

In cycle one, the questions focused on the broad purposes of this stage of education. We asked questions about the benefits and challenges of senior cycle in your school. We now want to delve into the aspects of the programmes offered in your school that we can learn from in this review of senior cycle. We also want to look further afield, explore some other ways of structuring senior cycle and draw comparisons with our own experiences.

1. Current Senior Cycle Programmes

In our system currently, approximately 65% of students entering senior cycle take Transition Year (TY), 95% of students follow the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) programme or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), with 5% following the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA).

Research has identified aspects of TY such as the inclusion of work experience, modular learning, collaborative learning, learner-led curriculum and self-development as being very beneficial for students. In LCE, there is a broad curriculum with a wide variety of subjects, that facilitates the progression pathways of students. LCA offers a pathway into further education and employment. LCVP gives students insights into the world of enterprise and work.

Research has identified some challenges related to these programmes including a lack of student engagement and high stress levels (LCE), limited access to progression routes (LCA), an unclear identity as a distinct programme (LCVP), and a lack of structure (TY).

The following research articles may be useful in discussing these programmes:

- [ERC Research on TY](#)
- [ESRI Research on LCA](#)

Please tick the programmes offered in your school.

Transition Year (TY)		Leaving Cert Applied (LCA)	
Leaving Cert Established (LCE)		Leaving Cert Vocational Programme (LCVP)	

- a. *What, if any, are the three most positive features of each of the programmes your school offers? Where possible, please provide specific examples.*
- b. *What, if any, are the three most negative features of each of the programmes your school offers? Where possible, please provide specific examples.*
- c. *If there is a programme that is not offered within your school, can you briefly outline some of the reasons why the programme is not offered?*
- d. *Please identify any programmes offered to senior cycle students in your school not listed above? Can you briefly outline some of the reasons why it/ they are offered?*

2. Ways of structuring Senior Cycle

In deciding how to structure Senior Cycle, there are a number of key considerations, including

- how long senior cycle should be
- whether students complete it at varying paces or all complete it in the same length of time
- the range of curricular components students choose from (subjects, modules, units of learning work experience, life-skills)

Currently in Ireland, Senior Cycle for all students is a minimum of two years duration to complete one of the Leaving Certificate programmes (LCE, LCA, LCVP). About two thirds of students complete an optional Transition Year which means a three-year Senior Cycle for these students. This is similar to other

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jurisdictions, where the duration of upper secondary programmes is broadly between two and four years. Some countries allow the duration of upper secondary to expand to four years or contract to two years depending on the requirements of the student (Ontario, the Netherlands). Modular credit-based systems (Ontario, New Zealand, Queensland, Sweden) allow students to choose modules of varying specificity and intensity which enables the contraction or expansion of time taken to complete the modules.

When answering this question, please consider: the optimal duration of senior cycle, whether all students must complete it in the same amount of time or whether should there be flexibility in the length of senior cycle, the degree of flexibility that could be offered, and how this could be structured. [International Research](#) can give us some examples of how this stage of education is structured in other jurisdictions.

- a. *How long should Senior Cycle be and what, if any, flexibility should there be for students to complete senior cycle at a different pace?*
- b. *Should the senior cycle curriculum be structured in terms of subjects, modules or units of learning?*
- c. *Are there some subjects/areas/ learning experiences that should be studied by all senior cycle students? Please explain your rationale.*

3. Pathways available to students in Senior Cycle

In discussing pathways at senior cycle, there are a number of key considerations including:

- the range of pathways available (academic, technical, vocational, professional)
- whether these pathways can be combined or are ring-fenced
- whether different sites of learning can be used or not

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In considering pathways available at senior cycle, it is helpful to bear in mind the range of options open to students on completion of senior cycle, including further education, higher education, traineeships, apprenticeships, employment or some of these combined.

In many jurisdictions, there are specific pathways available for students in senior cycle such as academic, technical, vocational and professional pathways, as well as traineeships and apprenticeships. In some countries, students can take modules in different areas and combine technical, vocational and academic pathways for completion of their chosen programme. This flexibility also allows for different sites of learning to be used in addition to the base educational institution.

Senior Cycle in Ireland has, to date, been a predominantly academic pathway with very limited vocational, technical or professional options available. The ring-fencing of the LCA and its exclusion from CAO has limited progression pathways for LCA students and resulted in a perceived lower status for the programme. The development of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes for junior cycle students and changes in school inclusion policies also have implications for senior cycle.

- a. *To what extent do all students facing senior cycle have suitable pathways and learning experiences available to them? What suggestions would you make in this respect?*

4. **Assessment**

Of the 37 subjects available in the Leaving Certificate established, 18 have an additional assessment component (project, practical or oral) completed before the terminal examination. In LCVP, students complete a portfolio worth 60% of the final grade. In LCA students accumulate credits over the course of the two-year programme through completion of modules, key assignments, tasks and interviews in addition to the final examinations.

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In most of the jurisdictions researched (with the exception of France) there is an internal assessment component in the final reporting of achievement. In credit-based systems (New Zealand, Ontario, Queensland, Sweden and Ireland (LCA only)), credits are accumulated over the course of the programme. Sweden awards credits for community involvement activities, and in Finland and New Zealand credits are awarded for structured work experience or work assignments in work placement. In most jurisdictions, there is a compulsory assessment of literacy and/or numeracy.

Please consider how the curriculum and the broad learning experiences of students at senior cycle might be assessed.

- a. *What, if any, are the positive features of current approaches to senior cycle assessment? Please limit your response to the three most positive features of assessment for each programme offered in your school (TY, LCE, LCVP or LCA).*
- b. *What, if any, are the negative features of current approaches to senior cycle assessment? Please limit your response to the three most negative features of assessment for each programme offered in your school (TY, LCE, LCVP or LCA).*
- c. *Considering your answer to question 3, would you like to see any changes to senior cycle assessment? If so, please outline the kinds of changes. If so, please outline the kinds of changes you would like to see, the reasons for these changes and the potential challenges in bringing about these changes.*

5. Reporting and transitions

Currently, Junior Cycle students receive a profile of achievement which reports on student achievement in a number of areas and TY students receive a record of achievement. LCA students receive a composite description of the credits achieved over the two years broken down into four levels (distinction,

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merit, pass, fail). LCE students receive a statement of grades in their final examinations.

In other jurisdictions, students can receive a range of documents to record their achievements such as a school leaving certificate (Sweden), a secondary school diploma (Ontario), in addition to matriculation or third level entry certificates (Queensland, New Zealand). Students in Queensland who have learning difficulties can receive the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement that provides a summary of their skills and knowledge for employers or training providers.

In cycle one, participants highlighted the narrow focus of reporting at the end of senior cycle. Please consider if there is value in reporting the broad learning experience of students during senior cycle.

- a. *What, if any, are the positive features of current approaches to senior cycle reporting? Please limit your response to the three most positive features of assessment for each programme offered in your school (TY, LCE, LCVP or LCA).*
- b. *What, if any, are the negative features of current approaches to senior cycle reporting? Please limit your response to the three most negative features of assessment for each programme offered in your school (TY, LCE, LCVP or LCA).*
- c. *Considering your answer to question 3, would you like to see any changes to senior cycle reporting? If so, please outline the kinds of changes you would like to see, the reasons for these changes and the potential challenges in bringing about these changes.*

6. **Anything we have missed?**

Please note anything we have missed in the booklet provided.