Senior Cycle Review

Draft Public Consultation Report

December 2019

Contents

List of Acronyms

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland
CAO	Central Applications Office
CBA	Classroom Based Assessments. All subjects in the new junior cycle have CBAs.
COGG	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, a scheme developed by the Department of Education and Skills in 2005 aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBI	Educational Training Boards Ireland
GAISCE	Meaning 'great achievement', it is a self-development programme for young people between the ages of 15-25 and has been in existence since 1985
Ibec	Business and employers representative organisation
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
ISSU	Irish Secondary Students Union
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
JLTI	Japanese Language Teachers Ireland
JMB/AMCSS	Joint Managerial Body/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools
L1LP	Level one learning programme is a programme for a specific group of students with general learning disabilities in the range of lower functioning moderate to severe and profound categories.
L2LP	Level two learning programme is a programme for a specific group of students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories.
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year Leaving Certificate available to students who wish to follow a programme with a strong practical and vocational emphasis.
LCE	Leaving Certificate Established is the leaving certificate course followed by the majority of students in senior cycle.
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme is designed to give a strong vocational dimension to the Leaving Certificate (established) and is followed by some LCE students if they fulfil certain criteria.
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance Education
NCP-P	National Parents Council Primary
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NPC-PP	National Parents Council Post Primary
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental organisation with 36 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland is an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland established in 2012.
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SEN	Special Educational Needs

SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
TY	Transition Year refers to an optional year that can be taken by students after junior cycle before starting senior cycle
USI	Union of Students in Ireland
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

The review of senior cycle education, initiated by NCCA in 2016, has to date included a phase of international research, a school-based review and a wider public consultation phase. The international scoping looked at key themes such as pathways and flexibility, inclusion, wellbeing, and assessment and reporting across nine jurisdictions. The school-based review was centred around the conversations amongst teachers, parents and students in 41 schools nationwide who examined similar themes across two consultation cycles. Cycle 1 explored the purpose of senior cycle education and the future needs of learners. Cycle 2 explored pathways, programmes and flexibility. The feedback from teachers, parents and students was analysed by the ESRI and a working paper was published for each cycle. In addition, a series of national seminars followed each cycle of the review, with the aim of opening up the conversation to include more schools, teachers and stakeholders. Bulletins outlining the key themes emerging from the review were sent to all post-primary schools and key stakeholders after each cycle of the review and at the start of the public consultation phase.

The public consultation (phase 3 of the review) was based on the *Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document* (NCCA, 2019) and the *Interim Report on the Review of Senior Cycle Education* (NCCA, 2019). These documents draw upon multiple sources which are informing the review, including *Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions: Overview Report* (NCCA, 2017), *Student, Teacher and Parent Perspectives on Senior Cycle Education* (ESRI, 2019), National seminars feedback summary (NCCA, 2019) and research into senior cycle education in Ireland more generally.

The public consultation involved four methods of gathering opinion: regional focus groups, an online survey, bilateral meetings with stakeholders and written submissions. The aim of this stage of the Senior Cycle Review was to broaden the conversation beyond the schools and stakeholders involved in the initial stages of the review. This phase has proved more expansive and iterative than anticipated. Many stakeholders held their own consultation events and gathered opinions from their organisations before submitting their views, and so this public consultation report encompasses a much broader scope than initially anticipated. NCCA would like to thank all the organisations and groups involved for the time and effort they put into gathering these opinions.

The experience of the review has been very positive. Many respondents to the survey, those who attended focus groups and the many stakeholders who came to bilateral meetings and sent written responses acknowledged and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on senior cycle and offer their perspectives. Many stakeholders welcomed the place of student voice in this review and welcomed

the observations provided. The perspectives encountered from all of those who contributed gave a real sense of the different experiences and contexts evident in the education system. The opinions proffered came from the lived experience of those contexts and so diametrically opposing views were often presented within the discussions heard. The discussions held were always insightful and have helped to strengthen relationships across the education spectrum. The commitments given to ongoing engagement with this process was one of the key strengths of this stage of the review. Future developments at senior cycle will be dependent on and be strengthened by the relationships built during this review.

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this consultation report is to present the feedback and perspectives emerging from the public consultation phase of the Senior Cycle Review. The ideas emerging from this report, coupled with feedback from earlier phases of the review, will help to identify priority areas, medium and longer-term goals and a proposed timeline and advice on the pace and scale for developments in senior cycle. This information will be presented in the form of an Advisory Report, which will issue to the Minister for Education and Skills for consideration in early 2020. The results of these extensive discussions are gathered here under the themes explored during the consultation. Given the range of interests represented, it is no surprise that there are often tensions and opposing perspectives in the views expressed. The disparate views are presented in no particular order and with no weighting attached, however, the points of contestation and tension are acknowledged, and it will be the role of the Advisory Report to consider those views and navigate a path for senior cycle for the future.

Report structure

This report offers an overview of the findings emerging from the public consultation phase of the review. The report gives an overview of the scale and variety of the responses collected within the public consultation and outlines the feedback gathered in terms of purposes of senior cycle, pathways and progression, curriculum components, assessment and reporting, and priorities and supports. Each aspect of the public consultation phase will be discussed under these headings, highlighting areas of agreement and tension emerging from the public consultation. The next steps section outlines the areas that will form the Advisory Report and the next phase of development for the Senior Cycle Review.

Overview of the Public Consultation

The public consultation process, which was open between July and November 2019, was designed to collect feedback through a variety of methods to gain further insights into the main ideas and suggested areas for development which emerged from phase 1 and 2 of the review. Feedback was gathered through an online survey, focus group discussions, written submissions, a programme of bilateral meetings and a consultation forum. The questions asked in the public consultation focused on the areas for further exploration gathered from the earlier phases of the Senior Cycle Review and outlined in the *Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document* (NCCA, 2019). The themes were organised under five headings:

- Purpose of senior cycle

- Pathways and programmes

- Curriculum components

- Assessment and reporting

- Priorities and supports.

In each strand of the consultation, questions on these themes were open ended and asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with particular aspects of senior cycle emerging from the review as outlined in the documents. Views were sought on whether there was too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects and if there was anything they would like to see added to the conversation.

Online survey

The online survey was open to teachers, parents, students and the general public. In total, 4,300 responses were received to the survey, with over half of the respondents identifying themselves as post-primary teachers, almost 10% of responses coming from teacher educators and 15% from parents/guardians. Just over 9.5% of responses came from second and third level students.

The survey included some quantitative elements, such as ranking and prioritisation questions related to priorities and supports for senior cycle with an open-ended question inviting any additional comments and feedback around the area of priorities and supports.
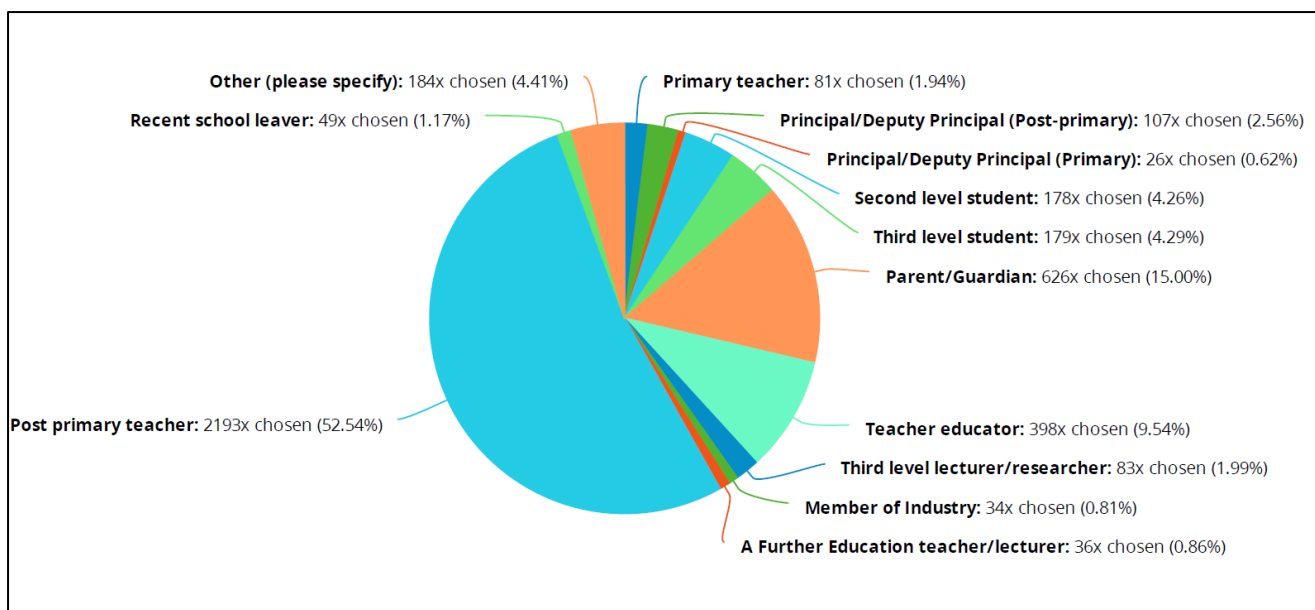
Figure 1: Profile of respondents to the online survey

Appendix 3 contains a list of respondents to the survey who responded on behalf of an organisation and agreed to have their organisation named as participating in the public consultation.

Bilateral meetings

A total of 21 bilateral meetings were held with key stakeholders and interest groups. Invitations were extended to a range of stakeholders to attend and a list of the stakeholders who attended can be found in appendix 1. Organisations attending bilateral meetings were invited, on an optional basis, to make a written submission and the majority submitted a written response to the consultation. The submissions from these organisations will be published on ncca.ie.

Written submissions

Written submissions were invited from all interested parties. A total of 1,403 written submissions were received with the breakdown as follows:

- Submissions from organisations: 48 (See appendix 2)

- Individual emails: 38

- Third level student emails: 191

▪ Email petition: 1126[1]

Focus groups

A total of 12 focus groups were held nationally. Two of these focus groups were co-hosted with the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI). The focus groups were located primarily in education centres around the country and the majority of participants in the focus group sessions were post-primary teachers, with a number of stakeholders from voluntary organisations, parents and interest groups also participating.
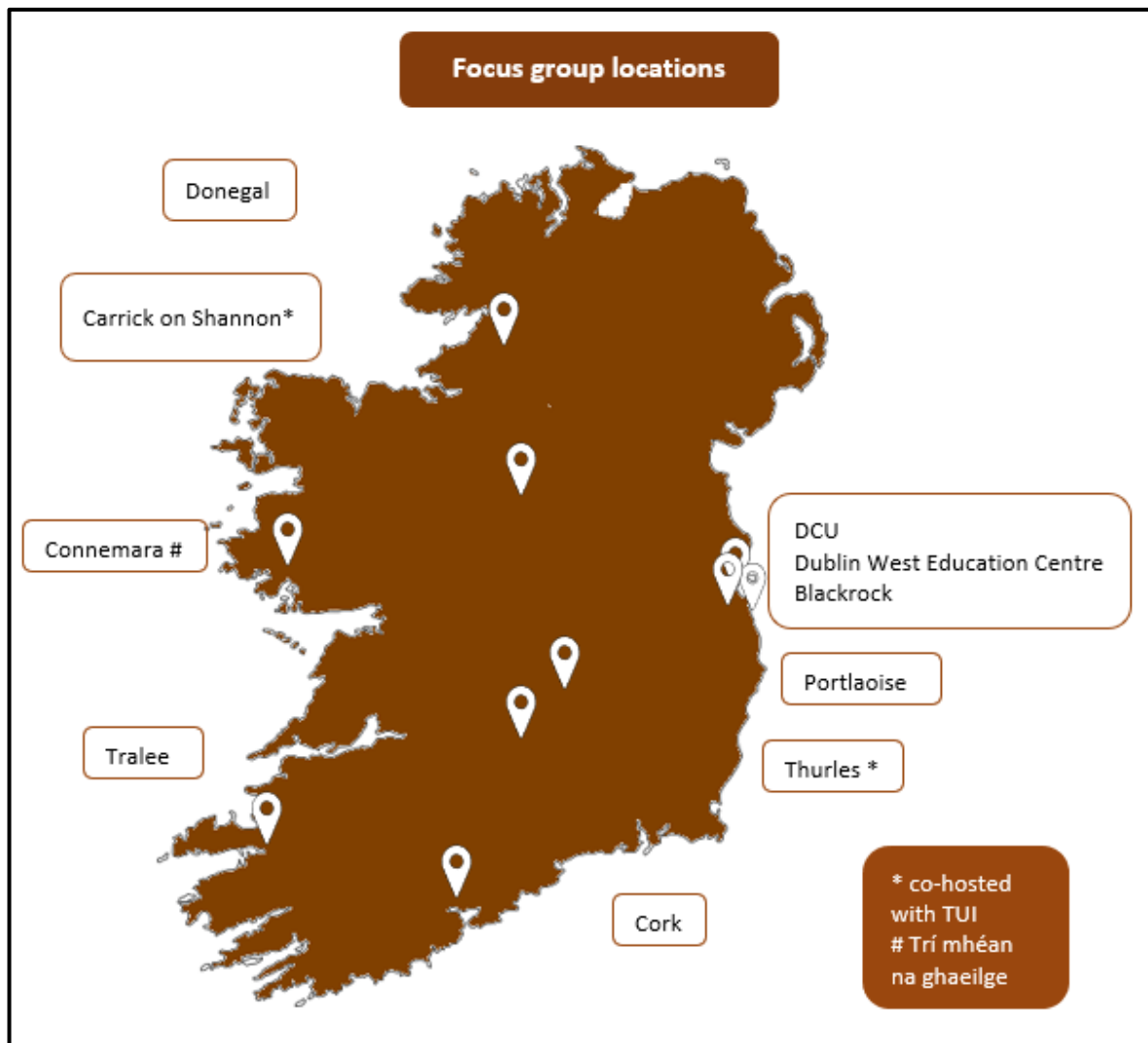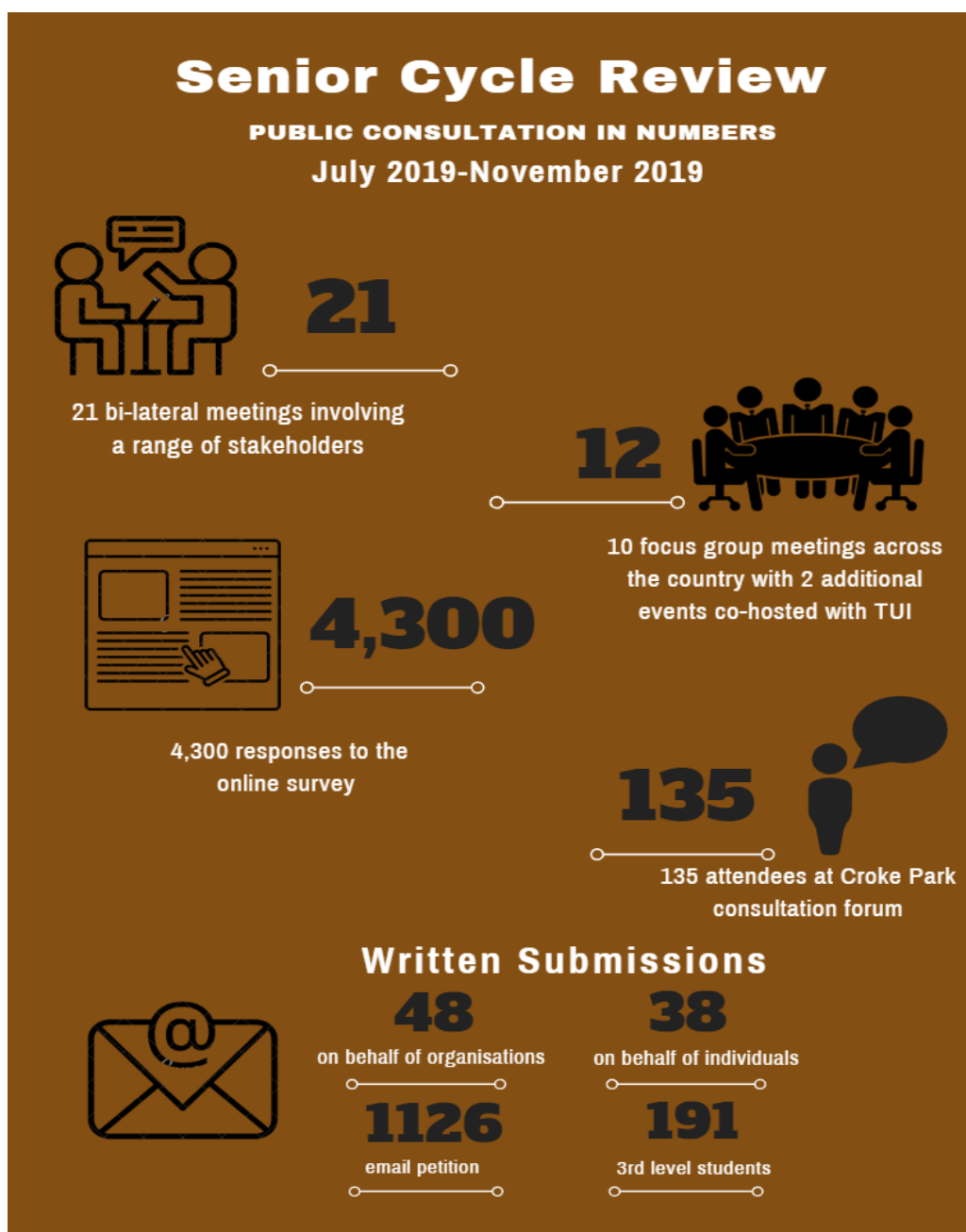

Figure 2: Focus group locations

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[1] An online campaign encouraged people to click to send an automatic email response to the consultation on their behalf. It also provided sample answers for the survey. The email responses received where the wording was identical have been treated as a petition for the purposes of this consultation. Wording of the emails can be found in appendix 4.

Consultation forum

135 stakeholders participated in a consultation forum in October 2019 in Croke Park. The forum invited stakeholders to come together to collaboratively consider different perspectives on key aspects of the consultation: the emerging purposes of senior cycle; pathways and progression; assessment reporting and transitions; and the system implications for teachers and school leaders. Feedback from the collaborative discussions was recorded by the facilitator at each of fifteen tables and added to the feedback from the other strands of the consultation.

Senior Cycle Review
PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN NUMBERS
July 2019-November 2019

21

21 bi-lateral meetings involving a range of stakeholders

12

10 focus group meetings across the country with 2 additional events co-hosted with TUI

4,300

4,300 responses to the online survey

135

135 attendees at Croke Park consultation forum

Written Submissions

48
on behalf of organisations

38
on behalf of individuals

1126
email petition

191
3rd level students

Broader Communications

In addition to these consultation events, the NCCA also attended various events to raise awareness of the review (listed below) and to encourage participation in the survey and regional focus groups. A third bulletin outlining the main areas for exploration in this stage of the review was also distributed to all post-primary schools and stakeholders. Advertisements were placed in both teacher union magazines, which are also distributed to schools. An awareness-raising campaign was launched on social media and people were urged to access the wealth of review and consultation materials available on our website.

Events attended:

- Transition Year Expo, Punchestown

- National Parent's Council (Primary) regional assemblies

- JMB Annual Conference

- TUI Education Conference

- AGM of Comhairle na nÓg Longford

- Ombudsman for Children Summit.
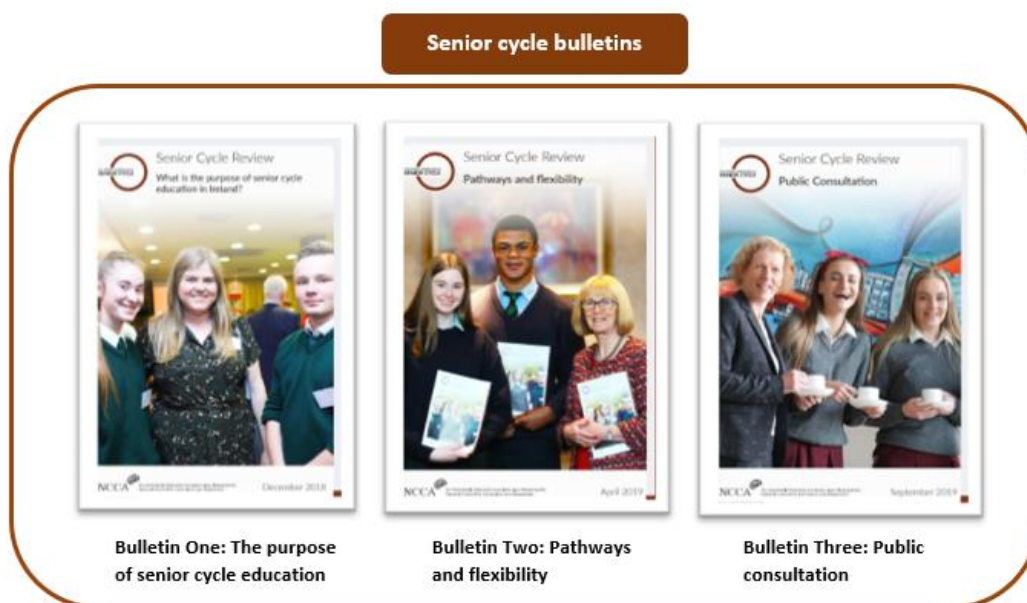
- Focus group conducted in direct provision centre

Figure 3: Senior cycle bulletins to date

Purpose of senior cycle

The *Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document (2019)* suggested an emerging purpose for senior cycle education based on the review to date. This purpose focuses on how senior cycle education supports all students towards *'fulfilling their potential'* whilst developing *'knowledge and skills throughout senior cycle as they mature and develop intellectually, personally and socially'*. It also proposed an educational experience that would *'equip students for diverse and sustainable futures so that they can embrace full, active citizenship and participation in society and the economy as they learn and as they make the transition to life beyond school'*. This representation of purpose was generally agreed with throughout the consultation with the majority of respondents in all strands of the consultation. There was also broad consensus on the vision for teaching and learning at senior cycle emerging from the review but tensions regarding the place of and relationship between knowledge, skills and qualities in senior cycle were evident in the discussions.

A minority of respondents felt that this portrayal of purpose was **ambitious**. While there was agreement around the emerging purpose, the ability of schools to realise this purpose for all students in all contexts was a questioned. Others suggested that the existing purpose of senior cycle already encompasses all of the statements discussed, but that the contextual constraints in schools may hinder the realisation of this purpose. This highlights the challenges faced in proposing a purpose to senior cycle that is inclusive and meets the needs of all students in all settings.

> *Tá réimse an-leathan moltai sna cáipéisí comhairliúcháin agus moltar go ndéanfar iad a mheas ó thaobh na réasúnaíochta agus ó thaobh na hinfheidhmeachta ag leibhéal na scoile […] Is gá gan neamhaird a dhéanamh de na hiar-bhunscoileanna beaga, go háirithe ar na hoileáin, agus athruithe á moladh.*
>
> *The consultation documents contain a very wide range of recommendations and it is recommended that all such recommendations be considered in terms of the practicalities of implementation at school level […] It is essential not to neglect small post-primary schools, particularly those on the islands when proposing changes*

(COGG, written submission)

A common thread running through all feedback received during the public consultation process was the current perceived purpose of senior cycle in general but the Leaving Certificate in particular, as an **entrance examination for third level**. This limited purpose was often juxtaposed with the desire to develop the broader skills required to be successful in third level and life beyond school, such as critical thinking, independent learning, communication/presentation and teamwork skills. In both the online survey and the focus groups, the responses to the questions around purpose revealed a desire to

reform the current CAO system for accessing third level. When explored further in the focus groups, the CAO system was accepted as being somewhat transparent in terms of the points system used and the anonymity of the application process. However, the 'points culture' was seen as narrowing students' focus and the status reserved for the points culture seen as not valuing other pathways taken by students having completed their Leaving Certificate.

> *Fulfilling potential must recognise the talents of every individual student. It should not be based on a system of achieving points in a limited range of subjects. It should not be based on placing a higher value on future academic qualifications than on other professions; it should be based on individual achievements and development of potential as an individual and as an individual within the context of their community and society.* (Young Social Innovators, written submission)

> *[…] the emphasis at the moment is on access to 3rd level and CAO. This affects the progress of students in senior cycle as there focus is shifted to what comes after instead of the learning in the present moment.* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

> *[…] there is too much emphasis on the LC exam at the end of the senior cycle. To have a final exam is important but it should be not the ultimate aim and the catalyst for all the student's learning goals. As it stands, the senior cycle is just a rat race in pursuit of CAO points and I find it totally contrary to the central idea of helping students reaching their full potential.* (Online survey response from a parent/guardian)

> *The CAO points system is crippling upper secondary experience and outcomes […] HEIs should be given a mandatory timeframe to explore and develop a matriculation process which (a) reduces the backwash on post-primary (b) elicits the type of self-directed learner they need and (c) leads into broader first-year programmes with subsequent specialisation.* (JMB/AMCSS, written submission)

A number of guiding principles for senior cycle emerged during earlier phases of the review, in the public consultation four – flexibility; inclusion; equity; and continuity and progression – were particularly emphasised**. Inclusion** emerged as an overarching theme in discussions around purpose. A broad understanding of inclusion emerged that encompassed students with a diverse range of needs, flexibility to provide access to a wide range of pathways, and recognition of the wide variety of contexts within which senior cycle education is offered. Particular reference was made to the immediate need for opportunities for progression for students completing Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes at junior cycle. These aspects will be developed further under pathways and programmes.

> *The positive educational principles of equality of access and opportunity and diversity of learning experience should be central considerations throughout.* (RIA, written submission)

> *I agree that in order to provide a more balanced Leaving Certificate which caters for all learners, we must provide multiple pathways for the completion of the Leaving Certificate. Currently there is too much focus on a terminal exam*. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

The idea of a reference to *'participation in the economy'* was contentious in the feedback emerging from both the online survey and in a cross-section of focus groups. A minority of respondents to the online survey expressed reservations about explicitly referring to the economy in outlining the purpose of senior cycle education and suggested that this might be perceived as promoting market-driven rather than student-centred approaches to learning.

> *I also wonder if the ultimate goal should be to develop thinkers, as opposed to churning out contributors to our economy which doesn't necessarily encourage contribution to society and active citizenship*. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

> *I would be a little wary of specifically singling out the economy. Yes, I believe that it is vitally important we are helping to shape and challenge critical, independent and active members of our society. A society which has many strands, one of which I would understand to be the economy therefore I'm unsure we should mention it in this context* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

In the feedback from the table discussions at the consultation forum it was noted that participants wanted the purpose of senior cycle to **build on the successful aspects of the current senior cycle programme.** This was also echoed in a selection of responses to the online survey coupled with a wide-scale acknowledgement of the need to evolve and develop senior cycle education. These discussions also revealed a tension between the care and empathy within the teacher-student relationship and the pressure of the culture of performance developed through preparation for the state examinations. In relation to students *'fulfilling their potential'*, feedback from the online survey and the focus groups noted that there was no reference to **challenge** in the emerging purpose. The need to maintain an **academic focus** within the purpose of senior cycle was expressed in the focus groups, the online survey and in a minority of bilateral meetings. Focus group discussions noted that education is more participative and performative in the 21st century and that the purpose should reflect this.

Knowledge, skills and qualities

There was a significant volume of feedback relating to the reference to **knowledge and skills** in the emerging purpose. Respondents to the survey underlined the importance of knowledge and content

understanding and how this was a key cornerstone of senior cycle education. A clear desire was expressed in the online survey and focus groups for the value of knowledge to be upheld in any future senior cycle developments. Feedback in the online survey and focus groups raised concerns regarding the perceived knowledge gap for students entering senior cycle from the new junior cycle but also highlighted the positive development of skills such as critical thinking, independent learning and research as useful for students entering senior cycle.

> *The ASTI fully endorses the centrality accorded to disciplinary knowledge in the senior cycle curriculum in the paper. Moreover, such knowledge must be of sufficient depth and breadth to ensure that students are adequately challenged. A balance must be articulated in subject specifications between content/knowledge, learning outcomes and skills* (ASTI, written submission)

> *QQI welcomes the adoption by the teaching profession and by the policy making community in secondary education to the use of the learning outcomes approach to guide and inform the development of curriculum and associated qualifications. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) represents a consensus view on the nature and complexity of knowledge, skill and competence, associated with qualifications offered in Ireland.* (QQI, written submission)

A broad theme in the bilateral meetings was the express need for students to have an opportunity to develop a range of skills which would be beneficial for students in their lives beyond school. A significant number of respondents to the survey also echoed this belief as did discussions in the focus groups.

> *[The concern is]…The imbalance in focus on information acquisition rather than on building knowledge, skills and positive dispositions to long life learning which will contribute to young people's readiness for diverse and changing futures.* (ACCS, written submission)

> *Key skills have become a focus of development at all levels of education systems around the world. Moving from a content- based to a more skills-based learning model at an early stage is more likely to equip students with the skills in greater demand for the 21st century such as problem solving, critical thinking, design, innovation, communications and creativity.* (Ibec, written Submission)

> *Strongly agree with the need to develop skills. Knowledge is important but emphasis on skill development will strengthen students' understanding of subject knowledge. Skill development requires students to experience their learning in an authentic way and this supports their development as citizens. (Online survey response from a teacher educator)*

> *I think there is too little emphasis on the skills of knowledge. Students need to be able to read, evaluate and write about knowledge. I think we focus too much on skills all the time. The skill of acquiring knowledge and how to use it are important. I find students are expected to know less about subjects because we are expecting*

them to learn the skills to go on and learn on their own. This is ideal, for the ideal student (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

Teaching and learning

There was strong feedback that rote learning in isolation was not the most beneficial approach for student learning. Respondents frequently linked a perceived culture of rote learning with the points system.

> *The way students are taught, is in my view the biggest challenge and obstacle to their learning. Learning by rote is antiquated and knowledge acquisition for its own sake is no longer desired in today's economy. Knowing how to do or how to think or how to apply learning and to work in groups and in teams is very important. Therefore, learning should model this new reality.* (Online Survey Response from a post-primary parent/guardian)

> *Every pupil should be given the opportunity to reach their potential but rote learning is not helping pupils to do this.* (Online Survey Response from a primary teacher)

> *I agree that we should try to move away from rote learning but need to be very careful not to 'dumb down' content.* (Online Survey Response from a post-primary teacher)

Consultation feedback acknowledged the tension between the desire to provide students with a **broad educational experience** whilst at the same time permitting/encouraging/allowing for increased specialisation by students as they progress through senior cycle and begin to envisage and prepare for diverse future pathways for themselves beyond school. There was also some discussion of the age and stage of learning for senior cycle students. In order to promote and develop independence and autonomy for learners in senior cycle it was suggested that students should be treated differently in senior cycle and be trusted to make their own educational choices rather than be the subject of tokenistic gestures towards their independence.

> *Policymakers, politicians, practitioners and indeed parents, do not have a monopoly of wisdom in terms of what should be core curriculum or one-track pathway or what defines broad-liberal or how to cope with change-of-mind – young adults themselves have far greater insight and agency were they to have the flexibility and freedom to choose and be supported and advised but ultimately trusted in their decisions.* (JMB/AMCSS, written submission)

Student wellbeing was highlighted in the online survey, focus groups and a cross-section of bilateral meetings. Concern was expressed in the online survey at the potential of a senior cycle wellbeing programme to erode class contact time but there was a broad acknowledgement that students require age-appropriate knowledge and understanding of relationships and sexuality and that the

development of resilience is a key quality students need to continue to develop as they progress through senior cycle education. But there was no emerging consensus as to how wellbeing should or could be woven into the education of all learners.

> *Wellbeing does not need to be introduced into Senior Cycle, 400 hours in Junior Cycle is more than sufficient for any teenager. The focus for Senior Cycle needs to be academic, students need to be prepared for the reality of third level and further education. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)*

> *[…] further allowances must be put into place to facilitate students' wellbeing, resilience and relationships and sexuality education at senior cycle. I feel time must be allocated to this on a weekly basis if we are to meet the growing needs of our young people. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)*

Reference was made in both the focus groups and the online survey to the role of home, parents and society. It was felt that they play a significant role in supporting aspects of purpose at senior cycle, in particular the wellbeing of students, and that responsibility in this area should not fall solely on the shoulders of the school. In some cases, survey respondents made reference to *familial and societal factors* referenced in the *Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document* (NCCA, 2019) and underlined the central role these play in the student's overall educational experience.

Skills for life were also discussed in the online survey, focus groups and bilateral meetings with broad agreement that these are vital for students. However, there was no consensus in terms of how the development of these skills should be supported with participants in the online survey cautioning against overloading the curriculum with modules or programmes in life skills. In a number of focus groups, it was suggested that all subjects could support the development of these and other core skills. The area of entrepreneurial skills was discussed in both the focus groups and the online survey and the commentary on these skills was broad and focused on the transferable nature of entrepreneurial skills.

The development of students as **active citizens** was also widely explored in the survey, focus groups and bilateral meetings as well as forming part of a number of written submissions. The need to foster civic engagement was discussed in a number of responses to the online survey, with observations that volunteer work and programmes such as Gaisce and Foróige support students in developing a sense of civic responsibility through the community engagement aspects of their programmes whilst also providing an opportunity to develop a range of skills such as communication, teamwork, goal setting and independent learning. Transition Year and work experience across the various programmes were seen as offering valuable learning experiences for students.

> *Students should be encouraged and appropriately rewarded to develop personal creativity and community involvement. Existing examples of this include*

programmes like Gaisce and enterprise awards. Senior Cycle should develop sustained initiatives like these as a formal part of second level education (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

I particularly like the idea of a "work experience module" or a "volunteering module" which could be counted toward a final award for a young person - that is how you will grow the whole of the person and achieve the enhanced interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that were highlighted earlier. (Online survey response from an organisation)
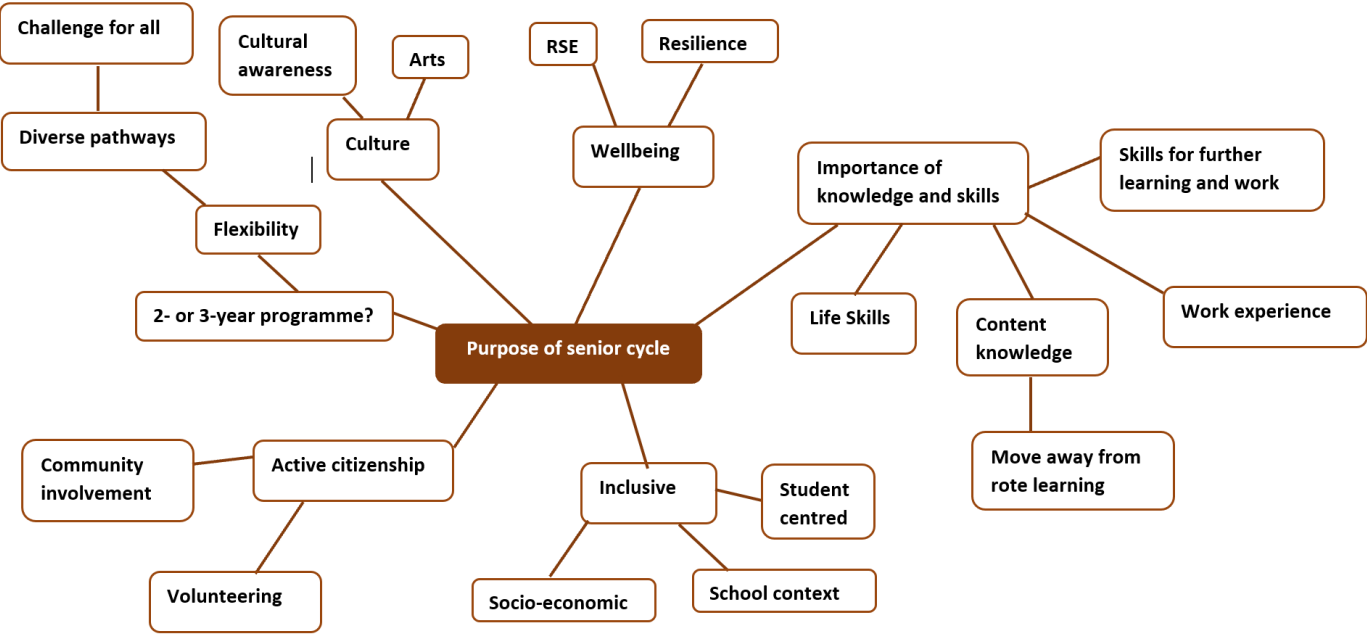
There were a number of areas that were perceived as missing from the discussion on the purpose of senior cycle. The need to consider the inclusion of cultural awareness was highlighted in some focus group discussions, where cultural awareness was viewed broadly as encompassing an awareness of both Irish culture and multiculturalism. The block of identical responses to the online survey previously referenced (see footnote on page 9) disagreed with the emerging purpose on the basis that it did not reference culture, heritage and the Irish language explicitly. **Arts education and creativity** were also identified as areas that could form a more prominent part of the purpose of senior cycle. Some respondents to the online survey suggested the inclusion of a reference to either **spiritual or moral** development of students.

Cúis imní é freisin an bhéim atá ar fhás na heacnamaíochta agus rath geilleagrach mar phríomh aidhm an oideachais. Tá tábhacht le daoine óga a ullmhú do shaol na hoibre ach tá ról i bhfad níos iomlánaí ag an oideachas. Is cinnte go bhfuil tábhacht le heolaíocht, teicneolaíocht, innealtóireachta agus mata (STEM) ach tá tábhacht freisin le teangacha, an Ghaeilge san áireamh, agus leis na healaíona.

Another concern is the emphasis placed on economic growth and economic success as an primary aim of education. It is important to prepare young people for working life but the role of education is much broader. Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) are certainly important but so are languages, especially Irish and the arts. (Gael Linn)

The feedback and responses to the purpose of senior cycle are further explored in the commentary on pathways and progression, curriculum components and assessment and reporting as these areas were often explored in tandem with discussions around the emerging purposes of senior cycle education.

Feedback exploring the purpose of senior cycle

Challenge for all

Cultural awareness

Arts

RSE

Resilience

Diverse pathways

Culture

Wellbeing

Importance of knowledge and skills

Skills for further learning and work

Flexibility

Life Skills

Content knowledge

Work experience

2- or 3-year programme?

Purpose of senior cycle

Move away from rote learning

Community involvement

Active citizenship

Inclusive

Student centred

Volunteering

Socio-economic

School context

Pathways and programmes

In the Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document, there were a number of areas listed for further exploration in the area of pathways and programmes. In the discussions held there was broad agreement that there is a need for more flexible, diverse pathways through senior cycle that allow students to access a variety of progression routes and to combine different types of learning, including technical, professional, vocational, creative and academic. The feedback tended to focus particularly on the need to develop vocational pathways and a desire for these pathways to have equal status with other pathways students might take through and beyond senior cycle.

A blending of the most positive features of the existing programmes (LCE, LCA and LCVP) was most often suggested as a possible base for developing pathways in senior cycle. Another area of broad agreement was the need to develop a follow-on pathway for students currently studying Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programmes at junior cycle, that is suitable for the later age and stage of their learning in senior cycle. The flexibility of a two or three-year senior cycle was reiterated as a strength of the current system but there was less agreement on the role a Transition Year should play within that structure.

The programmes currently offered in senior cycle (LCA, LCVP, TY and LCE) are each valued for the contribution they make to the personal, social and cognitive development of students. However, certain challenges were acknowledged by most respondents such as the restriction of progression pathways for LCA students, the limiting entry criteria for LCVP and the singular focus of the LCE in the attainment of points for third level entry to the detriment of other opportunities for learning. TY was recognised for the unique contribution it makes to the holistic development of the student but here too, there was discussion around issues of equity and access to TY programmes.

> *Ensuring fairness of opportunity is essential. TY costs money and many students are limited because they cannot afford to participate in the extra activities. My experience of Gaisce which is excellent is that it costs too much. To achieve the award one is limited if you do not have the money to engage in the extra learning activities/experiences. This is not an even playing field. (Online survey response from a parent/guardian)*

> *From teaching in a DEIS school who brought in TY I can see its huge benefits – unfortunately access to many good learning experiences and embracing the new type of learning costs money – money our students don't have. If we want all students to develop equally, we must make allowances for varied backgrounds and abilities and ensure the new senior cycle can overcome diversity through staffing, training and funding. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)*

In bilateral meetings and written submissions there was a strong belief that the diverse cohort of students in senior cycle and an expansive vision for senior cycle all point in the direction of trying to achieve better **continuity** both within the secondary system and beyond into the various pathways available for students when they leave secondary school. The learning needs of students who wish to progress on a pathway other than a direct route to third level were identified as being poorly served in our current system. Some stakeholders suggested combining the best features of current senior cycle programmes into a single senior cycle with multiple pathways. Within this single senior cycle elements of current programmes would be available to all students to create an educational experience that suits the learning and progression needs of all students. Others pointed out the difficulties of such an arrangement, especially in the case of smaller schools, where trying to sustain a broad provision at senior cycle is currently quite challenging.

> *Comparative data from the OECD[2] and the EU[3], shows the absence of a VET pathway in upper secondary general education in Ireland. This is an atypical phenomenon by international norms. QQI would welcome a conclusion under the current review on the prospects for the delivery of high-quality initial VET (IVET), within upper secondary general education.* (QQI, written submission)

> *THEA would fully support the idea of combining the existing programmes into a single senior cycle curriculum. This would not only create greater options for students in terms of the learning pathways and subject combinations available to them, but by bringing in different aspects of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied would also expand the methods of assessment and reporting arrangements for all students. (*THEA, written submission*)

> *There is an out-weighted emphasis on a single pathway within the current Senior Cycle system. This needs to be balanced by the development of a structure within the system that can accommodate, support and offer guidance in alternative technical, vocational, professional and creative pathways.* (Gamechanger Dialogue, written submission)

Some respondents to the online survey and participants in the focus groups suggested considering a pilot programme or phase to further investigate diversifying the range of pathways at senior cycle.

> *[…] tuigeann Gaeloideachas an gá atá le hathbhreithniú ar an tSraith Shinsearach agus aithnímid freisin go bhfuil conairí éagsúla de dhíth le freastal ar scoláirí nach n-oireann an Ardteistiméireacht Bhunaithe dóibh. Chuige sin is gá féidearthachtaí a fhiosrú agus múnlaí a phíolótú le hiarracht a dhéanamh articula chonaire nó ar*

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[2] OECD (2019) Education at a Glance 2018.
[3] Burke N.; Condon, N.; Hogan A.; (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe – Ireland.* Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports 2018.
http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/Vocational_Education_Training_Europe_Ireland_2018_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf

chonairí níos praiticiúla a bhfuil stádas ard acu agus meas agus muinín ag daltaí agus tuismitheoirí astu.

Gaeloideachais understands the need for a review of senior Cycle and also recognize that different pathways are required to cater for students for whom the established Leaving Certificate is not suitable. In this regard, it is necessary to explore and pilot more vocational models that have which are highly-respected and which parents and students have confidence and pride in. (Gaeloideachais, written submission)

The position of **Transition Year** was the subject of much debate and discussion. Some in focus groups and bilateral meetings favoured the incorporation of elements of TY into a three-year senior cycle programme, where students could take advantage of building on their participation in areas such as work experience over the course of the three years. In this way the personal and social development so prized in the TY programme was not segregated into a one-year optional programme but integrated across the duration of a broad senior cycle education. Others argued for retention of the separate provision of TY. It was argued that TY provides an opportunity for students to focus on developing other skills, qualities and attributes without the pressure of a summative examination. This unique feature of Transition Year, it was argued, would be removed should the elements of TY be integrated across a broader senior cycle.

Both the option of making Transition Year mandatory for all, and the option of extending Senior Cycle to three years to include aspects of current TY experience, could have benefits for students, but both options would need to be considered very carefully. While extension of Senior Cycle to three years might suit some or many students, it is also possible that it would result in higher rates of disengagement. Improving post-Leaving Certificate provision might be a more beneficial option for many students. (Online survey response from a third level lecturer/researcher)

The challenges of providing a **three-year senior cycle** were discussed in focus groups, bilateral meetings and submissions: the strain it could place on schools, the removal of choice and flexibility for students where it is compulsory, and the variable nature of TY provision in schools. A suggestion that arose in several bilateral conversations was the need to audit TY provision in schools to get a sense of what works in TY. Participants in the focus group sessions were keen to retain the autonomy of the programme but recognised the need to ensure that the programme offered was beneficial and worthwhile for all students.

There is a need to evaluate the 'ring-fencing' that currently exists between the three Leaving Certificate programmes so as to broaden learning opportunities of students. Transition Year must remain a stand-alone programme based on the current principle of supporting students' transition to a Leaving Certificate

*programme based on local needs and contexts. Transition Year should be available
and accessible to all students.* (ASTI, written submission)

The **LCVP** was recognised for the experiences it provides for students and the alternative assessment arrangements that allow for a variety of learning to be evidenced. However, the entry criteria represented by the Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) were seen as outdated and no longer fit for purpose. No respondent in a focus group, bilateral, written submission or survey argued for the retention of the VSGs. Teachers of LCVP highlighted the need for a review of the programme itself to make the programme more attractive to students. It was felt that the programme offers an opportunity to develop a range of skills which support transition to further education, the world of work and third level. Participants in the focus groups and the survey respondents noted the potential of the LCVP to support the development of entrepreneurial skills, a skillset also discussed in relation to the purposes of senior cycle. Teachers of the LCVP participating in focus groups highlighted the value of the programme for all students but expressed a need for the link modules and assessment to be reviewed as part of any review of senior cycle.

> *I agree with the proposals. My experience of the LCVP programme was very
> positive. This was probably the most useful and practical subject my child did in the
> Senior Cycle and it genuinely gave her skills for life. Flexibility, greater focus on
> supporting transitions, increased pathways that recognise the diversity of our
> young people in terms of their talents and skills will move us away from the "one
> size fits all" model that currently* prevails (Online survey response from a post-
> primary parent/guardian)

Some aspects of the **LCA** programme were considered to have a positive impact on senior cycle education such as the range of modules offered and the accumulation of credits over two years. However, respondents to the online survey and a cross-section of teachers participating in the focus groups felt that the value of the programme has been eroded over time. In the focus groups, participants suggested a number of reasons for this including the social value of the programme, the lack of progression options for students within the LCA programme and the ring-fencing of the programme. Participants in the focus groups expressed concern that the LCA programme had become somewhat of a 'cul de sac'. The need to form clearer links with apprenticeships and further education and training was also highlighted.

> *The current LCA program excludes students from taking any LC subject – this needs
> to be addressed to allow students greater flexibility and challenge. Greater
> connection to apprenticeships may help disengaged students (*Online survey
> response from a second level student)

The potential learning from **work experience** was widely discussed. Survey respondents highlighted the benefits for students of engaging in a programme of work experience, but currently this experience is limited to students who participate in TY, LCA or LCVP. This was echoed by the feedback

from both the focus groups and the bilateral meetings but practical issues in finding relevant and worthwhile work experience were also highlighted. It was felt that the location of a school can become an issue in sourcing work experience both in terms of relevant potential career areas and in servicing the placement of all students in a particular programme or year group. Other submissions mentioned the benefits of volunteering and the possibilities afforded by other sites of learning, particularly with an industry partner for schools. The role of industry in developing these links was iterated but there is also a desire expressed to keep education separate from the demands of industry, illustrating the tensions underpinning this aspect of senior cycle.

> *There is a need for equitable access to work experience as many students lack the required social capital to access same.* (PDST, written submission)

> *We would also love to see an introduction of two distinct and unrelated opportunities for work experience for all students regardless of which Leaving Certificate route they pick (this is currently limited to TY, LCA, LCVP). This requires a serious buy in from Industry to step up and supply meaningful work experiences for students of all abilities and to forge relationships with their local schools.* (IGC, written submission)

> *Much more collaboration from schools with external industry organisations such as ISME, IBEC, Enterprise Boards, Social Inclusion Initiatives etc. [is needed], wherein a clearer understanding of what working in society means for students [is achieved] and is accessible to them experientially while still in* school (Online survey response from a third level lecturer)

> *There is too much emphasis, mainly in the media/industry, on the role students must play in the future 'economy'. To treat secondary education as mere training for the work force is to do our young people a huge disservice. There is plenty of time for work force training when they are adults* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

Some of the respondents to the consultation went further than adjusting the current programmes in their suggestions for pathways through senior cycle. There were a number of stakeholders who suggested that the option of a **credit-based modular structure** could provide the desired flexibility and choice for students in senior cycle. In the focus groups, there were a number of teachers who had taught in education systems in other countries and made suggestions based on their experience, such as a dedicated vocational track, separate schools for this stage of education to allow for specialisation and additional points of exit from full time education. Some stakeholders also offered suggestions based on the modular flexibility experienced in third level, further education and higher education. The challenges which could accompany such changes were also expressed. Some recognised the increased difficulties facing small or rural schools in offering a modular structure, others commented on the impact such a structure would have on curriculum components, assessment and reporting.

> *A modular, credit-based system would allow for students who wish or need-to, to forge a vocational pathway which could allow for transfer to apprenticeships after two years. NCCA should explore such models in greater detail and open some proposals to consultation, without prejudice to the existing framework.* (JMB/AMCSS, written submission)

> *We would recommend more flexibility in the area of learning experiences/pathways, currently these programmes are ring-fenced however there should be an option to combine different aspects of the programmes to meet the needs of the individual student. Flexible pathways are inclusive of all students. A modular approach is key to enabling this to happen.* (JCT, written submission)

> *Rather than segregating students into different programmes because they don't feel as if they fit in a particular one, a suggestion I propose is that there is a common system that aims to meet the needs of all students. Perhaps it is less rigid than the current structures, students could specialise in different areas and carry out modules instead of subjects. Upon completion of these modules the students would all be equal in terms of their qualification for future progression, whatever that may be.* (Third level student, written submission)

One area that gained consensus in the feedback was the need to develop **a follow-on pathway** for students currently experiencing Junior Cycle at Level 1 or Level 2. The absence of any suitable progression pathway for these students currently in our system was very strongly felt to be an area that needs immediate attention and development.

> *That the commitment to inclusion for all learners reflected in the development of Level 1 and 2 Programmes at Junior Cycle be extended to a more inclusive senior cycle education for these students. It is imperative that students of all abilities can receive recognition and reward at senior cycle.* (ETBI, written submission)

> *I would strongly advise considering a follow-on course to deal with needs of level 1 and level 2 junior cycle students to senior level. They are operating at second class standard and to make that jump is not acceptable, there needs to be a course that addresses and follows through on their ability.* (Individual email submission)

In discussions on pathways and flexibility, two issues were repeatedly mentioned as fundamental to any developments in this area: **enhanced collaboration** and **career guidance**. Multiple stakeholders, respondents and focus group attendees mentioned the need to develop links with organisations involved in the further education and training sector in order to support coherent development of diverse pathways in senior cycle. SOLAS and the ETBs were mentioned across all platforms as having expertise in this area and their openness to new developments and ideas was recognised. In bilateral meetings both organisations, along with THEA and others, committed to engaging with ongoing discussions on these ideas and the pursuit of a coherent strategy across the continuum of education. Many respondents commented that the development of any diverse pathways through senior cycle would be dependent on the appropriate provision of career guidance not only in senior cycle, but also

before that point, in order to support and guide students in a manner that would help all students towards fulfilling their potential.

> *Future FET aims to provide clearer skills pathways for everyone, with greater flexibility and with potential access to more modular/bitesize and transferable skills options. We do acknowledge that teaching capability across many schools does not facilitate delivery of these options currently, but we would like to suggest that this is discussed for the future. We also believe that vocational options need to be more embedded across the senior cycle rather than presented in the current frameworks, which may be perceived as essentially separate tracks.* (SOLAS, written submission)

> *A common theme for parents that was repeated throughout the sessions was the need for more career guidance and for that guidance to start much earlier during 1st year. They also made several recommendations that the Career Guidance Counsellor should not be the only source of this guidance, they felt that members of local industry and the community should also be utilised.* (NPC-P, written submission)

The suggestions around appropriate guidance will be discussed under priorities and supports.

Feedback exploring pathways and programmes in senior cycle
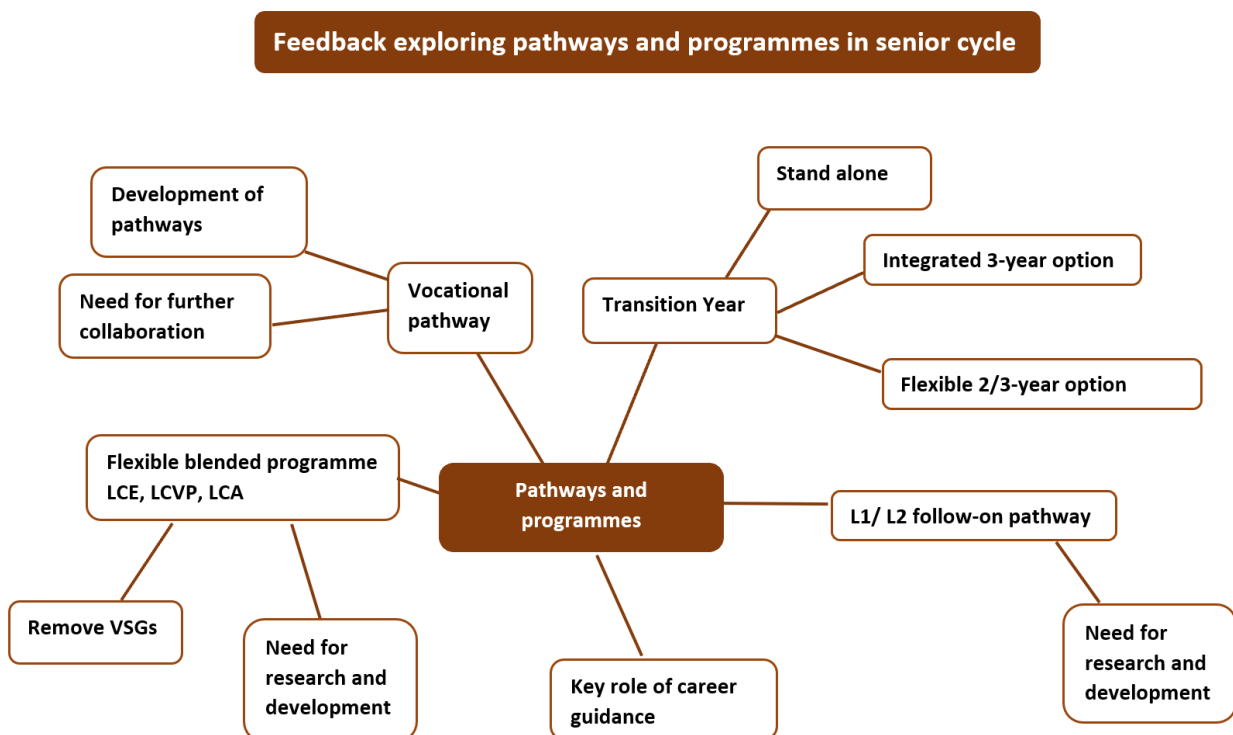
Curriculum components

Of the areas for further exploration for curriculum components listed in the *Senior Cycle Consultation Document* there were quite a number that were broadly supported in these discussions. A review of existing subjects, the future scoping of ways to combine subjects with shorter duration learning and the exploration of the volume, breadth and depth of subjects to be studied were all favourably viewed in this consultation.

One of the key areas of agreement in the consultation is the need for more **flexibility and choice** in the curriculum experienced by students. Many felt that in order to encourage independence and autonomy, students should have choices in how to shape their learning at this stage in life to best suit their future plans. Some respondents linked this stage of learning not with pedagogy but with andragogy, as students at senior cycle are young adults and so have different learning needs to children. However, there were also very strong opinions on what should be core to this phase of education and experienced by everyone. These two ideas, choice and mandatory components, are not always mutually compatible and the tensions that arose are outlined below.

The **range of subjects** currently available at senior cycle was praised for its diversity and breadth. However, not all students have access to all subject areas and this gives rise to a perceived restriction in the system. Many stakeholders commented on the need to revise current subjects and evaluate the relevance of some subjects and areas within subjects in today's rapidly changing world. The input of industry and third level was suggested in this context and support was offered by organisations and institutions with a view to maintaining the relevance of disciplines and reflecting the changing and evolving discipline areas present in the third level sector. It was also suggested that a regular cyclical review of all subjects should be in place to ensure that the curriculum remains current and its development ongoing. There were some subject areas identified as absent from the current provision such as philosophy, psychology, and performing arts such as drama and dance.

> *Subject choice in Senior Cycle is a recurring issue for students, with students citing the availability of certain subjects, the mandatory nature of others and the lack of certain areas of learning such as the arts as issues with the current curriculum.*
> (ISSU, written submission)

> *…the need to review the existing list of subjects must be an essential part of evolutionary change at senior cycle. There will always be a need to add new subjects as society and technology changes, and new disciplines emerge out of such changes. How one goes about deciding on what subjects should remain or be*

discontinued is more problematic. Obviously, there is a need to have strong and robust criteria in place so that there is an objective basis for such review, and which is not unduly influenced by political or other ideologies. International benchmarking is also critical here. In this regard, there may be another opportunity here for synergies between second level and third level (or the entire tertiary education system), particularly in relation to research about the changing pattern or otherwise of discipline formation. (THEA, written submission)

With the correct resources and supports in place for schools this looks like very innovative senior cycle review. Reduction in the volume of curricular components would lead to richer educational experience, reduction on the reliance of rote learning for elements that can be looked up by all adults and will not be remembered after the exam (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

Underpinning the discussions on the **optimal number of subjects** to be studied at this stage was concern with the breadth and depth of subject matter experienced but also the requirements for matriculation and the allocation of points. Opinions varied but the most consistent viewpoint expressed was that six subjects was optimal. This view was offset by discussions about other ways to engage with and experience the curriculum and by fears that a reduction in the number of subjects would lead to a narrowing of options for students. There were suggestions made around the inclusion of **modules** or **shorter courses** of learning, some suggestions were made around **major or minor subjects** or the modularisation of subject areas to allow for the flexibility and choice desired in senior cycle. The removal of ring-fencing was suggested to allow students the opportunity to access modules currently in the system in the LCVP and LCA programmes. It was suggested in some of the written submissions that the inclusion of diverse pathways through senior cycle would necessitate the investigation of subjects and modules to support these pathways, the inclusion of practical modules within subjects and an exploration of other sites of learning that could facilitate this learning.

The current range of subjects should be maintained of which students should undertake a minimum of six. (ASTI, written submission)

We encourage an exploration of more practical modules and options within subjects. Much can be learned from the experiences of traineeships, apprenticeships and further education programmes in terms of designing, teaching and assessing units of learning that have a vocational focus. (ETBI, written submission)

If the number of exam subjects taken by students were to be reduced, we believe that such a move would negatively affect language uptake in general and diversification in particular (JLTI, written submission)

Modules of learning and assessment at completion of module allowing building of credits throughout the programme – this could happen in fifth and sixth year or even should we consider a three year programme that allows time for LCE to include

> *the best parts of TY & LCVP and gives scope for inclusion of LCA students with LCE.*(Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

What subject areas, if any, should be compulsory in senior cycle was the subject of some debate and resulted in strongly held opinions and beliefs being expressed. Some pointed to the perceived **mandatory components** in the present system (Irish, English and mathematics), with others pointing to the fact that only Irish is a mandatory subject for study to Leaving Certificate. The matriculation requirements for third level, which often include English, mathematics, Irish and sometimes an additional language, have an impact on the choices available to students in our schools. Many pointed to the need to revise these requirements in parallel with any changes in senior cycle provision if there was to be any real change in the system.

> *Tacaímid, [dá bhrí sin,] leis an leagan amach atá ar chlár reatha29 na hArdteistiméireachta, clár a bhfuil croí-eilimint shubstaintiúil (Béarla, Gaeilge agus Matamaitic mar chroí-ábhair) chomh maith le heilimint shubstaintiúil roghnach (trí nó ceithre hábhar a roghnaíonn daltaí as roghchlár a shocraíonn an scoil) i gceist ann*.
>
> *[Consequently] we agree with the current structure of the Leaving Certificate programme which has a substantial core of subjects which must be studied (English, Irish and Maths) as well as a substantial range of optional subjects (three to four subjects chosen by students from the options offered within the school.* (Sealbhú, written submission)
>
> *I agree, but again if you are asking students to study 6/7 subjects and forcing them to study certain ones they lack a talent in or interest for, then how can they really experience the vision outlined? Most countries allow students to choose 3/4 subjects with no subjects being mandatory in the final year.* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

As with earlier stages of the review, there is a widely held belief that **literacy and numeracy** are central to a curriculum at this level but there were divergent opinions on how these could be accessed in senior cycle. Some suggested a core component of literacy and numeracy that may be assessed on a competency basis. Others argued that the subject areas English/Irish and mathematics should remain as central to the experience of senior cycle. Some respondents in the consultation suggested a more nuanced approach where literacy and numeracy may be addressed in core modules that are mandatory (such as language or functional mathematics) and have other modules as optional (such as literature or advanced mathematics). **Life skills**, inclusive of relationships and sexuality education, financial literacy, civic and social education, was also widely discussed as possible core components at senior cycle for all students.

The place of **Irish** in senior cycle was the singular focus of a significant number of respondents. A Facebook petition called for the core status of Irish to be maintained and this was echoed in the co-

ordinated block of survey responses. Some stakeholders argued that any limitation of choice at this level was a disservice to the autonomy of students. Others suggested that Irish culture and language may be retained as a core module but that it should not be mandatory for all students to study a full course inclusive of literature. In terms of policy coherence, a significant number of respondents pointed to the need to align with the Polsaí don Ghaeilge sa Chóras Oideachais.

> *Ba chóir an Ghaeilge a choinneáil mar chroí-ábhar sa sraith shinsearach a dhéanann gach dalta staidéar uirthi.* […] *De réir taighde suirbhé ar dearcthaí an phobail i leith na Gaeilge, tá tacaíocht an-láidir ann (64%) don Ghaeilge mar chroí-ábhar ardteiste, a dhéanann gach mac léinn dar leibhéal staidéar uirthi, agus níl mórán tacaíocht ann leis an stádas sin a athrú (14%).*
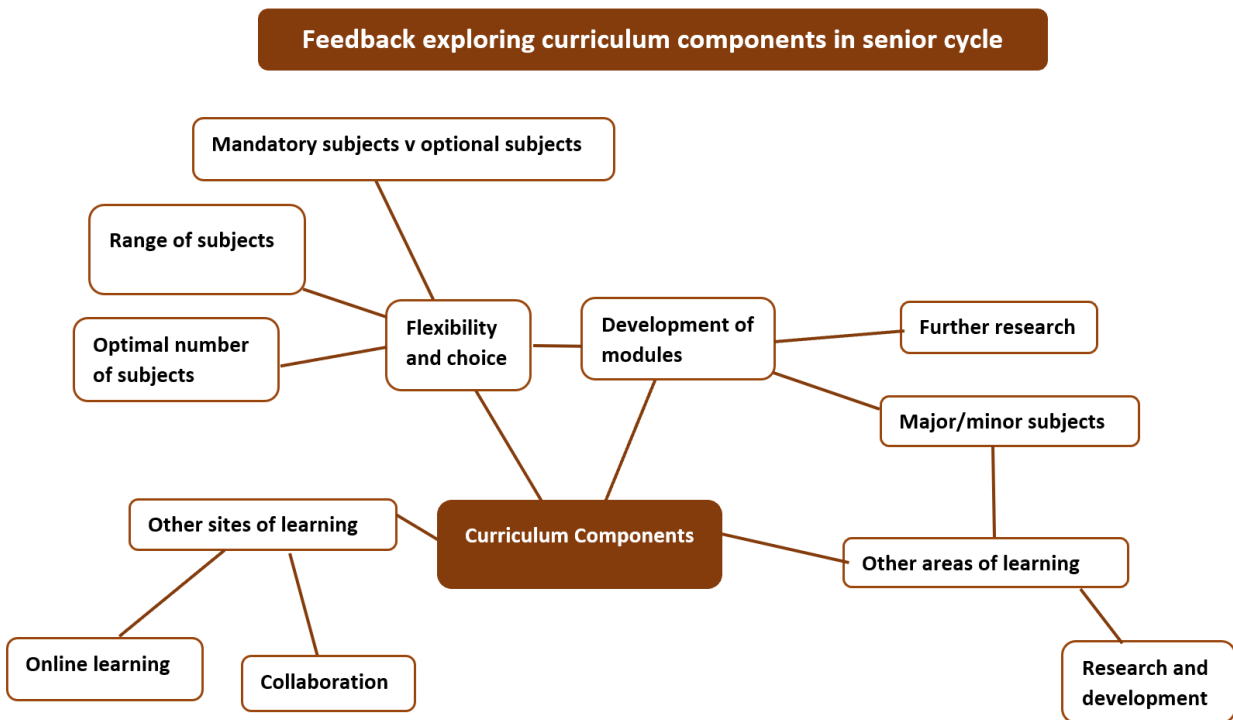>
> *Irish should be maintained as a core subject in the senior cycle studied by all students […] According to a survey conducted into the opinions of the public regarding Irish, there is very strong support (64%) for Irish as a core subject in senior cycle which every 2nd level student would study and there is very little support (14%) to change this status.* (Conradh na Gaeilge, written submission)
>
> *If it can be acknowledged that student choice can at least allow motivation and curiosity levels to flourish then it is inevitable that the **concept of compulsory subjects, especially for Irish and maths, must be abandoned**.[emphasis in original] It is the most desired change from the point of view of students – I have seen multiple survey evidence for this online and it makes perfect sense. Irish will not die as it will be studied to Junior Cycle and also it will flourish in Gaelscoils and with those who are really enthusiastic about the subject.* (Individual email submission)
>
> *One option might be to include Gaeilge as a Compulsory subject at senior cycle, but student could decide whether taking this as a state Exam subject or a Modular (i.e. assessment based) subject would be more appropriate for his/ her future plans.* (NCGE, written submission)

A significant number of submissions came from groups or organisations involved in formal or informal education and/or those who have an interest in the curriculum at this level. From these groups there were a number of suggestions around **other areas of learning** that should be part of the curriculum at senior cycle such as education for sustainable development, climate change, global awareness, entrepreneurship education, community or social action and faith development. Some argued for the inclusion of these areas as core to the experience of senior cycle, others favoured a more interdisciplinary approach that feature diverse methods of recognising and rewarding learning. There were also some suggestions about utilising other sites of learning. To deal with the challenges existing in trying to provide a broader selection of pathways through senior cycle and the limitations faced by smaller or rural schools, many suggested the development of **online learning modules** that could be accessed in a range of settings (including home schooling, single-sex or small schools and detention

centres, where limited options may be available). There were also many suggestions to build **collaboration** between schools, between schools and training centres, between schools and industry, and between schools and higher education institutions in order to explore the provision of modules to support vocational, technical, creative and professional learning.

Feedback exploring curriculum components in senior cycle

- Mandatory subjects v optional subjects
- Range of subjects
- Optimal number of subjects
- Flexibility and choice
- Development of modules
- Further research
- Major/minor subjects
- Other sites of learning
- Curriculum Components
- Other areas of learning
- Online learning
- Collaboration
- Research and development

Assessment and reporting

Discussions on senior cycle quite often centred on the assessment processes and outcomes of the Leaving Certificate Established. Of the areas for further exploration outlined in the consultation document there was agreement on further developing assessment arrangements, exploration of the role and weighting of second assessment components and scoping ways to broaden assessment and examination approaches to allow students to display a wider range of learning. The strengths and challenges of the existing arrangements, outlined in the *Interim Report on Senior Cycle Review (2019),* were further discussed in this phase of consultation and discussions explored various possibilities for senior cycle.

The modular structure of the LCA and its associated credit accumulation, task completion, interviews and range of assessment methods was not subject to the same degree of scrutiny in the focus groups, survey or written submissions. But, where a knowledge of the LCA was present, it was frequently lauded for the positive, diverse assessment arrangements in place that recognised and rewarded student learning in a variety of ways. The high-stakes nature of the terminal examinations for Leaving Certificate Established students, the implications of the drive for CAO points on the health and wellbeing of students and the associated interpretations of what we mean by or what is seen as success at senior cycle were the focus of many of the inputs to the consultation.

The following table summarises the strengths and challenges of current assessment and reporting arrangements identified in the public consultation:

Strengths	Challenges
Impartial, external, fair	Single assessment point in some subjects
Additional/second components are available	Most assessment in three weeks in June
Results easily used to facilitate third level entry	Relatively narrow range of assessment methods
Broad range of modules/assessment in LCA	Limited second chance opportunities
Broad range of modules/assessment in TY	Impact on teaching and learning
Modular assessment in LCVP	LCA reporting problematic

In order to maintain the strengths of the current system and make progress in addressing the challenges, discussions during the public consultation explored the range of options suggested in early

phases of the Senior Cycle Review. For each option suggested there were other strengths identified but also challenges that would be faced by students, teachers, schools and the wider education system. The main points made during the discussions are outlined below.

Spreading out assessment over time was discussed in focus groups and bilateral meetings and suggestions were made in some of the online submissions. The potential benefits of reducing the emphasis on terminal examinations at the end of senior cycle by having some examinations at the end of 5th year were welcomed by some groups while a number of focus groups suggested a greater variety of methods of assessment spread out from the final weeks of sixth year. The possible benefits discussed included having assessment closer to the point of learning and reducing the pressure felt by students. In certain subject areas this division would seem to be feasible, in other areas the skill development of students was seen as more integrated and so an assessment in fifth year was not viewed as a positive idea. There was also some fear of the unintended consequences of such a suggestion: that it could lead to increased points of pressure rather than lessening pressure, that it would be dependent on the expansion of an already over-stretched examination structure and that it could lead to the atomisation of learning.

Linked to these discussions was the exploration of **additional assessment components**. Many commented on the strengths of these components (orals, practicals, research reports, investigations, project work etc.) in valuing the aspects of subject-specific learning that are difficult to assess in a terminal written examination and the idea of considering extending these components to subject areas where they are not currently available was broadly welcomed. In the focus groups, participants highlighted the need for any second assessment components to be clearly aligned with the nature of the subject and to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. The judicious timing of second assessment components was suggested as a way of easing the pressure on the terminal assessment point.

> *Expanding the modes of Assessment (for certification) is commendable, and largely necessary. The greatest challenge is to do so while retaining the objectivity, and acknowledged impartiality, which grants the Leaving Cert the high-value "currency" it enjoys. I would suggest, where coursework assignments/Portfolios are components of a terminal award, the material should be completed in school under teacher's supervision/authentication and submitted to SEC for objective/ standardised marking by the same examiners that mark the "written" component, thus providing a measure of quality assurance. Many of the current LC subjects have already adopted this method e.g. Design & Communication Graphics.* (Online survey response from a post-primary principal / deputy principal)

> *In Coláiste Bríde, we believe that learners making the learning their own should be an important feature of senior cycle review. Assessment practices, therefore, should have the potential to showcase student talents not only in the summative pen and paper exam but in other forms such as portfolios, e-portfolios and group projects etc.* (Coláiste Bríde, written submission)

In terms of assessment in languages, and in the Irish language in particular, specific reference was made to the use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)[4] to support teaching, assessment and reporting in senior cycle. A number of concerns about the wisdom of linking the CEFR to language learning across all stages of teaching, learning and assessment and the challenges of doing so were also identified in the feedback.

The perception of the **current assessment arrangements** as fair, impartial and transparent was iterated by a number of groups but challenged by others. The central involvement of the SEC in the marking of students' terminal assessment was viewed as one of the key strengths of the current system. In discussions where other modes of assessment such as continuous assessment were mentioned, it was generally felt that any assessment that would have an impact on the final grade of a student should be externally marked.

> *The strengths of the current model of external assessment of the Leaving Certificate examination have been strongly endorsed in the consultation paper. The former include: a high level of public trust; its capacity to serve as a valid and objective statement of students' academic achievement; its fairness, impartiality and transparency.* (ASTI, written submission)

> *Under assessment the statement that the system is fair and transparent is highly problematic. The recent report from the HEA which found that "among students scoring 405 to 600 Leaving Cert points, more than one-quarter – 27 per cent – were from affluent backgrounds, compared with just 3 per cent from disadvantaged areas" would suggest that what we assess is far from fair.* (TCD, School of Education, written submission)

> *Most subjects require good performance on a day or days in June. That may be a good assessment of a student's ability to withstand pressure and stress but it is not a good way to assess their ability and knowledge of a particular subject. It doesn't reflect real life. (Online survey response from a parent/guardian)*

There was a repeated desire to see the modes and **methods of assessment** evolve to recognise, reflect and value the types of learning experienced in our schools but also to allow students to display their learning in a variety of ways that suit their needs and play to their strengths. Assessment that is fully aligned with the nature and content of the subject was regularly mentioned in the focus groups.

> *We need to move away from a one size fits all approach for exams. Students should be given the opportunity to choose between, for example, written examinations,*

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[4] The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

power point presentations, or audio/visual presentations etc. This would not only allow young people to best display their knowledge on particular subjects but will also allow them to develop vital skills for further education and the workplace. (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, written submission)

Continuous assessment and more emphasis on course work and projects during the cycle. My son sat history for the leaving cert. 20% of his marks were allocated to a project which he researched, wrote and handed up long before the day of the exam. For a subject like history all the skills required for this task - researching, writing, editing, rewriting etc- are appropriate for this subject and infinitely more relevant than what he remembers and writes in a couple of hours on a Wednesday in June. (Online survey response from a parent)

For language learning, the use of a language portfolio, compiled during the course of the Senior Cycle and incorporating audio and video files, samples of student writing, evidence of digital literacy and creative engagement with the language and its resources, would be highly recommended as a supplement to terminal oral and written examinations. (RIA, written submission)

I believe the current system of reporting students' grades is merely summing up their ability to linguistically convey their knowledge. The consultation document states that 24 of 37 subjects have two or more forms of assessment within their subject. However, the majority of these have a written exam at the forefront of the assessment criteria. This method does not convey the student's ability to orally or visually represent their comprehension. When taking differentiation and each students' different learning styles into account, I believe students should have a choice in how they represent their knowledge of a topic. (Third level student, written submission)

There were also suggestions made on how to broaden assessment methods and the current form and content of examinations to keep pace with international best practice and to encourage the move away from rote learning to more active critical engagement. Participants in the focus groups identified a tension between rote learning and independent thinking.

On demand or session-based CBE [computer-based examination] in particular will remove any perceived bias that might be extant for teacher marked course work. We would of course note that CBE is not just multiple choices questions but can be an exercise or the use of an application such as, for example, entering data on a bookkeeping package and can include the entry of free text answers. CBE exams of this kind cannot be prepared for by rote learning and therefore meet some of the criticism of a single terminal examination system. (ACCA, written submission)

Learning has two key dimensions: (meta)cognitive and social interactive/interpersonal. Learning needs to involve both process as well as content. Assessment therefore, needs to capture both process and content. (Online survey response from a lecturer in education)

NCCA has already commissioned research on computer-based examinations. Similar work should be commissioned to explore the possibility of open-book examinations. The consequences in terms of liberating the teaching and learning

> *process without loss of rigour could be enormous.* (JMB/AMCSS, written submission)

A number of groups commented on the inflexibility of assessment arrangements. While they welcomed the additional arrangements for bereavement introduced by the SEC this year, there was considerable discussion on the additional events that may impact on student performance in the terminal examinations. There was strong support for **additional opportunities to access assessment** over the course of senior cycle however, there were also concerns raised over how multiple access points for assessment would impact on the reliability and validity of those assessments.

> *Students are forced to repeat if they are unable to sit the exams and may be forced to learn an entirely new syllabus in a condensed space of time. These circumstances are entirely out of their control, and the lack of provisions in place for these are unacceptable. While we have seen the pilot scheme in 2019 to allow for those who have had a family bereavement to sit the exam in July, this policy should be extended to those who have to undergo emergency medical procedures.* (ISSU, written submission)

Reporting and recognition of achievement and learning in senior cycle is perceived as inextricably linked to the assessment arrangements in place. Many voices at focus groups, in the survey and at bilateral meetings lamented the narrow reporting of student achievement in senior cycle at present. The view was that the wealth of learning experienced by students over the two or three years of senior cycle was narrowly reported on in the final statement of terminal assessment results. For some students, particularly those in LCA, the reporting of achievement was not clearly understood by prospective employers and the absence of any CAO point equivalence means that pathways and progression options are fewer and less clear to students and parents. For students currently following a level 1 or level 2 programme the absence of certification at senior cycle provides a serious challenge. Many respondents favour a broader recognition of learning but with the caveat that any such reporting must be fully resourced and supported in the system. Some organisations and individuals recommended a Senior Cycle Profile of Achievement that recognises other areas of learning, while others adamantly opposed such an introduction. Some third level sectors favour a focus on the recognition of **transversal skills** that would be beneficial to students progressing to higher or further education. Many respondents mentioned the Personal Statement completed by students applying to UK colleges as being worthy of further investigation.

> *We value what is measured and unless the higher education sector begins to value more than the current very narrow definition of academic attainment then the reforms to the Leaving Cert Established will be of minor impact.* (TCD, School of Education, written submission)

It is important that the Higher Education Institutions and Universities and CAO are involved in discussions about the changes required. Example: What is the rationale behind continuing with the requirement for 6 formal level subjects to plan for the Higher Education college applications, especially considering that "mature" student entry requirements are different, therefore alternative requirements already exist. (NCGE, written submission)

I agree the reporting of students' achievements should be broadened but I think care should be taken in changing assessment in every subject. Allow assessment to be varied - one subject may suit a CBA type approach another may suit coursework task and another a state set exam half way through senior cycle. (Online survey)

To be an inclusive education system, I would kindly ask you to get rid of the word 'Junior' out of the junior cycle level 2 programmes and leave it just at a level 2 programme open to the cohort of students from both junior AND senior cycle that would be suitable for it. In this way, more options and pathways open up to more students that will otherwise not be included. (Individual email submission)

The link between **CAO,** the points system and the reporting of achievement was very apparent in the discussions. Many noted that any changes in the provision of senior cycle should be accompanied by a review of the system of applications to further and higher education for any changes to have a positive impact. Many of the areas for further exploration which have gained broad agreement outlined earlier, such as the development of pathways through senior cycle, a modular approach, broader and more diverse assessment arrangements, would need to be included in any development of reporting. It was repeatedly suggested that any changes at senior cycle would require and necessitate a review of the system of allocation of points for matriculation and third level entry purposes. The inclusion of areas of the curriculum outside the scope of the allocation of points, such as the completion of modules in LCA, would also need to be considered in light of any changes at this level. The inclusion of diverse pathways through senior cycle would also necessitate a broader system of reporting to reflect and recognise the learning experiences of students.

We should think about straying away from the points system all together. I think there is no point in changing the way the senior cycle is taught if the final goal for students remains the same. Even if the students in the classroom are encouraged to pursue other paths, if the points system remains present, the attitudes of students are unlikely to change. I think that the NCCA should have a conference with colleges and third level institutions in regards to how they allow students in and discuss how a new system can be developed which separates secondary school from college (Third level student, written submission)

In terms of the Leaving Certificate Established, there is CAO points available to students which allows them progress into third level education. However, I believe in terms of the Leaving Cert Applied there should also be CAO points awarded based on merit, pass or distinction like LCVP in the new Senior Cycle. This will allow for

inclusion of all students who sit their Leaving Cert. (Third level student, written submission)

The allocation of **bonus points** for higher level mathematics is in many instances seen as an inequality in our system that has negative impacts on subject achievement elsewhere, subject choice and student wellbeing. Some suggested that bonus points could be extended to other subject areas or be implemented only where it has direct relevance to the progression pathway of the student.

> *The arbitrary decision to award bonus points to selected subjects can be counter-productive for students who do not have an aptitude for that subject, and can cause huge stress and anxiety for that student, pressuring them to do a subject at a particular level. Where bonus points could be used constructively, is if they are linked with giving weighting to certain subjects which are connected to a college course e.g. getting bonus points for a science-related subject if one is applying for a science-related course* (Online survey response from an organisation)

> *One of the more recent changes to the leaving cert was the increased reward for higher level maths, which encouraged many students to keep studying in higher level even when it was unwise to do so. I agree with the governments assertion that maths is an essential subject and useful in everyday life, but it's important that we do not give students who are gifted in one area a specific advantage over those whose talents lie elsewhere.* (Third level student, written submission)

The **recognition of other areas of learning** to provide supplementary accreditation was also discussed. The adoption of the revised [EUROPASS](#) framework was mentioned by some stakeholders as an example of how learning is being digitally recognised internationally and that it could provide some insights and suggestions for the future development of reporting at senior cycle.

> *Reporting is currently for employers and universities, particularly universities who use only grades for access. Until the CAO changes any reporting changes will be mostly ineffective. Teachers already provide additional reporting through references which are regularly provided and written specifically for a course or job and therefore very tailored and personal.* (Online survey response from a second level student)

> *I agree this needs to be done but it needs to be meaningful. Needs to be value for students when reporting on other areas (needs to count for something) universities also have a responsibility here to develop a system to recognise other non-curricular areas i.e. drama, cookery, dance.* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

> *There needs to be greater emphasis on students realising their potential and working to the best of their individual abilities. Success should not be measured in terms of the number of points achieved or the number of higher level subjects studied.* (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)

The need for further **collaboration** with stakeholders such as SOLAS and further and higher education institutions was highlighted in discussions. Any reporting arrangements developed need to be of benefit to the students and to the institutions and employers who will use them. They must share a **common language** and be easily interpreted for the uses they will be put to, including international visibility.
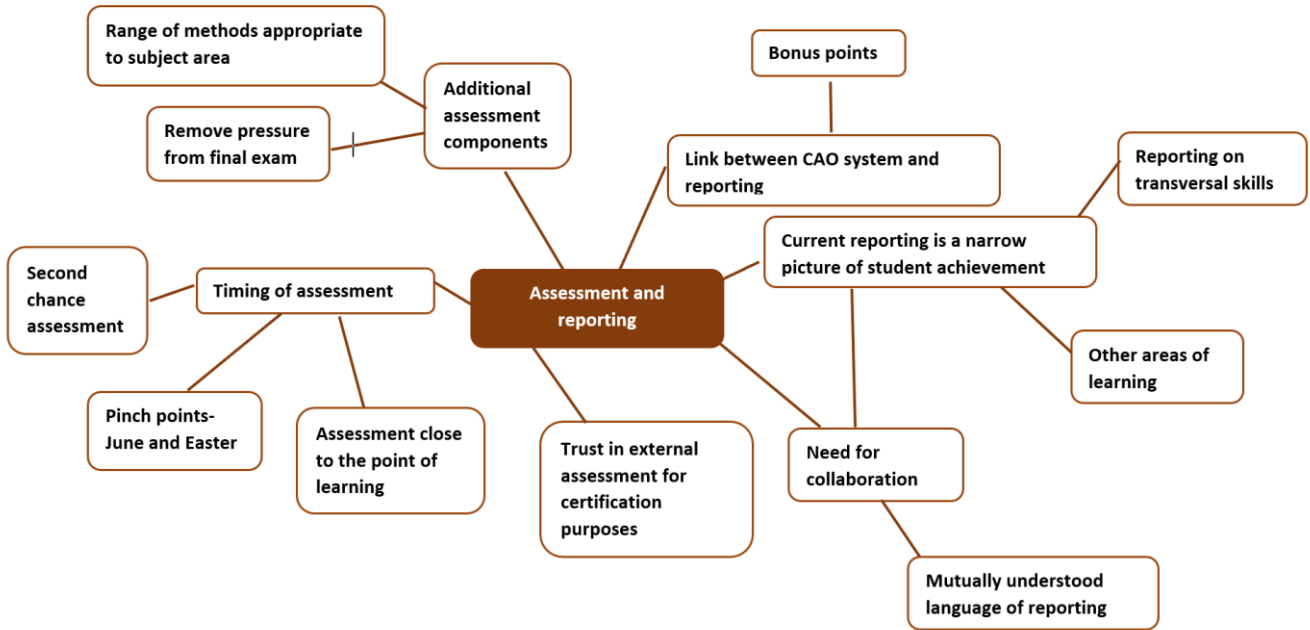
> *It is of fundamental importance that the award pupils receive at the end of Senior Cycle is the same regardless of the nature of assessment. Negative elitist attitudes driven by university entrance requirements have become associated with the LCVP and LCA. Similarly, TY and the LCE are seen as desirable for elitist parents. The only way to discourage disparity is to award one award and ensure choice for all Secondary School leavers.* (Individual email submission)

> *It is therefore an opportune time to consider how best to progress shared aims and outcomes, where relevant for learners progressing to FET from senior cycle education, and also to review the mechanisms and opportunities whereby we can ensure there is both early and meaningful engagement for students on all the potential benefits and pathways that FET can offer.* (SOLAS, written submission)

> *Engagement with the higher education communities around the relationship between higher education and senior cycle should continue to strive to realise permeable arrangements for post school transitions that are fair and transparent but don't unnecessarily constrain curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practice in senior cycle.* (QQI, written submission)

It was also suggested that the function of reporting may include a recognition of prior learning (RPL) that may be of use to students when transferring to an apprenticeship, traineeship or further/higher education institution where they may have already completed some relevant modules or areas of learning in senior cycle.

Feedback exploring assessment and reporting in senior cycle

Range of methods appropriate to subject area

Remove pressure from final exam

Additional assessment components

Bonus points

Link between CAO system and reporting

Reporting on transversal skills

Second chance assessment

Timing of assessment

Assessment and reporting

Current reporting is a narrow picture of student achievement

Other areas of learning

Pinch points- June and Easter

Assessment close to the point of learning

Trust in external assessment for certification purposes

Need for collaboration

Mutually understood language of reporting

Priorities and supports

In the consultation document, there were four areas that the participants were asked to consider: the identification of key priorities for development; supports needed for schools, teachers, students and the system; further research needed and implications for career guidance provision in schools. Across the consultation there was broad agreement on the implications for career guidance provision, the need for policy coherence and support for teachers and schools. However, there was much discussion of other aspects, such as the most effective model of CPD for teachers and school leaders and a diversity of opinions surrounding the pace of change.

The **CPD needs of teachers and school leaders** emerged as a strong theme in the feedback with respondents to the online survey highlighting CPD for school leaders in supporting change and development as a priority. In the discussions around CPD for both teachers and school leaders, the commentary was focused mainly on the timing of CPD and on the nature of the CPD provided. Respondents to the online survey often reflected their views on CPD through the lens of recent CPD experiences in the areas of literacy, numeracy and junior cycle reform. Participants in the focus groups reflected a desire for teacher voice in the design of CPD to ensure that the programme of CPD meets the identified, contextual needs of teachers. In the consultation survey a strong desire was expressed for future models of CPD to build on previous experience focusing on what has been effective and what could be improved upon. There was also some discussion of the continuum of learning for teachers and that CPD should be seen as part of career-long professional upskilling, particularly where new subject areas or modules are introduced. A more flexible more integrated approach to CPD and initial teacher education was mentioned by some stakeholders.

> *it is important to upskill teachers and support them with meaningful and well-designed cpd in order to do this. At the moment I think that there is a disparity and a lack of education of teachers regarding how to do this. A small proportion of teachers are motivated to upskill get involved in extra cpd because the work load is exhausting just being in the classroom. There needs to be a reduction in class contact hours for teachers to achieve all that is expected. (Online survey response from post-primary teacher)*

> *I've worked in other countries where my professional growth and development was supported, valued - 2/3 school days per year were at my disposal to use. We have some form of it for primary teachers. Guerrilla CPD - drop in drop out - every time there is a reform does nothing reformative at all - it's band-aid professional learning, it's imposed, not cultivated and if you want to develop & reform education you need to develop and 'reform' teachers over time, consistently, constructively. It should be part of my teacher DNA that I learn across my career and it should be part of the structures & practices of my academic year. It should be systematic. For*

me, I'm ever incredulous at how poorly developed it is in Ireland, how a la carte it all is. It isn't the 'implementation problem', it's nurturing continuing teacher education. (Online survey response from post-primary teacher)

A common theme across the feedback was the requirement for CPD to precede the initial implementation of change and to continue as appropriate in tandem with the developments, recognising that teachers and school leaders need different supports at different stages.

> *NO change should be introduced to schools until ALL training, in-service, CPD etc is complete. I believe this will give all stakeholders the confidence and time to plan appropriately, and deliver the changes properly. The new Junior Cycle would have been less stressful and a more positive experience if teachers were not, for example, still being trained just months before the final exam, or weeks before a CBA (Online survey response from post-primary teacher)*

> *Should new areas of learning be introduced within, or separate to, subjects ETBI recognises the need for rigorous teacher preparation and support to build such learning programmes.* (ETBI, written submission)

Respondents to the online survey reflected a desire to move away from a 'one size fits all model' with a need for CPD to be responsive to the needs of school leaders, schools and teachers. Time to consider the implications of change for school leaders and teachers was seen as a pre-requisite to any development of senior cycle. The need for specific CPD to support the inclusion of students with specific educational needs was also mentioned by several stakeholders. The time needed for collaboration was a common theme with teachers and school leader respondents to the online survey.

> *It would be great to see support for Teachers in term of CPD and reduction in class sizes so that this is the norm in senior cycle. Time allocation for collaboration, sharing of ideas, strategies and reflection on current practice at school level (Online survey response from post-primary teacher)*

> *Schools are rich environments full of untapped professional skills and it is through effective leadership of this talent and reculturing that schools will be able to assess their own situation and respond to their local context, be that DEIS band 1, DEIS band 2, rural, urban, academic, non-academic etc etc. […]. Schools will have to be supported in navigating the messy space of change management and moving to a space of deep professional collaboration. (Online survey response from post-primary teacher)*

The need for connected approaches in terms of CPD was highlighted at the consultation forum and in the focus groups. There was a strong desire for a connected approach between support services, a continuum of connected learning for teachers across their careers and clear connections between capacity building CPD and specific curriculum change.

The commentary on CPD across the consultation coupled with the experience of recent educational change in our system suggests some features of a model of CPD that would be welcomed by the system to support curriculum development in schools.

Features of an emerging model of CPD

Planned for and provided on a continual and well-resourced basis

Mostly school-based or network-based

Focused on overall capacity-building in tandem with support for specific curriculum change

Offers good alignment with the overall direction of development/change

Builds on the importance of processes of mutual adaptation and local enactment of framework and curricula

Timely and appropriate

The need for enhanced **guidance support** was considered a key cornerstone in the any proposed developments in senior cycle. The provision of additional pathways in senior cycle and the related choices for progression meant that students and parents would need greater levels of guidance to make informed choices. The consistency of a structured guidance provision across schools and sectors recurred as a theme among all stakeholders. Stakeholders referred to the EU Council resolution[5], 2008 which defines Guidance as

> *"… referring to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used.*
>
> *Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills."*

In addition, the Whole School Guidance Framework (NCGE, 2017)[6] outlines a broad continuum of support and comprises a whole school approach to guidance through guidance-related learning to individualised supports for students. Each of these documents, among others, was seen as being relevant to supporting any developments in senior cycle. The feedback on guidance expressed in the

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[5] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf
[6] https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework

consultation often focused on the provision of structured, consistent career guidance over the entire duration of post-primary education with increasing focus on pathways and progression as students approached senior cycle. Other aspects of learning to learn, self-management, decision-making and wellbeing were also included in some of the discussions on guidance. These discussions often reiterated calls for increased **teacher allocation** to support changes at senior cycle.

> ### Features of an emerging model of guidance
>
> Structured coherent approach
>
> Whole school integrated approach to guidance
>
> Developmental model of student support
>
> Adequately resourced with ongoing links to the worlds of work, education and training

The **pace of any potential developments** was also widely discussed. There were diverse opinions expressed in relation to the pace of any changes to senior cycle. The ongoing reform of junior cycle was often referenced in tandem with discussions around pace. Respondents were often divided on the need for full implementation and review of junior cycle to be completed before proceeding with any possible changes to senior cycle education. But a significant number of respondents noted the perceived gap between junior cycle and senior cycle experiences and called for a more accelerated timeline for change. Some stakeholders noted the rapidly changing pace of technological and societal change and the more protracted nature of educational change as a tension in any suggested timeline for the future. The need for ongoing discussions and dialogue was seen, unanimously, as central to the success of any future developments.

> *Teachers and practitioners must feel included in the formulation of a vision, otherwise it is doomed to fail. Focusing on the competencies and skills of teachers and practitioners when developing curricula, supporting greater autonomy and provision of resources for teachers and practitioners and designing and developing curricula to include all learners are key to the creation of a shared vision for the future development of curriculum and assessment in Ireland. (Online survey response from a post-primary teacher)*

> *Education systems are notoriously slow to change but the pushback against the junior cycle reform process should not be allowed to dictate the pace of senior cycle reform. If an "evolution not revolution" approach to change is to be followed it may take very many years for meaningful change to occur. This is not fair to the students who will go through the senior cycle in the meantime and given the serious global challenges Irish society is facing over the next period – climate change and the rise*

of AI and robotics – it is not clear that we have the luxury of moving slowly. (TCD, School of Education, written submission)

The evolution approach to change is an all-important one which acknowledges the capacity of the system for change, the significant changes already being experienced at junior cycle and the absolute need for evaluation and review of the impacts of these changes across the whole system. It is important that continuity for the learner in junior cycle with all its curricular and assessment changes, is clearly supported in a revised senior cycle. Ironically the strongest argument for a shorter timeframe for change at senior cycle is because there is real evidence at school level of a disconnect between the junior cycle experience and the current senior cycle experience. (ACCS, written submission)
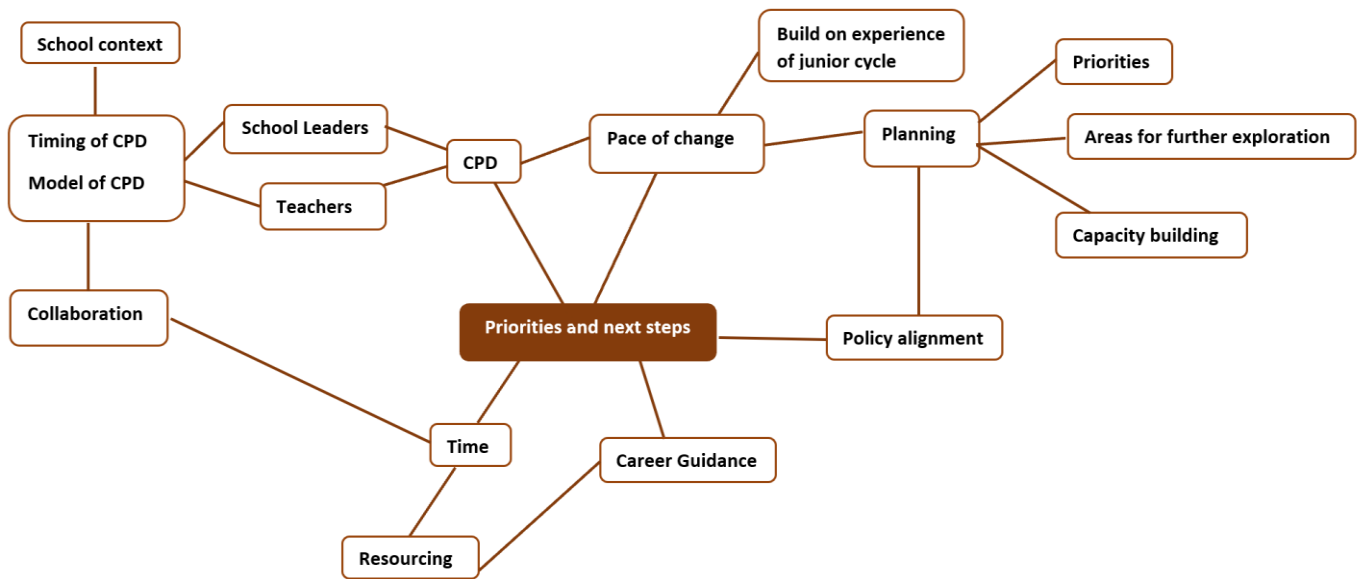
Policy **coherence** and system coherence emerged as one of the themes from the discussions around priorities and supports. During a number of focus groups, participants expressed a desire to have 'joined up thinking' where existing education policies such as Gaeltacht education strategy and to take steps to ensure coherence. Many stakeholders referenced other policy areas that have relevance to this stage of education such as the SOLAS *Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024*, the *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014-2020*, the *20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and the re-referencing of the NFQ to the European Qualifications Framework in 2020. Any possible changes at senior cycle should be well-aligned with other changes across the education system as schools are often the sites where the tensions of fragmented or differing strategies are experienced. Further collaboration and discussions could ameliorate the effects of disjointed policy implementation.

The **resourcing** of future developments was often raised as a concern throughout the consultation. Respondents to the survey cautioned against the implementation of change without adequate resourcing being secured. Resourcing was broadly used to describe a wide range of supports such as time, student-teacher ratio, guidance supports, training and access to digital technologies. Some stakeholders had developed their thinking on resourcing and supports to include systemic changes such as changes to the pupil-teacher ratio, changes to the teacher contract, changes to the school day/year, the creation of shared teacher posts, and changes to the location/co-location of schools. The physical environment of schools was discussed as a potential impediment to change and these discussions also included the provision of technological support, broadband, assistive technology for students with SEN and sufficient physical space to allow for the encouragement of independent learning.

Keeping parents and guardians and other stakeholders informed throughout the process is regarded as crucial to the successful implementation of any developments in senior cycle. The need for a **clear**

communication strategy that engages with schools, parents, students and other stakeholders was discussed at many of the meetings. Many of the stakeholders also emphasised the need to continue developing collaboration across the education system in order to ensure a senior cycle that is coherent, flexible, agile and fit for purpose.

Feedback exploring priorities and next steps in the review of senior cycle

- School context
- Timing of CPD
- Model of CPD
- School Leaders
- Teachers
- CPD
- Collaboration
- Build on experience of junior cycle
- Pace of change
- Planning
- Priorities
- Areas for further exploration
- Capacity building
- Priorities and next steps
- Policy alignment
- Time
- Career Guidance
- Resourcing

Next Steps

This report summarises the responses to the areas for further exploration outlined in the *Senior Cycle Review Consultation Document (NCCA, 2019)*. The areas for exploration emerged through the iterative phases of the Senior Cycle Review and the further exploration of these areas in the focus groups, survey and bilateral meetings has contributed significantly to the generating of a shared vision and purpose for senior cycle education. This emerging vision and purpose will be key to the NCCA advisory report, due for publication early in 2020, which will set out the priorities, pace and sequence for development work at senior cycle and will encompass:

- The knowledge, skills, qualities, learning and pedagogy that can provide a basis for the experience of senior cycle

- The pathways and programmes that could be available to learners

- The curriculum components and elements that might comprise those pathways and programmes

- The further developments in assessment that may be involved

- The ways in which reporting and recognition can be enhanced to reflect the overall changes at senior cycle

Underpinning any proposed developments at senior cycle will be the **shared vision** and **purposes** for senior cycle that have emerged from the discussions held so far. This vision and purpose will outline what it is we value and support in senior cycle now and into the future. The coherence of the elements of any policy on senior cycle education must be founded on alignment with this shared vision. This refined vision will require further developments to enable the evolving purposes of senior cycle to be realised and the consideration of implications which may include resourcing, CPD, guidance and supports.

As with all developmental work undertaken by the NCCA, there will be a continued focus on further **research**, data and information to support any decision-making. The pace and scale of any proposed developments at senior cycle will also be subject to securing the appropriate **resourcing** and supports necessary for successful implementation. A coherent implementation strategy, that allows for school autonomy and the alignment of complementary policies will be central to any evolving senior cycle.

The continuing **engagement and support of stakeholders** across education and beyond, will be central to further developments at senior cycle. The voices of teachers, students and parents must continue to be engaged in the evolution of a shared vision for senior cycle. Increasingly, as developments at senior cycle progress, this engagement will need to draw upon the **direct contribution, assistance, support and collaboration** of the stakeholders. At the heart of this collaboration will be **communication** and shared, agreed understandings and approaches to change.

In considering next steps, NCCA will be mindful of the potential gap that can emerge between purposes and practice, intention and realisation, plans and their enactment. Further planning at macro level for developments at senior cycle will consider the fact that most curriculum development and the most important curriculum development happens at the level of the school, the classroom and the learning interaction.

Appendix 1: Bilateral meetings

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
Central Applications Office (CAO)
Educational Training Board Ireland (ETBI)
Foras na Gaeilge
Higher Education Authority (HEA)
Ibec
Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC)
Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)
National Parents Council Post Primary (NPC-PP)
Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
SOLAS
State Examinations Commission (SEC)
Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI)
Technological Higher Education Authority (THEA)
The Teaching Council

Appendix 2: Written submissions from organisations

1.	American Chamber of Commerce Ireland
2.	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
3.	Arts Council
4.	Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA)
5.	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
6.	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
7.	Coláiste Ailigh
8.	Coláiste Bride, Clondalkin
9.	Conradh na Gaeilge
10.	Dyslexia Association of Ireland
11.	ECO-UNESCO
12.	Education Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
13.	Fianna Fáil
14.	Foras na Gaeilge
15.	Foróige
16.	Gaeilge Dept, UCC
17.	Gaeloideachas
18.	Gael Linn
19.	Gaisce
20.	Gamechanger Dialogue
21.	Green Foundation Ireland
22.	Ibec
23.	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
24.	Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)
25.	Irish Science Teachers Association (ISTA)
26.	Irish Secondary Students Union (ISSU)
27.	Japanese Language Teachers Ireland (JLTI)
28.	Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
29.	Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)
30.	Ludgate Education ICT
31.	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)

32.	National Centre for Guidance Education (NCGE)
33.	National Parents Council – Post Primary (NPC-PP)
34.	National Parents Council – Primary (NPC-P)
35.	Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
36.	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
37.	Royal Irish Academy (RIA)
38.	Sealbhú, DCU
39.	Sinn Féin
40.	SOLAS
41.	Technological Higher Education Authority (THEA)
42.	Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities
43.	Trinity College Dublin, School of Education
44.	Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta
45.	Union of Students in Ireland (USI)
46.	Worldwise Global Schools (WWGS)
47.	Young Critical Thinkers (YTC)
48.	Young Social Innovators (YSI)

Appendix 3: Survey responses on behalf of organisations

1.	Aonad Loch Gile
2.	Aontas na Mac Léinn Mhá Nuad
3.	Ardscoil Rath Iomghain
4.	Arts Council
5.	ASTI
6.	Ballymakenny college
7.	Barnstorm Theatre Company
8.	CAIRDE Teo
9.	Cashel CS
10.	CBS Thurles Secondary School
11.	Chartered Accountants Ireland
12.	Club Cispheile Gaeilge Lasair na nGael
13.	CMETB
14.	Coláiste Bride, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
15.	Coláiste Cholmcille Ballyshannon
16.	Coláiste Ghlor na Mara, Coláiste Cholumba
17.	Coláiste Ghobnatan
18.	Coláiste Iognaid
19.	Coláiste Mhuire Loch an Iúir Co Dhún na nGall
20.	Coláiste Naomh Leoin Ceatharlach
21.	Comhairle Túistí Coláiste Lú
22.	Conradh na Gaeilge
23.	Crana College
24.	Craobh Sheáin Mhic Dhiarmada
25.	DDLETB
26.	Dyslexia Association of Ireland
27.	Dyslexia Ireland
28.	Dyspraxia Ireland

29.	ECO-UNESCO
30.	Gaeilge4All
31.	Gaelcholáiste Choilm
32.	Glenart College Arklow
33.	Gorey Community School
34.	Holy Family Secondary School Newbridge
35.	IGC
36.	ISTA
37.	KCETB
38.	Kinsale Community School
39.	KWETB
40.	LCETB
41.	Limerick Educate Together Secondary School
42.	LMETB
43.	Loreto Community School Milford
44.	Loreto Navan
45.	Mary Immaculate College
46.	Meitheal Pleanála Teanga an Iar-thuaiscirt (MPTIT)
47.	Muineachán le Gaeilge
48.	Newbridge college
49.	Ógras
50.	Ombudsman for Children's Office
51.	Our Lady of Mercy College Beaumont
52.	Our Lady's Bower Secondary School
53.	Patrician Academy
54.	Ramsgrange Community School
55.	Roinn na Gaeilge,-Gort na Ráibe, Crossmhaoilína, Contae Mhaigh Eo
56.	Rosses Community School
57.	RTAI
58.	Sandymount Park Educate Together Secondary School
59.	Scoil Mhuire Buncrana, Co. Donegal
60.	Scoil na Gaeilge, an Léinn Cheiltigh agus an Bhéaloidis UCD
61.	Sinn Féin

62.	St Aloysius Secondary School, Cork City
63.	St Andrew's College
64.	St Angela's College Cork
65.	St Angela's School Ursuline Convent Waterford
66.	St Brigid's Special School
67.	St Joseph's college
68.	St Oliver's Community College
69.	St Patrick's comprehensive
70.	St Vincent's Secondary school
71.	St. Angela's College
72.	St. Brendan's Community School, Birr
73.	St. Finian's Community College
74.	St. Gerard's School, Bray
75.	St. Joseph's Boys' school
76.	St. Joseph's College, Lucan, Co. Dublin
77.	St. Michael's Special School
78.	Stratford College
79.	Tallaght Community School
80.	The Trinity Academy of Languages
81.	Tipperary ETB
82.	UCD
83.	University of Limerick
84.	Worldwise Global School's Teacher Advisory Group

Appendix 4: Email petition

The body of the following text was submitted as an email submission from 1,126 respondents in response to a social media campaign.

A chara,

Ba mhaith liom aighneacht a chur isteach maidir leis an gcomhairliúchan ar an Athbhreithniú ar an tSraith Shinsearach.

Seo duit na pointí gur mhaith liom go dtógfaidh sibh san áireamh:

● Ba chóir an Ghaeilge a choinneáil mar chroí-ábhar sa sraith shinsearach a dhéanann gach dalta staidéar uirthi

● Ba chóir aon athruithe don Ghaeilge sa tsraith shinsearach teacht mar chuid de Pholasaí don Ghaeilge sa Chóras Oideachais ón Réamhscoil go dtí an Tríú Leibhéal

● Ba chóir úsáid a bhaint as an gCreat Eorpach d'Fhoghlaim Teangacha le teagaisc, measúnú agus tuairisciú a dhéanamh ar an nGaeilge sa sraith shinsearach

Go raibh maith agat,

A chara,

I would like to submit the following points to the review of senior cycle education:

• Irish should be maintained as a core subject in the senior cycle studied by all students

• Any other changes to Irish in the senior cycle should be part of an overall Policy for Irish in the Education System from Pre-school to Third Level

• The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages should be used to teach, assess and report on Irish at senior cycle

Go raibh maith agat,