

Transition units

Developing new curriculum components

Many teachers and schools have found that the flexibility offered by Transition Year (TY) has opened up opportunities to develop exciting and innovative programmes of study. Over the years, schools have been supported in this work by the Transition Year Support Service and, more recently, by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). Many organisations and agencies have also developed useful resources that are used by many schools as part of their TY programmes.

Clearly, any developments in the area of post-primary senior cycle should build on the experience and expertise already in place in schools, allowing opportunities for teacher-led curriculum innovation to continue and flourish.

What are transition units?

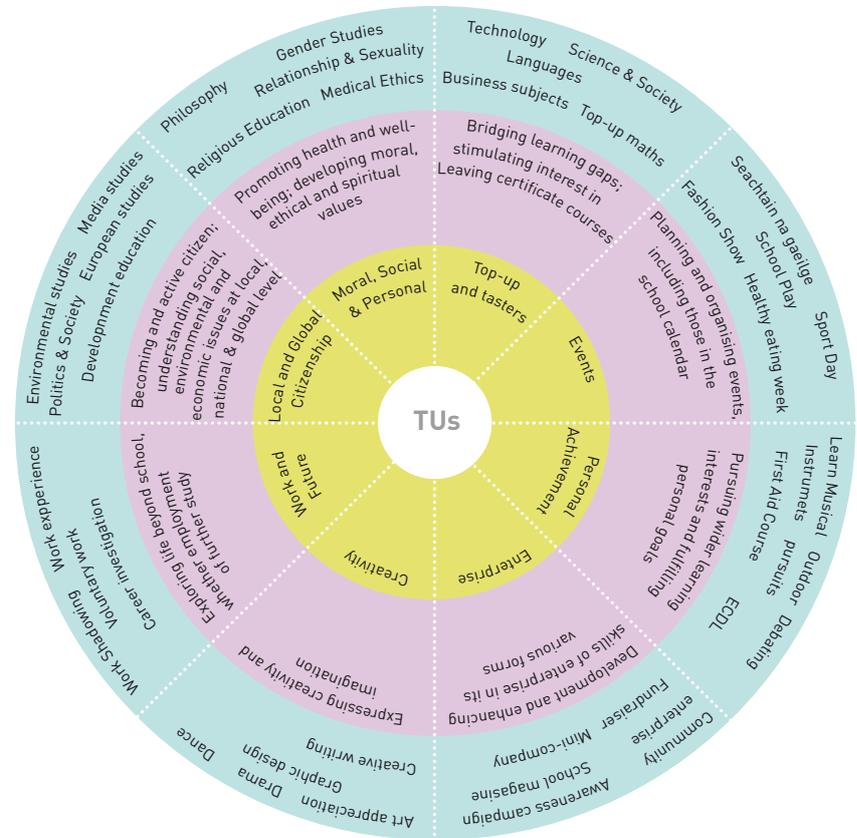
Transition units (TUs), are one of the new curriculum components currently being developed at senior cycle. They are 45 hour units of study designed to build on successful modules already offered by schools as part of their TY programmes.

In developing transition units, schools may create some 'from scratch' – opening up new areas of learning for students; they may decide to adapt some of the modules they already offer as part of their Transition Year programme, and redraft them as TUs; or schools may also work with external agencies, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

How will schools develop transition units?

Schools will prepare a written outline of each of the TUs they offer in senior cycle. The NCCA has developed a template to help schools write these unit outlines. The main elements covered in the template are

- Title of transition unit
- Area of study
- Aims
- Summary outline of unit
- Learning outcomes



The TU 'wheel' gives you some idea of the main types of transition unit that schools could decide to develop.

- Key skills
- Links
- Methodologies
- Assessment methods
- Evaluation
- Resources.

Why should schools become involved in the development of TUs?

The introduction of transition units to the senior cycle curriculum provides an opportunity for schools to offer a broader range of educational experiences to their students. In keeping with the general approach in Transition Year, a wide range of methodologies will be used in teaching TUs, such as negotiated learning, activity-based learning, group work, discussion, debate, project work, research, use of ICT, study visits and work experience. This ensures that the needs of learners with different educational backgrounds and different learning styles are adequately catered for.

Assessment is built into the teaching and learning of each transition unit. While a variety of formative and summative methods may be used, particular emphasis is placed on the type of assessment that will provide quality feedback to learners with regard to their strengths and weaknesses — to help them improve their learning, and to assist teachers in planning.

What can schools do now?

While all the elements relating to transition units are not yet fully in place it would be worthwhile for schools to begin to take a look at their Transition Year Programmes – to see if any of the courses or modules already being offered could be modified to fit the TU template. If your school would like further information on developing transition units please contact newsletter@ncca.ie.

Transition Units

Teaching Transition Year students to teach others

In the last issue of **info@ncca** we discussed the introduction of Transition Units (TUs) as one of the new curriculum components currently being developed at senior cycle. We suggested that schools might begin to take a look at their Transition Year Programmes to see if any of the courses or modules already being offered could be modified to fit the TU template that the NCCA has developed.

Among the many responses we received to this article was this description of practice from Michael Carey, a teacher at Glanmire Community College, who has decided to convert his module on Sports Coaching into a Transition Unit:

“

I have been running a Transition Module in Sports Coaching for the past 3 years with my PE department. In the past, badminton and basketball were the sports of choice but Gaelic Games and Volleyball were picked this year, and they proved really popular. The choice really depends on the interests of the students within Transition Year (TY).

This course prepares TY students to develop basic coaching skills, before then allowing them to work with students from local primary schools for a number of weeks. In their preparation they undergo an extensive program of practical and theoretical aspects of coaching younger students in basic skills (safety aspects, organizational skills, demonstration and communication skills). Part of this process entails holding 'practice sessions' with their own classmates before trying the real thing!

Over the course of the module, students clearly improve in terms of communication, organisation and creativity. They work in small groups and they really benefit from this. Students with little sporting experience can excel when it comes to interacting with younger students, so they really enjoy and participate fully in the module. The unit encourages students to engage in reflection following the sessions with the younger students. They notice what went wrong or how they excelled, and plan accordingly for the next day.

Student feedback is always positive and at the end of the most recent module, included comments such as:

'The thing I most enjoyed was getting the experience of coaching a group, and learning different leadership and management skills.'

'I got to work with children which is something I hope to do when I leave school.'

'It was tough at first, but then I got a lot more confident and comfortable at coaching, and I really enjoyed it.'

This unique opportunity is one that makes the students step outside of their comfort zone, which is what TY is all about. The initiative also helps foster good relationships with local sports clubs and particularly neighbouring primary schools who comment on the powerful 'positive role model' effect that this course creates.

I've decided to write this Module up as a Transition Unit, using the NCCA's template, for 3 reasons:

- other teachers in neighbouring schools have asked me in the past to outline the type of preparation the TY students need before working with younger students and I can now refer them to this clear framework.
- as occurs in any school, staff members come and go, and teachers spend a lot of time reinventing the wheel. Having a template will allow this well-established and worthwhile learning experience for the students to continue when I retire at 26 or go on maternity leave!
- creating a template has really allowed all the materials in the course to be drawn together to form a solid plan. By documenting the process, we reflect and having the framework leads to easy modification for next year. ”



The TU template is too long to reproduce on these pages but here is an excerpt which will give you an idea of the format:

| TRANSITION UNIT DESCRIPTOR | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Title of transition unit | Sports Coaching |
| Area of study | Personal Achievement (with link also to Events, and Work and Future) |
| Overview | This transition unit prepares students to develop basic coaching skills, before then allowing them to work with students from local primary schools for a number of weeks. In their preparation, they undergo an extensive programme of practical and theoretical aspects of coaching basic skills to younger students. During the unit, students have to step outside of their comfort zone, and in doing so improve their communication and organisation skills and learn to think creatively. The initiative also helps foster good relationships with local sports clubs and particularly, neighbouring primary schools. |
| Aims | <p><i>This transition unit aims to:</i></p> <p>Provide learners with the technical skills necessary to conduct a series of safe and effective coaching sessions for primary school students.</p> <p>Help students to develop their ability to plan suitable, motivational and enjoyable activities for primary school students.</p> <p>Encourage students to critically analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others.</p> <p>Support the leadership and cooperation potential of students.</p> |
| Learning outcomes | <p><i>On completion of this unit students should be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List the technical skills and principles involved in coaching young students 2. Identify the safety and organisational principals involved in coaching young students 3. Complete critiques of 2 coaching sessions conducted by their cooperating coach 4. Investigate a number of different sources for coaching information 7. Complete their coach logbook in relation to the 12 sessions 6. Reflect upon and critically analyse these 12 sessions 5. Plan and conduct 12 coaching sessions for 3 different groups (TY students, primary school students, a local underage team). |
| Methodologies | <p>A variety of teaching methodologies will be employed to optimise learning and understanding among the students. Direct purposeful experience, through active coaching, will form the basis of student learning in this unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The experiential approach being the most suitable methodology, with the cycle of pre-planning, coaching and reflection supporting this. → The use of group-work, paired and individual task-based methodologies will help to actively include all students in the learning experience. → Theoretical aspects will be taught through a variety of methods including group-work, discussion and didactic approaches. <p>The planning element of the unit involves research which requires students to engage in independent learning and use information technology.</p> |
| Assessment methods | <p>Assessment of this module will involve</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practical coaching demonstration This authentic method offers a genuine form of formative assessment. Focused feedback will be provided which will help students to improve their learning. 2. Written assessment. This method offers an opportunity to measure achievement in comprehending the theoretical aspects of the unit. 3. Submission of completed coaching log-book. (Session critiques, session plans and self-assessment sheets). This authentic method displays the progressive nature of the unit. 4. Presentation. This short presentation allows students to present to peers on the major events of their experience, and their perception of their performance. |

Resources

Physical Resources

- Coaching personnel and players from local clubs
- Teachers and students from local primary schools
- Local Sports Development Officers for chosen sport/sports

Resource Materials

Coaching Handbooks and Logbooks for chosen sports.

- Session Plan templates
- Reflection Sheets
- Critique Sheets

Websites related to coaching are available for most sports.

Some examples for Gaelic Games include

www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/resources/index.php

www.castleknock.net/coaching/default.asp

http://gamesdevelopment.gaa.ie/page/coach_education_resources.html

Volleyball

www.volleyballireland.com

Basketball

www.basketballireland.ie/coaching

Soccer

www.fai.ie

Badminton

www.badmintonireland.com/development

If you would like further information on developing Transition Units, please contact newsletter@ncca.ie.



Transition Units

Getting it together

“ I think transition units are a great innovation. So many schools are doing similar modules. I am currently developing a TY programme in a new school and feel that I am reinventing the wheel and I would really appreciate a database of resources. ”
(TY Coordinator)

Tired of reinventing the wheel?

If you've ever sat down on your own, or with your colleagues, to devise a transition year module, you too may have wondered if you are reinventing the wheel. It's not always easy to come up with fresh ideas for modules that will capture the imagination of students and that are interesting to teach and in keeping with the spirit of transition year.

You would imagine, with over 500 schools offering the programme, that there must be some other teachers out there who have come up with innovative ideas that you could adapt and use with your students. And you'd be right. That's one of the reasons why the NCCA has been developing **transition units** - to make the sharing of ideas possible.

What are transition units?

Transition units (TUs) are one of the new senior cycle curriculum components. They are 45 hour units, intended to be offered by schools to transition year students. The idea is that, in the future, schools will include a variety of TUs as part of their transition year programme. Just to reassure you, however, TUs aren't intended to be 'exam' courses; they won't be externally assessed, and won't count for 'points'. The aim of assessment in a transition unit is to provide the type of feedback to students that supports their learning and encourages the development of their self-assessment.

Here's one I (we) made earlier!

The NCCA has already been working with teachers in the Senior Cycle School Network to develop sample transition units and these are now

posted on the senior cycle website. Yes, that's right folks, they are sitting there ready to be used or adapted to suit your own needs and those of your students.

Here's a list of sample TUs currently available at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

Sample transition units:

- Soap Operas and Popular Culture
- Food Matters
- Legal Studies
- Sports Coaching
- Reading the Silver Screen
- Introduction to Genetics & Biotechnology
- Discovering Irish Art
- Media and Communications
- Setting up a Green School
- Ireland - a Level Playing Field?

We will be adding more TUs over the next few months, eventually building a comprehensive bank of resources for schools.

“ This is extremely useful and important work. As a TY coordinator I believe such units could enhance the experience for teachers and students alike. ”

Create your own TU

Many of you are already teaching creative TY modules so why don't you and your subject departments develop them into TUs for September

2008? To help you get started we have made the TU template available to download from our website, along with a helpful handbook on how to write up a transition unit.

Why use the template?

Teachers from the Senior Cycle School Network who have been writing up their own TUs have discovered many advantages to engaging in this work. It

- provides an opportunity for critical reflection on their current TY programme
- provides a tool that supports teachers in capturing on paper what they are already doing
- helps teachers develop the language and skills of curriculum development
- promotes better planning and communication within the transition year team.

How would you go about writing up a Transition Unit?

If you are teaching a TY module that would be worth sharing with others then why not have a go at writing it up as a transition unit? You'll find everything you need on the NCCA website.

Your first step is to download the template for transition units and the handbook. The guide will take you through the process step by step. There are 13 sections on the template that you need to write up. Some are very simple, but some require a bit more thinking, especially if you don't find yourself using the language of curriculum development on a day-to-day basis!

On the next page you will see a list of the different sections of the template. We've highlighted a few parts which are then explained further.

1. Title of transition unit
2. Area of study
3. Overview
4. Links
5. Summary outline of unit
6. Breakdown of unit
7. Aims
8. Learning outcomes
9. Key skills
10. Methodologies
11. Assessment approaches
12. Evaluation
13. Resources

Summary outline of the unit

This is a short step-by-step description of what students will actually be doing in the unit. This allows you to describe exactly what is involved in teaching your TU. You are not expected to give class lesson plans, but instead give a broad outline of the process. This outline should be detailed enough to give another teacher who has not taught this unit a good idea of how to go about doing something similar.

Breakdown of the unit

This gives an idea of how the TU is broken down between class contact time, out of school visits, exhibitions, independent research, and so on. This will, of course, vary according to the area of study. For example, a geography TU might involve the following:

Class contact time:
30 hours,
(3 class periods for 15 weeks)

Data gathering:
5 hours

Independent research:
5 hours

Preparing and presenting a report:
5 hours

Total: 45 hours

Aims

There should be only three or four aims which are general statements that say what the TU hopes to achieve. These aims (unlike the learning outcomes) can be broad. For example, the aims of a TU on media and communications could be to



- foster students' awareness of the principles of communications
- promote students' visual literacy
- provide cultural enrichment
- develop ICT skills.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are brief and specific statements that tell us what the students will be *able to do* at the end of studying a TU. All learning outcomes begin with a verb. Useful verbs include: *recall, identify, define, describe, summarise, interpret, explain, discuss, demonstrate, investigate, analyse, write, plan, design, formulate, evaluate, present, measure, operate, perform, construct, listen with respect, co-operate as part of a team.*

Learning outcomes may be

- content based
(e.g. analyse an historical event)
- product based
(e.g. prepare a report)
- or**
- process based (e.g. conduct an experiment, conduct a role-play, listen with respect to different view points).

Key skills

This section describes the types of skills that students will encounter through participating in the TU. Five key skills have been identified as important in helping senior cycle students to become effective learners. These are *information*

processing, critical and creative thinking, communicating, working with others, and being personally effective. This section asks you to think about how the key skills might be embedded in the teaching and learning of your particular TU.

What next?

Once you have written up your transition unit using the template then it is often useful to pass it onto a colleague to read through it and see if they can offer any further ideas. If you wish, you can forward it to the NCCA (e-mail: schoolnetwork@ncca.ie) and we will offer some further feedback and support.

In the next issue of **info@ncca** we will be taking you through other aspects of the template, bringing you more details of what's happening in the schools that are currently developing their own TUs, and discussing ways in which they can be shared with others.

Don't forget to check www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle for the latest news!



It's very worthwhile to have TUs written to a common template. Sharing of good practice is to be encouraged.



Transition units

Approaches to assessment

In the last issue of *info@ncca* (Issue 9, available to download from www.ncca.ie), we described some of the steps involved in writing up a transition unit (TU) to the NCCA template. In this article we look at the approaches you could take to assessment when developing and teaching a transition unit or for general use with your other classes.

Before continuing, it's important to say that assessment time should be built in to the 45 hour TU and not be treated as an added extra. Remember too, that TUs are not 'exam subjects'—they won't be externally assessed, and they don't count for 'points'.

The purpose of assessment in transition units is to provide really good feedback to students on what they have learned and achieved in the unit, and on how they can improve their learning both now and in the future. This is essentially an Assessment for Learning (AfL) approach. What you find out through the assessment will also help you to spot any gaps in the students' learning or understanding, and to adapt the content of the unit or your teaching approaches accordingly.

Assessment methods can include:

- a project
 - a portfolio
 - an essay
 - a report
 - an interview
 - an oral presentation
 - self-assessment
 - keeping a learning journal
 - an end of unit examination,
- but not all in the one unit! If you try to assess everything that the student learns or does you will end up overburdening your students, and yourself! In the context of TUs, we recommend picking one or, at most, two methods of assessment.

Getting the right fit

When it comes to deciding how best to assess a TU, it is helpful to ask yourself: *What are the really important things that I expect the students to learn in the transition unit?* This question will bring you back to the aims and learning outcomes of the unit and to the way in which the learning takes place. For example, a TU entitled *Speech and Communication Skills* would probably be best assessed through an oral presentation; a TU entitled *Environmental Studies* could be assessed by a project where students devise ways to reduce the school's 'carbon footprint,' and assessment of a TU entitled *Community Service* might involve students presenting a diary of their community-based work placement.

Some assessment approaches worth considering

Transition units provide an opportunity for you to try out new approaches to assessment. So why not think about using self-assessment or peer-assessment with your students?

- **Self-assessment using an assessment proforma** – An assessment proforma is a kind of checklist which students and teachers devise together. The teacher sets the students an assignment and then asks them to discuss: *What criteria would you use to judge an excellent assignment?*

From this a list of *criteria for success* can be agreed which will form the basis for an assessment at the end of the assignment.

- **Self-assessment using a personal learning journal** – This is particularly useful when the learning relates to the development of the student's attitudes and values, as well as their knowledge and skills. If you check out the NCCA website you will find a very good example of a learning journal in the transition unit *Ireland – A Level Playing Field?* devised by the Combat Poverty Agency. See www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle and follow the links to sample transition units.
- **Peer-assessment** – Peer-assessment is something that needs to be carefully planned and works best when students are clear on what a good piece of work looks like. An assessment proforma can also assist in peer-assessment as it helps focus the student on the agreed criteria for success. A sample proforma which shows how peer-assessment is used in a transition unit entitled *Environmental Studies* is shown on page 6 and can also be found on our **ACTION** website, at www.action.ncca.ie.
- **Peer-assessment in groups** – Here's an approach that involves students in peer-assessment of any piece of completed work, small or large, in any subject.

Environmental Studies Assessment of a Project

Project Title

Presented by

Give an example of one environmental issue/problem that was presented

.....

List some of the causes of this environmental problem

.....

List two steps that can be taken to address/change this problem

1.

2.

What was the best aspect of the project or presentation and why?

.....

Do you have any suggestions that might help to improve the project?

.....

Assessed by Class Date

Sample peer-assessment worksheet (Developed by Terry Lawless, Bray)



Having agreed on the *criteria for success*, each student carries out the assignment. When the assignment has been completed (over a period of time, overnight or in class), students are arranged in groups of three or four to view the material. They read and pass around each others work silently until all samples have been viewed by everyone. The students then discuss any differences. They then mark each piece of work together using the agreed criteria, perhaps starting with one that best meets the criteria for success discussed. The teacher then holds a class discussion as to what decisions were easier or harder to make. Again, you can view an example of a proforma to support this activity if you log on to our **ACTION** website.

Advantages

There are many advantages to using both self-assessment and peer-assessment.

“ Student self-assessment and peer-assessment are skills which need to be built up over time. Students do not automatically have these skills, but should teachers invest the time, it will bring dividends in the long run. ”

These include

- making students aware of the characteristics of ‘good work’
- encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning
- encouraging them to reflect on themselves as learners and so learn how to learn
- encouraging students to learn other ways of approaching a task other than the approach they used
- using peer pressure in a positive way to increase students’ motivation
- students using language that their peers understand and are familiar with

- students sometimes accepting criticisms from their peers that may have been ignored if given by you!

Student self-assessment and peer-assessment are skills which need to be built up over time. Students do not automatically have these skills, but should teachers invest the time, it will bring dividends in the long run.

In the next issue of **info@ncca**, we will continue to explore ideas around transition units and we will be sharing some interesting teaching approaches.