

Press release

Embargoed until 6am, Wednesday 16th October

NCCA to host national consultation forum on the Review of Senior Cycle.

On Wednesday 16th October, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) hosts a national consultation forum in Croke Park, Dublin. Participants will engage with and respond to ideas emerging from its senior cycle review to date.

The forum is part of an ongoing public consultation on the vision for senior cycle education emerging from NCCA's review of senior cycle education which commenced in late 2016. To date, review activity has included:

- Launch of [Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions: Overview report](#) at an event with 130 attendees including various stakeholders
- Two rounds of feedback from teachers and parents in collaborating schools
- Student voice consultation with almost 2,500 students in collaborating schools
- Feedback from 9 additional schools¹ and 24 email submissions
- 2 [ESRI working papers](#) analysing the feedback from teachers, parents and students who participated in the school review
- 7 [national seminars](#) with engagement from 600+ educational stakeholders and partners
- Update [bulletins](#) which were posted to post-primary schools nationwide and shared online
- Public consultation via an online survey (1854 responses to date), written submissions (4 to date), focus group meetings (10 meetings to date at venues nationwide), co-hosted events (4 to date), bilateral meetings (14 to date) and a national consultation forum on ideas emerging to date as outlined in the [interim report and consultation document](#).

The forum will engage delegates in discussion and debate about how senior cycle education in Ireland might evolve in the years ahead.

NCCA are delighted to welcome Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD, to speak at the forum. Speaking about senior cycle review, the Minister commented *“There’s clearly much of value in the current senior cycle. It enjoys the confidence and trust of education partners and the public. The*

¹ All review materials were available on www.ncca.ie for optional involvement by additional schools

primary focus of this review is on further developing a high-quality educational experience for all students, one that contributes to their learning, their life chances and their readiness for diverse futures.

The extensive consultation process the NCCA is engaged in represents an important opportunity for all voices, of all education and public partners, to be heard. I commend the NCCA on the scale of the consultation and the carefully considered, measured pace of the review - which should continue to be a feature of the process - and encourage everyone to get involved."

Teachers and school leaders, teacher union colleagues, representatives from management bodies, the National Parents Council Post-Primary, Higher Education, Further Education and Training, the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Skills, amongst others, will participate in this forum.

Forum participants will hear and respond to ideas emerging from the review to date and to a range of perspectives on these emerging ideas, from teacher union colleagues, teachers and school leaders, and from the organisations with responsibility for the national framework of qualifications (QQI), the further education and training sector (SOLAS) and state examinations (SEC).

Colleagues from the Directorate for Education of the OECD will also speak at the forum. Representatives of the OECD have been conducting a policy assessment of senior cycle education in Ireland for the past eighteen months. They have looked closely at the work of the review, participated in national seminars, visited schools to listen to the perspectives of teachers, students and school leaders, and engaged in formal bilateral meetings with stakeholders on senior cycle development. Beatriz Pont, Senior Analyst, who will present some of their preliminary findings based on this work at the forum, commented: *"OECD has engaged with Ireland, one of the high-performing education systems across OECD countries, to provide analysis to support the review of senior cycle. Our analysis of the current senior cycle shows a range of strengths- including high levels of public trust. However, the same analysis suggests some areas in which senior cycle could improve. For example, stakeholders expressed their concern about not having a more rigorous and attractive vocational segment in senior cycle, one that gives real work-based experience to students and that is delivered in close coordination with employers."*

In relation to the review process, Beatriz Pont commented: *"The tailored approach to engage stakeholders in the senior cycle review is an asset for the development of senior cycle. The NCCA succeeded in designing and carrying out an inclusive review process, collecting a range of perspectives that can enrich senior cycle."*

The forum builds upon wider ongoing public consultation, which includes an online survey, written submissions, focus groups and bilateral meetings. This public consultation continues until 1st November 2019 and builds upon the consultation with 41 schools which took place in 2018/2019. Further information about how to participate in the consultation is available [here](#).

NCCA chairperson Mary O’Sullivan commented *“The engagement and collaboration which have characterised this review to date will continue to be a feature of this process. In that spirit anyone who has not yet participated is invited to take the opportunity to complete the online survey, attend one of the remaining focus group meetings or send in a written submission before this phase of public consultation closes on the 1st of November”*.

Additional Background Information

Phase one of senior cycle review began in 2016 at the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle, which is made-up of representatives of educational partners and stakeholders. The Board identified priority areas for exploration in a review of senior cycle education.

To underpin and inform the review, NCCA commissioned research into existing senior cycle programmes and international scoping of upper secondary education provision in other jurisdictions. In February of 2018, NCCA publicly launched the Review of Senior Cycle with the publication of this research [Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions: Overview report](#).

Phase two of senior cycle review commenced in May 2018 when NCCA began working with 41 collaborating schools to generate a shared vision for senior cycle and a strong base from which to shape a senior cycle curriculum that meets the needs of all learners. This approach means that teachers, students and parents play a significant role in shaping policy advice and ensures that the realities of school life are to the forefront in considering what changes, if any, might be needed in senior cycle. Phase two of the review featured two consultative cycles of thematic discussions about senior cycle education, the first with a focus on the Purpose of Senior Cycle Education and Thinking about the Future, with the second cycle exploring Pathways and Flexibilities in Senior Cycle Education. The data collected from each cycle was analysed by the ESRI who presented the emerging themes at national seminars and in [two working papers](#).

Phase three of senior cycle review commenced in July 2019 with publication of the [Interim report of the review of senior cycle education](#) and the [Senior Cycle Review: Consultation Document](#) which marked the beginning of a wider public consultation on ideas emerging from the review to date. A

range of ways to engage with the consultation are available, including through an online survey (1854 responses to date), written submissions (4 to date), focus group meetings (10 meetings at venues nationwide), bilateral meetings (14 held to date) and a national consultation forum.

Key findings

Participants in the review to date affirmed that the purpose of this stage of education is to help every student towards fulfilling their potential, empowering students to deepen their knowledge and skills throughout senior cycle as they mature and develop intellectually, personally and socially. The educational experience at senior cycle aims to 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.

Participants in the review reaffirmed the need for senior cycle to recognise and affirm all talents and abilities. Strong support for providing a wider range of options for learning pathways at senior cycle has emerged from the review to date. Review participants spoke in positive terms about the wide variety of curriculum components currently available in senior cycle, including subjects, modules and work experience and indicated a desire for greater flexibility for students to combine learning in a variety of ways. Access to technical, vocational, creative and professional learning could be enhanced, with improved links to apprenticeships, traineeships and employment.

The many strengths of current senior cycle assessment approaches were affirmed during the review, with a variety of approaches to assessment used across the four programmes, including projects, tasks, key assignments, reports, portfolios, practicals, orals, interviews and examinations. Teachers and parents place high value on having a system of assessment at senior cycle which is widely viewed as objective and fair. A desire to broaden and rebalance existing assessment approaches, building on key strengths already evident in senior cycle assessment was a feature of the review to date. It was suggested that some form of record of learning and achievement could provide a fuller picture of student learning and achievement, recognising and affirming students' diverse range of talents and abilities and assisting meaningful and coherent transitions to further learning and employment.

What now?

Given the scale of engagement in this review, NCCA is providing this public consultation opportunity to ensure that emerging areas for development are fully reflective of the needs of students, schools, teachers and parents now and into the future in relation to this important phase of education.

To this end, NCCA is inviting feedback on the areas for development from the review to-date contained in the [interim report](#) and accompanying [consultation document](#).

Individuals and organisations can provide feedback through an online survey or by making a written submission. Details of how to get involved and how to make a submission can be accessed at:

<https://www.ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/senior-cycle-review/consultation>

Public consultation continues until 1st November 2019.

What's Next?

Arising from the review and the consultation with schools and the wider public, NCCA will formulate priority areas including advice on the pace and scale of developments and longer-term goals for the evolving development of senior cycle education in Ireland. Once discussed and agreed by NCCA Council an advisory report will be issued to the Minister for Education and Skills for consideration.

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Notes to Editors

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body of the Department of Education and Skills.

The twenty-five members of the Council are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for a three-year term. The members represent the partners in education, industry and trade union interests, parents' organisations and other educational interests. The Council also includes one nominee each of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Minister for Education and Skills appoints the Chairperson. [See the Council members here](#).

The Council is supported in its work by three boards and a number of development groups. Members of these represent similar stakeholders to Council. [See our Board and Development Groups here](#).

The day-to-day work of the Council is led by the Chief Executive Officer, John Hammond, supported by a full-time executive staff.

The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on:

1. curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools.
2. assessment procedures used in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum.

Advice is developed through Research, Deliberation, Consultation and Networks.
