

**MOVING
FORWARD**

SENIOR CYCLE

**KEY SKILLS
ASSESSMENT
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SHORT COURSES
TRANSITION UNITS
SCHOOL NETWORK**



SENIOR CYCLE

MOVING FORWARD

If you have been reading info@ncca, or glancing at www.ncca.ie, or meeting with your subject associations, or chatting with your colleagues, you will have heard that there are changes afoot at senior cycle. The purpose of this bulletin is to give you an overview of the current work and to alert you to some upcoming consultations and developments in which you, or your school, might be interested in participating.

There's a lot going on. It can seem complex. But all the developments are focused on what is learned, how it is learned and how it is assessed, making learning more meaningful and relevant to the lives of students and more interesting and rewarding for teachers.



KEY SKILLS

The review of current subjects and development of new subjects are greatly influenced by the five **key skills** that are central to teaching and learning across the curriculum at senior cycle. These are *information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking* and *working with others*. The key skills set out the tools that will unlock a range of learning experiences for students, helping them to become more effective learners, both during their time in school and into the future and to participate fully in society, including personal and family life, the world of work and lifelong learning.



I found that learning is definitely more effective if you develop these skills and testing the students has verified this. New methodologies are leading to better learning.
(Teacher, key skills project)

ASSESSMENT

Expect changes to the way in which subjects are assessed. A broader range of **assessment methods** in the examinations and an improved match between the aims of the syllabus and what is assessed will support more effective learning. Most subjects will have a **second assessment component**, like a practical examination or a field study. This will be especially important for subjects like Physics, Chemistry and Biology where students will get an opportunity to show what they can do as well as what they know. Changes to the way Leaving Certificate examinations are timetabled as proposed by Minister Hanafin, will also bring a welcome change for students.

SCHOOL NETWORK

In order to ensure that the work on senior cycle is well grounded in classroom practice, NCCA is working closely with a network of 16 schools on many aspects of the senior cycle developments. These schools help us to focus on the reality of school life and on the experience of teachers and students in the classroom. They help us to identify what makes a difference to teaching and learning and to establish what is feasible and manageable for schools, teachers and students. As well as harnessing the opinions and expertise of teachers in school settings, this work also helps us to tune in to the views of students and parents.

The main focus of this work is currently on the embedding of key skills in teaching and learning, on the development of transition units and on exploring ways of developing more flexible learning pathways for students who don't wish to follow the more traditional approach to the senior cycle curriculum.

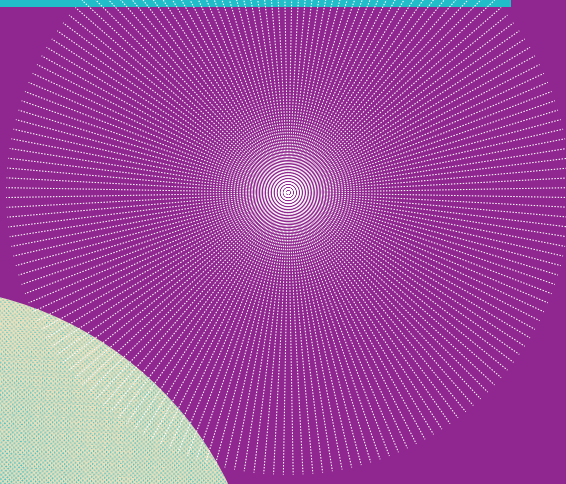
...this is a chance to get involved and make a difference. Sharing ideas on what works for them in the classroom enhances teachers' confidence and affirms them in what they are doing.

(Teacher, School Network)

CURRICULUM COMPONENTS - THE FAMILIAR AND THE NEW

NCCA is currently working on subjects, short courses and transition units. The table below gives an overview of the areas under development right now.

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



SUBJECTS

There will be a new emphasis in curriculum documents on what is learned and how it is learned. All courses will have **learning outcomes**, which will provide clear statements of what *students should be able to do* and will provide direction and clarity for teachers and students on the *what* and *how* of learning in the particular subject.

Subjects are the most familiar of the curriculum components and are designed as 180 hour courses. The subjects under development in Phase 1 are the science subjects, Mathematics, English, Irish and modern languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish). Other subjects will be reviewed in Phase 2.

NEW SUBJECTS

Two new subjects are currently being developed – Politics and Society and Physical Education. It is intended that these will be optional, examinable subjects. Curriculum frameworks for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education at senior cycle are also being developed. Draft syllabuses and curriculum frameworks will be available for consultation in 2008, and will be available on www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

SHORT COURSES

Short courses are proposed as new 90 hour optional, examinable courses. The first short course being developed is in **Enterprise**. It is in the final stages of preparation, will then issue to the Department of Education and Science for consideration and, if approved, will be the first of a set of short courses that would become available for schools, as options at senior cycle.

TRANSITION UNITS

Transition units (TUs) are 45 hour courses that build on successful modules already offered by many schools as part of their Transition Year. In developing transition units, schools may decide to adapt existing TY modules and offer them as TUs, or develop new units 'from scratch'. The difference is that they are written to a common template and can be shared between schools. You can find sample transition units on the senior cycle website www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

Transition units are a great idea. It's helpful to have a template to work from and it helps to share units between schools.

TY teacher

PROJECT MATHS

The review of Leaving Certificate Mathematics is part of an overall review of post-primary mathematics education and presents an exciting new model of syllabus revision. *Project Maths* will involve teacher professional development and support for a new approach to teaching and learning in mathematics, with increased emphasis on contexts and applications that are relevant to students' present and future needs. The project will include the development of classroom materials and resources.

From September 2008, it is proposed that a group of schools will implement changed syllabus strands in mathematics, on a phased basis. This will allow for feedback from teachers and students before the revised strands are implemented in all schools. The examinations will be reviewed over time to reflect syllabus revision and changes in classroom practice.



IRISH

Following the recent announcement by Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Education and Science, about increasing the proportion of marks awarded for oral Irish in the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations, work has begun on adjusting the syllabuses to facilitate these changes to the examinations and related teaching and learning. NCCA and the National Centre for Technology in Education conducted a pilot project in 2007 which examined the use of mobile phones and text-based web chat for teaching and learning Irish in junior cycle. The phones were employed to deliver a number of vocabulary text messages to students each day and for students to call up a voice-prompt system, where they supplied responses to audio prompts. The integration of these technologies was received very positively by both teachers and students, and may become a feature of the increased emphasis on oral Irish in senior cycle.

THE TECHNOLOGY SUBJECTS

A revised syllabus in Design and Communication Graphics (to replace Technical Drawing) and a new syllabus for Technology were introduced by schools in September 2007. Two other syllabuses: Architectural Technology (to replace Construction Studies) and Engineering Technology (to replace Engineering) will follow. The syllabuses have increased emphasis on modern developments in technology, with ICT playing a significant role. Computer Aided Design (CAD) forms a major element of the Design and Communication Graphics syllabus and schools have received funding for the hardware and software required.

LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

This year, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is celebrating ten years since its introduction. As a relatively new programme, it was important to allow it time to settle in the system before considering any significant review. Some initial investigation has been conducted on aspects of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Review of LCA will be influenced by two pieces of research currently being conducted by ESRI - (i) a specific study looking at participation in the programmes and where LCA students progress on completing the programme and (ii) a longitudinal study into the experience of students from first year through to senior cycle.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

A number of strands of the work are now coming to a stage where we will be looking for your views on how they are shaping up. Teachers can expect to hear about the following areas over the coming months.

- * Three **science subjects**, Biology, Chemistry and Physics, will be among the first subjects to appear as draft syllabuses for your consideration, in 2008. The syllabuses will be accompanied by new proposals for their assessment.
- * The draft syllabus for **Politics and Society** will give teachers an opportunity to have a first look at this new subject.
- * The draft syllabus for **Enterprise** will be presented to the Department of Education and Science as a first step in the consideration of short courses.
- * The first suite of **transition units** and materials to support teachers in developing transition units for their own class groups will be available.

In 2008, NCCA will be seeking the views of teachers, parents, students and others on all of these areas of development. Schools will be able to access all the materials on the senior cycle website and submissions will be invited in a number of formats. More about this in our next bulletin.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the senior cycle developments is available at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle. The website will be updated regularly to provide information on any new developments in the work. Regular updates will also appear in the NCCA publication, info@ncca.