



**NCCA**

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

# Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society

For consultation

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## Introduction

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The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in [Equity and Excellence for All](#) (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Politics and Society is included in Tranche 4, which will be completed in 2027 for introduction to schools in September 2028.

This paper provides a context for the review of Politics and Society and has been informed by the views of teachers, school leaders and students gathered through school visits conducted in a representative sample of schools. It begins by considering the background of Politics and Society with Section 1 presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments. Section 2 sets out how Politics and Society related education is currently provided for within the Irish curriculum before focusing in more detail on Politics and Society while Section 3 provides an overview of the insights gained through the school visits conducted and the lived experience of schools, teachers, and students. Section 4 considers similar education opportunities internationally and presents an overview of four different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discuss some issues identified for consideration in the redevelopment of Politics and Society before finally setting out a proposed brief for this work in Section 6, which will guide the work of the development group.

## Background and Context

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This section sets out some of the significant developments in Politics and Society since its initial introduction, before focusing on the education and broader policy landscape which are important contextual considerations for the review and redevelopment of Politics and Society.

Leaving Certificate Politics and Society was introduced on a phased basis, starting with forty-one schools from 2016/17. In this first cycle of implementation, eight-hundred and sixty-seven students opted to take the subject (1.6% of the total cohort of Leaving Certificate students). From September 2018, Politics and Society was available to all post-primary schools, and an additional sixty schools elected to offer the subject. According to the Department of Education and Youth (2024), the Politics and Society is currently offered in 189 schools.

In 2019, an early enactment review of Politics and Society established that the specification was working well but would benefit from minor revisions. In the main, these amendments reflected the changing socio-political sphere nationally and globally. Changes also took account of feedback about a need for greater clarity in a small number of learning outcomes, and that the key thinkers should be open to all students, rather than limited to those studying the subject at higher level. The amended specification was published for implementation from September 2019, and key NCCA support materials were updated in line with the revised specification.

In the intervening years since the development, implementation and review of the Politics and Society specification, changes in the education and policy landscape and seminal shifts in the local, national and global political and social environments represent important contextual considerations for the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society.

Amongst the most relevant curriculum developments in the interim period since the initial introduction of Politics and Society are the publication of a [Civic, Social and Political Education \(CSPE\) short course](#) (2016, revised 2021) in line with the [Framework for Junior Cycle](#) (2015), a new [Transition Year Programme statement](#) with Civic and Community Engagement as one of the student dimensions, the new [Leaving Certificate Climate Action and Sustainable Development](#) specification and redeveloped [Leaving Certificate Geography](#) specification. An emphasis on global learning/citizenship education is also reflected in the [Senior Cycle Key Competencies](#), including the competency of 'Participating in Society', and in international frameworks such as [The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#), the [OECD PISA global competence framework](#), and [UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education: Topics and learning objectives](#).

From a broader education policy perspective, there are several national strategies with relevance to Politics and Society. The second [National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) to 2030](#) provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making towards a more sustainable future at individual, community, local, national and international levels. Young people feature prominently in the five priorities outlined in this strategy, in terms of the opportunities that will be provided for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, dispositions, and to undertake ESD-related actions. Another relevant national strategy is the Department of Foreign Affairs' (Irish Aid) [Global Citizenship Education strategy 2021-2025](#). Global Citizenship Education (GCE) aims to increase awareness and understanding of

the rapidly changing, inter-dependent and unequal world. As key change-makers in building a better world, young people are a named target group in this strategy. The supports arising from these strategies enable schools to engage with citizenship education relevant teaching and learning at curricular, cross-curricular, and extra-curricular levels.

Beyond national education policy, a plethora of government policies and strategies have relevance for Politics and Society, including:

- [A Better World: Ireland's policy for international development](#)
- [Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Global Ireland Strategy 2018-2025](#)
- [National Action Plan Against Racism](#)
- [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#)
- National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals (forthcoming)
- [National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025](#)
- [Wellbeing Framework for Ireland](#)
- [Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028](#)
- Statements of Strategy from relevant government departments

These domestic policies, together with commitments aligned to the international policies, such as the Council of Europe's [European Declaration on Global Education to 2050](#) and UNESCO's [Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#), provide insights into the contemporary relevance of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society.

We live in challenging times, with growing nationalism, threats to the efficacy of international and national institutions charged with upholding human rights, lack of accountability and impunity in international relations, conflicts, climate change, injustice and inequalities. According to the Council of Europe (2017), citizenship education is 'essential to demonstrate the relevance of democracy and human rights for everyday life' (p. 18). This claim is reflected in research into the implementation of Politics and Society. For example, McKeever (2023), found that amongst the strengths of Politics and Society are that the subject offers students:

...the chance to explore a broad variety of values and to experiment with a variety of viewpoints...encouraging critical thought and respect for difference of opinion. It also teaches students practical information on how to research and reference appropriate material to bolster their understanding and strengthen their arguments. ...it grants agency and instils a sense of empowerment... (McKeever, 2023, p. 124).

In our complex and ever-changing world, this type of education has never mattered more. The redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society is therefore timely, providing an opportunity to ensure that the specification is relevant, engaging and offers hope for students, so that they can more effectively participate as informed, critical, and active citizens now and in their futures.

## Section Summary

- The current Leaving Certificate Politics and Society specification has been implemented in schools on a phased basis since September 2016. The latest figures show that the subject is being offered in 189 schools.
- In 2019, an NCCA early enactment review resulted in minor revisions to the specification and to accompanying NCCA supports.
- National education policies, such as the second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the Global Citizenship Education strategy, have a bearing on the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society.
- Beyond education policies, a broad range of national and international policies and commitments can inform and impact on aspects of the specification.
- In the context of our rapidly changing world, a revised Leaving Certificate Politics and Society curriculum is important and timely.

## Politics and Society in the curriculum

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This section provides an overview of the opportunities for learning related to Politics and Society currently available to students within both the junior cycle and senior cycle programmes. It then focuses on the participation rates in Politics and Society, outlining the uptake of the subject.

### Citizenship Education in junior cycle

The Junior Cycle Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) short course aims to 'inform, inspire, empower and enable young people to participate as active citizens' (DES, 2021, p. 5). Human rights and social responsibilities underpin all learning in the short course. For this reason, Strand One: Rights and responsibilities, which includes learning relative to human dignity and human rights instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is considered foundational. Strands Two and Three address global citizenship and democracy and related themes such as sustainable development, law and media.

Active reflective citizenship is 'at the centre of the learning process' in CSPE (DES, 2021, p. 4). Students are expected to reflect on their learning and what it means in their lives in an ongoing manner. They complete at least three citizenship actions, one for each of the three strands, and create an Action Record for one of these actions as their Classroom-Based Assessment.

### Leaving Certificate Politics and Society

Politics and Society aims to "develop the student's ability to be a reflective and active citizen, in a way that is informed by the insights and skills of social and political science" (DES, 2019, p. 8).

The objectives are to develop:

- an understanding of the social systems within which people act locally, nationally and more widely
- an understanding of concepts which underpin contemporary systems of government and of the diverse models for making these concepts operational
- an understanding of and a respect for human rights and responsibilities, for human dignity and for democratic modes of governance
- an understanding of and a respect for sustainable development
- a commitment to and a capacity for active participation in the learner's social and political worlds
- a commitment to and a capacity for critical, discursive, and independent thinking
- a commitment to and a capacity for engagement in peaceful and democratic means of resolving conflicts
- a sense of care for others and a respect for and a valuing of diversity in all areas of human life within the parameters of human rights principles
- the capacity to analyse and interpret qualitative and quantitative social and political research data, and to use such data carefully in forming opinions and coming to conclusions (*ibid*).

The aim and objectives are aligned to the four strands and related topics in the specification:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Strand 1: Power and decision-making         | Topic 1: Power and decision-making in school<br>Topic 2: Power and decision-making at national and European level                 |
| Strand 2: Active citizenship                | Topic 3: Effectively contributing to communities<br>Topic 4: Rights and responsibilities in communication with others             |
| Strand 3: Human rights and responsibilities | Topic 5: Human rights and responsibilities in Ireland<br>Topic 6: Human rights and responsibilities in Europe and the wider world |
| Strand 4: Globalisation and localisation    | Topic 7: Globalisation and identity<br>Topic 8: Sustainable development   |

Table 1: Leaving Certificate Politics and Society – strands and topics

Strand 1 include foundational concepts and should be studied first. Strand 2 focuses on skills fundamental to being an informed, reflective and active citizen. These skills should be taught explicitly and integrated with learning from across the course, and while carrying out the citizenship project. Strands 3 and 4 provide an opportunity for the application of these foundational concepts (DES, 2019, p. 31). Following the revision of the specification in 2019, all students doing Leaving Certificate Politics and Society study all learning outcomes.

## Politics and Society in focus

This section explores participation rates in Leaving Certificate Politics and Society drawing on statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and provides an overview of assessment for certification.

### Student participation

The number of Leaving Certificate students has increased in recent years, and Politics and Society participation rates have increased slightly year-on-year in the same period, as indicated in Table 2.

| Year | Higher Level | Ordinary Level | Total Candidates | Total LC candidates | Politics and Society as a % of total candidates |
|------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|---|
| 2019 | 676          | 103            | 779              | 56,071              | 1.39  |
| 2020 | 1,440        | 214            | 1,654            | 57,569              | 2.87  |
| 2021 | 1,992        | 230            | 2,222            | 57,952              | 3.83  |
| 2022 | 2,135        | 253            | 2,388            | 58,056              | 4.11  |
| 2023 | 2,151        | 353            | 2,504            | 58,006              | 4.31  |
| 2024 | 2,350        | 296            | 2,646            | 56,791              | 4.66  |

Table 2: Number of students sitting Leaving Certificate Politics and Society at higher and ordinary Level 2018/19-2023/24

## Assessment for certification

Assessment in Politics and Society is carried out through two components:

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| • Citizenship project report | 20% |
| • Written examination        | 80% |

### Citizenship project report

The Citizenship Project Report assesses a candidate's ability 'to use the knowledge and concepts of Politics and Society to make judgements as to how to be active in communities' and the 'capacity to reflect upon and evaluate what they have learned or achieved from being an active participant in civil, social and political life' (DES, 2019, p.19, 40). This coursework element affords students opportunities to engage in research, analysis, action and extended reflection.

Citizenship Project titles are issued annually by SEC for fifth year students. Students select one from the list of four titles. Group actions may be undertaken but reports must be the work of an individual. The titles are common to all students. Differentiation (level of analysis, evaluation and application required) is applied at the point of assessment by using two separate marking schemes. The scheme used is determined by the level of written exam selected by the student. The report must be submitted in the SEC digital completion booklet which includes the following headings: rationale and research, execution of the citizenship project, Reflections on knowledge gained and skills developed, and References and Bibliography. Each section has a recommended word count, with a maximum total word count of 1,700 words (SEC, 2018; SEC, 2025).

### Written examination

The Leaving Certificate Politics and Society written examination (OL/HL) consists of one paper of two and a half hours. The exam assesses:

- knowledge and understanding of social and political issues
- analysis and interpretation of qualitative and/or quantitative social and political data
- the capacity to form reasonable and logical argument – clarity and coherence in argument and management of ideas.

These three assessment objectives are aligned with the three sections on the paper, as follows:

- Section A (Short answer questions) assesses candidates' knowledge of the four strands in the specification.
- Section B (Short answer and extended response questions on a data-based case study) assesses skills of thinking critically and independently; of analysing and interpreting qualitative and quantitative social and political research data; and of using data carefully in coming to conclusions. It also assesses the capacity of students to come to conclusions by drawing on their wider Politics and Society knowledge.
- Section C (Discursive essays) assesses knowledge across the four strands, together with the students' skills in critical, discursive and independent thinking and in using qualitative and quantitative data carefully in coming to conclusions.

| Component                            | Assessment requirement   | Marks                            | Weighting |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Citizenship project report           | One report based on a title from a prescribed list of four titles  | 100 (OL/HL)                      | 20%       |
| Written examination                  | 80%  |                                  |           |
| Section A:<br>Short answer questions | 20 questions to attempt 10 (OL)<br>15 questions to attempt 10 (HL) | 100 marks (OL)<br>50 marks (HL)  |           |
| Section B:<br>Data-based questions   | All questions (OL/HL)  | 150 marks<br>(OL/HL)             |           |
| Section C:<br>Discursive essays      | 6 questions to attempt 3 (OL)<br>6 questions to attempt 2 (HL)     | 150 marks (OL)<br>200 marks (HL) |           |

Table 3: Coursework and written examination structure for ordinary and higher levels

Insights arising from Junior Cycle CSPE, and from information about Leaving Certificate Politics and Society, can be used as context for discussion to progress a redeveloped specification.

## Section Summary

- The Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) short course aims to enable young people to participate as active citizens. Human rights and social responsibilities are foundational in the specification, which also addresses global citizenship and democracy.
- The aim of the current Leaving Certificate Politics and Society specification is to develop students' ability to be reflective and active citizens. Informed by social and political sciences, the specification includes four strands: (1) Power and decision-making (foundational); (2) Active citizenship; (3) Human rights and responsibilities; and (4) Globalisation and localisation.
- Politics and Society participation rates have increased every year since implementation however the relative rate of increase has slowed in recent years.
- Assessment consists of a citizenship project (20%) and written examination (80%). Students select one project title from a list of four issued annually by the SEC. Examination papers are split into short answer questions, questions relating to data-based case study, and essay questions.

## Insights from school visits

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School visits were conducted as part of the scoping work for this Background Paper. A representative sample was selected from the fifteen schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in Leaving Certificate Politics and Society curriculum developments. Six schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place in May 2025 and involved focus group meetings with 39 senior cycle students, 10 Politics and Society teachers and 9 school leaders.

A thematic approach to examining the focus group feedback unearthed rich insights that can be categorised under the following headings:

- The aim of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society
- Subject appeal
- Discussion, dialogue and debate
- The scope of the specification
- Assessment.

### The aim of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society

When discussing the aim of Politics and Society in a redeveloped specification, students and teachers highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of power structures, and current national and global challenges. They stressed that the subject should continue to support students to develop critical thinking and consciousness, to identify reliable and biased sources, to carry out inquiries. Participants identified the importance of pedagogy and classroom environment in achieving these aims. The focus on discussion and student-led approaches is seen as a positive, as is the alignment of Politics and Society aims with senior cycle key competencies and school ethos.

### Subject appeal

Students chose to study Politics and Society for a range of reasons. Some have a long-standing interest in current affairs or developed an interest through a Politics and Society related Transition Year module. Others saw alignment with extra-curricular or outside-school activities, for example, activism, volunteering and voting. Class discussions, in which they will be exposed to different perspectives, is a draw for others. Students were also influenced by a perceived complementarity between Politics and Society and the knowledge, skills or assessment in Business Studies, English, Geography and/or History. A synergy with future study or work plans in law, journalism, economics, public administration and politics also makes the subject attractive.

Where the numbers of students taking the subject is holding steady or increasing, this was attributed to the student-centred and relevant nature of the subject, passionate teachers and good examination results. The impact on student numbers in History was referenced, but school leaders said that this is easily overcome by ensuring that students can take both History and Politics and Society.

## Discussion, dialogue and debate

Discussion, deliberation and debate are recognised as important methodologies for Politics and Society (DES, 2019, p.15). Topic 4 (Rights and responsibilities in communication with others) was recognised by teachers as being closely related to the pedagogical approach and classroom environment underpinning the subject. Students value being given the freedom to form and use evidence to defend their opinions about current affairs. They make direct connections between discussion and their levels of critical thinking, communication and respect for others. Teachers identified that students need to be supported to build discursive skills, for example, by engaging in pair work, then progressing to group work.

Participants reported that engaging with different viewpoints can be challenging, especially when dealing with identity and cultural diversity (Topic 7). Students were alive to the need to deal sensitively with 'difficult knowledge' (Bryan, 2016) that may elicit strong emotions, highlighting the importance of teachers acting as mediators and emphasising that discussion was more appropriate than debate in these cases. They highlighted wellbeing concerns linked to the climate crisis and the propensity of the media to report negative news stories. For this reason, teachers counselled that, insofar as is possible, a pedagogy of hope be integrated into the redeveloped specification.

## The scope of the specification

While participants spoke positively about Politics and Society, there were mixed views about the manageability of the current specification. Some teachers claim that the course is too big. This feedback was often in conjunction with commentary about the challenges inherent in keeping up to date with current affairs and recent data. Certain topics were labelled as time consuming, for example, Topic 1 (Power and decision-making in schools), Topic 5 (Human rights in Ireland), Topic 6 (Human right in Europe and the wider world) and Topic 8 (Sustainable development). However, there was also positive commentary about the linkages between the topics which contribute to keeping the specification manageable.

Out of the eight topics in the specification, students are particularly interested in Topic 2, especially gender and media. While female students suggested they would like to expand the gender-related content, teachers suggested that this content is less appealing for some male students. Most participants think that media could form a larger part of the redeveloped specification. For example, by adding a key thinker or learning about the use of new technologies (AI) in media or left- and right-wing media activity.

Participants hold mixed views on the inclusion of content related to the law in the current specification. For some, the reference to the judiciary in Topic 2, together with opportunities to bring a legal perspective into the human rights topics, is sufficient. Others think that constitutional and family law, and court processes in Ireland and elsewhere could be added.

There was a sense that Topic 2 is insufficiently theoretical. This led to calls to include political ideologies, neoliberalism, and structural power. Students also suggested that they would like to learn about local authorities and Public Participation Networks (PPN), and about political developments in both EU and non-EU countries. For this reason, teachers argued for a rethink of the title of Topic 2 (Power and decision-making at national and European level).

For most teachers and students, human rights (Topics 5 and 6) are the most interesting. There were suggestions to include consideration of economic inequality, and conflict and migration using a human rights lens. It was also felt that students should have opportunities to learn about situations where rights holders hold extreme political views.

For many students, the key thinkers are the best part of the Politics and Society specification. Noam Chomsky, Paulo Freire, John Locke, Kathleen Lynch, Karl Marx, Robert Nozick and Sylvia Walby were identified as favourites. However, although participants called for a decrease in the number of thinkers, they did not agree on who should be removed. There were strong opinions about the need to rebalance the thinkers, to improve gender representation and present a diversity of ideological stances.

In the absence of right-wing arguments, participants argued that student struggle to differentiate between the thinkers and are not sufficiently supported to articulate a counter argument. Furthermore, several teachers identified that the theoretical arguments, for example in patriarchy (Topic 2), do not reflect the views of a growing number of students.

Some participants articulated awareness of the care needed when choosing named thinkers, to avoid legitimising extreme political arguments. It is worth highlighting that the early enactment review led to the inclusion of a statement in the 2019 specification to the effect that additional relevant theorists could be considered alongside the named thinkers.

## Assessment

### Citizenship Project

Topic 3 (Effectively contributing to communities) was recognised by teachers as underpinning the citizenship project. Students generally value being able to choose their project title and there was a mixed reaction to the idea of a single broad project brief that could be adapted to student interest and context. Both students and teachers perceive a lack of equity in the workload associated with different project titles.

While students suggested that the project should be research focused, teachers mainly agreed that the focus should be on action, given that this supports the development of citizenship skills. The action versus research debate was reflected in feedback about the digital completion booklet. Students recommended a review of the word count and the weighting to allow demonstration and a fairer recognition of their research. Teachers agreed that the distribution of word count and marks needs revision but generally thought that the weighting in favour of action should be maintained.

Amongst the challenges relating to the completion of projects, participants mentioned the language register in the titles and booklet, planning, time and workload management issues. They also mentioned the pressure on schools when lots of students choose a title with a fundraising element, student stress associated with identifying and relying on overstretched external groups and organisations for information or engagement, particularly in contexts where social capital may be an issue; and the wellbeing risks in doing online research and online actions.

Participants expressed trepidation about stress levels with the move to, and scheduling of, additional assessment components. Everyone wants the AAC brief as early as possible. School leaders flagged the need to build students' research skills in junior cycle, and the cultural shift that is required for teachers and parents/guardians to support students to succeed on their own merits. They expressed general concerns about the use of AI; equity issues related to technology and technical issues with AAC submissions.

School leaders and students argued that plans for a weightier additional assessment component necessitates strict management of expectations of the level of learning in the course. For some, the work required for the current projects is worth 40%. Others suggested that the word count in the booklet should be increased to coincide with introduction of the AAC. Some students favoured a move towards a multi-media portfolio approach, for evidence of research and action in real time. Other AAC suggestions included participation in a structured debate, a research essay or thesis, or a data-based case-study.

### **Written examination**

In considering future exam papers, students indicated that they would value accessible language in questions, more time and reward for the presentation of alternative, reasoned viewpoints. Teachers want a clear alignment between the redeveloped specification and the exam and a more detailed marking scheme. Participants like the short questions and the choice in Section A but reported struggling with Section B (data-based questions). They can find the questions difficult to interpret and often find it difficult to understand what is being assessed. Teachers think that too many marks are given to this section. The essay choice in Section C is appreciated, but students recommended either fewer essays or more exam time.

## **Section Summary**

- Focus groups with students, teachers and school leaders were held in six representative schools.
- Feedback on the subject aim emphasised learning about the impact of power, current events and challenges, and research and inquiry skills. The importance of dialogic pedagogies in achieving the aim was highlighted.
- Students select Politics and Society because it aligns with their interest in current affairs, their participation in groups and activities in and outside of school, other Leaving Certificate subject choices and/or with future student/work plans.
- Students were alive to the need to deal sensitively with emotive topics or topics that might evoke anxiety, such as identity and culture or the climate crisis.
- Teachers articulated mixed views about the manageability of the specification.

- Feedback from students and teachers indicated high levels of interest in gender, media, and human rights. There were strong calls to consider the number of, and balance between, the named key thinkers in the specification.
- There were mixed views about the number and nature of SEC titles for the citizenship project; the assessment and word count weighting in favour of action over research; and, in terms of suggestions for an AAC in the redeveloped specification.
- Feedback on the written examination focused on time in the exam, the pitch of the questions, and the marking scheme.

# International trends in Politics and Society education

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This section considers the citizenship education landscape internationally. A review of relevant upper secondary curricula in four jurisdictions (France, International Baccalaureate, New Zealand and Northern Ireland) illustrates the main areas of study within these international curricula and offers a range of upper secondary structures to inform the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Politics and Society specification. These four curricula were selected as they are all standalone programmes or subjects, albeit with different time allocations. In many other jurisdictions citizenship (or related) education is thematic across other disciplines, with and without prescribed time allocations. The four curricula also offer a diversity of interpretations of upper secondary citizenship education and different approaches to assessment. The curriculum documents in France and the International Baccalaureate are recently revised and implemented, while in New Zealand revision is scheduled for completion in 2029.

## France – Moral and Civic Education

Compulsory Moral and Civic Education (EMC) was introduced in France at primary and secondary education in 2015. In the final two years (*première* and *terminale* respectively) for the general and for the technical *Baccalauréat*, EMC is allocated 18 hours in total, that is, 9 hours per year. A [new EMC Baccalauréat programme](#), with the same time allocation, was published in 2024/25 and will be implemented in the *première* year in 2025/26, and in the *terminale* in 2026/27.

The new *première* programme focuses on 'Cohesion and Diversity in a Democratic Society', and the *terminale* focus is 'Democratic Life: Debate, Deliberation and Decision-making'. Each of these units include two themes, as follows:

### *Première* - Cohesion and Diversity in a Democratic Society:

1. Social cohesion and the values and principles of the Republic, with topics including solidarity and brotherhood; gender equality; discrimination and inclusive society; racism, antisemitism, anti-Romani sentiment, xenophobia, and anti-LGBT hatred; pluralism.
2. The Republic and the Nation, which includes the indivisibility of the Republic and decentralisation; nationality and citizenship; national defence and security; digital society.

### *Terminale* - Democratic Life: Debate, Deliberation and Decision-making:

1. The principles and spaces of democratic debate, which includes the culture of debate and the ethics of discussion; political parties and organised civil society; public opinion; participatory democracy; digital society; active citizenship.
2. Institutional deliberation, which includes legitimacy; consensus or majority; European law; international law.

The pedagogical approach detailed in the EMC programme outlines that teacher planning should focus on encouraging reflection, and is consequently expected to include research, and/or presentations and/or reasoned discussions or formal debates. This contributes to the development of students' oral skills, particularly through the practice of argumentation, which enables them to clarify their thoughts and make reasoning explicit.

## Assessment

School-based continuous assessment is weighted at 40% of the *Baccalauréat*. 2% of the 40% comes from the annual average mark over the final two years of upper secondary EMC. EMC teachers may devise the 'annual project' which can be an investigation, research, commentary on a wide range of documentary sources, or engagement with external groups or officials.

Alternatively, drawing on Ministry of Education guidance on continuous assessment for the *Baccalauréat*, teachers can decide that each student receives three grades per year, on which their final annual grade is based. These three grades may relate to a variety of assessments, for example: participation in a debate, a group activity, a research or production project, or an individual piece of reflective writing following a debate or any other collective activity.

## International Baccalaureate – Global Politics

Global Politics is a subject in the last two years (students aged between 16-19 years) of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP). A revised syllabus was published in February 2024, for implementation from August 2024. The first assessment is scheduled for May 2026. Students chose Global Politics from nine subjects in a grouping entitled 'Individuals and Society'. The Global Politics DP course is available at both standard level (SL) and higher level (HL). SL and HL differ in duration (SL = 150 teaching hours; HL = 240 teaching hours) and scope of learning but share the same grade descriptors.

The Global Politics course explores fundamental political concepts such as power, sovereignty, legitimacy, equality, interdependence, sustainability, and peace. It aims to develop understanding of the local, national, international and global dimensions of political activity, and to explore political issues that affect students' lives. It enables students to evaluate power in contemporary global politics; examine how state and non-state actors operate and interact; investigate and analyse contemporary political issues; and develop a commitment to active global citizenship.

The Global Politics DP draws on the social sciences and humanities, aiming to help students to understand abstract political concepts by grounding them in real-world examples and case studies, and inviting comparative study. Developing international-mindedness and an awareness of multiple perspectives is at the heart of the course, which also aims to encourage dialogue and debate.

The course has a common core curriculum (125 hours for both SL and HL) under the central unifying theme of 'people, power and politics'. This consists of four units, each with prescribed mandatory topics:

| Units   | Prescribed mandatory topics  |
|---|--|
| Understanding power and global politics (core unit) | Framing global politics; Systems and interactions; Power; Sovereignty; Legitimacy; Interdependence (includes the UN); and Theoretical perspectives in global politics. |
| Rights and justice/human rights (thematic study)    | Contested meanings; Interactions of political stakeholders and actors; Nature, practice and study of rights and justice; and Debates on rights and justice.            |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Development and sustainability (thematic study) | Contested meanings; Interactions of political stakeholders and actors; Nature, practice and study of development and sustainability; and Debates on development and sustainability. |
| Peace and conflict (thematic study)             | Contested meanings; Interactions of political stakeholders and actors; Nature, practice and study of peace and conflict; and Debates on peace and conflict.                         |

Table 4: IB DP Global Politics units

The core unit topics can be studied separately or integrated with the thematic studies. Students can also examine extended case studies encompassing more than one theme.

### Assessment

The assessment objectives for Global Politics focus on knowledge and understanding, application and analysis, synthesis and evaluation, and use and application of appropriate skills. These objectives apply to all assessment components.

All students must undertake an engagement project (SL = 25 hours, HL = 35 hours), which as inquiry-based learning requires identifying and analysing a political issue in a community or local setting through research and active engagement. HL students conduct additional research to inform recommendations to address the identified political issue. All students complete a written report based on an engagement project. The report is internal assessed and authenticated (SL = 2,000 words for 30%; HL = 2,400 words for 20%), and externally moderated by the IB.

Students doing HL also conduct further inquiry in the form of independent research on two case studies. This case study research is allocated 80 hours and must fall under HL global political challenges topic areas: Borders, Environment, Equality, Health, Identity, Poverty, Security, Technology.

At SL level, students do two external written exams (3 hours: 1.25 + 1.75). Students doing the HL course do three external written exams (4.5 hours: 1.25 + 1.75 + 1.5).

- Paper 1 (SL = 30%; HL = 20%) includes four compulsory questions based on sources (text, images, diagrams, infographics) that address topics from across the course.
- Paper 2 (SL = 40%; HL = 30%) includes extended response questions. Students answer one question focused on a particular thematic study, and one integrating question that draws links across course.
- Paper 3 (HL only = 30%) Stimulus-based questions. Students support their responses to 3 questions with evidence from their two previously researched case studies.

### New Zealand – Social Studies

Social Studies is an optional subject in the last three years (Years 11-13, 15-18 years) of upper secondary education in New Zealand. To be considered as an approved National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)/University Entrance (UE) subject, students must achieve 14 credits by their third year, equating to 140 hours of combined class contact and independent study.

(NCEA) Social Studies aims to develop students' understanding, knowledge and skills in relation to social, cultural, economic, and political processes, and to enable them to participate in society as critically informed, ethical and empathetic citizens with a concern for and commitment to the wellbeing of society. It emphasises experiences in New Zealand and the Pacific region, and connectedness with the wider world.

Integral to Social Studies is: (1) social inquiry, to explore contemporary social issues and inform decision-making related to social actions; and (2) social action in relation to a contemporary social issue, and through Social Studies processes, practices, and skills. Social inquiry and action support students' knowledge and understanding in relation to the 'Big Ideas' and 'Significant Learning'<sup>1</sup> in the curriculum. Aspects of Significant Learning often cross over multiple Big Ideas (outlined below), and vice versa.

- Big Idea 1): Cultures are dynamic and change through connection and interaction.
- Via social inquiry, students apply their own identities, cultures, lived experiences and knowledge to social issues and explore the causes and consequences of change.
- Big Idea 2): Societies are made up of diverse systems that have multiple impacts on people. Students learn about social organisation in the past and present and consider future implications and challenges. They develop understanding of place in these societal systems, informed by their own lived experiences. This Big Idea offers opportunities to explore and compare social, cultural, traditional, and spiritual forms of decision-making systems. They explore how power, privilege, and control in decision-making are central to the impacts on people and their experiences; examine barriers to participation; and consider possible future change in social structures.
- Big Idea 3): Global flows influence societies.
- Students explore our interconnected world where global social, cultural, economic, political and environmental flows interact and impact people and places. They explore what citizens can do to address global issues, such as international conflicts, climate change, and global pandemics, and develop skills and understanding in critiquing problem-solving and decision-making at the global level, for example, by examining power, sovereignty, cultural dominance, and colonisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Significant Learning is learning that is critical for students to know, understand and do by the end of each Social Studies curriculum level.

## Assessment

For NCEA Social Studies, the Level 3 achievement standards are:

| Standard  | Credits | Assessment conditions  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1. Demonstrate understanding of ideological responses to an issue                             | 4       | External: End of year online/paper-based exam. A response/account (800-900 words) on a current issue identified by the student.  |
| 2. Conduct a critical social inquiry  | 6       | Internal: The teacher, or student in consultation with the teacher, decides on the focus of the inquiry. Evidence is gathered from in- and out-of-class activities and can be presented in any media. In the case of a group inquiry, the teacher must ensure that there is evidence that each student have met all aspects of the standard. |
| 3. Demonstrate understanding of how ideologies shape society                                  | 4       | External: End of year online/paper-based exam. Analysis of resources in a prescribed booklet, using skills learned during the course.  |
| 4. Examine personal involvement in a social action(s) that aims to influence policy change(s) | 4       | Internal: In addition to the conditions outlined for the critical social inquiry, the student's active participation is based on negotiated participation in a social action(s) approved by the school. Evidence should be recorded and show specific examples of how the student has participated.  |
| 5. Examine a campaign of social action(s) to influence policy change(s)                       | 4       | Internal: The campaign may be a current or a historical campaign with ongoing consequences.  |

Table 5: NCEA Social Studies: achievement standards and assessment conditions

For the NCEA, students must achieve 14 credits at Level 3. For each standard, achievement criteria are set out at three levels: Achievement, Achievement with Merit, and Achievement with Excellence.

## Northern Ireland – Government and Politics

GCE A Level in Government and Politics is available at AS and A2 levels. Students can take the two AS units (in Year 1 of the two-year course), plus the two A2 units (in Year 2) for a 360-hour GCE A Level qualification. They can also choose to do a standalone 180-hour AS qualification.

Government and Politics aims to help students to gain a better understanding of and interest in political systems and ideas and the changes these have made to society, and to enable them to relate this understanding to local, national and international events reported in the media. Students explore and think critically about the structures of authority and power in the political

systems that have the greatest impact on their lives and have opportunities to develop the skills of creative thinking and problem-solving, analysis, research and evaluation.

The specification has four units:

- AS 1: The government and politics of Northern Ireland since 1998, including the Northern Ireland Assembly; the Executive Committee; and the Northern Ireland political parties.
- AS 2: The British political process, including Parliament; Executive; the British Judiciary; and pressure groups in the UK.
- A2 1: Option A - A comparative study of the government and politics of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, or Option B - A comparative study of the government and politics of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.
- A2 2: Option A - Political power, including the factors involved in the exercise and theories of political power, or Option B - Political ideas, based on the study of three key texts – J S Mill, *On Liberty*; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; and Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. Students also explore the three main political ideologies of Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism.

### Assessment

The assessment objectives for Government and Politics focus on knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation, and construction and communication of coherent arguments. Each of the four Government and Politics units is externally assessed through written examinations, as summarised below.

| Units  | Assessment   | Hours | Weighting               |
|--|--|-------|-------------------------|
| AS 1: The government and politics of Northern Ireland since 1998 | External written exam<br>One source: 4 short and extended response questions | 1h 30 | AS: 40%<br>A level: 16% |
| AS 2: The British political process                              | External written exam<br>5 short and extended response questions             | 1h 45 | AS: 60%<br>A Level: 24% |
| A2 1: Comparative study (Options A or B)                         | External written exams<br>One source: 6 questions                            | 2h 15 | A Level: 35%            |
| Unit A2 2: Political Power or Ideas (Option A or B)              | External written examination<br>Source: 5 short and extended questions       | 1h 30 | A Level: 25%            |

Table 6: AS and A2 Government and Politics assessment

Politics and Society related upper secondary developments in other jurisdictions provide an important reference for discussing and developing a new Leaving Certificate Politics and Society specification.

## Section Summary

- France, International Baccalaureate, New Zealand, Northern Ireland offer upper secondary courses relevant to Politics and Society as a standalone programme or subject. All four contribute towards certification, albeit to varying degrees.
- In France, upper secondary Moral and Civic Education is a compulsory 18-hour programme spanning two years. The focus is on 'Cohesion and Diversity in a Democratic Society' (1<sup>st</sup> year), and 'Democratic Life: Debate, Deliberation and Decision-making' (2<sup>nd</sup> year). Assessment is continuous and school-based, worth 2% of the 40% for continuous assessment in the general and technical *Baccalauréat*.
- The IBDP Global Politics syllabus is an optional two-year course that can be studied at standard or higher level (SL/HL). Learning is structured in compulsory units entitled 'Understanding power and global politics,' 'Rights and justice/human rights,' 'Development and sustainability,' and 'Peace and conflict'. Assessment is internal (an engagement project – all students; two research-based case studies – students studying HL) and external (written examinations).
- In New Zealand, Social Studies is an optional subject for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). It involves 140 hours of class contact and independent study over 3 years. The course focuses on people – who they are, what they do, how they change, and what happens to them. Social inquiry and action are key features. Assessment is both internal (critical social inquiry; active participation in an action) and external (written examinations).
- In Northern Ireland, GCE Government and Politics can be studied at both AS (180-hours) and A2 (360-hours) levels. The course consists of four units: The government and politics of Northern Ireland since 1998 (AS 1), The British political process (AS 2), A comparative study of politics and government (USA and UK or Republic of Ireland and UK) (A2 1), and either Political Power or Political Ideas (A2 2). All units are assessed via written examinations.
- These four jurisdictions present a varied picture of provision and approaches to core and optional learning, and assessment.

## Issues for Consideration

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This section sets out issues for consideration in the redevelopment of Politics and Society. These arise from the nature of the subject itself, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper.

### Curriculum continuity and coherence

Junior Cycle Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) 'provides a foundation in the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for studying Politics and Society' (DES, 2019, p. 9). According to the literature, CSPE often encounters entrenched enactment challenges, with multiple causes (O'Brien, 2024; Redmond and Butler, 2003). The development group needs to consider these continuity challenges and progress the redevelopment of Politics and Society accordingly.

The Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report (2022) established that a senior cycle for every student, offering a range of learning pathways, should be developed. This requires the development of curriculum components which can meet the needs of students in terms of range, continuity, consolidation, progression and transition. The aim of a senior cycle that offers a range of learning pathways raises questions of coherence with other Leaving Certificate curriculum components and beyond. In the development of Politics and Society, senior cycle programmatic level questions will need to be taken into account, such as:

- How will the specification align with other senior cycle subjects?
- How can learning and assessment in Politics and Society prepare students for future lives, learning and the world of work?

### The relevance and scope of the specification

The interdisciplinary nature of Politics and Society points to the subject's broad relevance. Redevelopment should take cognisance of appropriate balance between learning related to the social science and political science, together with recent, critical developments in the field of citizenship education and feedback from school focus groups.

It is clear from student feedback that their interest in current events and challenges contributes to the appeal of, and engagement with, Politics and Society. Changes in the education and policy landscape and seminal shifts in the local, national and global political and social environments represent important contextual considerations for the redevelopment of Politics and Society. Furthermore, in the context of our rapidly changing world, consideration will need to be given to ensuring relevance and value into the future.

Focus group feedback on the issues arising from the number and breadth of key thinkers needs to be carefully considered, especially with regards to potential risks associated with including theories that may be at odds with a human rights approach. The scope of the course needs to be tempered by the age/stage of students and the time allocation for the subject. To ensure manageability, careful consideration will need to be given to the nature and extent of content, while still supporting teachers and students to engage with current, and potentially difficult and sensitive knowledge.

## **The importance of competency and skills development**

The redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society presents an opportunity to support students 'to develop key competencies within and across the curriculum during senior cycle' (NCCA, 2023, p. 1). Of particular significance to Politics and Society is the key competency of 'Participating in society'. Through engagement with this competency, students 'deepen their understanding of human rights and responsibilities, diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and sustainability. They are aware of and engaged with societal issues, seeking to understand why these issues arise and to mitigate their impacts. They demonstrate their commitment to meaningful participation in school and beyond and advocate for and try to bring about positive change' (NCCA, 2024, p. 27).

Student feedback emphasised the importance of engaging with perspectives other than their own, and in learning how to use data and key thinkers to effectively support arguments and counter arguments. Literature on the implementation of the subject points to the potential of Politics and Society to support students in developing dialogic, research and inquiry, reflection and action skills (Levins, 2018; McKeever, 2023; Reale, 2024).

In redeveloping the Politics and Society specification, the development group should seek to reinforce learning that supports students to gain and build these social and political science related skills.

## **Assessment**

During the school visits, there was substantial discussion about the citizenship project and the written examination. Feedback on the project featured a mixture of views about the number and nature of the project titles. The balance of assessment weighting in favour of action over research was questioned by students, who perceive that they cannot adequately demonstrate their research work in the digital completion booklet and that this work deserves more reward. However, feedback from teachers referenced the essential nature of reflective action in Politics and Society. Furthermore, the emphasis on reflective action is evident in the prominence of inquiry and action in the Politics and Society related curricula in the jurisdictions outlined in this paper. The development group will need to consider how to build and improve upon current assessment arrangements to integrate a coherent and manageable AAC which allows the students to show evidence of their learning in a manner that is in keeping with the subject aim and learning outcomes, rewards effort, is valid and reliable.

The purpose of the data-based questions in the written exam is to assess 'skills of thinking critically and independently; of analysing and interpreting qualitative and quantitative social and political research data; and of using such data carefully in coming to conclusions' (Department of Education and Science, 2019, p. 42). Feedback from students during focus groups indicated that they did not understand what is being assessed and why. In the redeveloped specification, clear and effective communication of the purpose of all assessment components will require consideration.

## Section Summary

- The Leaving Certificate Politics and Society development group needs to consider continuity between the subject and Junior Cycle CSPE and alignment with other senior cycle subjects and modules, and beyond into future lives, study and/or the world of work.
- Changes in the education and policy landscape and seminal shifts in local and global politics and society must be considered in the redevelopment of Politics and Society. In the context of our rapidly changing world, consideration will also need to be given to ensuring relevance and value into the future.
- Expected learning in the redeveloped specification needs to manageable in the time available and should support teachers and students to engage with current, and potentially difficult knowledge, while being mindful of the age and stage of the students. The number and breadth of key thinkers need to be carefully considered, especially with regards to potential risks associated with including theories that may be at odds with a human rights approach.
- The redeveloped specification should reinforce the skills of social and political sciences and balance social and political learning, while being cognisant of recent critical developments in citizenship education.
- Through engagement with the redeveloped specification, students will have opportunities to develop senior cycle key competencies, including the key competency of 'Participating in society'.
- The Politics and Society development group will need to consider how to build upon current assessment arrangements to integrate a coherent and manageable AAC which allows the students to show evidence of their learning in a manner that is aligned to the subject aim and learning outcomes, rewards effort, is valid and reliable.
- Clear and effective communication of the purpose of all assessment components will need to be presented in the redeveloped specification.

# Brief for the review of Politics and Society

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NCCA has established a development group to undertake the task of redeveloping a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Politics and Society. 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.

This brief is designed to provide the basis for redeveloping the Leaving Certificate Politics and Society specification. While the brief is derived from the key insights and issues for consideration identified in the previous sections of this paper, it is also guided by the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects ([Appendix 1](#)).

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 as set out in the [Technical form of curriculum specifications for subjects and modules in a redeveloped senior cycle](#) (NCCA, 2023). The Senior Cycle Key Competencies will be embedded in the learning outcomes.

The specification will be completed for Q2, 2027.

More specifically, the redevelopment work on the Politics and Society specification will consider and address the following:

- How the specification aligns with the guiding principles of senior cycle and the vision for senior cycle education.
- How to 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.
- How to support the development of senior cycle key competencies and the development of a range of digital skills relevant to future life, work, and study.
- Provide a clear rationale for Leaving Certificate Politics and Society, making it transparent and evident to students, teachers, and parents/guardians.
- How to further widen the appeal and continue to promote broader uptake of the subject.
- How the specification can support the development of a range of key competencies and skills of social and political sciences.
- 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 social and political knowledge and conceptual understanding.

- How the specification will take cognisance of an appropriate balance between content associated with social sciences and with political sciences, together with recent developments in the field of citizenship education.
- How the specification can support students to engage with a diversity of key thinkers in generating arguments and counter arguments.
- How the specification can be manageable in scope, while supporting teachers and students to engage with important current, and potentially difficult and sensitive/emotive knowledge.
- The assessment of Leaving Certificate Politics and Society that is aligned to the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects and modules (Appendix 1).
- How the AAC can support and extend the agency of teachers and students, offering choices that support the inclusiveness of the curriculum and allow for students with varying abilities and linguistic levels to engage meaningfully with relevant tasks, whilst continuing to develop their competencies.
- How the specification, in its presentation, can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment.
- 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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# **Appendix 1: Overarching parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects**

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## **1. Background**

- The Minister for Education announced an update on September 20, 2023, on the approach to be taken to the introduction of new and revised subject specifications including how assessment would be addressed in those specifications. Specifically, the announcement indicated that:
  - Each subject shall have an assessment component in addition to the final written examination.
  - This assessment component (an AAC) will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
  - Each subject is to have one written examination; typically marks for the written examination will be 60%.
  - Typically, there should be two assessment components: One written examination and one other assessment component (an AAC).
- More than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and after extensive consideration of the overall assessment load on students. Such exception, however, would be based on strong, clear evidence that a second AAC or a second written paper in the final examination is essential to assess student learning which cannot be achieved through a single AAC and a single written examination paper.

## **2. Introduction**

This document outlines the overarching assessment arrangements and parameters to guide the design of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects which include:

- Art
- Economics
- French
- Gaeilge
- German
- Italian
- Politics and Society
- Spanish
- Technology.

This advice is informed by ongoing work with Tranche 2 and 3 subjects and will be amended, as appropriate, for future tranches which may take account of their subject areas and existing assessment arrangements.

The arrangements as detailed here reflect the policy direction issued by the Minister of Education that all subjects will have an assessment component, to be in a form that is not a traditional written examination, for those components to be set and assessed by the SEC and thereby lead to a reduced emphasis on final examinations in June of 6<sup>th</sup> year.

Specifically, the arrangements for all assessment components as outlined in this document are framed by the Minister's announcement(s) on March 29, 2022, and subsequently on September 20, 2023. Underpinned by the following understandings, the assessment components:

- will not take the form of traditional written examinations
- will be set and marked by the SEC

- will be subject to SEC arrangements for their completion, authentication, and submission.

In developing the arrangements outlined below, the following rationale for moving towards all subjects having another assessment component beyond written examinations is central. This rationale is informed by deliberations on research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC, and on the assessment literature more generally. From this work, it is evident that these components have the potential to:

- **Reduce dependence** on written summative examinations and therefore provide for a **broader assessment system**; written examinations have an important role but can be seen as a 'snapshot' of learning and can lead to teaching and learning having an excessive focus on examination preparation; other forms of assessment can mitigate the potential for this narrowing of learning by assessing aspects of student learning better and/or more comprehensively than written examinations alone can do; or assess learning that is not readily assessable through written examinations.
- Support and enhance teachers' understanding and assessment of **key competencies** by contributing to a greater understanding of how students' knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are assessed.
- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to **reflect on student learning**, boost students' motivation to learn and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices.
- Extend the range and diversity of assessment opportunities; including **spreading the assessment load** over the course of the last two years of senior cycle and thus contribute to a reduction in or spreading of pressure on students.
- Build and develop **teachers' assessment skills and assessment literacy** as teachers support students in working through the assessment activities as detailed within assessment briefs or guidelines.
- Generate student assessment data which can help reduce the vulnerability of the system to future unprecedented or unexpected system shocks such as COVID.
- Allow for assessment opportunities that are more **authentic** than a system relying on terminal written examinations solely.

It is also important to note that a review of the assessment literature more generally also indicates that when introducing other assessment components, it is necessary to consider how to mitigate risks, for example, of:

- over-assessment of students
- over-rehearsal of assessments
- the assessments becoming overly structured, compartmentalised, repetitive, and routine.

As is already the case where other forms of assessment apply, the new assessment arrangements will be guided by the overarching principles of equity, fairness, and integrity.

In addition, at a programme wide level (i.e. taking account of all subjects and modules implemented across schools), it is necessary to have regard to the overall assessment load on students primarily as well as on schools more generally. Whilst it can be expected that SDGs might focus on the approach to assessment in their own subject initially, they are encouraged to be mindful of the overall assessment load across all subjects and modules. Such programme level considerations will also include the methods of assessment being undertaken. As stated above more than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and the following section outlines the process for such cases.

### 3. Process

This section sets out the process through which a variation to the parameters defined in this document will be considered and decided upon; for example, an additional AAC or a second final written examination.

1. Following extensive discussion by the SDG and after exploration of a range of options for a single suitable AAC/single written examination for the subject, the NCCA Executive generates a written note setting out the strong, clear case being made by the Development Group.
2. The written case is agreed and signed off by the Subject Development Group.
3. The written case is discussed with the Board for Senior Cycle.
4. The written case is discussed with the Council. On foot of this discussion, the Council decides whether or not to send the case forward to the Department.
  - a) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case isn't sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council requests the Development Group to work on the basis of the previously set-out parameters in this document applicable to the subject concerned.

OR

- b) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case is sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council agrees to send the case forward to the Department of Education.
5. In the case of 4b, the written case is sent to the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Management Office (SCRPMO) in the Department of Education for consideration and response.
6. The Department may convene the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Implementation Group (SCRIG) to support its consideration of the request for a variation. The SCRIG is a Department-led structure established to provide oversight and support the co-ordination of work across the key agencies/organisations contributing to the redevelopment of senior cycle. Its members include senior officials from the Department (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, Inspectorate, Teacher Professional Learning [TPL]), NCCA, SEC and Oide.
7. The Department decides to support or decline the request for the variation sought and communicates its decision in writing to the NCCA in a timely manner.
8. The Subject Development Group progresses its work in line with the Council's response (arising from 4a) or the Department's response (arising from 4b and 7).

#### **4. Timelines**

The process outlined above will require time. Such time, if involving a number of weeks, could have significant implications for the timeline for specific stages of work on the subject specification and/or the overall completion of the specification ahead of sending it to the Department for consideration. This time factor may necessitate NCCA organising additional online meetings of the Subject Development Group, the Board for Senior Cycle and the Council in order to ensure the development work remains within the overall timelines.

Table 1 below sets out the general parameters and processes to guide the work of the subject development groups (SDG) as they consider the most appropriate assessment for each subject. The specific parameters for each of the Tranche 4 subjects are set out in Table 2.

**Table 1: Assessment parameters and processes – general application to tranche 4 subjects**

| Considerations                   | Parameters to guide the work of the development group.   |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Nature</b>                    | <p>The purpose and nature of the assessment component will be clearly outlined in the subject specification and accompanying guidelines to support the completion of the assessment. Details will be provided on the nature of the component. Existing examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• research project/extended essay</li> <li>• oral assessment</li> <li>• performance assessment</li> <li>• portfolio assessment</li> <li>• creation of an artefact</li> <li>• field study</li> <li>• experiment/ proof of concept/ practical investigation.</li> </ul> <p>The subject specification and the accompanying guidelines will articulate clearly what the students are required to do, the form(s) in which it can be carried out and submitted, and the workload expectations associated with the assessment. The alignment of the assessment component to a particular set of learning outcomes from the subject specification will be provided, as well as details on which key competencies and associated learning outcomes will be assessed. This does not preclude the same LOs from being assessed in the final examination.</p> |
| <b>Weighting</b>                 | <p>The assessment component in each subject will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.</p>   |
| <b>Timing</b>                    | <p>The SDG will advise on the time required for the carrying out of the assessment component across the course of study.</p>   |
| <b>Completion and Submission</b> | <p>While the SDG may suggest when this may occur (as referenced above having regard to the assessment load on students in particular), a final decision will be made by the SEC following consideration of the overall schedule of completion dates for all assessments across all subjects. This will be finalised by the SEC following engagement with the NCCA and DE.</p> <p>The dates for final completion and\or submission of the assessment component by the student will be published by the SEC and this detail will not be included in the subject specification.</p>   |
| <b>Design</b>                    | <p>The majority of assessment components will result in a completed item that is materially different to a traditional written examination and which tests different competencies being transmitted to the SEC and assessed by the SEC.</p> <p>In some instances, the design of the assessment may require examiners to visit schools to conduct the assessment but manageability at school and system level will need to be considered.</p>   |
| <b>Guidance</b>                  | <p>Guidelines to support the assessment components will be specific to each subject. These guidelines will be developed collaboratively by the NCCA</p>  |

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|  | <p>and SEC. They will be informed by the deliberations of the SDG during the development of the specification and will detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the purpose of the component concerned i.e., what it is intended to assess.</li> <li>• the nature of the assessment component/activity.</li> <li>• descriptors of quality in the form of a graduated rubric and details on assessment standards at higher and ordinary levels if deemed necessary by the assessment method.</li> <li>• details on the timing of the assessment (its duration and when it could happen).</li> <li>• guidance on the processes that may be used for the administration of the assessment.</li> </ul> |
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**Table 2: Parameters for assessment arrangements for each Tranche 4 subject**

| Subject          | Current arrangements  | Parameters for new assessment arrangements   |
|------------------|---|--|
| <b>Art</b>       | <p><i>Practical coursework:</i> 50% (completed over 12 weeks); In December Year 6 SEC issue a sketchbook and brief with 3 themes and students choose 1. They must create 2 artefacts in 2 distinct areas of practice. 1 artefact is completed in this period and they must engage in planning for the second artefact to be produced in the practical exam.</p> <p><i>Practical Examination:</i> 20% (5 hours); invigilated exam. Takes place 10 days after completion of practical coursework (above). The focus is the completion of the second artefact. Planning for this assessment is included in the sketchbook.</p> <p>SEC visit the school to assess both artefacts and the sketchbook.</p> <p><i>Written examination:</i> 30% (2.5 hours)</p> | <p>Written examination: minimum of 30% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum of 60% weighting in response to a brief issued by the SEC.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>                              |
| <b>Economics</b> | <p>Written examination is 2.5 hours duration for higher level and ordinary level students and is awarded 400 of the 500 marks available (80%).</p> <p>Coursework is an individual student research project which is done in response to a common brief from SEC and is worth 100 marks (20%). It is based on the learning outcomes from the specification. The common brief is graded in line with the</p>  | <p>Written examination: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p> |

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|         | standards that apply to the level at which the candidate sits the written examination.   |  |
| French  | <p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%<br/>         Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%<br/>         Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%<br/>         Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period<br/>         Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June<br/>         Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Focus of oral assessment is a general conversation based on the syllabus content and may include a literary work or a project the student has worked on.</p> | <p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting<br/>         Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> |
| Gaeilge | <p><b>Higher and Ordinary Levels</b></p> <p>Written examination with 2 papers:</p> <p>Paper 1: HL 2 hr 20; OL 1 hr 50 (160 marks)<br/>         Aural (60 marks)<br/>         Composition (100 marks)</p> <p>Paper 2: HL 3 hr 5; OL 2 hr 20 (200 marks)<br/>         Reading comprehension (HL and OL: 100m)<br/>         Prose (HL 30m; OL 50m)<br/>         Poetry (HL 30m; OL 50m)<br/>         Additional Literature (HL 40m)</p> <p>Oral Examination: 240 marks</p> <p>For HL and OL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction: 5m</li> <li>▪ Poetry reading: 35m</li> <li>▪ Conversation: 120m</li> <li>▪ Picture sequence: 80m</li> </ul>                                       | <p>Written examination (inclusive of aural, composition and comprehension): minimum 50% weighting</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 40% weighting</p>  |

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|                | <p><b>Foundation Level</b></p> <p>One written paper: 2 hr 20 (360 marks)</p> <p>Aural (120m)<br/>Reading Comprehension (150m)<br/>Writing (90m)</p> <p>Oral examination: (240 marks)</p> <p>This is divided into 4 blocks as follows:</p> <p>Block 1: Family and Home<br/>Block 2: School Matters<br/>Block 3: Pastimes<br/>Block 4: Holidays, time, weather and work.</p>   |   |
| <b>German</b>  | <p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%<br/>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%<br/>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%<br/>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period<br/>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June<br/>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts:<br/>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content<br/>B: Discussion of project or picture sequence<br/>C: Role play situation</p> | <p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting<br/>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> |
| <b>Italian</b> | <p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%<br/>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%<br/>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%<br/>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p>   | <p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p>   |

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|                             | <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content</li> <li>B: Role play situation</li> <li>C: Picture sequence</li> </ul>   | <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>  |
| <b>Politics and Society</b> | <p>Written examination is worth 80% of the total marks available, and the exam is 2 hour 30 minutes in duration.</p> <p>Coursework is a report on a Citizenship project and is allocated the remaining 20%.</p>  | <p>Written examination: typically, 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p> |
| <b>Spanish</b>              | <p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%<br/>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%<br/>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%<br/>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 2 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A: General conversation based on the syllabus content with the option of discussing a literary work</li> <li>B: Role play situation</li> </ul> | <p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p><b>Assessment components:</b></p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>                      |

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| <b>Technology</b> | <p>Written examination at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%).<br/>The higher-level written examination is 2.5 hours in duration and the ordinary level written examination is 2 hours in duration.</p> <p>Coursework at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%).<br/>The coursework differs with separate briefs set for higher level and ordinary level.<br/>Briefs are issued around 1st October (Year 6) with a completion date of 30th March approx.</p> | <p>Written examination: 50% weighting.<br/>Assessment component: 50% weighting.<br/>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.<br/>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p> |
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**NCCA**

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