

SENIOR CYCLE

TOWARDS LEARNING

LISTENING TO SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION

ISSUE 1

2009

SENIOR CYCLE TOWARDS LEARNING

The needs and perspectives of learners, teachers and schools are central to the developments currently underway at senior cycle. They have emerged through consultation and through the NCCA's work with schools on developing key skills, transition units and other aspects of senior cycle. As a result, a number of draft syllabuses and other documents will be ready for your views during 2009 and beyond.

We would like to hear from you about how changes to curriculum and assessment can make a real difference for senior cycle students and their teachers. The last consultation on senior cycle was about what needed to change; this one is about how to make that change happen. We will be looking for your views online and we will be meeting with subject associations, teacher unions, parent bodies, representatives of higher education and a selection of schools and student groups to discuss how to make real changes to senior cycle and support schools to engage with those changes.

The consultation starts with this information leaflet, the first in a series to be published over the period of consultation. The first areas for discussion are an overview of senior cycle as it is now and as it might look in the future, a new syllabus for Politics and Society and some ideas on leading and supporting change in schools. These will be followed in time by discussions on two sample short courses, revised syllabuses for Biology, Chemistry and Physics, a new syllabus for Physical Education, and revised syllabuses for languages.

The consultation is premised on the view that if change is to bring benefits to learners, teachers and schools, then schools must be the genuine starting points for thinking about change. So get involved and share your views on senior cycle with us!

CHANGING SENIOR CYCLE

Why are we looking to make changes at senior cycle? When we consulted in the past on what needed to change, teachers, students, parents and school management said they wanted

- a different learning experience and school culture for senior cycle students
- a curriculum that helped develop skills as well as knowledge and understanding
- more varied assessment arrangements and a new certificate.

This kind of change would help to keep students in school to the end of senior cycle, keep them motivated and engaged, and prepare them for future lives of learning.

Since 2006 developments in curriculum and assessment have focused on moving senior cycle in these directions. These are the areas we have been working on.

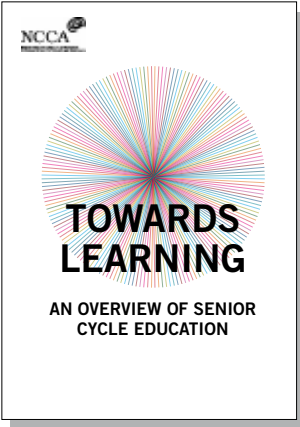
Review of existing subjects	New subjects	Short Courses	Other developments
Irish	Politics and Society	Enterprise	<i>Curriculum frameworks for:</i>
English	Physical Education	Psychology	
Modern Languages			Social, Personal and Health Education
Biology			Physical Education
Chemistry			Sample Transition Units
Physics			
Mathematics			

The subjects reviewed now emphasise how learners learn as well as what they learn. In the process of embedding the key skills, attention has been given to the balance between knowledge and skills in the curriculum and in learning. All this opens up possibilities for new approaches to teaching and learning, and to assessment.

But there will still be a lot that is familiar about senior cycle. There will still be subjects that are externally assessed and a broad curriculum with plenty of choice. Essentially, the ideas for change build on what is working well at present and reflect on where and how the learning experience for students can be improved.

The combination of what currently works well with what is new is reflected in the vision of senior cycle, the values on which it is based and the principles that shape curriculum and assessment at senior cycle. These are set out in the following sections.

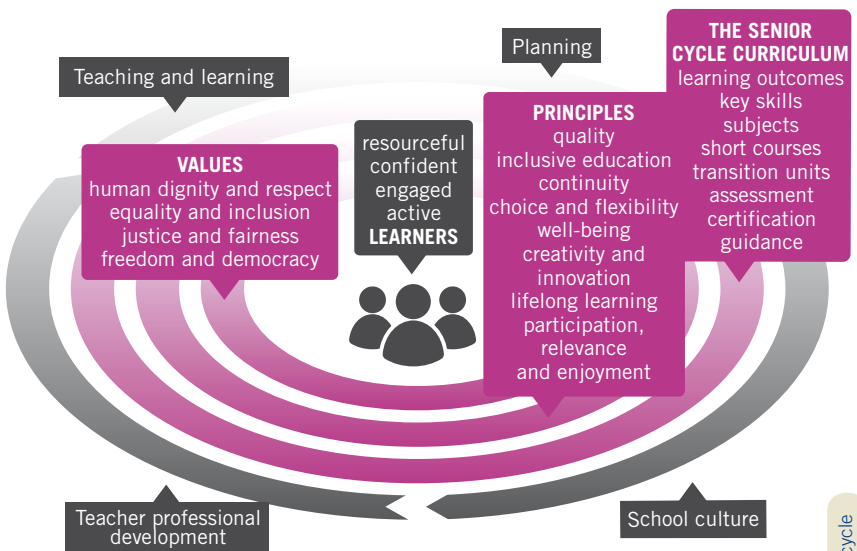
TOWARDS LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW OF SENIOR CYCLE EDUCATION



Towards Learning describes senior cycle as it is at present. But it also sets out a vision of senior cycle for the future, the values on which it is based and the principles that shape curriculum and assessment. Current thinking on developing the senior cycle curriculum, key skills, teaching and learning, assessment and certification is outlined. All of the syllabuses and courses for consultation are based on the ideas in the overview. We would like to hear your views on *Towards Learning*, which can be viewed or downloaded on www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SENIOR CYCLE

All developments at senior cycle place the learner as the focus of the educational experience. That experience will enable learners to become resourceful and confident, to participate actively in society, to build an interest in learning and the ability to learn throughout their lives.



VISION

The vision of the learner is underpinned by the values on which senior cycle is based and it is realised through the principles that inform the curriculum. The curriculum as experienced by learners – subjects and courses, key skills, clearly expressed learning outcomes, and a range of assessment methods – is the vehicle that makes the vision a reality for learners.

RESOURCEFUL

show their imagination, intelligence, intuition and other talents through

- curiosity
- enquiry
- open-mindedness
- reflection
- connecting learning
- innovation
- problem solving
- creativity

LEARNERS
COMPLETING
SENIOR
CYCLE
ARE



CONFIDENT

they develop their physical and mental well-being and

- become self-aware
- have high self-efficacy
- engage with ethics, values and beliefs
- welcome opportunities
- can cope with setbacks
- can effect positive change

ENGAGED

they participate in the social, community, national and international dimensions of their lives by

- showing respect for others
- forming and sustaining caring relationships
- making informed decisions
- building practical know-how
- taking interest in and responsibility for their social and physical environment
- developing moral/ethical and political understanding
- making lifestyle choices that are sustainable
- contributing to their own material well-being and the material well-being of society

ACTIVE LEARNERS

they pursue excellence in learning to the best of their ability and develop a love of

- learning by seeking and using knowledge, and understanding how knowledge is created
- experiencing passion for, rigour in and commitment to learning
- developing intellectual and critical thinking skills
- exercising autonomy and independence in learning
- managing their learning and making learning choices
- setting and achieving learning goals
- pursuing learning qualifications

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT ABOUT THE CURRICULUM?

Three types of curriculum component are being developed.

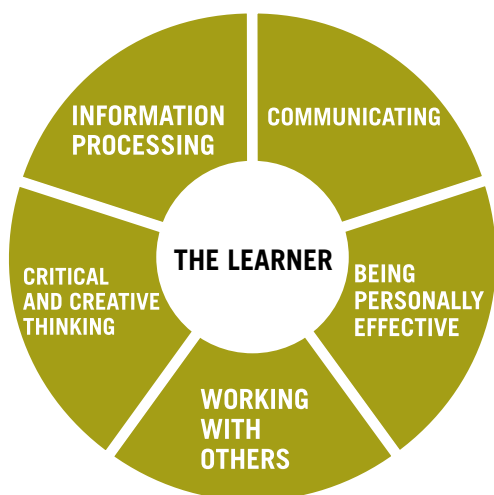
- Subjects are 180-hour courses of study. There will be some new subjects – the first of these is Politics and Society – and a number of existing subjects are being revised.
- Short courses are 90-hour courses. The first two sample short courses developed for consultation are Enterprise and Psychology.
- Transition units are 45-hour courses that would be developed and assessed in schools to a common template.

The way syllabuses are presented will be different. All syllabuses will follow a common format giving them all a similar look and feel. They will focus firmly on the learner and what is to be learned, thereby promoting learner-centred activities and experiences. They will all be expressed in learning outcomes.

NCCA is currently working with a group of schools to develop models for more flexible approaches to planning the senior cycle curriculum in schools. Check out the website for the work on Flexible Learning Profiles.

KEY SKILLS

Five key skills have been identified as central to teaching and learning across the senior cycle curriculum. The key skills have been embedded in the syllabuses and they will feature in the learning activities that are presented on the website.



ASSESSMENT

A broader range of assessment methods in examinations and an improved match between the aims of the syllabus and what is assessed will be features of the new syllabuses. Most subjects will have a second assessment component, like a practical examination or an activity report. Through this, students will get an opportunity to show what they can do and the depth of their understanding. We look forward to your views on assessment proposals.

SEEKING YOUR VIEWS

The first phase of consultation will extend over about eighteen months to allow you time and space to engage with as many areas as you wish. All aspects of the consultation will be available online at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

The consultation will include ideas on how sections of a syllabus, for example Politics and Society, might be taught and some accompanying learning activities. These activities, available on www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle provide examples of the syllabus brought to life in the classroom and will help teachers to see how it might work out in real classes. We will continue to develop more activities in response to your feedback, bringing an interactive dimension to the consultation. Along with podcasts, the online consultation and some slideshows, these learning activities will provide you with a focus for discussion in your own group or staffroom, or subject meeting.

We would also like to hear your ideas about what needs to happen to achieve curriculum change in reality. Some current thinking on change, including working principles for change, are presented in *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools*.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOUR FEEDBACK?

All aspects of consultation will feature an online questionnaire or forum. Feedback collected through the questionnaires and through more targeted meetings, focus groups and some workshops will be used to inform the further development of the curriculum and our thinking on how change can be supported in schools. A brief report will be published for each aspect of the consultation and published on the NCCA website.

GETTING STARTED

Firstly, we will be looking for your views on the new approach to senior cycle presented in *Towards Learning* and on the new syllabus for Politics and Society. We then plan to seek your views on short courses and the science subjects, followed by the language syllabuses and Physical Education. Meanwhile, you can also comment on the more general ideas about Leading and Supporting Change in Schools.

We will keep you informed of what is happening through the NCCA website, info@ncca and through further information leaflets. So to get started log on to www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle and follow the link to the consultation.

Further information on developments at senior cycle and all of the topics presented in this leaflet is available in the bulletin *Moving Forward*, circulated early in 2008, in *Towards Learning: An overview of senior cycle education* and on the Senior Cycle section of the website.

www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle

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