



**NCCA**

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

# Report on the early enactment review of Leaving Certificate Physical Education

## Reader's note:

This report was approved by the Council in May 2023. It contains recommended responses to the findings of the review, which are outlined in Tables 3 and 4 (pages 14 and 15). The recommendations in Table 3 were for immediate implementation, while Table 4 outlines recommendations for consideration by the Leaving Certificate PE Development Group.

Due to the acceleration of the redevelopment of senior cycle, announced by the Minister for Education in September 2023, the Leaving Certificate PE commenced its work in February 2024 alongside the other [Tranche 2 subjects](#). This approach ensures that the updating of the curriculum will be aligned to the broader redevelopment of senior cycle.

The recommendation in Table 3 to remove Personal Exercise and Fitness as an option for the Performance Assessment will now be considered by the Development Group as part of its broader considerations. The recommendations in Table 4 will be considered in light of the broader redevelopment in senior cycle including the parameters for the design of Additional Assessment Components in the development of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects.

The updated LC PE curriculum will be introduced in schools in September 2026.

May 2023

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## 1. Introduction

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Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) was introduced, on a phased basis, as an optional subject for senior cycle students from September 2018. The initial phase involved 60 post-primary schools. The introduction of LCPE was a historic and a welcomed development as it was the first time Physical Education was recognised as an examinable subject at post-primary in the Irish system. The first examination of the subject was set for June 2020, however, all state examinations were cancelled in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The full national rollout phase of the subject began in September 2020 and, to date, 350 post-primary schools have introduced LCPE into their senior cycle programme. In June 2022, 4,987 students sat the final examination of LCPE.

An early enactment review was scheduled to be undertaken by NCCA when the first cohort of students had completed the course but plan was suspended in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was not possible to commence the review until the 2022-23 school year when students had completed the curriculum and assessment arrangements as set out in the curriculum specification.

This early enactment review was completed in Q1, 2023 to gather feedback and explore:

- how the curriculum is being enacted and how it could be improved
- the student experience of learning and assessment
- how teachers are working with the curriculum.

This report presents an overview of the consultation conducted as part of the review, followed by a summary of the findings from the consultation. The report concludes with key insights and recommendations for modifications to the specification, based on the findings from the review.

In considering the feedback outlined in this report it is important to be mindful of the extraordinary effort made by LCPE teachers to introduce this new subject to the senior cycle curriculum.

## 2. Background information

This section provides a brief overview of the curriculum specification, its intended assessment arrangements, and the assessment adjustments introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which is important contextual information when considering the findings below.

### Overview of specification

There are ten topics set out under two strands in the Leaving Certificate Physical Education specification: Strand 1: Towards optimum performance, and Strand 2: Contemporary issues in physical activity.

Table 1 *Overview of the strands of the LCPE specification*

<i>Strand 1: Towards optimum performance</i>	<i>Strand 2: Contemporary issues in physical activity</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning and improving skill and technique</li> <li>2. Physical and psychological demands of Performance</li> <li>3. Structures, strategies, roles and conventions</li> <li>4. Planning for optimum performance</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Promoting physical activity</li> <li>6. Ethics and fair play</li> </ol> <p><i>In addition, two of the following topics will be prescribed each year:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Physical activity and inclusion</li> <li>8. Technology, media and sport</li> <li>9. Gender and physical activity</li> <li>10. Business and enterprise in physical activity and sport</li> </ol>

Students' physically active participation is central to teaching and learning across strand 1 and 2 in Leaving Certificate Physical Education. To enable this to happen, students learn about the different theoretical perspectives through their engagement in three different physical activities. These activities are selected from six distinct physical activity areas, which reflect the activities most commonly included in school physical education programmes currently (NCCA, 2017a, p.11). The areas are Athletics, Artistic and Aesthetic Activities, Adventure Activities, Games, Aquatics, and Personal Exercise and Fitness.

There are three assessment components in Leaving Certificate Physical Education: Physical Activity Project (PAP); Performance Assessment (PA); and a written examination.

- Physical Activity Project (PAP): Undertaken over an eight- to ten-week period where students are required to apply their learning to develop their personal performance in their chosen role i.e. performer or coach/choreographer. It is completed in a digital format. The Physical Activity Project (PAP) can be completed outside of the school setting.
- Performance Assessment (PA): Students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the principles of play/performance; the rules and conventions of the activity; and adherence to safe

practice before, during and after the performance. Students are assessed in a variety of contexts. The performance is captured digitally by the student and across sessions. The Performance Assessment (PA) must be completed in a school setting and in one of the three chosen physical activities.

LCPE is provided at two levels, Ordinary level and Higher level. NCCA has published guidelines for completing the Physical Activity Project and the Performance Assessment.

Table 2 – *Overview of assessment components*

Assessment Component	Weighting	Level
Physical Activity Project	20%	Higher and Ordinary level
Performance Assessment	30%	Common level
Written examination	50%	Higher and Ordinary level

The format established by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for the final written examination is composed of 3 sections: Section A - short questions; Section B - case study; and, Section C - long questions.

### **Adjustments to assessment arrangements introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic**

On March 12, 2020, the national response to the Covid-19 pandemic began a process of substantial emergency measures in education. In the case of Phase 1 of the rollout of LCPE, students were not required to submit coursework in 2020 nor did students sit a final examination that year, following the introduction of a system of Calculated Grades.

For the 2021 final assessment, students could choose SEC Accredited Grades or participate under revised assessment arrangements. Revised LCPE coursework arrangements, published by the Department of Education (DE) in December 2020, reduced the number of performance goals from 4 to 3 in the Physical Activity Project and the Performance Assessment was removed. Adjustments were made to the final examination to increase choice and reduce the number of questions to be completed.

In 2022, there were also adjustments to the final examination but there was not an option of SEC Accredited Grades and students completed the Performance Assessment.

### 3. Overview of the review process

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The review was conducted from January to March 2023, and comprised the following three modes of engagement:

- School visits to capture the perspectives and experiences of sixth year students, teachers and school leadership.
- A survey issued to teachers in schools where LCPE has been offered for more than one year.
- Written submissions from stakeholders directly involved in the introduction of LCPE since 2018.

A thematic approach was used for data analysis, framed by a set of guiding themes used through the review. The findings of this analysis are presented in Section 4 of this report. Students aged 18 years and over consented to their participation in the review consultation. Parental consent and student assent were sought for school visit participants under the age of 18. Data gathered through the school visits and online interviews, was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the review 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 through invited written submissions.

#### Methodological approach

##### School visits

The schools selected to participate in the review were chosen from those schools in the initial Phase 1 cohort of LCPE schools (60 schools) and which responded to an open call to participate in the review. Phase 1 schools were the only schools to have enacted the LCPE specification before the emergency measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The schools involved in the visits were selected by stratifying those which responded to ensure that the final six schools represented the diversity of school types and contexts in post-primary education in Ireland.. Each of the school visits comprised three focus groups capturing student voice, teacher voice and school leader voice. School visits took place from January 20<sup>th</sup> to March 19<sup>th</sup>.

##### Teacher survey

A link to the teacher survey was sent to all Phase 1 schools and PE teachers were invited to participate. 18 teachers responded to the survey. The breakdown of the teachers identified as 'ETB' (5), 'Community' (5), 'Voluntary Secondary School' (6), 'Other' (1) and 1 chose not to identify.

##### Written submissions

Stakeholders involved in the enactment of the specification were invited to share a written submission as part of the review consultation. Three submissions were received: Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), State Examinations Commission (SEC), and the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI).

## 4. Feedback from the review

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Based on the analysis of the feedback from the review, ``:

- Achieving aims and objectives
- Continuity and progression
- Learning outcomes
- Physical activity areas
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Assessment.

Throughout the review, participants spoke highly of the specification. It was reported that the introduction of PE as a Leaving Certificate subject was a very welcome and positive development on many fronts. Teachers perceived it as providing a greater level of professionalism to their area of expertise with their subject now *'on a par'* with other Leaving Certificate subjects. Students reported being given the opportunity to pursue their interests in sport as part of their Leaving Certificate as an excellent opportunity. It is also important to note that students repeatedly spoke of how relevant the learning in LCPE is to their current and future lives.

### Achieving aims and objectives

There was a strong consensus that the aim and objectives of the specification are being realised. Across all the schools visited, students reported that participating in LCPE has meaningfully impacted the way they approach their health and sport. Many students reported that they have a keen interest in physical activity and viewed the subject as *'relevant'* to their lives and provided specific examples of how they apply what they have learned in the specification to their lives outside of school. Students selecting to pursue LCPE referred to themselves as *'sporty'* and cited a keen interest in physical activity.

*[re what is it like in your class?] 'We are all working away on our own thing, like you're really interested in it because it's your sport and you're getting to use the stuff you just learnt (Student, focus group)*

*Instead of just doing sport, I know more about why I'm doing and what I'm doing. I understand much more and makes me think of things differently, things like recovery, preparation, I know more about how the body works (Student, focus group)*

*It will definitely help me in later life, it's really important information to have to help me be healthy (Student, focus group)*

Teachers also concurred with this description of the relevance of LCPE to their students' lives, which they believed increased student motivation and engagement with their learning. Teachers also emphasised that supporting their students to be a *'self-directed and reflective performer'* is not without its challenges, stating this type of learning can be new to students.



*Aim is bang on. There is a huge enjoyment, the fact that they enjoy it helps to engage them. The students are very motivated, they like that you are speaking to their sport. They are all competing in sport. The specification has supported [the teacher] being able to tap into their own area (Teacher, focus group)*

Feedback from across the participants indicated that the range of topics and physical activity areas within the specification enabled the teacher to teach areas that are relevant and of interest to their students. The combination of theory and the practical application of knowledge and skills within the specification was reported as beneficial to supporting the students' understanding of Physical Education and in realising the aim and objectives of the specification.

*The daily classroom has a practical focus. Whether physically carrying out parts of the course, or providing relevant examples, the subject is rooted in the activities. A wide variety of media is used to provide the context for the learning. Videos, websites, podcasts have all been incorporated (Teacher, online survey)*

*Students have gained a more in-depth knowledge of three physical activities than they have done previously. They have learned about the relative contributions of factors such as diet & nutrition, psychology, physical fitness to overall performance. (Teacher, online survey)*

Some participants in the review noted that the degree to which teachers and schools could fully explore the breadth of the specification was dependent on a number of factors, amongst those cited were: teacher expertise, equipment and facilities, and access to digital technology. It was noted that where there is limited access to resources, equipment, facilities and digital technology, this can impact a student's experience of the specification. Teachers reported investing significant time in their own readiness to teach the subject, ensuring they were informed and confident in the specific theory relevant to the learning outcomes as well as upskilling in digital skills to support learning.

*A lot of the planning is down to the school and the cohort of students that you have. Planning is based on what you have access to. Aquatics, I think it is the most important skill for young people, but our students don't have access to it. Adventure and aquatics is not an option. We developed the gym in the last few years, we are hemmed into the resources we have. We also have a vote and listen to the students. It [LCPE specification] does give the freedom to work with the students and negotiate what options best suit them (Teacher, focus group)*

## Continuity and progression

Students reported that their experience of Physical Education at primary and junior cycle, with its emphasis on participation, teamwork and enjoyment of sport, often leads to a perception of LCPE being a 'cushy' or 'handy' subject in Senior Cycle. Prior to engaging with the specification, it was felt that being 'good at sport' alone would ensure success in the subject. Both teachers and students reported a significant 'moment of realisation' when the theoretical rigour of the subject at the initial stages became apparent. In some cases, when the theoretical elements of the subject became clear some students were ill equipped to engage with the learning. For these students,

they took up another subject but for others this was not an option and they struggled. However, both teachers and students highly value the theoretical elements of the course.

*It is a lot different than what I expected. I do a lot of sport so it's important in my life, but I was like whoa there's a lot learning here, so much theory to know too (Student, focus group)*

*Even though we held information sessions etc. we still had a lot of people thinking it was going to be all playing sport and not as theory heavy as other subjects. People now have a better understanding of what is expected in the subject (PE Teacher, focus group)*

Teachers referred to the 'jump' from Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) to LCPE. They stated that while they recognised the purpose of JCPE is not to equip students with all the knowledge and skills necessary to progress to LCPE, they outlined some of their efforts to help support the transition between JCPE and LCPE. These included developing students' digital skills in Transition Year (TY) so that they were better equipped to manage recording and uploading video footage; introducing taster modules in TY; and using JCPE as an opportunity to focus not just on participation but on other aspects of performance. Teachers expressed a hope that many issues relating to progression will be alleviated with the enactment of the 135-hour JCPE specification in September 2023.

*Initially we had a continuity issue with Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle, we have now modified our junior cycle and TY programme to better align with LCPE... Not only to develop the [IT] skills we felt helped but also you could introduce areas of study that gave students a better understanding of the type of learning in LCPE (PE Teacher, focus group)*

*As an all-boys secondary school with very high PE participation, it has been a natural progression to teach and learn the aims & objectives of LCPE. It's an excellent subject for those interested and willing to do the projects and learn the theory however it's been a shock to the majority of the students just how much learning is required as the current Junior Cycle options such as the Short course do not prepare them for it (PEAI written submission – PE teacher)*

It is evident from the feedback received that the expectations of what is studied in Physical Education have evolved through the introduction of LCPE. Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) and the Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE) framework place a strong emphasis on the holistic development of young people, wellbeing and that of lifelong learning, whereas LCPE is regarded as the subject where an in-depth understanding of the theoretical principles that underpin physical activity and performance is developed. Students participating in both LCPE and SCPE agreed that they were both unique, valuing SCPE as distinctly contributing to their wellbeing in a way that they don't get from other subjects.

*{SCPE is} different to LCPE.... It's a place to blow off steam to get away from the learning and pressures.... Sure, it can be the same sports but you're not all exam focused.... Time spent with your friends... it's more relaxed... (Student, focus group)*

## Learning outcomes

In general, feedback on the learning outcomes was positive. As mentioned previously, the opportunity to apply theory to practical performances in a range of activities, thus achieving the learning outcomes, was consistently mentioned as a positive by participants.

*There have been some great opportunities to teach some of the learning outcomes in a practical setting and this helps the students learn easier and better (Teacher, online survey)*

However, planning across the strands in an integrated way and the clarity of particular Learning Outcomes was noted as challenging. Of particular mention were the learning outcomes in topic 1 relating to *Analysing skill and technique* and topic 2 relating to *Diet and Nutrition*. For example, some teachers questioned the appropriateness of the verb 'analyse' in learning outcome 1.2.1 and there was a consensus that further guidance on some topics, such as *2.8 Diet and Nutrition*, would be welcomed.

Teachers expressed confidence in their ability to support students' understanding of the learning outcomes but expressed uncertainty when it came to exam preparedness. However, throughout the review there was a sense that the curriculum becomes increasingly more understood over time, and as teachers gain experience of working with the learning outcomes and more support materials become available, this will positively impact on their confidence.

*Sometimes it can be hard to know how far you go with something, am I covering enough for them to be ok in the exam (PE Teacher, focus group)*

*We don't have all of the mark schemes and papers we have in other subjects means it can be hard to make sure I know all of the stuff I'm supposed to (Student, focus group)*

*Like any new syllabus it takes time to consider the clarity of the specification versus the practicality of its implementation. The specification has to be taken in its entirety and with the unavoidable delay in being able to implement the whole syllabus, allied with the addition of examination amendments, it will take some more time to assess their clarity. There were many questions at the support workshops for teachers and many of the students were uneasy about what was required to perform well in the subject in comparison to more established subjects (Teacher, online survey)*

## Physical activity areas

As previously stated, the specification sets out six physical activity areas. In general, participants felt that the six distinct physical activity areas were appropriate, wide-ranging and reflective of students' interests. There was some discussion around the breadth of the 'Games' category, which includes invasion, striking/fielding, and net/wall games. There were mixed feelings expressed with some participants indicating there was an opportunity to subdivide into more than one category while others welcomed the broad category.

Learning the different theoretical perspectives through participation in three different physical activities was welcomed by both teachers and students and there is evidence that students in the six schools visited as part of the review are receiving a broad and balanced programme. Whilst none of the schools visited had students with physical disabilities/sensory loss, it was felt that specific adapted physical activities could be explicitly mentioned in the specification.

Games, Athletics and Personal Exercise and Fitness are the most common physical activity areas chosen for study by students. Students interviewed were complimentary of the democratic nature of the process resulting in the chosen physical activity areas, feeling they had choice and voice.

The six categories of physical activities are outlined in detail in Section 6 of the specification (pages 33-45). This section was cause for robust discussion throughout the review. Participants welcomed the information in this section as they recognised the need for guidance in specific skills and techniques relating to physical activities. However, it was noted that skills and techniques in any sport are incredibly dynamic in nature and already some of the information was identified as outdated in places. Participants suggested that the information in Section 6 would be better housed in guidelines which would enable it to be updated easily as needed.

*A large majority of the skills listed use outdated terminology and do not reflect the modern version of the sport played today. Many teachers, students and NGBs [National Governing Body] are confused and indeed angered at the listing of these skills. A full review of each sport and activity (pages 33-45) would be needed to avoid confusion, ensure accuracy and be accessible to all students who play the sport. Developing a close working relationship with the NGBs to ensure accuracy in terms of terminology, skill set, and techniques would benefit all involved (PDST, written submission)*

The activity area Personal Exercise and Fitness garnered significant discussion. Personal Exercise and Fitness activities are defined as 'active and purposeful participation in a personally designed exercise and fitness programme that reflect personal interests, goals and principles of training' (NCCA, 2017a, p. 44). Teachers and students were unanimous in their belief that this physical activity area is different since it underpins the learning in the other five activity areas and as such is integral to the learning in PE. It is the physical activity area most chosen by students as part of the selected three activities. However, there were mixed views expressed regarding its degree of challenge as a physical activity area as set against the other areas.

*Due to its [Personal Exercise and Fitness] nature, it is not comparable to other physical activities and is not a suitable stand-alone area for achieving the assessment objectives of the PAP or the PA. Not only does this present a difficulty for properly assessing the full range of competencies that are intended to be developed by learners, but it also presents difficulties in achieving fairness across the cohort, given the difficulties in achieving comparability between what can be assessed in this area and what is assessed in the activities in the other areas (SEC, written submission)*

## Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The LCPE specification places a strong emphasis on the use of digital technology, referred to as ICT in the specification. It recommends the integration of ICT throughout teaching and learning of

topics within the strands and also forms the basis in which students capture and submit their two practical assessment components.

There was broad welcome for the inclusion of ICT in the specification and it was particularly commended for its role in providing opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their understanding of PE and how digital technology can be used to analyse their own and others' performances. Teachers and students reported enjoying using digital technology in the classroom and found it worthwhile and valuable in terms of analysing performances and showing evidence of skill development. Students viewed the use of video as particularly beneficial to supporting their understanding of their sport and progression in their performances. When asked whether there was an alternative way of displaying this evidence, they were unanimous in their view that video was the '*best way*'.

However, teachers and students expressed significant stress in relation to the specific digital requirements for assessment. Teachers reported that students lacked '*basic IT skills*' such as formatting, creating and inserting tables, naming files, and changing file types. This theme is expanded on in the section relating to the PAP and PA (see p. 11).

*PEAI members did indicate that the requirement for a high level of digital technology competency (Microsoft Word, video recording, editing and transfer of media files) was challenging for them and their students. It had also increased the workload on both LCPE students and teachers (PEAI written submission)*

*kids have tablets and phones and everything and use them regularly, but the basic IT skills just aren't there... [The LCPE specification] presumes kids have the skills but they don't and this is a huge problem (PE Teacher, focus group)*

## Assessment

There was much discussion and feedback gathered throughout the review centred around the assessment of LCPE. Teachers and students were unanimous in their view that the three assessment components, Physical Activity Project (PAP), Performance Assessment (PA), and written examination, were appropriate for assessing the learning within the specification.

Overall, there was discontent with the weighting for each component. All involved in the discussions in schools, including school management, were emphatic that the weighting of each component was not commensurate with the load required to complete the components. Participants reported that the 20% weighting for the PAP does not reflect the significant amount of work involved in its completion.

### Physical Activity Project (PAP)

In the course of the review, the PAP was reported as aligning very well with the aim, objectives and learning set out in the specification. Participants welcomed the autonomy it affords which they noted as '*motivating* and *enjoyable*'. Students reported that engaging with the PAP provided an opportunity to consolidate their learning from the strands.

Feedback gathered was emphatic in relation to the significant workload associated with the PAP and all participants reported experiencing high stress levels around its completion. Teachers

reported a significant learning associated with the first time that they supported their students in completing the PAP. They indicated that the digital skills and technology required by students to use the SEC-developed template and submit completed work in the designated file format to the online portal caused stress and additional work to the project content itself. Teachers and students reported finding the requirements, such as word count limitations and the inclusion of tables, very rigid.

*Students really do not have the prerequisite IT skills for the PAP and this can make it very stressful for the facilitator of a large group (Teacher, online survey)*

*Teaching students how to use the different digital packages: google drive, recording devices and packaging the overall projects and practical assignments. The students haven't used anything like these before and it takes a considerable amount of time in getting them competent (Teacher, online survey)*

*The feedback that we have received from schools indicates that preparation, editing and submission of video files in support of the assessment of this component is taking an inordinate amount of time and effort and distracting from the main aims of this component. Our own direct experience of dealing with these submissions also supports this perspective, given the frequency with which corrupted, improperly formatted, or otherwise unsatisfactory video files are submitted (SEC written submission)*

In some schools, management commended the PE staff for their commitment, spending 'long hours' after school submitting student work and noted that such commitment was unsustainable as the numbers opting to study PE were increasing.

Nevertheless, students placed a high value on the use of video as a way of capturing and displaying evidence of their learning, despite their stress in formatting and preparing their project for completion.

*I thought the video was the best way to show what I was doing but then you couldn't rewind or slow it down to show it in detail. So, then you were trying to write it out in words and that was really hard (Student, focus group)*

*In the project, not allowing video to be slowed down or paused has disabled quality observation and analysis of technique was not possible. Quality analysis of biomechanics requires slow motion footage to allow the observer to note the intricacies of movement (PDST Written submission)*

Feedback from teachers and students indicated that they would welcome more flexibility in the requirements for the submission of completed PAPs and this would be helpful in alleviating some of the stress experienced by them.

## Performance Assessment (PA)

Whilst teachers felt strongly that LCPE is a practical subject and should provide students with an opportunity to show their prowess in the sport in which they participate, it was felt that the

experience of the PA is not supporting this to the extent it could. Teachers indicated that the desirable situation is for students to showcase their ability in their chosen sport and to receive recognition for this through an appropriate allocation of marks in the PA. However, they conveyed significant concerns in guiding and supporting their students on what should feature in the video of the performance being submitted for assessment and what differing levels of performance in different sports might look like. They indicated a need for more support and guidance to assist them in this regard. It was felt that there is a lack of clarity around the level of skill expectation and criteria on which the performance is judged.

This lack of clarity appears to have resulted in Personal Exercise and Fitness being selected as the most common physical activity area for students to complete their Performance Assessment. While it is recognised that this isn't a performance in the most authentic sense, it was felt that the expectations of this activity area for the PA, as outlined in the Assessment Guidelines for the Performance Assessment, included more detail than the other physical activity areas.

*Its 30% I want to know what I have to do to get good marks. It is vague like what is an excellent range of skills? what is a very high standard and a satisfactory standard what does that look like in GAA or sprinting? I don't know .... It's easier to do gym work because you know what to do and there isn't a standard to get to like its not on the weight you lift or anything (Student, focus group)*

*Obviously from an educational perspective it makes sense that students actually perform in a sport or dance or something but the reality is this is 30% and if I can't tell my students what exactly the examiner is looking for then I can't take the risk that they will be marked down, the simplest thing is for them to do something in the area of Personal Exercise and Fitness because then I can guide them on what is expected it's all just form and technique weight or difficulty doesn't come in to it anyone can do it (PE Teacher, focus group)*

Students expressed reluctance to complete their PA in their *own sport* (as they refer to it) due to a perception that they are being judged against other elite performers in the field and unless they are at the top of their game they will not score well in the PA, which accounts for 30% of their final grade. Completing their PA in Personal Exercise and Fitness, is perceived as a fairer option for them and they report knowing '*what I have to do to get a good mark*'. During the consultation with teachers and students, it became apparent that there is a perception that students are being disadvantaged if they choose to perform in an activity area other than Personal Exercise and Fitness .

*I'm a fairly good footballer [Gaelic football] but I heard if you're not playing at the level of David Clifford [Senior all-Ireland intercounty player of the year 2022] then don't do it (Student, focus group)*

There was a welcome for any change that would make the performance more authentic, and teachers cited their experience from other jurisdictions where the PA took place on a particular day with someone '*coming in*' to mark the performances.



## Written examination

The structure of the SEC designed exam paper was spoken of positively throughout the review. The mixture of short questions, long questions and case study was reported as an appropriate means of assessing the learning set out in the specification. However, participants did express a concern that short questions were not always 'short'.

There was general agreement that the length of the examination was challenging. Teachers reported that the students struggled to complete the exam paper in time and noted a lack of 'review time' which was of particular importance as they were referring to the examination paper that is adjusted due to the disruption of Covid-19. Students concurred with this feedback and reflected that there are challenges with the length of the exam paper, even with the assessment accommodations that were made to the paper as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers expressed concern that they were not clear on the expectations of some of the learning outcomes until the final examination and marking scheme were published.

*...it has been a learning curve reviewing the written exams to judge the level of detail that is required to complete the questions (Teacher, online survey)*

The case study questions in the written exam were welcomed across the review providing the student the opportunity to demonstrate a practical application of knowledge and understanding. However, some participants commented that reading the case study was not necessary and as a result students could gain time in not reading it and answering questions. Participants discussed the benefit of problem-based scenario questions as an alternative approach which would align better with the aim, objectives and learning set out in the specification.

*You didn't have to read the case study to be able to answer the questions, they were more like another set of long questions. (Student, focus group)*

*I really like the idea of the case study, it's a real chance for them to use what they have learnt but in my experience it hasn't been like that... (Teacher, focus group)*



## 5. Key insights, recommendations, and next steps

### Insights and recommendations

NCCA would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers, students and other stakeholders who contributed to this review. Their feedback was very insightful into how the LCPE specification has been enacted and experienced since its introduction in 2018. A range of practical suggestions and wider considerations are presented in this report which can help inform adjustments to the specification, and associated assessment guidelines, to improve the experience of LCPE.

An analysis of the feedback from the review indicated that:

- The aim and objectives of the specification are being realised and the learning is seen as relevant and meaningful to the current lives, and future lives, of LCPE students.
- The structure of the specification has enabled teachers to exercise agency and professional autonomy, and students are enabled to have choice and voice and to take ownership of their learning.
- The Learning Outcomes are clear and appropriate, though some minor modifications would be beneficial for a small number of specific outcomes.
- The assessment components are seen as an appropriate means of assessing the knowledge, skills and values described in the learning outcomes. Some concerns relating to ICT challenges, weighting of assessment components and selection of the physical activity area of Personal Exercise and Fitness for the Performance Assessment were raised.
- Students, teachers, school leaders and wider stakeholders responded very positively to the introduction of the specification, and it is envisaged that the uptake and popularity of the subject will continue to increase over the years to come.

Table 3 below sets out recommended responses to key insights that can be acted upon in the short-term and further details on the exact modifications to the specification that would arise from these changes are summarised in Appendix 2. Table 4 below sets out recommended responses to a further set of key insights that will need to be considered by a Development Group.

Table 3: Key insights and recommended responses for introduction in September 2024

Key insight	Recommended response
1. Section 6 (list of skills and techniques) is misplaced in the specification. There are varying levels of detail given on the skills	Review and update section 6 of the specification and move to an appendix of the specification.

<p>expectations for each of the physical activity areas, and the skills expectations need to be reviewed and updated to reflect the dynamic nature of expectations of youth sport.</p>	
<p>2. Formatting and submission of the PAP is time consuming and onerous on teachers and students.</p>	<p>Collaborate with colleagues in SEC to explore options to improve this. This may include: flexibility around word count limitations; flexibility around file formats; a more user-friendly template for the online portal for submission of completed work, tables and additional evidence.</p>
<p>3. The selection of Personal Exercise and Fitness in the Performance Assessment has unintended consequences.</p>	<p>Remove Personal Exercise and Fitness as an option for the Performance Assessment (Except in the exceptional case where a student is certified as having a medical condition/injury that precludes them from completing their PA in the remaining two chosen activities during January to March of sixth year).</p>

Table 4: Key insights and recommended responses for consideration by a Development Group

Key insight	Recommended response
<p>1. There is potential to make the curriculum more inclusive.</p>	<p>Expand the list of activity options to include adapted physical activities.</p>
<p>2. There is a significant workload required to complete the PAP.</p>	<p>Review the weighting assigned to assessment components to ensure these are commensurate of the work involved in each component.</p>
<p>3. Further guidance for the completion of the Performance Assessment would be welcomed.</p>	<p>Provide further guidance for students and teachers in relation to performance expectations in the Assessment Guidelines for Performance Assessment.</p>

4. The clarity of some learning outcomes could be improved.	Review the clarity of specific learning outcomes in Topics 1 and 2.
5. The 'Games' category as listed in the Physical Activity areas is very broad.	Explore how to sub-divide the Games category into more than one category.

## Next steps

Based on the insights and recommendations presented above, and consideration of the ongoing redevelopment of senior cycle, the following two-step approach is proposed.

### Step one

The proposed modifications set out in Table 3 are made to the specification and are introduced for students entering fifth year in September 2024.

### Step two

In order to ensure that the redevelopment of LCPE is informed by ongoing research on assessment in senior cycle, and in particular, the research and deliberations on the technical form of curriculum specifications, a Development Group should be convened. This development group could then consider the recommendations set out under Table 4. It is proposed that the work of this group could commence within one of the next tranches of subjects to be revised as part of the redevelopment of senior cycle

It is proposed that the work of this group could commence within the schedule of tranches for the redevelopment of senior cycle. This will ensure that an updated LCPE specification, informed by this review, will support the realisation of the purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle.

## 6. References

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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2017a). Leaving Certificate Physical Education Specification. Retrieved on the 25 March 2023 from <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-Cycle/Senior-Cycle-Subjects/Physical-Education-Specification/>.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2017b). Assessment Guidelines for Performance Assessment. Retrieved on the 25 March 2023 from <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-Cycle/Senior-Cycle-Subjects/Physical-Education-Specification/>.

## **Appendix 1: List of organisations who submitted written submission**

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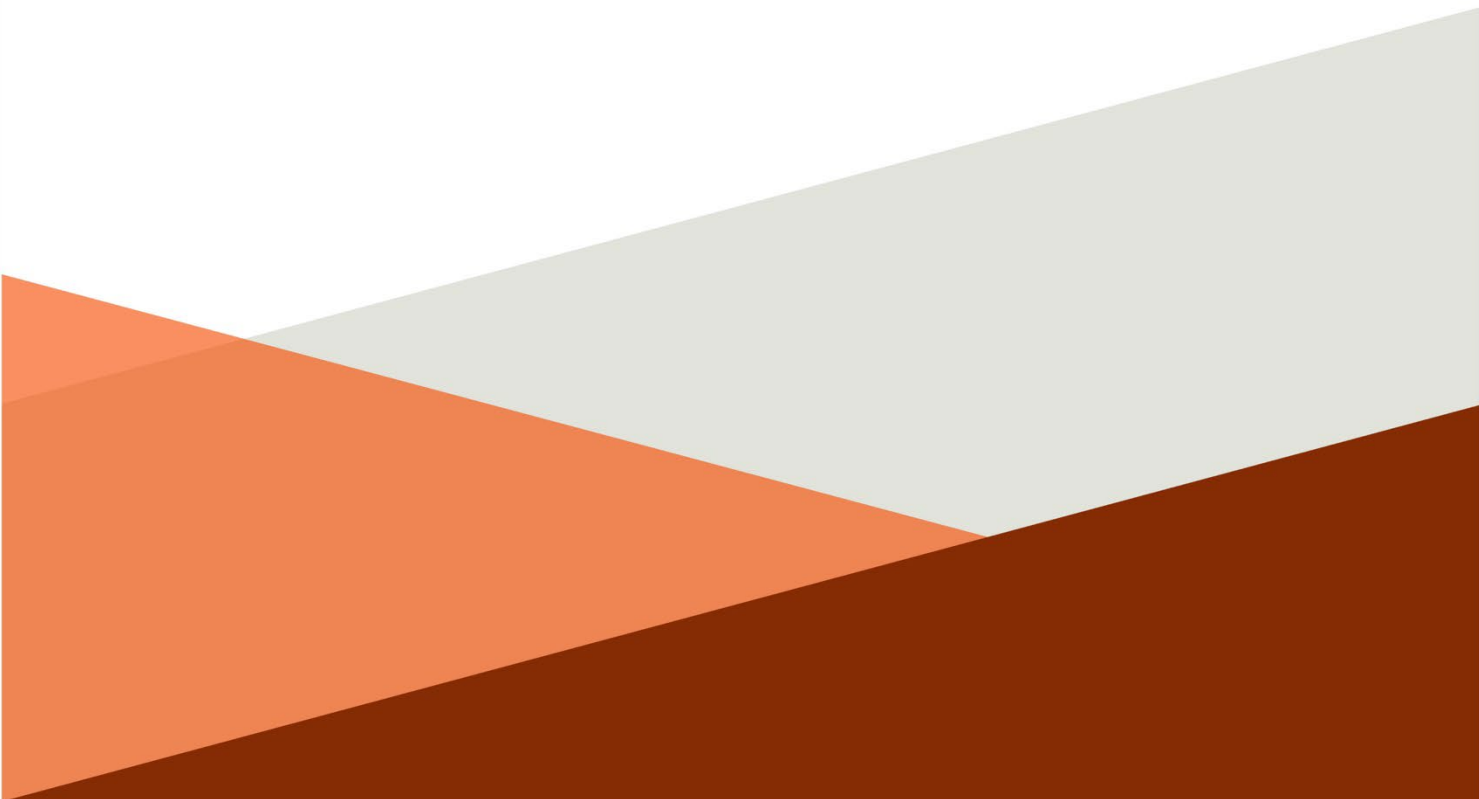
The following is a list of organisations who shared a written submission and wished to be named:

- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI)

## Appendix 2: Proposed modifications for consideration for September 2024

Modifications to the LCPE specification, based on the set of recommended responses in Table 3

Section of the current specification	Current text	Proposed text ( <i>actions such as remove, move, etc are in italics</i> ) Some inclusions of additional text are underlined>.
p.11	Learners' physically active participation is central to teaching and learning in Leaving Certificate Physical Education. To enable this to happen, students learn about the different theoretical perspectives through their participation in three different physical activities. These activities are selected from six distinct physical activity areas which reflect the activities more commonly included in school physical education programmes currently.	Include the following note: <b>Learners are not permitted to complete their Performance Assessment in the area of 'Personal Exercise and Fitness'. Except in the exceptional case where a student is certified as having a medical condition/injury that precludes them from completing their PA in the remaining two chosen activities during January to March of sixth year.</b>
p. 47	Learners choose one of the three selected physical activities being studied by their class in Leaving Certificate Physical Education for their performance assessment.	Learners choose one of the three selected physical activities being studied by their class in Leaving Certificate Physical Education for their Performance Assessment. <b>Learners are not permitted to complete their Performance Assessment in the area of Personal Exercise and Fitness- except in the exceptional case where a student is certified as having a medical condition/injury that precludes them from completing their PA in the remaining two chosen activities during January to March of sixth year.</b>



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