

Introduction

41 schools have been engaging in a collaborative review of senior cycle education with the NCCA since May 2018. Cycle 1 explored the purpose of senior cycle education. Cycle 2 explored pathways, programmes and flexibility. A series of national seminars followed each cycle of the review, with the aim of opening up the conversation to include more schools and stakeholders.

Following cycle 1 seminars in Cork, Galway and Dublin, participant feedback indicated a desire for fewer presentations and more time for table discussions. This fed into the design of Cycle 2 national seminars in Limerick, Athlone, Waterford and Sligo, where table discussions formed a major part of these events, to facilitate the gathering of further feedback. What follows is an overview of the feedback collated during cycle 2 national seminars.

Purpose discussions at national seminars

During cycle 1 of the school review, teachers, parents and students affirmed that the ultimate purpose of senior cycle education is to help every student to reach their full potential, providing opportunities and experiences through which students

- apply knowledge and develop skills
- contribute to their personal development
- build towards diverse futures
- contribute to full citizenship and participation in society and the economy

Teachers, students and parents from the 41 participating schools, as well as teachers and school leaders from other schools and a wide range of stakeholders debated, discussed and further teased out this emerging purpose at cycle 2 national seminars. The observations they made vary in scope and focus. Some observations concentrate on the opportunities the learner should have to grow and

develop; some focus on what achieving particular purposes would mean for schools and the education system; others still relate to broader societal matters (such as equality) and even global concerns (sustainability). These rich reflections on purpose extend well beyond considering the purpose of senior cycle education for the individual student. During national seminars, it was suggested that in considering the purpose of senior cycle:

- continuity and coherence of purpose from early childhood, through primary schooling, across junior cycle and into senior cycle is desirable yet must simultaneously allow that each phase may have some distinct elements to its identity, as appropriate to the age and stage of learning and the full range of abilities, talents and interests of learners
- it is vital to strive for progression and the achievement of high standards, as appropriate to the individual learner, across a range of different domains, interests, talents and abilities
- it is important to forefront the moral purpose of education, to impact positively on the entire development of the young person and to consider what the learners at the core of this experience need, experiences which contribute to the cognitive, emotional and physical wellbeing, growth and maturity of every student. A holistic canvas, a vision of active, empowered learners not a fragmented list of inputs and outputs is a helpful way of thinking about the purpose of senior cycle education
- some contributions emphasised that there is scope to focus more on the role education plays in the development of expressive, imaginative and artistic abilities; in deepening awareness of Irish cultural heritage and multiculturalism; and raising awareness of sustainability issues
- it was suggested, given a tendency towards greater specialisation in senior cycle education, that aspirations for students to further develop certain knowledge and abilities should not translate into a list of compulsory subjects all students must study
- it was suggested that in thinking about the purpose of senior cycle education, increased emphasis on the skills needed for life in the modern world is important. At the same time, this should result in eclipsing or downplaying the importance of knowledge. Furthermore, it was suggested that the inter-relationship between cognitive development and physical and emotional wellbeing; and the complex relationship between knowledge and skills be carefully considered in order to achieve a balanced approach to students' senior cycle experiences
- it was generally accepted that one clear purpose of senior cycle is that of equipping learners for a range of diverse futures and pathways beyond school. Some participants stressed how urgent it is for Ireland as a small nation to have a strong focus on adapting to an uncertain future, in light

of a perceived acceleration in the pace of change in technology and the workplace. Others suggested that the future has always, by its very nature, been an unknown entity; that adaptability is a trait of successful learners irrespective of the era in which they live; and that adaptability serves human needs, not just the needs of the (future) economy

- in keeping with the discussions emerging from the school review, suggestions that life skills development form part of the core purpose of senior cycle education generated some debate. It was acknowledged that parents/guardians have an important role in supporting learning in the area of life skills. It was also suggested that given the amount of time students spend in school, teachers' role in loco parentis and the fact that not every young person has access to this learning in the home presents a strong rationale for including life skills as part of the experience of senior cycle. It was pointed out that some of these areas are already and can be further integrated across a range of subject domains. It was also acknowledged that this can make the development of certain life skills in school highly dependent on the subject choices offered in schools and chosen by students.

Participants in the national seminars held a mirror up to the purpose of senior cycle emerging from the school review and made a number of observations about local and systemic forces constraining the achievement of this purpose, as follows:

- if it is through the processes of learning that students deepen their knowledge and develop a range of skills, including how to learn, then we must tackle the issue of content overload, which constrains teachers and students and prevents schools from achieving the breadth of purposes aspired to, particularly time to develop a range of skills through deep encounters with knowledge
- it was suggested that the range of purposes aspired to can be experienced by students during senior cycle currently but unevenly due to the ring-fenced nature of the different programmes and inequalities of access both to the programmes and to options beyond school
- the role of education as a vehicle for social justice was discussed. It was accepted as self-evident that some young people have rich opportunities to develop knowledge and skills beyond the classroom, in the home and the community, whilst others do not and that by providing some of these opportunities in school, education can contribute significantly to social justice. However, it was also emphasised that parents/guardians, the state and the wider society must work in tandem with the school to support the educational experience of students in order for every student to realise their full potential

- the vital role of parents/guardians in supporting their child's learning was highlighted. The observation was made that when support structures for students, households and families with additional needs are resourced in policies cross-sectorally (e.g. health, housing) not just within education policy, then the outcomes for students have the potential to be much more positive
- schools experience challenges providing both breadth and specialisation (particularly smaller schools and single-sex schools) as well as gender-neutral subject options and combinations
- establishing and maintaining ongoing links with employers that provide meaningful work experience is challenging. Student initiative is important in this respect. The range of types of experiences open to students can vary depending on where the school is located
- the structure of senior cycle currently is quite rigid and inflexible, making it difficult for students to embrace, develop and display a range of talents, abilities and interests across the two/three years of senior cycle
- the stigma associated with pathways which do not lead to third level education is a major challenge to affirming students in following their interests and/or selecting apprenticeships, traineeships and/or proceeding directly to employment
- where assessment, certification and reporting serve a narrow purpose, learning often narrows to serve that purpose and schools are constrained in achieving the breadth of purpose aspired to in the school review
- for example, participants spoke about the impact of the CAO system and suggested that excessive focus on entry to third level education often drives the dynamics of teaching, learning and assessment. The resulting context will present many challenges to pursuit of these emerging purposes for senior cycle education and meeting them across the entire duration of senior cycle

Ultimately it was suggested that for the purpose of senior cycle to be fully and meaningfully experienced by students, the systemic forces constraining its realisation in schools need to be examined and, where possible, removed. It was also acknowledged that cultural and institutional norms, in society and in schools, would need to evolve over time for this purpose to be realised for all students in the fullest way possible.

Structure discussions at national seminars

Structure discussions, as with discussions on purpose, ranged broadly across many areas, with some observations focusing on how structure impacts on the opportunities the learner has to grow and develop; some focusing on proposing changes to existing structures and identifying what any such changes might mean for schools and the education system; others still relating structures to broader societal matters, such as the age students start school and models participants had encountered in other jurisdictions.

In considering how long senior cycle should be, whether students should have the option to complete it at varying paces, what range of curricular components should make up senior cycle, and whether there are some experiences all students should have, the following were amongst the suggestions and points made:

- students might benefit from having some of the elements currently concentrated in TY (such as active and interdisciplinary learning; wide variety in learning methodologies and ways of displaying learning; work experience; social, emotional and personal development) integrated across the full duration of senior cycle. To achieve this the CAO points system would need to evolve to value a broader range and type of learning. If this did not happen, or if schools did not have clear parameters to work within, concern was expressed that TY type experiences which provide opportunities for cognitive, social and personal growth and maturity could gradually be abandoned in favour of focusing on what would be rewarded for the purpose of CAO points and entry into third level
- a range of views were expressed about the number of subjects/modules students should study, with some indicating a strong preference for a reduction in the number of subjects and others indicating a preference for a continued emphasis on breadth
- as with the school review, it was frequently suggested that less breadth in subject content would allow for greater depth of exploration using a wider range of methodologies, thus helping students to develop a wider range of skills. For others, breadth in subject content is a marker of the standards in the subject and concern was expressed at the idea of a reduction in subject content
- any reduction in the number of subjects studied by students was identified as having implications for compulsion but also may have unintended consequences such as the elimination of arts or practical subjects

- it was suggested that work placement/work experience, working in the community and career guidance should form part of senior cycle, as is currently the case in a lot of schools. Access to meaningful work experiences can lead to apprenticeships, traineeships and/or employment during holidays. However, it was also acknowledged that it takes time, resourcing and effort from all involved, particularly employers, for this to be achieved. It was also suggested that rural schools can find this more challenging as small towns tend to have less diversity in workplaces/industries and inferior transport links
- some students might benefit from an option to complete one year of senior cycle and then transfer into an apprenticeship or trainee programme
- there is currently inequality of access to a three-year senior cycle. Some schools do not offer TY and there are significant financial barriers to participation in TY by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- whilst many expressed a preference for a three-year senior cycle, others pointed to demographic changes with most children now aged five when starting school. Thus a compulsory three-year senior cycle could significantly raise the school leaving age, with a range of knock-on consequences. Given their age, it was suggested that students should have options, including in relation to how long to spend completing their senior cycle
- it was suggested that the current structure of senior cycle is, to too great an extent, based on the assumption that the main purpose of senior cycle is access to third level. The range of choices offered to students needs to be more diverse, balanced and inclusive
- it was suggested that the way senior cycle is currently structured around a set of learning experiences for students but is also used as a gateway to third level has a significant impact on the experience itself. It was suggested that much of the pressure on students arises from competition for third level places and from many students' sense that their entire future is determined by which course they get into and that changing to a different course if they pick the wrong one can be very difficult and expensive. For these reasons, it was suggested that one way to reduce pressure on students would be to have all students complete a general year of study in third level before specialising
- it was suggested that school timetabling and matriculation requirements should not steer students into overly focusing on one area (e.g. languages frequently form three out of the seven subjects studied for the leaving certificate established) which might not be their area of strength or interest and that, where this happens, it can lead to disengagement

- a modular, credit-based system with major and minor options, where students build up credit over time was suggested as a possibility. This would provide a sense of being able to achieve over time in a way which 'counts' for their future pathways. It could also mitigate against students giving up hobbies and sports in their final year of school. If this option was pursued, close attention would need to be paid to avoiding assessment overload across the number of subjects/modules studied and the CAO system would need to evolve to indicate the range of credits and modules required for each course. It was suggested that external oversight is important to ensure fairness in a modularised system, as is currently the case in LCA
- co-operation between schools (e.g. through clusters, teachers of specialist areas working across two smaller schools, online learning) could support continued provision of a wide range of subjects and modules to students, particularly for smaller and rural schools
- it was suggested that senior cycle needs constant review and changes should be monitored on a rolling basis so that unforeseen opportunities and challenges can be responded to in a timely manner
- a common discussion point was that any major change to the current structure would need to be supported by adequate resources and infrastructure.

Pathways and programmes discussions at national seminars

Discussions focused on the extent to which all students facing senior cycle have suitable pathways and learning experiences available to them. The range of pathways available to students, including academic, technical, vocational, professional and/or a combination a number of elements from across different pathways were discussed, as was the question of whether different sites of learning can be used. The following were amongst the observations and suggestions made:

- one consensus coming from all the seminars was the need for a more flexible structure that was student-centred rather than programme-centred, allowing the school and student to structure a learning pathway suitable for them
- there was strong support for a single programme or curriculum that incorporates the best aspects of the current senior cycle while allowing for different pathways and curriculum components within it

- many suggestions were made as to whether these curriculum components could be modular, credit-based, and include areas such as work experience being made available for all students
- underpinning all of these discussions was the importance of guidance as a means to help students to determine and explore the most suitable pathways for them through senior cycle and on to future destinations
- one of the concerns raised about the current senior cycle is the absence of a pathway for some students, particularly the cohort of students with special educational needs. The flexibility present at junior cycle is absent at senior cycle and this was viewed as a major difficulty
- Transition Year was extensively discussed and recognised for the space it provides for students to be teenagers, to develop skills and to find their passions. Work experience was singled out as the most worthwhile experience in TY, with the caveat that it must be well planned and organised
- the merging of TY within a two or three-year senior cycle structure was discussed and while the merits of valuing the experiences of TY across senior cycle were identified there were some concerns that in merging TY it would lose its distinctive characteristics that made it valuable in the first place
- the difficulties faced by smaller or rural schools in providing the TY programme were also discussed which also led to the acknowledgement that TY was experienced differently by students depending on school context. One discussion however, questioned the effectiveness of TY as a transition programme in preparing students for the transition to senior cycle and beyond
- it was thus suggested that Transition Year could end up reinforcing disadvantage and the need for standardised guidelines for the year were discussed to aid equity
- the issue of school size, location and DEIS status were all discussed in relation to the challenges that local context can present in realising the aim of offering a broad choice to students
- the Leaving Certificate Applied was also extensively discussed but here the focus was on the lack of parity of esteem held by the programme. Whether this was a societal issue, where progress to an academic third level was seen as the ultimate form of success, or whether it was due to a lack of progression routes for students who complete LCA, was debated
- work experience was identified as one of the most positive aspects of LCA but the ringfencing of the programme was criticised for the limitations it placed on students
- the challenges of getting buy in from industry for work experience and progression to employment were also discussed

- many suggestions were made relating to off-site learning including work experience and to the possibility of exploring other sites of learning such as further education, vocational training or visiting Gaeltacht areas as a means of broadening the learning valued in senior cycle
- the overly academic focus of the Leaving Certificate Established was perceived as being detrimental to the personal development of students as teachers and students felt they did not have sufficient time for developing skills and capabilities beyond exam preparation, with the exception of some of the projects and practicals linked to particular subject areas
- this focus was seen as impacting on subject selection with arts or practical subjects being selected less often due to perceptions that more academic subjects based on written displays of learning would be more valued and valuable in third level. The exception to this was in Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Applied
- the need for a creative or arts-based pathway was also discussed as was the need to incorporate the development of life-long learning and opportunities for second chances for students
- the development of vocational pathways engaged many participants in discussion and suggestions were made about adapting some of the German model of apprenticeships and encouraging more links with industry
- the P-Tech model was suggested one way of approaching technical and STEM education that might be of interest
- many discussions urged recognition of our history in this area and referenced the VPT programmes and technical colleges as efforts to explore vocational pathways in the past but led to ghettoization and lack of parity in senior cycle experiences and outcomes
- the LCVP was viewed as more of a subject than a programme and received less attention during the discussions.

Inclusion and wellbeing discussions at national seminars

Discussions on **inclusion** revolved around equality, flexibility and meeting the needs of all learners and were linked with wellbeing. The following were amongst the observations and suggestions made:

- it was suggested that current programmes are not adequately supporting life-long learning and responding to the needs of all students, particularly those for whom a highly academic focus is challenging. It was suggested that students should be able to choose from an 'à la carte' menu and that this would require a culture shift whereby all programmes have equal status and the Leaving Certificate Established is not viewed as synonymous with senior cycle. The challenges associated with achieving this kind of culture shift were acknowledged
- a reduced focus on subjects to also embrace short courses/modules (e.g. six-week courses in cooking or drama) was suggested
- it was suggested that the current senior cycle is missing vocational training for students with SEN. There were mixed views on this, and a student questioned was this needed, and should it not be done in the real world?
- pathways and progression were considered important for an inclusive senior cycle. It was suggested that a senior cycle pathway equivalent to and progressing on from Level 1 and Level 2 learning programmes is required. This would need to be authentic so that students leave school with a recognized certificate and have continuity in their learning, especially as junior cycle has the capacity to report on achievement in a flexible way embedded in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. It was noted by special school attendees that their 17-18-year-old students are currently taught from the primary curriculum
- the observation was made that inclusion not only encompasses SEN; that it also encompasses the needs of exceptionally able students. The observation was made that the wide range of factors that impact on social inclusion also need to be taken into consideration
- it was suggested that flexible assessment that is credit based with less emphasis on terminal exams might be more inclusive and that there should be more flexibility that allows students to change their minds. It was also suggested that there should be no set time for programme completion: when students have the credits required for their chosen pathway they can leave and progress or continue in senior cycle to gain more credits. Continuous assessment was seen as more accessible for students with SEN & students who enjoy displaying their learning in a range of ways but participants also cautioned against assessment overload

The organic focus on **wellbeing** which emerged during the school review in responses from teachers, students and parents led to a broadening of the conversation and discussions at this series of seminars invited participants to explore both inclusion and wellbeing. Student-teacher relationships were at the core of wellbeing discussions with comments such as happy students/happy teachers and vice-versa. For clarity they are categorized under the headings of student wellbeing and teacher wellbeing though there is clear overlap. It is also noted that although the focus was to be on wellbeing (as opposed to lack of wellbeing), a tendency to focus on its absence, rather than the factors which contribute to enhancing wellbeing, was evident in the feedback from both teachers and students.

Student Wellbeing

- TY was mentioned by some groups as an experience which broadly enhances student wellbeing, with some suggesting that it be integrated across senior cycle and others suggesting it should be left as a stand-alone programme
- it was suggested that a more student orientated curriculum could promote wellbeing. Topics discussed in different groups included reducing subjects and reducing content within subjects. The purpose of text books was questioned in the context of the possible benefits for students of learning a smaller amount in-depth rather than a broad curriculum superficially. It was suggested that current curriculum, assessment, certification and transition arrangements promote and/or result in an excessive focus on memorisation and regurgitation
- to enhance wellbeing, it was suggested that students should have time to learn about themselves. Modules in wellbeing that are credited was discussed. Examples given included study skills, getting to know school and taking care of oneself
- more phased assessments and different forms of assessment (practicals, projects) were viewed as helpful from students' perspectives. Particular subject projects were mentioned by students (History & Music for example) in this respect. Varied assessment opportunities and broader reporting were seen as mostly positive in terms of alleviating stress though some suggested that continuous assessment could add more pressure not reduce it and that the volume of coursework across multiple subjects would need to be carefully thought out if any changes were being made
- students suggested that homework and workload are causing them stress and that school becomes their whole life during the Leaving Certificate Established. Many feel they can't participate in activities (extra-curricular) that they enjoy because of the pressure caused by lots of homework.

- it was suggested that the competitive nature of exams and the CAO have a negative impact on student and teacher wellbeing and that change is required
- it was suggested that clarity around progression pathways could reduce stress. It was acknowledged that there are more options than progression to third level/college and that students should be aware of them all but that enhanced resourcing of career guidance as well as more flexible pathways would be required if this broader perspective were to be achieved.

Teacher Wellbeing

- it was suggested that effective CPD and training can enhance teacher wellbeing and resilience in coping with curriculum change and that a gradual rollout of senior cycle changes might help to reduce teacher stress
- it was further suggested that CPD should be more practical than theory based, that access to CPD should be available to all and that more CPD opportunities should be available
- the collaborative aspect of CPD was seen as important in terms of sharing resources and experiences and it was suggested that time is needed for teachers to reflect on the CPD and on their own practice
- the NCCA was commended for including teacher wellbeing in the conversation as it was suggested that teacher wellbeing and morale is currently quite low and that this has the potential to impact significantly on student wellbeing. Factors which negatively impact on teacher wellbeing which were mentioned included having to develop their own wellbeing programmes, the number of new initiatives to know/manage/put in place, heavy workload/demands on teachers, subject planning, the intensity of inspections that accompany change, and paperwork
- teachers spoke about challenges encountered in finding time for individual planning and cross-curricular/whole-school planning. Groups discussed a move from planning for wellbeing in 'silos' to more collaborative planning and teaching. The majority view was that collaboration has the potential to reduce stress, but that time is needed to allow space for meaningful collaboration.
- it was suggested that if a senior cycle wellbeing programme is introduced in future, it would need to be clearly communicated and properly managed and that timeframes are important for effective embedding. It should be designed around evidence-based programmes that have proven success in creating wellbeing. It was suggested that SPHE should be compulsory and that wellbeing should be threaded throughout the school and evident in all classrooms. It was reiterated that training would be required for all teachers to achieve this.

Assessment discussions at national seminars

At the seminars there was a strong response to the discussions on assessment. As with the other areas, there are elements of overlap with reporting, structure, pathways and underpinning everything was purpose. In the discussions, the following were among the points raised:

- there was significant discussion on the need for assessment to align with the teaching and learning in the classroom. The discussions included thoughts on the aim of assessment such as to demonstrate learning and to allow the student to shine
- there was wide affirmation of the range of assessment approaches available in TY, LCVP and LCA such as case study, module completion, application of learning, interviews, presentations, projects and blended authentic assessment tasks
- there was a strong belief expressed in the fair and objective nature of the current system. The anonymity of students and external assessment of terminal examinations were seen as central to this
- many teachers said that they do not wish to be involved in the assessment of their own students' work for certification purposes because of the high stakes involved and in the interest of maintaining this objectivity and fairness
- there was considerable agreement on the need for more flexibility in the assessment approaches including flexibility of time and content. Suggestions included open-book exams to encourage critical thinking and analysis; presentations to build on junior cycle learning; different types of questions, modular approaches, spreading out the timing of assessments, the possibility of repeating assessments within a shorter timespan (rather than a year later), the opportunity to complete assessments online, the potential for more continuous assessment and/or more flexible weighting for second assessment components in different subjects
- concerns were raised over the wellbeing of students and teachers due the high stakes nature of terminal examinations. Some questioned the validity of assessing subjects on the basis of a single method of assessment, namely written examinations (as is the case currently in subjects like English, Irish and Mathematics) and at a single point in time
- the reported experience of excessive memorisation raised questions about the validity of assessment and debates ensued around assessment methods to capture soft skills and different learning experiences

- continuous assessment was discussed, and necessary supports were identified to empower professional judgement and structures needed for moderation.
- challenges were discussed such as authentication concerns, plagiarism, increased number of stress points for teachers and students in a staggered assessment arrangement, assessment overload and increased workload.
- discussions about assessment frequently linked to other areas. The number of subjects students study and the volume and complexity of knowledge and skills they develop, particularly during the Leaving Certificate established programme, were seen as posing a variety of challenges, such as demotivation for students who become overwhelmed and/or pressure to 'teach to the test' where the end goal of education is viewed exclusively through the lens of access to the student's third level course of choice.
- one benefit of assessments being spread out over time is that it could allow for multiple exit points from or re-entry points to senior cycle
- there was concern over the impact of bonus points for higher level mathematics and the focus of assessment revolving around third level entry
- the need for transparency in reporting assessment such as the breakdown of marks for each component was seen as important for feedback to students. Suggestions were made that were linked to discussions on structure such as the accumulation of credits over the duration of senior cycle and the reporting of credits at different stages.
- the need to learn from varied experiences of CBAs in junior cycle was discussed, particularly in relation to assessment timing and overlap; the impact on students of multiple assessments across multiple different subject areas; and the similarity of skills being assessed in different domains
- the need for increased resources to ensure equity was discussed.

Reporting, certification and transition discussions at national seminars

A number of themes arose at the tables in relation to whether reporting at senior cycle should be broad; how best this might be achieved; and what approaches to reporting could be integrated or added at senior cycle. The following were among the points and suggestions made:

- the majority of those involved in the table discussions suggested broadening the reporting system to give a fuller picture of student achievements and a more rounded picture of the student
- it was suggested that decisions about that to report on should like back to the broad purpose of senior cycle education
- there was acknowledgement of the need for a method of marking the completion of school and recognising the broad range of learning experiences of students beyond a certification of examination results
- participants highlighted the need for clarity on who a report is for - the student, parent, university, employer, teacher, school? Or is it for a combination of all these?
- the format of reporting at other stages in the system, primary, LCA, LCVP was seen as positive and as providing a broader picture of student achievement than the current system of reporting in the LCE
- reporting of cumulative rather than final, summative assessment was viewed positively. Participants suggested that currently little value is placed on what is achieved in fifth year and a beneficial development would be to see subjects modularised so that some exams could be completed and reported on at the end of fifth year. It was suggested that this development would not only place higher value on what is done in fifth year but would also mean that students who leave school early would have something to show for their time in school
- there was consensus that whatever is reported on must be valued and discussions highlighted the need for other stakeholders in the system; employers, third level institutions and course providers to agree on the value of and the value to be placed on achievements beyond examination results and points. It was lamented that currently points are the main thing valued, which offers a very narrow picture of student achievement and gives little consideration to progression to anywhere other than college

- it was noted that if second assessment components such as project work and practical work were separately reported on this would give these components value as well as providing a better picture of student achievement.
- reporting on participation and achievements besides exams was suggested, as this would give the message that the system values students' other strengths and capacities
- whilst extra-curricular school activities are valued and are an area that could be considered for inclusion in a broad report of student learning and achievements, some concern was expressed that schools who cannot offer a full range of options might be disadvantaged
- developments in junior cycle reporting were discussed. From the students point of view, the introduction of the JCPA was seen as a positive development in giving a broader picture of the student. It was suggested that the timing of when students receive the JCPA is problematic and that a similar senior cycle type of report might be more valued if it were used as a basis for developing a type of personal statement along the lines of that used by UCAS.
- it was further suggested that if students know the JCPA, their achievements from TY and school participation/community service etc. are going to be valued and can form part of a personal statement, this would provide encouragement for students to participate fully, which in turn could contribute positively to the holistic development of the young person
- it was queried whether a senior cycle report would receive the same recognition as a qualification and whether it could be externally verified. Whilst current certification in the Leaving Certificate Established is quite narrow in terms of what it reports on, it was suggested that it is a qualification which is recognised internationally
- concerns were expressed about the extra work the creation of a broader report at senior cycle might place on teachers and administration staff. It was noted that technology exists that would ameliorate many negative implications. It was suggested that any SCPA should adopt a common template for all students
- reference was made to the adoption of a university-style GPA system where a student has access to their profile throughout their time in school
- inconsistencies in how progress is reported were noted in particular in relation to the language currently used in junior cycle and that used in senior cycle and it was noted that this presents challenges, particularly for parents in understanding what a written report (as opposed to verbal reporting in parent-teachers meetings etc) is telling them about their child's learning.

The issue of certification in relation to reporting was discussed and there were a number of suggestions as to how to certify what is reported on. Suggestions included the following:

- at local level a credit system could be applied to school participation
- a Gaisce style approach to non-academic achievement could be adopted and achievements could be categorised in a similar manner and signed off on by an acknowledged/trained person in the school. There was however, acknowledgment that this development would require significant investment at school level
- currently points are awarded to LCVP for merit, distinction etc, and it was suggested that this could be built on for extra-curricular involvement
- in TY students are offered courses that are externally certified; GAA coaching, First Aid, RSA etc and it was suggested that this practice could be continued and included not just in TY reporting but also in a school completion report.

The feedback gathered at national seminars will inform and be incorporated into the senior cycle review public consultation report, which is available online at <https://www.ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle>.