



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
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Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the Review and Revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement

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Introduction

To inform a review and the subsequent updating of the [Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools](#) as part of the broader redevelopment of senior cycle, a [Background Paper and Brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement](#) was developed. This Background Paper was approved for consultation by Council on November 8th, 2022, and the public consultation ran from November 10th to December 22nd, 2022.

The Background Paper provides an overview of the current context for the review and redevelopment of the *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools*, which serve as the current Transition Year (TY) Programme Statement. It outlines the origins and growth of the TY programme, and the current educational and policy context in which the programme continues to evolve. The enactment of the current TY guidelines in schools is examined using inspection reports, published research, and a school-based review of TY. The paper then draws on the previous sections to set out issues for consideration which formed the main basis of the consultation questions. The final section presents a brief for the development of the revised TY Programme Statement which guides the work of the Development Group.

The aim of the consultation on the Background Paper was to seek the views of interested parties, including students and teachers, in order to inform the work of the Development Group in revising the TY Programme Statement.

This report on the consultation presents an overview of the consultation process, followed by a summary of the feedback received, and explores key findings from the consultation for the work of the Development Group as they progress their deliberations on a revised TY Programme Statement.

Section One: Consultation process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from the public, schools, other education settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022). The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in the NCCA's Research Strategy (2019) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Methodological approach

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement included multiple modes of engagement:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- School-based visits to capture the perspectives of students, teachers, TY coordinators and senior management.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey and written submissions. The schools selected for the consultation visits were chosen from the original list of schools which responded to the open call to all post-primary schools to express an interest in participating in the TY review. These schools were not involved in the review that was conducted to inform the Background Paper. For the consultation visits, four schools were selected at random from the list.

The online survey and written submissions facilitated the collection of data from a wide cross-section of respondents, while the school visits supported more extensive discussion and exploration of the issues for consideration which were presented in the Background Paper.

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

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

Consultation responses

24 responses were received through the online survey with eight organisations (listed in Appendix A) requesting to be identified as having responded to the survey. An overview of the online survey respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent demographic¹

Post-Primary Teacher (Transition Year)	9
Post-Primary Teacher (non-Transition Year)	2
Transition Year Coordinator	5
Principal/Deputy Principal	2
Parent/Guardian	3
Teacher Educator	1
Third-level Educator/Researcher	2
Other	3

'Other' respondents included:

- Representative of professional association
- Representative of voluntary organisation
- Representative of professional organisation.

Four written submissions were received from interested parties and organisations which are also listed in Appendix A.

Four schools supported student participation in the consultation with one student focus group taking place in each school. These were undertaken with predominantly 5th year students who had completed TY, but also a small number of Transition Year students and 6th year students. A total of 25 students took part in the student voice aspect of the consultation. A total of 15 teachers, who are teaching a mix of core and optional subject areas in TY, took part in four focus groups. In addition, four TY coordinators took part in four focus groups, most accompanied by senior management.

¹ Some respondents identified as responding from multiple perspectives, e.g. parent/guardian and teacher educator, hence the discrepancy between total number of respondents (27) and the total responses (24).

Section Two: Feedback from the consultation

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The consultation focused on exploring the strengths and weaknesses associated with the *Transition Year Programmes - Guidelines for Schools* (1993), and how these guidelines are enacted in schools. This was then followed with a focus on the issues for consideration as outlined in the *Background paper and brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement* (pp.23-25) which are:

- Scope and nature of a revised TY Programme Statement
- Purpose, vision and guiding principles of the redevelopment of senior cycle
- Building on current provision of TY
- Continuity and Progression
- Continued inclusion from junior cycle
- Empowering students through TY
- Supporting learning
- Assessment, reporting and certification
- Diverse pathways
- The role of career guidance.

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

Strengths and challenges associated with the *TY Programmes - Guidelines for Schools*

Participants identified many strengths associated with the existing guidelines and their enactment, with the flexibility and autonomy afforded to schools being regularly referenced as particularly positive. When this flexibility and autonomy to design a curriculum was used to develop students holistically, in line with the current guidelines, it was considered by all stakeholders to be significantly beneficial to the school community.

'It is very clear from the guidelines that TY is student centric. The guidelines are broad enough to provide educator with the scope to create a unique TY programme while at the same time providing clear guidance'

(Response to the online survey, Localise Youth Volunteering)

'Autonomy for each school to customise and create their own TYP as each school can tailor their programme to meet the needs of their specific student cohort.'

(Response to the online survey, St. Andrew's College, Booterstown)

In general, participants spoke of the hugely positive and broad impact of:

- Vocational education and awareness – work experience, new vocational skills, subject sampling, guest speakers
- Greater community links – with local organisations and employers, and with educational institutions

- A wider set of experiences – participation in the arts, new life-skills, opportunities to participate in national events and competitions, and a broader range of physical activities
- A deeper sense of belonging - engagement and motivation especially for those who may have disengaged with learning, more ownership of tasks and behaviour, stronger relationships amongst everyone involved in the TY programme.

When participants spoke of weaknesses associated with the current guidelines, they tended to focus on the implementation challenges and less on the content of the guidelines themselves. Participants identified that much of the terminology, skills and listed subjects were outdated.

'It must be brought into line with current local, national and global thinking and policies.' (Written submission, PDST)

The most consistently cited weakness related to the additional costs for schools to run TY programmes, and the concomitant financial costs for the families of children participating in TY. In some cases, it was noted that the cost for families was a very real barrier to participation in the programme. Other common weaknesses included misaligned use of school autonomy to make the TY programme an additional year of the Leaving Certificate Established and the lack of consistency across schools in the realisation of the overall purpose and vision of the TY programme. Participants also identified, as weaknesses, a perception of TY as a 'doss year', absenteeism amongst students as the year progresses, and a belief that TY can be taken less seriously than other programmes.

Some of the challenges associated more closely with the perceived non-academic focus of TY included:

- pressure that out-of-school events, such as a foreign trip, would be offered by the school
- mis-use of subject sampling to present a version of the subject that is not aligned to the experience students will have if they choose to study the subject in the Leaving Certificate Established
- teacher frustration at student absenteeism from class in order to participate in other school activities, within the school itself
- teacher frustration that absenteeism during TY can be perceived as less consequential for TY students compared to other years.

Scope and nature of a revised TY Programme Statement

Participants generally spoke of the scope and nature of a revised TY Programme Statement in terms of retaining the strengths of the existing programme and incorporating a stronger focus and emphasis on skills that should be developed by student participation and reported on by the school. The consultation found that, at its core, the revised TY Programme Statement needs to have a clear vision.

'There is a...need to prioritise the philosophy of TY to ensure that its vision and values are understood by all.' (Response to online survey, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals)

Participants emphasised the need to continue focusing on the overall development of the person while retaining the development of their academic skills. Generally, across all modes of the

consultation, the view was expressed that a revised TY Programme Statement should include some of the following features as a minimum:

- A clear focus on the type of skills to be developed in TY
- Subject sampling
- Work experience
- Pedagogies that promote self-regulated, autonomous learners
- A variety of activities and projects which promote meaningful community and vocational experiences, and develop digital, design, analytical and creative skills
- A balanced approach to the holistic development of the students.

In addition, some participants spoke of other elements they considered essential to a TY programme: wellbeing modules, guidance, inclusivity of all learners, interviews with students on their own development, and reporting templates including self-evaluation mechanisms.

Across the breadth of the consultation, there was a general consensus that a revised TY Programme Statement may need to be more prescriptive while, at the same time, continuing to offer flexibility and autonomy in setting out the parameters for school-based curriculum development for TY.

Discussion around the optional nature of participation in TY, whenever it arose, brought up similar nuances to those expressed in the Background Paper such as school responsibility to students to create a highly effective programme, managing financial costs, and issues around equity and access to the TY programme. Participants, especially students, spoke of the absence of exam stress and anxiety during TY. In addition, participants reported that parents welcomed this absence of stress and anxiety for their children. Across the various modes of engagement, particularly in schools, there was a desire for mechanisms that allow for meaningful student input into modules offered, and also into activities and modes of reporting.

Building on current provision

Participants offered two distinct perspectives about building on current provision: one perspective emphasised the need for external support to build on current provision and the other spoke more to building on current provision from inside the schools themselves.

When participants discussed this issue from the perspective of external support, they referred to the importance of a coordinated rollout of CPD.

'The autonomy and bespoke nature of transition year will require a bespoke element to the support such as school support visits and collaborative groups with similar contexts or challenges, as part of a planned cpd framework to support the new statement.' (Written Submission, PDST)

School leaders, TY programme coordinators and teachers particularly referred to supports for schools in terms of planning with a revised TY Programme Statement, the need for professional learning supports for teachers and clarity regarding planning and creating a programme.

'Student engagement and ownership is important. Students currently and in the future no matter what a new Transition Year Programme may look like need to buy into the Transition Year programme. This is where professional development is very important for teachers to look at different methods of empowering the students....'

(Written submission, TY Teacher Professional Network)

The impact of DE inspections on the process of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) was referenced. Participants identified the need for easily accessible supports for schools on all aspects of a TY programme. The range of supports included new resources for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting, developing vocational skills and sourcing placements, and access to a wider range of curriculum components, particularly those that could enhance the '21st century skills' of students. Some participants referenced the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme, where students can complete tasks and key assignments within a general national framework but suitable to their own needs, abilities and contexts. CBAs in junior cycle and Applied Learning Tasks in Leaving Certificate Computer Science, were mentioned in this regard as fulfilling similar functions.

It was noted that it requires a significant amount of time to carry out the role of a TY coordinator, and that this requires a reduction in the class contact hours for a coordinator. Some participants raised the issue of greater financial support to schools running TY programmes and the associated costs of providing TY experiences. In some cases, participants felt that this financial support should be mentioned explicitly in a revised TY Programme Statement. When participants discussed this issue from the perspective of schools building on current TY programmes, they spoke of a whole-school approach that moves TY programmes into the space of effective practice, similar to that described in section 4 of the Background Paper for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement.

Some participants spoke of the importance of a clear vision to enable schools to build on current provision and create an inclusive programme where TY programmes become as varied as possible, increasing the opportunities available to all students.

In many instances during the consultation, the need to retain elements of formal academic focus from junior cycle emerged.

'More structure for Maths, English and Irish. It would still be nice to have the freedom to enter competitions etc, but to know that x, y and z need to be covered.'

(Response to the online survey, post-primary TY teacher)

Some participants referred to the importance of the TY programme focusing on skills and human development and being clear about the relationship between TY in senior cycle and subsequent Leaving Certificate programmes in senior cycle.

'There is an element of formality needed...to remind students of this and hold on to the process and discipline of learning - it's hard to get back to study once you have stepped away from it for a while - even as an adult learner.'

(Response to the online survey, parent/guardian)

Teacher support and involvement across the school, parental buy-in and clear expectations around the vision and purpose of TY were raised as some of the other factors required to build on current TY programme provision.

Purpose, vision and guiding principles for the redevelopment of senior cycle

There was a broad consensus that TY could offer the scope and flexibility to support the realisation of the purpose of a redeveloped senior cycle. Feedback from participants tended to be similar to the ideas reported under other headings in this section. For example, participants spoke of the personal development of students and opportunities for the development of skills required for academic study and practical/project work, life-skills, managing relationships and student wellbeing. There was also recognition of the value of work experience and student engagement with a broad range of activities as being features of a TY programme.

It was noted that many features of TY are more aligned to the Framework for Junior Cycle than the current senior cycle experience. However, there was agreement that these features align to the purpose, vision, and guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle as described in the Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022).

Where participants spoke directly to the purpose, vision and guiding principles for the redevelopment of senior cycle, the feedback tended to be in the context of the potential for a revised TY Programme Statement to align with for example, the guiding principles:

'e.g. the importance of including Wellbeing, Learning to learn, learning for life, participation and citizenship, learning environment and partnerships.' (Written submission, PDST)

The transformative power of TY was discussed, particularly by students during the school visits, in the context of positive personal development, better relationships and increased readiness for Leaving Certificate programmes. It was also discussed in some school settings by teachers who experienced TY as students and who now embody the principle of lifelong learning and learning to learn in the context of their own working lives.

Where participants spoke of portfolios (digital or physical), the suggestion was made that perhaps a revised TY Programme Statement could provide more direction and guidance on the structure of student portfolios.

Continuity and progression

This issue was discussed from the perspective of students transitioning *from* junior cycle, and from the perspective of progression and continuity *into* the remainder of senior cycle and beyond.

'It would be a pity for Junior Cycle for it to be the end of skill development.' (School visit, teacher focus group)

When participants spoke of continuity and progression *from* junior cycle, their responses were significantly dependent upon how they viewed junior cycle and their experiences of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Some participants discussed the strong connections between junior cycle and TY in terms of the underpinning values and the skills developed - the Junior Cycle Science specification and CBA 1 (Oral Communication) in English were mentioned in this context. It was felt by these participants that the key skills of junior cycle, especially those associated with CBAs, and the use of success criteria in the TY classroom for example, needed to be extended and enhanced in a revised TY Programme Statement. In this context, the provision of suggested templates to support effective planning for TY and guidance in relation to practices most likely to realise the vision, aims and rationale would be welcome in a revised TY Programme Statement.

Other participants felt that there was too much openness, ambiguity and lack of depth around the knowledge, skills and values developed in junior cycle, and consequently TY was viewed by these participants more from the point of view of the deficits accrued in junior cycle and how to bridge the gap in the transition from junior *into* senior cycle.

'Junior cycle has been reviewed, senior cycle is still traditional, transition year sits in between both.' (School visit, teacher focus group)

Discussion on 'Progression and continuity' in the consultation tended to open the debate around the meaning of the word 'transition' in Transition Year. In one setting, TY was seen as an opportunity for students to build resilience, create new friend groups and take on lots of new challenges. When TY was viewed as the transition *into* senior cycle, some participants saw the values and skills of junior cycle and the current senior cycle as misaligned. Participants often expanded this point by asking the question of whether the whole of senior cycle should be re-developed in a more integrated fashion rather than a TY Programme Statement being re-developed in advance. Progression to other pathways did not arise during consultations on this issue and tended to be discussed under other issues for consideration such as the role of career guidance and diverse pathways.

Continued inclusion from Junior Cycle

This issue referred to how students progressing from Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) or Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) at junior cycle could be best supported through a revised TY Programme Statement. Experience of providing L1LPs and L2LPs was limited in some of the school-based settings and the consultation in general tended not to yield in-depth responses based on experience.

The participants with experience of these learning programmes suggested that the freedom and flexibility of TY programmes can help to ensure continued inclusion of students from L1LPs and L2LPs, supported by appropriate levels of coordination with the Special Education team. A similar theme to the previous section on continuity and progression from junior cycle was re-stated by some participants.

'At present there are no Level 1 or 2 courses at Senior Cycle and it is difficult to envisage how it might look bridging the gap when it is not clear what the senior cycle level 1 and 2 course will look like.' (Written submission, PDST)

Empowering students through TY

In a similar fashion to the responses to the issue around the purpose, vision and guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle, participants found this issue difficult to engage with because it asked specifically about background reading of the various education strategies referenced in the background paper. Participants therefore generally came to this issue on its own merits regarding empowerment of students through TY. Many of the responses reflected those of the participants to other broad issues, such as continuity and progression, and scope and nature of a revised TY Programme Statement.

'Transition [year] should be able to create the conditions for students to develop confidence to pursue areas of learning outside the comfort zone on a continuous basis.' (Written submission, TY TPN)

The responses of the participants centred around empowering students with skills and dispositions such as collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, empathy, self-awareness, responsibility for their own learning and for themselves, and ensuring there is continuity and progression in developing these skills from junior cycle. For example, the incorporation of digital dimensions across TY programmes was a common suggestion to embed and enhance digital skills.

'Digital literacy should be integrated into each of the TY layers. Project work and digital portfolios could also develop the students' digital literacy. Completion of courses like ICDL, and participation in projects could be beneficial.'
(Written submission, PDST)

In the classroom, appropriate pedagogies were seen as a key enabler of empowering students and creating a suitable environment for these skills to flourish. In addition to the previous responses, the impact of student input into the TY programme was referenced here, echoing the discussion under the issue of assessment, reporting and certification. Specific areas mentioned in this context, by students and educators alike, were sustainability and climate action modules, digital competence and coding skills, enterprise projects such as mini-company, interview skills, and vocational preparation particularly around building and writing student CVs. The SSE process was mentioned again as an effective model of increased communication with students and parents, in particular around programme evaluation within the school.

Supporting learning

Participants across the consultation spoke of pedagogical approaches consistent with the type of approaches that are required to empower students in TY.

'It is important to provide a range of pedagogical approaches which foster active learning, inquiry-based learning and most importantly, independent learning or learning to learn, learning for life.' (Written submission, PDST)

Participants suggested that self-direction and independent learning skills are best facilitated by open tasks and experiential opportunities, supported by formative assessment and reflective

practice amongst students and educators. Examples of open tasks and experiential learning opportunities offered during the consultation included: project work as part of the curricular components, engagement with national competitions or organisations such as Sci-fest, Concern debating, Junk Kouture, Young Scientist, Young Social Innovators (YSI), Gaisce and entrepreneurial competitions, performance in the arts, in particular the school play or musical, development of vocational skills, and engagement with guest speakers and workshops.

'Taking action to translate their idea into a workable solution gives participants experience of the adult world, project planning, pitching for financial support, collaborating with peers and experts, advocating and campaigning.'
(Written submission, YSI)

Across the consultation it was suggested that the range of student abilities in TY necessitates a range of pedagogical approaches. In this context, participants also spoke of differentiation, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), continued use of success criteria in learning and assessment, professional freedom to experiment with new approaches and genuine collaborative learning experiences for students facilitated through considered reviews, by teachers and TY coordinators, of the composition of student groups.

The curricular autonomy offered by TY meant that schools spoke of supporting learning across many of the issues for consideration, particularly assessment, reporting and certification, and continuity and progression. Student portfolios or similar tangible supports, were frequently referenced as an enabler of effective reflective practice.

Assessment, reporting and certification

There was a range of views expressed on the approach that should be adopted for assessment, reporting and certification of TY, but there was a consensus on the need to find a way to recognise the growth and development of students and reflect the skills and learning acquired through participation in the TY programme. Participants tended to agree that assessment and reporting needed to be consistent with the agreed vision of a redeveloped TY and that certification, if it exists, should not be part of an overall Leaving Certificate. Some of the variation in responses to the online survey included the following:

'Formal Certification is essential from the Department of Education, to include careful reference to all relevant skills learned during work placement.' (Response to the online survey)

'Over reporting during Transition Year is counter productive. Better to give certs at the end of the year.' (ibid)

'Schools must maintain their autonomy around assessment and reporting that is suitable to the individual school context.' (ibid)

In terms of gathering evidence of learning in the classroom, suggestions ranged from regular written tests to student portfolios that reflect on key learning and student responsibility for learning, to the need for a range of approaches to assessment consistent with the range of pedagogical approaches. Where participants spoke of portfolios (digital or physical), the

suggestion was made that perhaps a revised TY Programme Statement could provide more direction and guidance on the structure of student portfolios. Schools spoke of the increasing use of formative assessment techniques and the need for assessment to capture 'academic knowledge' and 'practical skills' as part of the teaching and learning process. In this respect, it was suggested that success criteria can play a role in providing a more rigorous approach to teaching, learning and assessing modules.

Across the school visit element of the consultation, there was a recognition of the importance of student input into the assessment and reporting aspects of TY. The question was also posed around gathering data and evidence to show that students have developed and to allow better decisions to be made about future TY programmes, resulting in suggestions such as:

'[a] Realistic and flexible model to show student improvement.' (School-based consultation, TY Coordinator and senior management focus group)

Most participants, across all modes of engagement, spoke of the need to report on the wider development of the student. Quantifying social skills or increased empathy for example, was discussed as a significant difficulty in some school settings, especially through more conventional, teacher-led reporting structures. Some participants added notes of caution around over-assessment in TY possibly infringing upon effectiveness of the programme itself. Teachers, guidance counsellors and students in particular, spoke of the positive impact of interviews, often tied into goal setting and portfolio content, as a means of demonstrating progress. Reporting through descriptors, such as those used in junior cycle or in the LCA Programme, was seen as important for recognition of student achievement but also as consistent with the ethos of TY, as opposed to the use of grades for example.

Certification emerged as a double-edged sword. It could be seen to add value and status to the TY programme but could be seen to impose some levels of restrictions or stress associated with official certification.

'Much more rigorous reporting needed to reflect higher standards that are needed in a revised TY. Needs standardisation throughout the country.' (Response to the online survey, Principal/Deputy Principal)

'There are benefits to a national certification system, but such measures would hinder school autonomy.' (Response to the online survey, post-primary teacher of TY)

Participants, particularly in the school visits, spoke of the impact and credibility of external certification of certain modules, such as First Aid or ICDL. This form of certification tends to have more status amongst students and parents. It was frequently mentioned that a form of certification in TY, similar to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, could be explored. When this was mentioned, it was often in the context of how it could report on other areas of learning and how useful it could be for students whose final year of post-primary education might be Transition Year.

Both students and parents place value on a Dept Ed Certificate – whether it's meaningful or meaningless. (School visit, teacher focus group)

When participants in the school visits were asked what they would consider to be the essential elements of a TY report, they tended to refer back to their response to the nature and scope of a revised TY Programme Statement. Again, input from students into the reporting or certification process was frequently referenced as an important aspect for TY programmes. Some participants also spoke of a credit-based system in schools and various levels of coordination across all curriculum components that make up a TY programme.

Diverse pathways

The participants throughout the consultation tended to view TY as an opportunity to increase awareness among students of more diverse pathways into their futures. The perceived necessity for more diverse pathways, outside of third level pathways, tended to be linked to the socio-economic setting of the school.

Schools cited examples where students are given opportunities to raise their awareness of diverse pathways such as:

- subject sampling, various work experiences and community placements
- structured provision of career guidance within the resources of the school
- guest speakers on careers that tend to be dominated by one gender more than another or tend to be associated with a particular socio-economic group.

An apprenticeship roadshow was established in one school setting, and another school outlined how they continued to avail of online resources for exposing students to diverse pathways, such as through Ibec or careersportal.ie for example.

In one school visit students remarked how the exposure to both subject sampling and work experience during transition year had helped to clarify their ambitions, not only in their choice of subjects for study following transition year, but also their chosen career pathway. For other students, this exposure had helped them to exclude certain subjects or career choices. In either case, the students recognised the importance of TY being accessible to all students so that they could try out new subjects, including those they didn't study as part of junior cycle but which they could choose to study within senior cycle.

Frequently schools spoke of the difficulties of creating links with Further Education and Training (FET) providers or Higher Education authorities in ways that were sustainable and cost effective. The creation of modules which highlight pathways to FET and raise awareness of these pathways were mentioned in this context. Some participants also mentioned the difficulties of getting sufficient numbers of employers to offer TY programmes, and noted that a centralised database for schools, such as careersportal.ie, could be beneficial in this regard. It was also suggested that broadening existing pathways could be achieved through, for example, structured work experience opportunities through the Irish language.

It was suggested that an OECD (2021) paper on Teenage Career Readiness could be a useful way to frame vocational preparation for diverse futures and that the broadening of existing pathways could be achieved through the provision of structured work experience modules through the medium of Irish.

The role of Career Guidance

Participants tended to view career guidance as a subset of wider vocational guidance and provision. The role of the guidance counsellor was seen in the wider consultation as a central linchpin of this aspect of TY, in conjunction with other aspects such as work experience and vocational preparation, subject sampling and future subject choice, and the various opportunities for students outlined in the diverse pathways section.

During the school visits, career guidance offered by the guidance counsellor was reported as highly dependent upon resources available. The expertise brought to bear by the guidance counsellor can be provided in a variety of ways from weekly timetabled hours to targeted support, including externally provided assessments of student suitability to different careers. Effective use of career guidance was generally considered to be an essential element of a revised TY Programme Statement, with some schools offering TY career guidance as a subset of a coordinated plan of career guidance across senior cycle.

Across all forms of the consultation, there was a consensus that building strong(er) links between the school and the local community, with opportunities to engage in out-of-school learning and exploration of diverse learning pathways to further education and training and higher education, was seen as an important consideration.

‘Learning by doing and seeing yourself as a valuable member of your local community is key in (developing) student agency.’ (Online survey response Third-level educator/researcher and parent)

There was no consensus on whether students should engage with work experience one day per week or in weekly blocks. The school visits found that 1 week was considered too short and 6 weeks was at the edge of the practicable range for meaningful work experience in blocks. The consensus among participants was that students should be encouraged to experience as diverse a range of placements as possible to inform their subsequent choices regarding future pathways to take, or not to take.

Other areas of discussion

In many schools there was apprehension, among teachers especially, around the potential negative backwash effect of students sitting paper 1 of Leaving Certificate English and Irish in 5th year from September 2023. Schools are already reporting adjustments to the relevant components in TY in order to prepare students for new challenges and skills in these subjects when the students transition to 5th year.

Feedback during school visits often focused on the need for parents to understand and acknowledge that learning in TY is different and while it prepares students for 5th year, it is not the sole purpose. Parents, it was felt, need to buy in more to the learning that happens in TY and the growth and maturity acquired by students through participation in TY that they would most likely not have acquired by, for example, direct entry into the Leaving Certificate Established programme. The fact that an increasing number of parents may have experienced TY as students is an interesting new dynamic in this context.

The issue of the age profile of students was raised. With formal schooling starting at a later age, students can be between 15 and 17 years of age when they are participating in TY programmes. Aligned to their part-time work experience and engagement with adults, it was raised as a changing context from the time when the previous guidelines were published.

Section Three: Key findings for TY redevelopment

The findings of the consultation indicate that the redevelopment of the TY Programme Statement is timely and widely welcomed, and that the Background Paper and Brief for the review of TY provides a comprehensive overview of the issues that will need to be considered by the Development Group. This section of the report identifies some of the key findings for the redevelopment of the TY Programme Statement arising from the consultation.

Scope and Nature of the TY Programme Statement

The consultation found that a revised TY Programme Statement needs to have the holistic development of the student at its core, while retaining the flexibility and autonomy granted by the current guidelines. It should provide clarity on what constitutes a TY Programme and emphasise the interconnected nature of its components. A revised TY Programme Statement therefore needs to take account of the personal, holistic development of the student, including an academic grounding and meaningful vocational experiences, supported by appropriate teaching, learning, assessment and reporting strategies, and evidence-based planning of the programme.

Evidence-based reviews of TY programmes

The consultation highlighted many of the strengths and weaknesses of TY. When schools review their programmes, evidence used to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses can vary from year to year and from school to school. This evidence ranges from the level of assessment of student learning and development in a given component to the overall effectiveness of the school's TY programme. A revised TY Programme Statement needs to consider how best to support schools in their self-evaluation of TY and how schools could gather evidence of, and report on, the holistic development of their students. The revised TY Programme Statement Development Group also needs to consider how to create equality of access to, and equality of opportunity within all TY programmes so that there is more consistency in the programme nationally.

Vocational Education

The consultation found a strong appetite for increasing student awareness in TY of the diversity of pathways from post-primary education. The targeted use of career guidance resources was reported as a key component of vocational education across senior cycle. The TY Programme Statement Development Group will need to consider how information on diverse and alternative pathways can be accessed by students and schools, and how the Further and Higher Education sectors and employment bodies could support TY programmes in this area. Guidance such as how to make the experience of vocational learning more rigorous and coherent for schools would need to be considered.

Continuity, Progression and the meaning of Transition

The consultation found that the word '*Transition*' in Transition Year evoked many meanings among participants. For some, transition meant a bridge of remediation learning from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle due to the perceived deficits. While for others, the transition evoked ideas of a space for students to build on their junior cycle skillset while experiencing the senior cycle environment without the pressure of final examinations. Finally, for some participants, the transition was seen as preparation for the world beyond junior cycle, which may or may not include participation in a Leaving Certificate programme. Arising from the consultation, a revised TY Programme Statement needs to clearly articulate the vision and purpose of TY, including the

transition piece. The provision of suggested templates for planning purposes and guidance in relation to practices most likely to realise the vision, could be considered by the TY Programme Statement Development Group.

TY as a motivator for learning

The consultation found that the strengthening of relationships between educators and students, and the reported increase in maturity of students who participate in TY, tended to increase student motivation in their Leaving Certificate programmes. It was also noted that the transition in the first few months of 5th year can be a difficult period of adjustment for many students.

During the school visits, teachers who themselves took part in TY as students, reported their TY experience as similarly transformative for subsequent motivation to study and for their career choice. A revised TY Programme Statement could consider the role of TY in the context of nurturing values and dispositions required for further learning in senior cycle and more broadly for lifelong learning, which would also align with the guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle.

Empowering students through TY

The consultation found across the range of participants that student input to the TY programme in their school is a pillar of empowerment. While the focus was often on student evaluation of their experiences, it also included some element of self-reporting and student reflection on goal-setting. Student input further extended into their choice of whether to do TY or continue into 5th year and was not unrelated to some concerns over the rising age demographic of school-leavers.

In addition to student input, the consultation found that certification (internal and external) of components was empowering and often gives students qualifications and recognition that extend beyond TY. This was also seen as one way of challenging perceptions of the TY programme as an unproductive year and a waste of time when measured against a high-stakes Leaving Certificate programme. A revised TY Programme Statement may need to find ways to address student empowerment in areas such as student input, goal-setting, and qualifications and skills that carry forward beyond TY.

For a successful enactment

The consultation found that more targeted CPD may be needed to support the rollout of a revised TY Programme Statement. Practitioners also spoke of availability of resources to assist with vocational education, the introduction of new TY components and the financial implications of providing TY experiences.

The consultation found that students can often be unclear about the purpose of TY, and schools often felt that parental buy-in to the spirit and purpose of TY could be more informed. Schools that embrace the aims of the current guidelines can often feel undermined by neighbouring schools that co-opt TY as a third year of a Leaving Certificate programme. The purpose and vision of TY needs to be clear and accessible for all stakeholders, the enactment of the TY Programme Statement within schools needs to be aligned to the vision of TY, and the purpose of TY needs to be communicated to, and acknowledged by students and parents.

Conclusion and next steps

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement generated rich discussion and led to useful feedback from multiple perspectives. The quality of the responses to the consultation and the thoughtful and considered opinions and suggestions offered indicate the extent to which TY is valued by participants in the consultation.

NCCA would like to thank all of those who participated in school-based focus groups, completed the online survey, or made a written submission. Furthermore, NCCA is grateful to the school leaders and TY coordinators who facilitated the focus groups in their schools and to all of those who supported student participation in the consultation.

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

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Appendix A

As part of the consultation on the Background Paper and Brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement the following organisations consented to be identified as having responded to the online survey:

- City of Dublin Education and Training Board – CDETB
- Localise Youth Volunteering
- Our Lady’s Voluntary Secondary School
- St. Andrew’s College, Booterstown
- Ardee Community School
- Moate Community School
- National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD)
- Young Social Innovators

During the consultation four written submissions were received and organisations who have consented to be identified in the report were:

- Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST)
- Young Social Innovators (YSI)
- Transition Year Teacher Professional Network (TYTPN)



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