, bringing about positive change and countering feelings of powerlessness and being overwhelmed.

Whilst action was a welcome focus, the need for realistic expectations around what might be achievable when it comes to student action was highlighted, given the limits of time (180 hours of class time), and other contextual factors such as locality. Further, respondents cautioned against underestimating the value and impact of small actions in making a difference to the lives of students and others. Students themselves noted many types of practical actions they would enjoy doing as part of this subject, such as horticultural projects, upcycling, field trips, case studies, raising awareness and passing on learning to their peers. They recognised action as a valued opportunity to develop their thinking so they can go out into the world and make sustainable decisions.

## Interdisciplinary approach

There was strong agreement across the consultation that the subject should take an interdisciplinary approach, with students integrating and building knowledge, skills, values and dispositions from a range of areas to engage with complex challenges:

*'I think the subject should link into other subject areas – politics, business, morality...it should be interdisciplinary. A little bit of everything but in a way that allows you to go into greater depth' (Student, focus group).*

A range of disciplines have been noted as having relevance in the development of LC CASD, spanning areas such as science, business, the arts, psychology, history, technology and geography. Many expressed the view that

*'creating clear cross-curricular links will also allow for a whole-school approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and 'buy-in' from stakeholders' (JCT, Written submission).*

However, whilst the issue of having an interdisciplinary subject such as CASD was welcomed by many, some exercised caution, saying there needed to be clear delineation between CASD and other subjects. Concerns over a dedicated subject in this area were most frequently noted amongst submissions from Geography educators (see 'Other areas of discussion').

## Local to global

Many participants expressed the view that local action should connect to global thinking. Students often referred to this as connecting with 'the bigger picture', taking actions and seeing how they have global impacts. Further, the connection between the individual, broader communities and collective responsibility was noted. Feedback suggested that LC CASD should allow students to critique a system where the individual sits within and disproportionately benefits from capitalist systems that contribute to climate change. There were some suggestions that the best starting point for connecting with this bigger picture is through the students' subjective life experiences, developing an awareness of social context and an understanding of power structures in their society and a growing awareness of the lives of other people locally and globally. In this way, LC CASD could serve as an important tool in promoting empathy, consideration of diverse perspectives, reduction of 'othering' and empowering students as global and planetary citizens.

## Root causes and futures thinking

*'Students must leave the course understanding that climate change is not solely a technical issue; vastly more important is that it is a political issue, and a question of power, distribution and voice' (Coalition 2030, written submission).*

Several written submissions and survey responses referred to the importance of LC CASD examining the root causes of inequality and injustice, to ensure any action students take is informed. Through a focus on the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of climate change, students gain understanding of the systems and values through which unchecked climate change has occurred. Students should be enabled

*'not to look at poverty or climate change but to understand the connections and cause-and-effect relationships between them' (Business in the Community Ireland, written submission).*

Moreover, an understanding of policy developments over time was suggested. Historical analysis should enable students to engage with seminal materials, such as the Brundtland Report, so they understand how international frameworks, such as the SDGs came to be. It was felt that futures thinking should also be within the scope of the subject. Students should have space to imagine radical and systemic social change, to envisage alternative ways that society could be organised and consider the steps to realise this.

## Learning within and outside the classroom

Feedback suggested that schools engaging in LC CASD should harness and build upon the expertise and resources already available, developed by agencies outside formal education. In collaborating with tried and tested programmes, resources and initiatives promoting ESD, global

citizenship education (GCE), eco literacy and youth led action amongst others, schools can bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to bear on student learning and perhaps even teacher capacity building. The idea of accessing experts in the field was cited across the consultation as beneficial, with many students saying they enjoy learning from experts beyond their teachers. There was also a call for improving the classroom experience by bringing '*non-formal approaches to formal settings*' (ECO-UNESCO, written submission). The point was made that many young people already involve themselves in climate action, but are sometimes unaware of further opportunities to be involved in related activities outside of school. Greater cooperation between the formal and non-formal sectors could increase awareness.

Some respondents argued there could be great opportunities for cooperation to form a central part of LC CASD. Through technology and other means, students could cooperate with other schools in their locality, across Ireland and around the world. There are opportunities to get involved in local communities, and students were strong in their desire to get out and learn how sustainability is promoted in the worlds of business, science, and agriculture, for example.

Some points of caution were made across the consultation in relation to drawing from the expertise of the non-formal sector. Firstly, any external programmes, initiatives or resources that would be linked to the new subject would need to clearly align with the learning outcomes of the specification. Secondly, the interest and uptake of external programmes, initiatives and resources varies across schools and at times can be dependent on the interest and voluntary commitment of teachers and school management. Over relying on engagement with the non-formal sector could thus lead to inequities. Further, some respondents warned against a risk of surface level engagement with external agencies, whereas the experience of the subject should include long-term change projects that deliver meaningful impact, a firm knowledge base and academic rigour. Finally, some students expressed concern about bringing something they might voluntarily engage with outside school (e.g., youth-led climate action) into a school subject. They felt there was an enjoyment and attraction which drew them to volunteer and partake outside school, and LC CASD should enhance rather than diminish this.

## Student voice and action

*'I'd love to be taught how to use our voices in certain situations, we always talk about standing up and using our voices in relation to bullying, but we never talk about this in a climate change way. Teaching the younger generation to speak up, how to get in touch with the bigger picture and to genuinely make a difference'*  
(Student, focus group).

The emphasis on student voice and action outlined in the Background Paper was particularly welcomed across the consultation. Some respondents noted student voice as a right; LC CASD should create a safe space and inclusive opportunities for students to form and amplify their voices, express views, be heard by relevant audiences, and have influence. Others saw voice as a means to question power; rather than being 'given a voice', students should instead have opportunities to discuss power in decision-making, extrapolating this locally, regionally, and globally to unpack how certain identities have been systematically marginalised. Following this, the importance of including multiple voices was noted, including those who have been silenced by

the climate crisis. The subject should examine how students can assist others to raise their voices. The role of the teacher in this was seen as central:

*'ownership of the process remains with the participants, educators facilitate dialogue, rather[than] being there to impart knowledge' (Written submission).*

Meaningful action, in response to the voices of students, is seen as a critical component of LC CASD.

*'Young people are the key contributors to both climate action and sustainable development, and they can and must lead the way in changing society. We welcome the developments from student action in the last few years and with good quality, trustworthy, and considered information in this subject, it has the ability to give young people the reliable and just arguments to cause change. This could include aspects on how to make good scientific arguments, good science communication methods, and coping with the global situation.'* (Institute of Geologists of Ireland, survey response).

The subject should develop, through student-centred approaches, the skills necessary to take action and experience decision-making, increasing their capacity over time to collaborate with their peers on actions they have chosen. Feedback received included an array of means by which students could engage in meaningful action and have their voices heard. For example, they could liaise with decision makers and policy makers, host project showcases for NGOs, parents, community members, work directly with organisations to increase school sustainability and engage with businesses/industries to learn first-hand how they embed sustainable practices.

A number of submissions noted the value students place on providing solutions to environmental issues locally and globally, helping to counter feelings of anxiety they may hold about our future. Students themselves want to have a better understanding of the systems that influence their lives and the choices that are made on climate and sustainability matters. It was suggested that as well as taking action, students could build knowledge of the features of effective action, through studying social movements in the past and present, examining cycles of social change over generations, considering barriers to participation, developing communication and facilitation skills, participating in research, doing advocacy work and getting involved in youth-led action. Students also value the opportunity, through their actions, to be leaders for others:

*'Who's to say Ireland couldn't create a new way to be sustainable? Even if it's just taking little steps, we could ignite a passion in people and other countries...like a positive chain reaction' (Student, focus group).*

Feedback noted that in order for students to be effective in using their voices and taking action, there needed to be a pervasive, climate friendly culture across the school community.

## Pedagogies to support learning

Linked to the views on student voice and action, a variety of insights were shared on the types of pedagogies that would enable students to meaningfully engage in LC CASD.

*'In 20 years' time I'm going to need to live in a sustainable world where I feel safe and so are our teachers...as we are learning they're learning stuff as well. Get together and work it out together' (Student focus group participant)*

Students expressed a desire to have space in the CASD classroom to work through climate and sustainability issues with their teachers. The idea of a democratic classroom was referenced a number of times across the consultation, where students lead, and teachers facilitate. Students and teachers working and learning together, perhaps even co-designing learning, were seen as positive examples of what might happen in LC CASD. A variety of pedagogical approaches were suggested as conducive to this type of environment, including dialogue and debate, reflective practice, design-based challenges, problem solving and solution generation, amongst others. Some participants said ways of thinking from the arts and expression through art could help students engage with complex issues. The need to manage information also featured strongly across the consultation. As the climate crisis is embedded in issues of power and politics, LC CASD should enable students to develop research skills, including the ability to question and challenge the messages they are receiving daily, support them to source accurate and credible information, to discern misinformation and disinformation, and to spot the difference between genuine sustainability endeavours and greenwashing.

Students wished to work with their classmates on matters of their choosing and of importance to their lives. They saw their peers as a valuable resource; as students work together, they develop collaborative skills, encourage each other to try out new things, change their behaviours, and possibly 'see a knock-on effect' amongst other students in their class and beyond. Thinking of relationships beyond the classroom, students would like to pass on what they know, and would welcome opportunities to share their learning with younger students and with members of their wider communities.

*'Imagination should be central- students should be supported to imagine the better world they want to grow old in. This should be a joyful, pleasurable, creative experience- not all doom and gloom and anxiety. If they can bring it to life in their imagination, they will be more likely to work towards its realisation' (Creativity & Change @ Crawford College of Art and Design, MTU, survey response)*

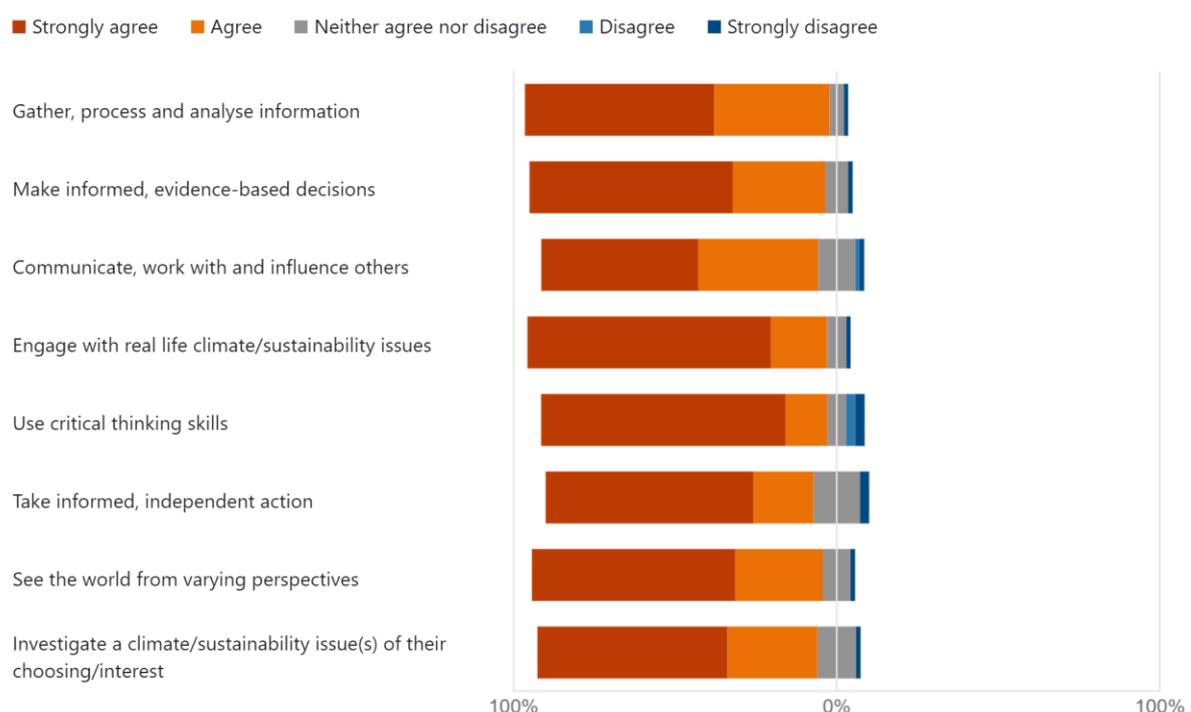
The duality of eco-anxiety and pedagogies of hope was a recurring theme throughout the consultation. It was suggested that a pedagogy of meaningful hope was needed - where students engage with issues objectively, neither feeling despondent nor creating the illusion that school activities can solve the complex challenges that have up to now evaded global leaders and governments. The challenge of striking that balance between being honest without scaremongering was noted, as well as the need to be realistic about what can be achieved by students through the subject. Again, the connection between solutions focused, student-led actions was seen as a route to empowerment; doing what they enjoy, connecting with others and with social change. Some feedback suggested teaching students coping techniques, helping them to leave school with a sense of hope for the future, despite the existential threat of climate

change. Moreover, the specification could look at how different coping skills, underpinned by emotions such as hope or concern, could lead to more or less pro-environmental behaviours by students and others. In this regard, the subject could present significant opportunities to support student and societal wellbeing.

## Assessment

Survey respondents welcomed a range of ideas for coursework assessment, as outlined in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – survey responses to the question *Coursework assessments should provide opportunities for students to:*



Across the consultation, it was felt assessment should focus on students taking action, building in opportunities to think systematically, demonstrate their role and the role of community in solving 'wicked problems'. Assessment of personal reflection was also suggested, and a variety of ideas were proposed for this, such as blogs, journaling, conversation with peers and oral examinations.

There were a number of suggestions that assessment could take place over a prolonged period, through multiple projects, and perhaps the development of a portfolio similar to what currently happens in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Through long-term engagement with project work, some respondents suggested a catalogue of skills development and awareness raising could be developed. LC CASD could be innovative in how evidence of learning could be gathered and shared. Examples suggested included creation of an artistic expression, a sustainable fashion show, diary entries and videos. There were also suggestions that, as well as taking action themselves, students could critique the actions of others. They could look critically at current climate solutions proposed locally and beyond, critique the solutions, and come up with their own ideas. There may even be opportunities to connect with and learn from innovative practices around the world, e.g., disaster risk reduction in the Caribbean.

It was noted that students could be exposed to the nuances of climate and sustainability challenges, thinking about these from a variety of perspectives, including how it affects them personally, their future career prospects, the lives of others, and so on. Students would like to see a variety of coursework options, ranging from research projects and engagement with case studies to action projects in the school and locality, work experience, and volunteering. Their desire to pursue areas of interest, and to see a visible impact of their learning in CASD, were common across students' suggestions.

Some thoughts were offered on the timing and regularity of coursework. To allow for evidence of building skills and taking action over time, some respondents argued that it would be beneficial to complete some of the coursework during the first year of study. Others felt it was important to avoid over-assessment and to be careful with the amount of coursework activity. To avoid repetition and stagnation in the types of coursework presented over time, it was suggested that optional areas of focus could be given every few years that would relate to the current state of the world.

## Other areas of discussion

Whilst not directly asked about under the issues for consideration, other issues emerged throughout the consultation which have implications for the development of LC CASD.

### The degree of welcome for the subject

*'We welcome the proposed Leaving Certificate subject as a key step in fostering a sense of agency, commitment and hope among our younger generations' (Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group in Addressing Climate and Environmental Emergency, written submission).*

*'The subject is very necessary for the world we live in. It needs to be true and real because we are going through it in our lives right now. There will be students who go on and do great things from this subject and make a big difference in the world. I would have loved this subject if it was an option!' (Student, focus group).*

Introducing a subject in this area was welcomed by a large number of stakeholders, in particular by students. Whilst some stakeholders felt a dedicated subject on CASD may be an unnecessary departure from the cross-curricular ESD approach adopted here and elsewhere, others saw it as an opportunity for Ireland to be curriculum leaders. The focus on climate action, instead of climate change, was also welcomed. Some respondents said that LC CASD could help to 'connect the dots' between areas of sustainability learning that students experience across their JC subjects. Looking beyond post-primary school, others signalled the potential for students to progress to further education in this area, and noted the benefits of studying LC CASD for students' ways of thinking, acting, and living in the world.

Whilst there was a high degree of welcome, there were also some questions and concerns. There were mixed views on who might be best suited to teach this subject, from a qualifications and experience perspective. Some respondents argued that Geography teachers, given their subject's emphasis on interdisciplinary learning about the human, physical and social world, would be well placed to teach LC CASD. However, throughout the consultation, teachers from a variety of

disciplines across the natural sciences, the arts, and more, expressed an interest and motivation to teach LC CASD. The issue of teacher professional development was also raised, with feedback that a comprehensive programme of professional development and supporting resources would be necessary to equip teachers in engaging with the subject.

### The potential challenges of a dedicated subject on CASD

There were a number of concerns expressed on the development of the subject in general and, in light of existing disciplines, its purpose. It was noted that

*'Each disciplinary area [in the curriculum] provides important knowledge, skills and perspectives that are needed to understand complex issues like climate change, and to consider potential solutions. It is crucial that the CASD subject does not detract from the cross disciplinary approach to ESD already being adopted' (Ubuntu Network, written submission).*

It was pointed out that the importance of this subject complementing a cross-curricular approach to ESD is vital. LC CASD should not signal to schools that climate change and sustainability are no longer of concern in other subjects – ESD should continue to be promoted as a lifelong and life-wide process. Feedback acknowledges that this subject should enable the critical exploration of issues that may not be engaged with in such depth in other subjects.

*'Students could learn about the actions of others, successful community actions, and social movements around the world both past and present, as a source of inspiration and motivation. Students could learn action skills so that they can self-organise, learn about challenges and barriers to climate action and learn practical skills for a sustainable world.'* (Teacher educator, survey response).

*'...this subject should be a capstone and an additional in-depth and critical exploration of climate change and related issues' (Ubuntu, written submission).*

Concerns around developing a subject on CASD were particularly highlighted from the subject area/discipline of Geography and related to:

- Calls for an update to the existing LC Geography syllabus which, it is argued, should incorporate a variety of CASD aspects.
- The perceived de-emphasis on JC Geography and calls for it to be made a compulsory subject.
- The appropriate situating of Geography as a discipline from which to learn about CASD over other subjects/disciplines.
- Suggestions that CASD be addressed from a discipline perspective, e.g., Geography, and that a subject on CASD does not represent a 'discipline'; developing subjects based around themes or big ideas could, it is argued, lead to further dilution of existing disciplines in the future.

There were similar calls from other disciplines for a strong representation of their subject area in LC CASD. Science educators emphasised the need for a high level of scientific content in the subject, and for coordination/alignment between the content taught in CASD and existing LC

science subjects. Others suggested that concepts engaged in through Home Economics, Politics and Society, and Construction Studies should be central to the subject.

### **The learning environment**

Feedback on the learning environment emphasised the benefits of outdoor learning and connection with nature. Consideration should be given to hands-on, immersive experiences, spending time in nature and carrying out practical activities, e.g., working with biodiversity, doing a beach clean with data analysis. Through active experimentation and reflective observation, students could develop values and emotionally connect with their learning, which can lead to changed behaviours. Further, through engaging in outdoor and place-based learning, students step into the places in which they live as active citizens. A number of submissions referenced evidence that other countries have seen radical changes in students through bringing them to areas affected by climate change, as well as raising the point that the value we place on nature can be highlighted by situating learning in nature.

## Section Three: Key findings for subject development

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The findings of the consultation indicate that, despite some noted concerns, the development of LC CASD is timely and welcomed. This section of the report identifies some key considerations for the development of the subject arising from the consultation.

### **The scope of the subject**

The Development Group will consider the scope of the specification to ensure that the learning set out can be taught and assessed within a minimum of 180 hours. In doing so, the consultation feedback has indicated that they will need to consider the purpose of LC CASD as a subject and the areas of learning that are most important and relevant for students, being mindful of the suggestions around connecting the local to global, climate science, climate literacy, exploring root causes and future thinking, and taking action through interdisciplinary approaches. There is also a need to ensure a sufficient balance between the breadth and depth of engagement with both climate action and sustainable development. The importance of environmental sustainability, along with the other dimensions of sustainable development, and their intersections, will need to be explored.

### **Purpose and identity**

The observations of educators from a subject discipline perspective, in particular Geography, demonstrate the challenge of introducing a new subject in a space with existing and established practices. LC CASD needs to ensure it has its own identity, without infringing on other disciplines, but at the same time drawing on a variety of knowledge and skills across disciplines to help students engage with climate and sustainability matters. In developing the specification, the Development Group will consider opportunities for a critical exploration of climate change and related issues, with an emphasis on learning about, and through, action.

### **Learning outcomes, pedagogical approaches and supports**

As the Development Group work on the learning outcomes and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in LC CASD, they will consider a number of factors. They will look at opportunities for skills development, including systems thinking and critical thinking. The relationship between the scale of global challenges, emotional wellbeing and action, space for conversation and the benefits of connecting with nature through the experience of the subject will also be explored. Consideration will be given to practical, hands-on experiences that enable students to use their voice, reduce eco-anxiety, and centralise the concept of hope for a sustainable future. There are a wide range of actors and initiatives in the climate action space that add significant value to subject specific and cross-curricular ESD learning in schools. As the Development Group go about developing the LC CASD specification, they will do so in cognisance of the opportunities to learn from and harness the resources available to schools in the non-formal sector.

### **The potential of a second assessment component**

Coursework assessment offers significant potential for the subject. The Development Group will need to consider a range of potential areas for assessment and explore different modes and timings of assessment in order to develop a valid, reliable, and equitable component that supports students in developing and demonstrating a range of skills.

## Conclusion and next steps

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The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of LC CASD generated rich discussion and led to useful and thoughtful feedback from multiple perspectives. The quality of the responses to the consultation demonstrated significant engagement with the Background Paper and Brief for the development of LC CASD and the thoughtful and considered opinions and suggestions offered indicate the extent to which there is considerable interest in, and support for the introduction of CASD as a new subject in senior cycle.

NCCA would like to thank all of those who participated in focus groups, completed the online survey, or made a written submission. Furthermore, NCCA is grateful to the school leaders who facilitated teachers in participating in the focus group events and to all of those who supported student participation in the consultation.

This report has presented an overview of the range of views and perspectives across the consultation process. The findings presented in this report will provide direction and guidance for the Development Group who were recently convened to undertake the task of developing a new specification for LC CASD. This Development Group will continue their work, informed by the findings outlined in this report, and it is anticipated that a draft curriculum specification will be available for public consultation in Q3, 2023.

## References

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## Appendix A

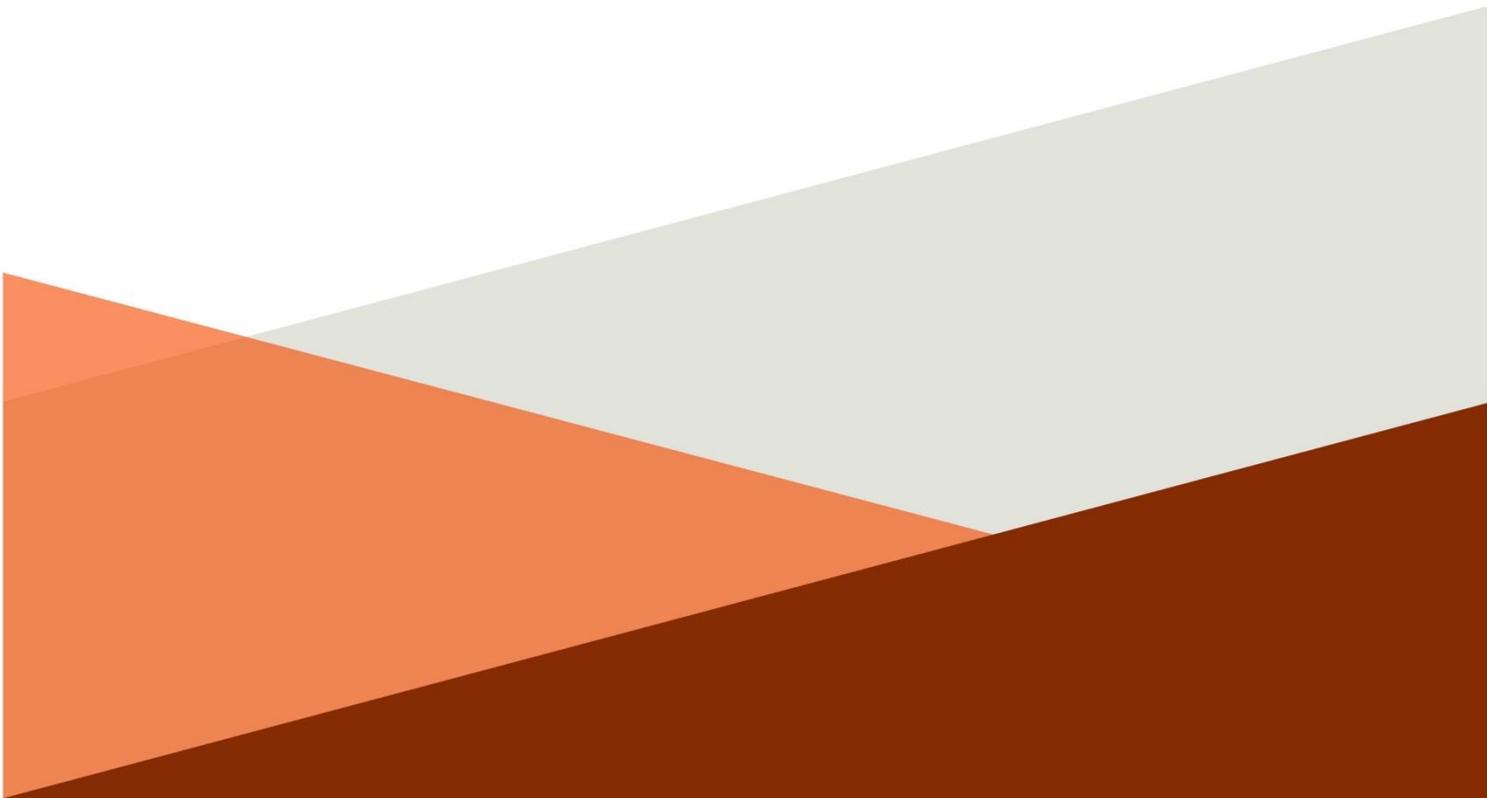
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As part of the consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for LC CASD the following organisations requested to be identified as having responded to the online survey:

- Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE)
- Burrenbeo Trust
- Creativity & Change @ Crawford College of Art and Design, MTU
- Dublin Zoo
- ECO-UNESCO
- Future Focus 21c EDU
- Green Foundation Ireland
- Institute of Geologists of Ireland
- Members of the SEAI teacher panel
- School of Planning UCD, School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy UCD
- Scoil Ruain
- Self Help Africa
- The National Water Forum - An Fóram Uisce
- Trócaire
- World Vision Ireland

During the consultation, the following individuals, groups and organisations requested to be identified as making a written submission:

- Airfield Estate
- An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- Business in the Community Ireland
- Coalition 2030
- Des Gillmor
- Dr Martin Sokol, Associate Professor in Geography, Trinity College Dublin
- Dr Peter E. Childs
- Dr Ruth McManus
- Dr. Sasha Brown
- Dr. Trish Morgan
- Eugene Farrell, Geography, University of Galway
- Frank Bredin, Wesley College
- Geographical Society of Ireland
- Geography and Geosciences Committee of the Royal Irish Academy
- Geological Survey Ireland
- Gwen Duffy
- Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)
- Irish Planning Institute
- Irish Science Teachers' Association
- James Hammersley
- Junior Cert Climate Action Short Course
- Junior Cycle for Teachers
- Maeve McGandy
- Patrick Barrett, Bioeconomy Implementation Group, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Postgraduate and Early Career Network of the Geographical Society of Ireland
- Professor Frances Fahy
- Professor Patrick Paul Walsh, UCD School of Politics and International Relations & UCD Earth Institute; Vivienne Fitzpatrick, UCD MSc Sustainable Development student 2022/2023
- Rachel McArdle
- SEAI Education and Youth Programme
- Shelagh Waddington
- Sian Cowman, Maynooth University
- Ubuntu Network
- Worldwide Global Schools
- UNESCO Chair, Munster Technological University



**NCCA**

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Curriculum and Assessment