Background paper and brief for the review of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules

Contents

Introduction

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in Equity and Excellence for All (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Tranche 1 subjects will be completed in 2024 for introduction to schools in 2025. The redevelopment of the LCVP Link Modules is included in Tranche 2, which will be completed in 2025 for introduction to schools in September 2026.

This paper provides a context for the review of the Link Modules and has been informed by the views of teachers, school leaders and students gathered through school visits conducted in a representative sample of schools. It begins by considering the background of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme with Section 1 presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments. Section 2 sets out how LCVP-related education is currently provided for within the Irish curriculum before focusing in more detail on the current LCVP Link Modules while Section 3 provides an overview of the insights gained through the school visits conducted and the lived experience for schools, teachers, and students. Section 4 considers similar education opportunities internationally and presents an overview of four different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discuss some issues identified for consideration in the redevelopment of the LCVP Link Modules before finally setting out a proposed brief for this work in Section 6, which will guide the work of the development group.

1. Background and context

This section sets out some of the significant developments in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) since its initial introduction, before focusing on the education and broader policy landscape which are important contextual considerations for the review and redevelopment of the LCVP Link Modules.

LCVP places a very strong focus on both the world of business and the vocational environment (Malone, 2011, p.96), strongly emphasises active learning and the use of digital technology, and was designed to provide students in senior cycle with the opportunity to develop transferable skills (DES, 1994). The programme is delivered in tandem with the established Leaving Certificate and includes two link modules, *Enterprise Education* and *Preparation for the World of Work*, which are studied in addition to a minimum of five Leaving Certificate subjects. LCVP is optional in schools where the programme is offered.

The programme was initially introduced in a small number of schools in the late 1980s, revised and further expanded in 1994 and further revised in 2001. Participation in the programme expanded steadily following its introduction and recognition for CAO points purposes, with over 550 schools providing access to the programme in September 2023. Since its introduction, the education landscape, potential pathways, the world of work and policy priorities have changed significantly. This section will now explore some of the most significant changes in the context of the Link Modules.

Post-primary education

From a curriculum perspective, there have been many significant developments. The Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015) outlined a revised junior cycle which included new subject specifications for all subjects with broader assessment arrangements and placed a renewed focus on skill development through the embedding of key skills across the curriculum. At senior cycle, the publication of the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022) set out an agreed purpose for senior cycle education and outlines a vision for the redevelopment of senior cycle that is underpinned by a set of guiding principles. Responding to the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022a) in March 2022, Minister Foley initiated a programme of senior cycle redevelopment. As part of this redevelopment, a set of student key competencies have been identified for integration across learning outcomes in new and redeveloped subjects and modules.

Within the broader education policy landscape, the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 focuses on the potential of digital technology within the curriculum and places an increased emphasis on the role of digital technology in supporting and enhancing teaching, learning and assessment and in fostering the development of 21st century skills.

Further education and training

The establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) in 2020, signalled a renewed focus on further education policy and the overarching area of Further Education and Training (FET), thereby reinforcing FET as a key cornerstone of Irish education and training. The National Further Education and Training (FET Strategy) 2020 - 2024 details how the world of work and the way we work has changed and underlines the need to support the development of skills with a particular emphasis on creativity and problem-solving. The Action Plan on Apprenticeship 2021 - 2025 aims to establish an

approach to the apprenticeship model which focuses on fostering skills development and creating new opportunities in a range of occupations and industries, and are spread across the National Framework of Qualifications, up to Level 10. This expansion of post-secondary school opportunities for students underlines the need to consider how students with a wide variety of post-school aspirations can be supported through the redevelopment of the Link Modules.

Higher education

The landscape in Higher Education has also changed and diversified since the LCVP was introduced and is evolving to reflect contemporary society and the world of work. The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 proposes that undergraduates should be encouraged to spend more time in authentic work-related scenarios and envisions the development of appropriate modules and programmes which are both flexible and responsive. It also suggests that increased attention should be paid to core skills such as quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-working skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, and the use of digital technology as these skills are required and valued in the workplace and are key for student success in further research and study.

Broader policy landscape

Beyond education policy, a range of government policies and strategies such as the National Skills Strategy 2025 highlight the need to strengthen employer participation in the promotion and communication of career opportunities and to ensure work placement is available to all students in Transition Year (TY), LCVP and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The strategy also outlines a plan to review guidance services, resources and careers information offered to students to ensure that they are supported in exploring the range of pathways and career opportunities available to them. It further considers the skills required to support the Irish economy and notes that the 'increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the world of work' (2016, p.33) results in an overlap of the skills required across different sectors, thereby emphasising the importance of the development of transversal skills. Such skills are seen as relevant to a broad range of occupations and sectors and include creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, critical and analytical thinking, teamwork, communication, and business acumen.

Internationally, significant focus has also been placed on the importance of skill development. The Future of Jobs 2020 Report published by the World Economic Forum, highlights the skills that young people require for future study and work, as 21st century citizens, including creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, echoing those identified in the National Skills Strategy. This focus on skill development is an important consideration, as despite being one of the most educated workforces in the EU and OECD, research by the ESRI and others suggests a level of skills mismatch in the Irish workforce and suggests that more vocational options and pathways could help to address this, with post-primary education providing an initial starting point.

From a digital skills perspective, the Digital Transformation: Assessing the Impact of Digitalisation on Ireland's Workforce Report published by the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs highlighted the rapidly-changing working environment. It notes that 1 in 3 jobs in Ireland are likely to require the adoption of digital technologies, underlining the need to support digital skills development and to work towards counteracting a future digital divide. This is further underlined in the EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) which recorded 52% of Ireland's population in 2018 as not having basic digital skills. The National Artificial Intelligence Strategy published by the department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment explores the advent of Artificial Intelligence

and how it will transform the world of work and presents both opportunities and challenges for society and the economy.

Such broad-ranging and dynamic changes mean that redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules is now timely and provides an opportunity to ensure that vocational, work-based, and enterprise-related learning is relevant for all students, as they transition to different pathways and a range of post-school aspirations.

Section Summary

- The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme was initially introduced in the late 1980s and initially focused on enterprise, ICT, and vocational skills. The programme was expanded in 1994 and underwent significant reform in 2001, with the introduction of the two Link Modules: *Preparation for the World of Work* and *Enterprise Education.*
- Significant curricular developments have occurred since the introduction of the LCVP, namely the Framework for Junior Cycle, which focuses on broader assessment arrangements and skill development. More recently, senior cycle redevelopment has commenced, which includes a focus on the development of key competencies within subjects and modules.
- The range of pathways and post-school opportunities available to students has diversified since the most recent reform of LCVP in 2001 and the range of competencies valued for progression to the world of work, training, further and higher education has evolved significantly.
- National and international policies of particular relevance to the redevelopment of the Link Modules include those that place an emphasis on the development of transversal skills and competencies, in addition to those that highlight the importance of advances in digital technologies and skill development in the world of work and business.

2. LCVP in the curriculum

This section provides an overview of the opportunities for learning related to the Link Modules currently available to students within both the junior cycle and senior cycle programmes. It then focuses on the participation rates in LCVP outlining the uptake of the programme and explores the most recent Chief Examiner's report from the State Examinations Commission.

LCVP-related education in junior cycle

Learning in junior cycle includes a focus on the development of key skills across all subjects, short courses and Level 1 and 2 Learning Programmes . These key skills are closely linked to the transferable skills developed through engagement in the LCVP programme. Statement of Learning 22 within the Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015) places a specific focus on entrepreneurship where students have opportunities to take initiative, be innovative and develop entrepreneurial skills. The Junior Cycle Business Studies specification places a focus on developing a deeper understanding of enterprise through helping students to recognise opportunities and understand the financial, marketing, and operational functions of an organisation. Students of Junior Cycle Business Studies also develop an understanding of aspects of the world of work including the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, while also exploring how organisations can impact on the community in which they are based. Within the Wellbeing programme students can have access to guidance which often includes a focus on developing career awareness, identifying strengths and interests and considering possible career pathways.

LCVP-related education in senior cycle

In addition to the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, where students study two Link Modules on the *World of Work* and *Enterprise Education*, students in senior cycle also have other opportunities to study vocational and enterprise-related subjects and modules across the other three senior cycle programmes: Transition Year Programme (TY), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE).

Transition Year (TY)

The Transition Year (TY) programme in senior cycle has recently been reviewed and redeveloped as part of the broader programme of senior cycle redevelopment. As set out in the TY Programme Statement (2024), schools may provide enterprise-related learning as part of the TY curriculum through the Curriculum Dimensions, drawing on the myriad of enterprise resources and programmes designed specifically for TY. Many schools have previously provided opportunities for students to develop and run their own mini-company thereby applying their understanding of enterprise to a real-life scenario. Students may also engage with enterprise-related learning through the Student Dimension of Career Exploration outlined in the TY Programme Statement.

The aims of the redeveloped TY programme include a focus on expanding the student's experience and awareness of diverse future pathways and nurturing the student's capacity to sustain their growth and development through a process of lifelong learning. As part of the Student Dimensions of Career Exploration, and Civic and Community Engagement, students in TY will undertake work / community placement during the year-long programme and have

opportunities for involvement in their local communities to foster civic and community engagement.

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is a distinct, self-contained, two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. There are various modules available within *Vocational Preparation and Guidance*, which is a compulsory area of study for students following the programme. *Vocational Preparation and Guidance* was designed to enhance both students' vocational development and their understanding of the world of work. Students following the LCA programme undertake work experience throughout the two years with workplace learning opportunities forming a mandatory part of the programme. While students have several opportunities to engage with enterprise education and learning about the world of work, they cannot access the LCVP Link Modules under current arrangements.

Leaving Certificate Established (LCE)

Many subjects within the Leaving Certificate Established also provide opportunities for LCVP-related learning. Students in Leaving Certificate Business (which is currently being redeveloped as part of the first tranche of subjects within senior cycle redevelopment) learn about enterprise and the world of work while students studying Home Economics may learn about the world of work as part of the Social Studies elective. Career guidance is often provided to students in senior cycle to assist them with their 'educational and career choices' (Irish Statute Book, 1998) and this can include focusing on particular career-related strengths and investigating potential future pathways.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

As noted above, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme was first introduced in a small number of schools in 1987 to promote the development of enterprise, information, and communications technology (ICT), and vocational skills at senior cycle (SEC, 2015). The programme was expanded in 1994 with the introduction of Link Modules which focused on the broad discipline of enterprise and work, to strengthen the vocational content of the programme. The most significant review of the programme occurred in 2001, which focused on the use of information technology and personal vocational exploration, and culminated in the redevelopment of the Link Modules, Preparation for the *World of Work* and *Enterprise Education*, which were designed to be combined flexibly with each other and to be implemented with close connections with the vocational subjects. To support this integration of the LCVP Link Modules with vocational subjects, the programme was confined to students who were taking particular

combinations of subjects, known as Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) [1] from the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) curriculum. In addition to the vocational subjects which are characteristically practical by nature, the combinations of subjects complemented one another naturally and provided students with a lens to develop vocational skills and explore career options. Prior to 2022, students qualified for participation based upon their subject selection with a requirement for students to study two subjects from the Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs). This requirement, in addition to the language stipulation for students to study a course in a European Foreign Language was removed by Minister Foley in an initial step towards reducing the ringfencing of programmes in senior cycle (DE, 2022b) and an interim Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Statement was published.

Table 1 provides an overview of the two Link Modules.

Table 1: LCVP Link Modules

Module	Module Units	Overview
Preparation for the World of Work	- Introduction to working life - Job seeking skills - Career investigation - Work placement	Designed to develop students' general understanding of the world of work, introduce them to career research and provide them with the knowledge and skills to find employment.
Enterprise Education	- Enterprise skills - Local business enterprise - Local voluntary organisations / community enterprises - Enterprise activity	Aims to develop creativity, resourcefulness, self-confidence, and initiative, as students investigate local enterprises.

[1] The VSGs were designed to provide students with a focus for developing vocational skills and exploring potential career options. They included specialist groupings of subjects which complemented one another and Services Groupings which complemented one another from an enterprise perspective.

LCVP places a strong emphasis on cross-curricular interdisciplinary links between the subjects studied by the student and the Link Modules; and between the school and wider community (NCCA, 2022b). The Link Modules are almost entirely activity driven with experiences such as work placements, career investigations, mini-enterprises and visits outside the classroom considered an integral part of the programme, which are intended to be underpinned by active teaching and learning methodologies and supported with timetabling in double periods or blocks of three periods.

Student participation and assessment in LCVP

This section explores participation rates in LCVP, drawing on statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the Department of Education (DE), and provides an overview of assessment for certification. It also gives insights into student engagement with different areas of the current Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules, based on the most recent SEC Chief Examiner's Report (2015).

Student participation

Student uptake of LCVP has remained relatively consistent since 2019 with an average of over 22% of students taking the programme. This stabilisation of numbers follows several years of fluctuation, peaking at 30.2% in 2011. The SEC data presented in Table 2 does not reflect the policy decision to remove the VSG and language requirements, as this will only become evident following the 2024 examinations, but early insights into the impact of the removal of the eligibility criteria is provided in the section Insights from School Visits.

Table 2: Number of students undertaking the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules 2012-2023 (SEC Annual Examination Statistics 2012-2023)

Year	LCVP Link Module Candidates	Total LC candidates	LCVP as a % of total candidates
2023	12,848	58,006	22.1%
2022	12,460	58,056	21.5%
2021	13,532	57,886	23.4%
2020	13,454	57,569	23.4%
2019	13,130	56,071	23.4%
2018	13,369	54,440	24.6%
2017	14,038	55,770	25.2%
2016	14,655	55,707	26.3%
2015	14,924	55,045	27.1%
2014	15,276	54,025	28.3%
2013	15,684	52,767	29.7%
2012	15,848	52,589	30.1%

Assessment for certification

The two LCVP Link Modules *Preparation for the World of Work* and *Enterprise Education* are treated as a single unit for assessment purposes. Assessment is at a common level and is comprised of two assessment components, the Portfolio of Coursework, and a Final Examination Paper, both of which are assessed externally by the State Examinations Commissions (SEC), with 60% awarded for the coursework component and 40% for the final examination.

Final Examination

The final examination is a two-and-a-half-hour examination paper at common level taken by students in May of year two of the programme. The examination paper is composed of three sections and is worth a total of 160 marks or 40%.

- Section A consists of an audio-visual presentation, which profiles a business and / or community enterprise or organisation, after which students answer eight questions based on the presentation. 30 marks (18.75%) are available to students.
- Section B consists of a Case Study, shared with students a month in advance. The Case Study covers topics such as a profile of an entrepreneur, a business, or an economic issue. Students answer three questions, with 30 marks (18.75%) available.
- Section C requires students to answer four multi-part general questions from six drawing on both Link Modules. This section is worth 100 marks (62.5%).

Portfolio of Coursework

LCVP students submit a portfolio of coursework as part of the final assessment, in which they assemble a selection of both core and optional portfolio items. Students are required to submit six portfolio items (four core and two optional)[2] in March of year two of the programme, for a total of 240 marks or 60%. Table 3 provides an overview of the portfolio sections and requirements.

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[2] As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 revised assessment arrangements were put in place. Since 2020, students have been required to submit three core portfolio items from Section One, one of which must be the Curriculum Vitae and one optional portfolio item from Section Two. The number of marks awarded for the portfolio of coursework has remained the same.

Table 3: Structure of the Portfolio of Coursework

Section	Portfolio Item	Summary
Section One: Core items *Students submit all four portfolio items*	Curriculum Vitae	A two-page document that outlines a student's education and work experience, achievements, skills, and qualities.
	Career Investigation	A 300 – 600 word report on an investigation of a career and an evaluation of the investigation itself.
	Enterprise Action Plan	A 300 – 600 word enterprise action plan that relates to an enterprising activity that students intend to organise or an action they intend to take. Students plan, select and conduct research and evaluate the success of the plan.
	Summary Report	A 300 – 600 word report that summarises an activity in a concise and logical sequence, drawing conclusions and making appropriate recommendations.
Section Two: Optional items *Students submit two portfolio items of choice*	Diary of Work Experience	A 1000 – 1500 word document that records the tasks and duties preformed and the skills learned through their work placement, in addition to an evaluation of the placement considering a student's personal career aspirations.
	Enterprise Report	A 1000 – 1500 word report on an enterprise activity a student has participated in. The report summarises and presents the key events and findings of the activity and evaluates a student's personal contribution to the activity.
	Recorded Interview / Presentation	A 3 – 5 minute audio-visual recording of a student expressing their opinion and communicating effectively as they discuss activities they have engaged in.
	Report on My Own Place	A 1000 – 1500 word report that outlines an investigation on an important issue in a student's local area and presents and evaluates the main findings of the investigation.

Insights from the Chief Examiner's Report 2015

The most recent Chief Examiner's Report for the LCVP Link Modules was published after the 2015 cycle of assessment and provides data on candidates' choice and subsequent performance in both the final examination and portfolio of coursework.

Final Examination Paper

The report on the examination paper highlights areas where candidates performed well or could improve. It notes that misreading and / or misinterpreting the requirements of the questions, were considered the most common cause of candidates losing marks in questions, in addition to failing to develop answers to an appropriate level. Of particular significance, was the high number of candidates demonstrating difficulties with higher order tasks within questions, particularly when asked to evaluate. Evaluation skills are mentioned within specific learning outcomes in six out of eight units, yet the Chief Examiner noted that many students simply mentioned evaluation methods, providing insufficient analysis of the issue at hand.

Students demonstrated high levels of success in questions in section three of the exam, when they could apply learning developed from preparing portfolio items to support their answer. In seven of the eight units in both Link Modules, specific learning outcomes state that all activities should be linked to learning in relevant Leaving Certificate subjects. Students were asked to choose two LC subjects and explain their relevance in a career choice, with many students not choosing relevant subjects or omitting the link to a career. Students also demonstrated difficulties around their knowledge of, and ability to develop answers when asked to describe and evaluate aspects of their activities and learning across the Link Modules.

Portfolio of Coursework

The Chief Examiner noted that the Portfolio of Coursework was completed to a much higher standard than the written examination paper. Each portfolio item earns significant marks for word presentation, layout, spelling and grammar and this can be an area where students lose marks. It was observed that a good performance across the portfolio correlated to an engagement with a wide range of activities. Some of the activities that students engaged in however, were noted to not align to the specific learning outcomes in the Link Modules. The report also notes that activities students engage in, including work experience, must be completed within the two-year time frame of the programme.

It was observed that, in general, when students engaged in group activities, they did not always state their own personal aims or objectives in the activity, and even if they did, more often students did not link back to them when a portfolio item required a conclusion or recommendation. Students showed particular weakness in analysis and evaluation skills. This was evident as many students focused on an evaluation of their investigation rather than of a career itself in the Career Investigation, and was echoed in the Summary Report, where many students described the preparation of the activity rather than an analysis of the activity itself. In the Diary of Work Experience, students lacked an in-depth analysis of their own performance during work experience and how it related to their own vocational aspirations.

The report also provides interesting insights into the optional portfolio items submitted. 92% of students submitted the Diary of Work Experience in 2015, and 89% of students submitted the Recorded Interview / Presentation, making these the most popular optional items. In contrast, just 8% of students submitted the Enterprise Report, and 10% submitted a Report on My Own Place in 2015.

Certification and Recognition

Students who complete the Link Modules receive the same state certificate as students of the Leaving Certificate Established with the inclusion of the grade descriptor received for the Link Modules. Assessment of the Link Modules is at a common level, with three grade descriptors awarded as outlined in Table 4.

From 1999 onwards, third level institutions awarded points for the Link Modules in lieu of a sixth Leaving Certificate subject. Initially universities and Institutes of Technology (ITs) offered different levels of points for the modules, with ITs offering more points than universities. Contributors to the Points Commission in 1999 called for the equal recognition of the Link Modules by all Higher Education Institutions, as the skills and competencies developed were considered particularly valuable in a third level context, and the report noted an initial commitment to keep the level of points awarded under review as participation in the programme increased. In 2003, universities began to recognise the value of the Link Modules and began to offer higher points which eventually led to the points offered for the Link Modules across all Higher Education institutions being regularised. The points available are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: CAO points for LCVP based on grade descriptor achieved

CAO points for the LCVP Link Modules	
Grade Descriptor	Points
Distinction (80 – 100%)	66 points
Merit (65 – 79%)	46 points
Pass (50 – 4%)	28 points

Section Summary

- Students have multiple opportunities to engage in LCVP related learning. In junior cycle, the key skills are closely related to transferable skills developed through LCVP, while students have an opportunity to understand aspects of entrepreneurship and the world of work through Business Studies. In Senior Cycle, students can engage in enterprise and vocational education in Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Applied through a range of modules, while those engaged with the Leaving Certificate Established programme access LCVP related learning through a range of subject options such as Business. Students also have access to career guidance.
- The uptake of LCVP has remained consistent since 2019 with an average of over 22% of students taking the programme.
- The Link Modules *Enterprise Education* and *Preparation for the World of Work* place a strong emphasis on cross-curricular, interdisciplinary links between the subjects studied by the student and between the school and wider community.
- The Link Modules are treated as a single unit for assessment purposes. Assessment is at a common level, which is comprised of two assessment components—a Final Examination Paper and a Portfolio of Coursework. Both components are assessed

externally by the State Examinations Commissions (SEC), with 60% awarded for the coursework component and 40% for the terminal examination.

- The most recent Chief Examiner's Report (SEC, 2015) highlights that the Portfolio of Coursework is completed to a higher standard than the final examination. Students perform better on questions that are connected to the portfolio; however, they struggle with higher order tasks such as analysis and evaluation.
- All Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offer the same number of CAO points providing students with an option to use LCVP for HEI entry purposes.

3. Insights from school visits

School visits were conducted as part of the scoping work for this Background Paper. A representative sample was selected from the 26 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in LCVP curriculum developments. The six schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place in January 2024 and involved focus group meetings with 47 senior cycle students, 17 teachers of LCVP and 12 school leaders. The following section provides an overview of the insights gathered through these visits.

Successful aspects of the programme
Focus groups conducted with students suggested that the active learning aspect of the programme was considered both beneficial and enjoyable, with students identifying a number of different approaches to teaching and learning employed in the LCVP classroom, and appreciating the differences between the programme and the majority of their subjects. Teachers of the Link Modules also acknowledged the benefit of the active approaches to teaching and learning promoted through the programme and the opportunity to employ a range of strategies including groupwork and presentations. Both teachers and students highlighted the links with the community, world of work and enterprise as a strength of the programme and one that should be consolidated and built upon as part of the redevelopment.

In terms of approaches to assessment, certain elements of the portfolio were seen as particular strengths, including the development of the CV and Career Investigation. However, it was noted that there can be some overlap with student learning in Transition Year, and it was suggested that the Link Modules should ensure that there is an opportunity for progression and building on previous learning. This could be achieved through creating stronger links and greater alignment between student learning and portfolio items in areas such as work experience. Both teachers and students appreciated the weighting afforded to the portfolio and the incremental compilation of the portfolio, while the completion of the examination in May outside of the traditional Leaving Certificate window was also acknowledged, as it was seen as reducing student stress. In some cases, there was evidence that preparation of the portfolio items dominated LCVP class activities, and some students felt it would be more beneficial to reduce this focus where possible and allow for the development of greater links with the community, world of work and enterprise which could then be evidenced through the portfolio.

The removal of both the VSGs and the language requirement was broadly welcomed by schools. Most schools where LCVP was optional had seen an increase in student uptake with one school indicating that student numbers had tripled as a result.

Challenges encountered with the programme
Timetabling constraints were identified as a significant challenge for school leaders who felt that there were increasing pressures on the school day. A range of approaches to timetabling were noted in the schools visited, with some schools providing LCVP as an option for students exempt from the study of Irish, some providing it as an optional subject where students could study six subjects and the Link Modules and others trying to balance the demands of seven subjects plus the non-examinable areas of Guidance, PE, SPHE and Religion. A small number of schools had made the programme compulsory for all students since the removal of the VSGs, but it was noted that students were generally more motivated and engaged when they had chosen to study LCVP.

Timetabling pressures were also evident in the approach to the use of a team to teach the different aspects of the programme, with schools visited having reverted in the main to having an LCVP teacher for each class over the two years rather than a core team of teachers engaging with different aspects of the Link Modules.

Access to IT was also identified as a challenge in a number of schools with school leaders highlighting the increasing pressure on access to devices, but all participants in the review valued the opportunities in LCVP to develop and advance student digital skills.

Facilitating work experience was seen as a challenge due to the programme being provided in tandem with the Leaving Certificate Established. Schools generally facilitated a three-day work placement in line with the requirements for the Diary of Work Experience portfolio item, but the timing of this differed across the schools visited, with students where LCVP was optional often undertaking work experience during mid-term breaks or holiday periods to avoid missing class contact time in other subjects.

Raising student and parental awareness of the programme and its potential benefits was identified as a challenge by all those participating in the focus groups. Parents tended to conflate the LCA and LCVP programmes and it was seen as difficult for parents to understand the nature of the programme. Students were generally motivated to take the programme following engagement with the guidance counsellor or from discussing the programme with students who had previously studied LCVP. The value of the programme was noted as a significant factor in the decision to study LCVP and this is explored further below.

Perceptions on the value of the programme
During the school visits both teachers and students highlighted the value of the programme in terms of potential for skill development. LCVP was also seen as providing an opportunity to prepare for aspects of life not catered for within Leaving Certificate subjects and to develop valuable digital skills. The potential for fostering and improving oral communication and interview skills was also seen as a strength of the programme and one that could be built upon during the redevelopment.

Feedback from the school visits indicate that while some significantly value the programme due to the points on offer, many suggested some disappointment with the maximum points awarded for a distinction in LCVP, being comparable to a H4 at Higher Level. However, there was consensus that LCVP was not directly comparable to a subject, and that a large number of students use their points from LCVP for acceptance to Higher Education courses while a number of students highlighted the need to look beyond the narrow focus of progression to Higher Education and instead consider how the programme could be valuable for a range of pathways.

Links with other aspects of senior cycle
There was significant discussion about the overlap between the learning identified in LCVP and that experienced in LC Business and aspects of TY, namely work experience and enterprise education. Many students felt that LCVP was too closely related to Leaving Certificate Business with significant overlapping areas, and that the learning in LCVP should be more related to developing entrepreneurial skills, but at the same time, not replicate the approach to mini-companies already experienced by many students in TY.

There was a general consensus that the work experience engaged in TY by the majority of students had the potential to be very similar to that experienced as part of LCVP. The need to ensure that work placement provided an opportunity to build on previous work experience or personal part-time work was underlined by those taking part in the focus groups in addition to the challenges for students in securing a placement and the need for stronger links between work experience, the Career Investigation, interview skills and work placement.

Students felt that there was potential for greater linking in general across the two Link Modules and felt that there were a number of areas and opportunities in the current Link Modules that would facilitate this, while the portfolio items could also provide a vehicle to draw on student learning across both modules.

Updating the programme

There was general consensus that the Link Modules needed to be updated to reflect contemporary society and the need to provide opportunities to develop a broader range of competencies. It was felt that this could be supported through building in stronger links with the community, the world of work and enterprise, and through providing more opportunities for authentic engagement with same. Students felt that LCVP provided an ideal opportunity to consolidate and develop a range of competencies with many highlighting the need to build further on the oral communication skills developed throughout a range of subjects in junior cycle. The need for students to continue to develop a range of digital skills was also noted with some gaps in student digital skills identified. It was suggested that the programme could move beyond the focus on word-processing and document preparation to include a broader range of digital skills and applications, but also noted that supports, resourcing, and professional development would be required to support this.

Changes to the world of work were highlighted by many of the focus group participants, with students in particular highlighting the significant impact of technology, including Artificial Intelligence, and new ways of working as particular areas of interest to them. This was also echoed in discussions around the Enterprise Education Link Module with participants across the focus groups highlighting the importance of the development of enterprise-related competencies such as creativity and working with others.

Section Summary

- The importance of using a range of active teaching and learning approaches in the LCVP class and for building links to the community, world of work and enterprise was highlighted.
- The need to build on and progress students' prior learning and experience, particularly in TY was noted.
- Significant challenges arise around the timetabling of the programme, which include balancing the demands of seven subjects for students in addition to Guidance, PE, SPHE and non-curricular Religion for students. Access to IT and facilitating work experience for students also led to significant challenges for schools in terms of timetabling.
- There was support and acknowledgement of the potential positive influence of the removal of the VSGs on participation rates.

- There was support for the weighting of the Portfolio at 60%, but some evidence to suggest that preparation for the Portfolio may dominate class activities and should be more developmental in nature.
- The value of the programme was one of the most significant concerns, with some disappointment with the number of CAO points on offer in comparison to other LCE subjects. There was a general acceptance that the Link Modules were not comparable to an LCE subject and that a large number of students do use the points gained for entry to Higher Education, in addition to benefitting from the skills developed within the programme.
- There was significant discussion about the overlap between the learning identified in LCVP and that experienced in LC Business and aspects of TY, namely work experience and enterprise education. The need to ensure that the learning in the Link Modules would build on previous learning experiences was noted.
- There is general consensus that the Link Modules need to be updated to reflect contemporary society, providing opportunities to develop a broad range of skills such as oral communication and digital skills that can be applied within the modern workplace.

4. International trends in upper secondary education in the context of LCVP-related learning

This section considers LCVP-related education or similar learning experiences in a number of international jurisdictions. The jurisdictions explored below do not offer programmes identical to LCVP but have been chosen as they offer a range of subjects and / or modules and / or programmes that provide similar learning to that set out in the current Link Modules. Opportunities for such learning in each of the jurisdictions is set out under three headings: Preparation for the World of Work, Enterprise Education, and Assessment and Recognition.

Ontario

Grades 11 and 12 in Ontario are similar to the senior cycle phase of education in Ireland and build on learning in grades 9 and 10. Students can undertake a range of courses which are designed for a range of pathways. These include:

- University / college preparation courses which are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the entrance requirements for specific programmes offered at universities and colleges.
- College preparation courses which are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the requirements for entrance to most college programmes or for admission to apprenticeship or other training programmes.
- Workplace preparation courses which are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the expectations of employers, if they plan to enter the workplace directly after graduation, or the requirements for admission to certain apprenticeship or other training programmes.
- Open courses which are designed to broaden students' knowledge and skills in subjects that reflect their interests and to prepare them for active and rewarding participation in society. They are not designed with the specific requirements of universities, colleges, or the workplace in mind.

Preparation for the World of Work

The upper secondary curriculum in Ontario provides an opportunity for students to undertake courses related to guidance and career education which are 'designed to help students develop learning and interpersonal skills, identify their educational and career interests, and explore post-secondary educational and work-related opportunities' (Ontario 2006). These courses are offered across grades 11 and 12 and include:

- **Designing Your Future** (Grade 11) which focuses on exploring post-secondary pathways through career planning and links with skills, interests, and personal characteristics.
- **Leadership and Peer Support** (Grade 11) promotes active community participation and the development of communication skills.
- **Navigating the Workplace (**Grade 12) is focused on skills and habits for success in the workplace and provides an opportunity to develop the skills and habits required for success in the workplace.

- **Advanced Learning Strategies** (Grade 12) focuses on success after school and transitions to work / training or further and higher education and this module can be modified at a local level for students with particular learning needs.

All of these Grade 11 and 12 modules are offered as open courses meaning that they are common level with one set of expectations for all students. The modules can be taken prior to, or during co-operative education experiences as outlined below.

Students in Ontario also have access to a co-operative education programme which includes two co-operative education courses generally undertaken in Grade 11.
- **Cooperative Education Linked to a Related Course / Courses** is linked with another course or courses and provides students with an opportunity to apply their learning from a particular subject area in a practical setting outside of the classroom.
- **Creating Opportunities through Co-op** is an open course which allows students to explore a range of interests that may not be directly related to a subject area and includes inquiry-based learning.

Both modules feature a focus on health and safety, wellbeing and experiential learning and include a classroom component and a community-based component.

Enterprise Education
Enterprise education in the Ontario curriculum is provided through Business Studies with three entrepreneurship courses available to students. At Grade 11 students can take:
- **Entrepreneurship: The Venture:** which is a college preparation course which focuses on developing new business ventures and business planning for a new venture.
- **Entrepreneurship: The Enterprising Person:** which is an open course and explores the modern workplace, the skills needed to be enterprising and provides an opportunity to organise an event.

There is one enterprise-related course available at Grade 12:
- **Entrepreneurship: Venture Planning in an Electronic Age:** is a college preparation course which focuses on e-commerce and developing a plan for a digital business.

Assessment and Recognition
Assessment in Ontario is predominantly ongoing and school-based and includes a range of modes of assessment. Students are assessed based on both content standards and performance standards. Credits are awarded to students based on the course studied (including cooperative education) and these credits form the basis for the awarding of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Northern Ireland

The Post-16 Northern Ireland curriculum is available to students over the age of 16 and is offered at Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework and provides for Entry level (units in subject areas, vocational areas, and skills for life), Vocational (practical qualifications related to a specific job or career area) and General Certificate in Education (GCE) awards (A-level qualifications).

At Vocational Level 3 students can undertake a Level 3 Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, which focuses on the development of personal and employability skills. There are six different modules within the curriculum specification:

- Active citizenship
- Work-related activities
- Career planning
- Global awareness
- Enrichment activities
- Research and presentation skills.

Preparation for the World of Work

Each of the modules listed above features two student challenges and as part of the programme students must successfully complete three challenges from across three different modules. The options available are as follows:

- Active citizenship: community action / community placement
- Work-related activities: work experience / business enterprise
- Career planning: career options / application for higher education
- Global awareness: international travel and experience / global research
- Enrichment activities: skill development / leisure pursuits
- Research and presentation skills: research project / presentation skills.

In terms of the World of Work and Work Experience the most relevant challenges include:

- **Active citizenship** (community placement) which aims to develop an insight into the needs of others and an understanding of the student's own personal and social development through active involvement in an existing community project.
- **Work-related activities** (work experience) which aims to develop interpersonal skills and increase knowledge of the world of work by gaining direct experience of some of the rewards and demands of employment and an insight into how a business functions, through a work experience placement.
- **Career planning** (careers options) which aims to increase knowledge of employment opportunities, to heighten awareness of abilities, aptitudes, and aspirations in relation to the options available and to develop skills and confidence to present oneself favourably when applying and being interviewed for courses / jobs.

Many of the other modules offer opportunities for the development of key competencies relevant to the world of work.

Enterprise Education

Enterprise education in the Level 3 Certificate of Personal Effectiveness has a particular focus within the Work-related activities module where the second student challenge focuses on business enterprise. The aim of this challenge is to develop knowledge and practical experience of the processes involved in the operation of a business and to foster business skills through involvement in an enterprise project or business venture.

Assessment and Recognition

Assessment for the Level 3 Certificate of Personal Effectiveness is internal and is based on students providing evidence for each of the assessment units, and an organised portfolio which provides evidence of achievement for each assessment unit and successful completion of the required number of challenges. The Level 3 Certificate of Personal Effectiveness can be presented as part of an application to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and carries a UCAS tariff of 16 points.

Wales

The Welsh curriculum includes a focus on both entrepreneurship education and careers, and the world of work as part of the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate. This is an innovative qualification that promotes learning inside and outside of the classroom, providing learners with opportunities to select their own areas of study whilst advancing their skills of Planning and Organisation; Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; Creativity and Innovation; and Personal Effectiveness. The qualification which was introduced in September 2023 helps learners develop complex skills, attributes and behaviours and provides experiences which enable them to be better prepared for their future destination, whether it be higher education, apprenticeships, training, or employment.

The Advanced Skills Baccalaureate replaces the Skills Challenge Certificate which will be awarded for the final time in 2024. It comprises of learning across four sets of learning outcomes which are embedded across three projects:

- The **Global Community Project** which supports learners to develop and demonstrate application of the Integral Skills listed above whilst considering complex global issues and participating in community action to promote citizenship in a sustainable world and Wales.
- The **Future Destinations Project** supports learners to develop and demonstrate application of the Integral Skills whilst exploring future destination goals for life, employability and citizenship in a sustainable world and Wales.
- The **Individual Projec**t in which learners will develop and demonstrate application of the Integral Skills whilst planning, managing, and conducting an independent research project.

Preparation for the World of Work

The Future Destinations Project will be introduced in May 2024. In completing this Project, learners will consider their own attributes, capabilities, achievements, and priorities for future wellbeing, explore opportunities for personal progression to employment and the potential impact on wellbeing and demonstrate collaboration skills by working successfully towards a common goal.

Education in Wales also includes a framework to support learning about careers and the world of work. The framework includes different sets of learning outcomes for students aged 11-19. At Post-16 level, which is equivalent to senior cycle, students explore career pathways and develop their understanding of the world of work while developing transferable skills in the areas of conducting research and making decisions. The framework emphasises the importance of developing a real knowledge of the world of work and not just theoretical knowledge and the

importance of applying their learning within the contexts of their individual pathways and subject choices.

Enterprise Education
The learning outcomes within the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate includes the development of skills related to creativity and innovation which are foundational aspects of enterprise and entrepreneurship and support students in using creative thinking approaches, considering feasibility, and refining and developing ideas. The application of these skills and learning within the learning outcomes are assessed as part of the three projects completed for the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate.

Government policy also requires learners in Wales to experience entrepreneurship education across the curriculum. The focus on enterprise is made up of two elements, entrepreneurship education which focuses on students developing the attitudes and skills to realise their potential while also developing the competencies to be positive, proactive, and successful. The second element is enterprise education which provides students with opportunities for the practical application of these skills.

This focus on enterprise is supported by the ACRO (Attitude, Creativity, Relationships and Organisation) model which provides a structure to support entrepreneurship and focuses on developing a 'can do' attitude, being innovative and creative, developing relationships and being able to manage aspects of business, career planning and the world of work.

Assessment and Recognition
Assessment is based on the three Advanced Skills Baccalaureate projects which are internally assessed and externally moderated. The Individual project carries a weighting of 50% while the remaining two projects are 25% each. Each of the three projects is internally assessed and marked by the school or centre and externally moderated. The qualification is graded from A* to E and is equivalent to the UCAS tariff for A-Level subjects.

International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is offered in schools and centres internationally and includes a number of programmes. The upper secondary programme is known as the Diploma programme. Students can also undertake an International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (IBCP) which is a framework which focuses on career-related education. The CP framework includes
- a Career-related Programme Core
- a Career-related Study

which are taken in addition to two courses/subjects from within the traditional IB Diploma.

Preparation for the World of Work
The Career-related Programme Core within the IBCP includes four inter-related modules
- Personal and professional skills
- Service learning
- Reflective project
- Language development.

Two of these modules, *Personal and professional skills* and *Service learning* provides opportunities for students to learn about the World of Work.

- **Personal and professional skills** supports students in developing a range of attitudes, skills and strategies which can be applied to personal and professional situations and contexts. This course focuses on five themes including personal development, intercultural understanding, effective communication, thinking processes and applied ethics, all of which are considered in both personal and professional contexts.
- **Service learning** includes the development and application of knowledge and skills towards meeting an identified and authentic community need. As part of this module students may undertake service initiatives related to topics encountered in their IB Diploma courses / subjects supporting them in applying the skills, understanding and values developed in these courses and subjects. Strong emphasis is placed on skills development for the workplace as transferable skills that can be applied in a range of situations.

IBCP students are also required to undertake a **Career-related study** which is designed to prepare students for higher education, an internship or apprenticeship, or a position in a designated field of interest and provides an opportunity for students to apply and develop their skills in authentic and meaningful contexts. This may include completing additional qualifications or certification in a particular area of study including IT, finance, and sport.

Enterprise Education
The IBCP does not include an explicit focus on Enterprise Education. However, in completing the **Reflective project** as part of the Programme Core students have an opportunity to develop and apply skills in innovation and creativity. In completing the project, students identify an issue from their Career-related study and focus on a potential ethical dilemma, examine different perspectives, and evaluate the ethical dilemma.

Assessment and Recognition
Assessment of student learning in Personal and professional skills and Service learning is school-based, designed by the teacher, and can include a broad range of modes of assessment including interviews, reviews of student reflections where students select what can be shared, discussions with community and external partners, and student presentations. Assessment of the Career-related study is based on the area of study and includes input from the partner association or institution, while the Reflective project is assessed at school-level using a standard rubric from the IB programme guide. The IBCP is recognised by a range of further and higher education providers internationally for the purposes of progression.

Section Summary

- A number of jurisdictions offer opportunities for learning similar to that catered for in LCVP and aim to prepare students for higher education, apprenticeships, training and /or employment.
- A number of jurisdictions have recently introduced or updated these learning opportunities reflecting the value afforded to LCVP-related learning internationally.
- The programmes explored for this section of the background paper feature a strong focus on learning related to the world of work which is both classroom-based and workplace-based, developing student reflective capacity, project work and the development of key competencies.
- The jurisdictions examined place an explicit focus on career investigation with students having multiple opportunities to explore a particular career path in some depth.
- Many of the jurisdictions explored in this section include an emphasis on both local and global community and citizenship thereby providing students with opportunities to apply their learning to explore complex issues.
- Assessment in these programmes is multi-faceted with a focus on a range of assessment modes with a balance in some cases of school-based and external assessment.
- Each of the programmes explored is formally recognised for progression purposes either through the award of assessment credits, points for progression to further study, on an institution-by-institution basis and / or by certification.

5. Issues for consideration

This section sets out a number of issues for consideration in the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. These arise from the nature of the programme itself, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper.

Consolidating and widening the appeal of the programme

The removal of the ringfencing associated with the programme, in the form of the VSGs and the language requirement has broadened student access to the programme. LCVP is clearly beneficial for a wide range of students as it provides an opportunity to develop a range of key competencies relevant to students' future lives and diverse pathways. For many students it also supports access to Higher Education as the points gained are used for CAO purposes. However, since the introduction of LCVP the range of pathways available to students has greatly diversified and a redeveloped programme should acknowledge and promote this diversification.

The current LCVP programme also pre-dates the introduction of senior cycle key skills which have now been replaced by a set of student key competencies. Skill development is a highly valued aspect of the programme, and this redevelopment provides an opportunity to consolidate and advance the development of a range of key competencies in tandem with the opportunities for the development of these competencies in a range of subjects and modules. Schools appreciate the flexibility afforded to timetabling the programme, but greater guidance around timetabling in terms of contact time rather than class periods could also support schools in continuing to offer the Link Modules as part of their redeveloped senior cycle and in exploring how a range of subject teachers and the guidance counsellor could contribute to teaching and learning within the programme.

Programme assessment

The current assessment arrangements in LCVP are seen as beneficial for students with both teachers and students highlighting the opportunity to compile the coursework portfolio across the two years of study and to complete the examination in May, before the traditional start of the State Examinations in June. Deliberations around assessment will require careful consideration about how these aspects of assessment can be preserved while also considering how the coursework assessment could be more developmental in nature with stronger connections across the two Link Modules and provide greater opportunities for student reflection and the development of both personal and professional competencies. Consideration should also be given to the potential of digital technology within the assessment of the programme, both through the preparation and transmission of the portfolio and the multi-modal potential, including oral communication opportunities.

Programme certification and recognition

While many students benefit from the points awarded to the Link Modules for transition to Higher Education there is some concern that the level of points available is not motivating a wider range of students to study LCVP. This is a challenge as the programme is not a 180-hour subject and is taken by students at common level rather than at higher and ordinary levels, as is the case

with Leaving Certificate subjects. The unique nature of the programme and the diverse student cohort who take the programme must be considered in any exploration of programme recognition and it is essential that students who wish to use the programme for CAO points purposes continue to have the opportunity to do so, in order to ensure that students can have access to a range of post-school opportunities. However, some consideration should also be given to how the learning within the programme might be valued by a range of institutions and training providers including through the recognition of prior learning and / or additional certification thereby potentially making the programme more attractive to a wider range of students. Additional certification or recognition opportunities could also be considered in areas such as digital skills, health and safety and other aspects of workplace or community-related learning.

LCVP within a redeveloped senior cycle

Deliberations throughout the development process should consider the purpose and structure of LCVP and the significant benefit for students of the Links Modules within the overall redevelopment of senior cycle. This includes considering how they link with aspects of the LCE and LCA programmes especially those outlined in previous sections of this paper, while also considering how LCVP can support students in building on their prior learning.

The structure and learning set out within the current Link Modules *Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education* should also be considered in light of the removal of the VSGs, the introduction of senior cycle key competencies and the diverse pathways available to students. Changes to the 21st century world of work and a broader understanding of enterprise and entrepreneurial skills should also be explored as the Link Modules are redeveloped.

Links with the wider community, the world of work and enterprise are a valuable and often unique aspect of the programme, and it will be important to consider how these can be consolidated and further developed to provide a wide range of opportunities for students to engage outside of the traditional classroom setting. Opportunities for greater engagement with career guidance-related learning could also be considered as a means of enhancing these links.

Work experience is seen as a valuable aspect of the programme but could be reconceptualised in terms of the opportunities available to students through Transition Year and the growth in the number of students engaged in part-time work outside of school at this age and stage of learning. A cooperative-style approach to work experience could be explored which would provide for stronger links between the employer, the student, and the school, and for the integration of student reflection. Consideration should also be given to how a work experience or work placement can be managed within the programme both in terms of adding value to the student experience, establishing coherent links with other aspects of the programme, and ensuring that students are not missing class contact time in other Leaving Certificate subjects.

The importance of digital skill development

The work on the redevelopment of the Link Modules will focus on the senior cycle key competencies and in particular, the competencies that students should develop in preparation for future learning in life, study, entrepreneurship, further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and the world of work. The key role played by digital literacy in

supporting the development of key competencies will also require consideration. Furthermore, it is important to consider the potential for the programme to support students in developing a range of digital skills. The digital world and technology more broadly has developed and advanced significantly since the introduction of LCVP. This change not only affects where we work but also how we interact and communicate with others. Throughout the redevelopment it will be important to consider how the Link Modules can support students in developing and applying a range of digital skills required to engage successfully with the contemporary world as they prepare to leave school for a diverse range of further study, training, and work pathways.

Section Summary

- Greater guidance around timetabling and an exploration of how a range of subject teachers and the guidance counsellor could contribute to teaching and learning within the programme should be considered during redevelopment.
- There is some concern that the level of CAO points available for LCVP is not motivating a wider range of students to study LCVP. The unique nature of the programme and the diverse student cohort who take the programme must be considered in any exploration of programme recognition, ensuring recognition for these students is maintained, while exploring additional recognition of prior learning and / or additional certification.
- The redevelopment of the Link Modules should acknowledge and promote the diverse range of pathways available to students in addition to considering the potential of the Link Modules to build on student prior learning while exploring how they link with aspects of the LCE and LCA programmes.
- The structure and learning set out within the current Link Modules *Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education* should be considered in light of the removal of the VSGs and the introduction of senior cycle key competencies.
- Links with the wider community, the world of work and enterprise can be consolidated and further developed to provide a wide range of opportunities for students to engage outside of the traditional classroom setting.
- Work experience is seen as a valuable aspect of the programme but could be reconceptualised in terms of the opportunities available to students through Transition Year and the growth in the number of students engaged in part-time work outside of school at this age and stage of learning.
- Students need to develop, foster and apply a range of digital skills required to engage successfully with the contemporary world and prepare to leave school for a diverse range of further study, training, and work pathways.

6. Brief for the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules

NCCA has established a development group to undertake the task of redeveloping the curriculum specification for the LCVP Link Modules. The work of the Development Group is, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and approved by the Council in the form of the brief set out below.

This brief is designed to provide the basis for redeveloping the Link Modules. While the brief is derived from the key insights and issues for consideration identified in the previous sections of this paper, it is also guided by the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects (Appendix 1).

The redevelopment of the new specification for the LCVP Link Modules will take account of current research and developments in the field. It will remain student-centred and outcomes-based, and in general terms, the specification should be aligned with levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The specification will align to the template, agreed by Council, for curriculum specifications as set out in the *Technical form of curriculum specifications for subjects and modules in a redeveloped senior cycle* (NCCA, 2023).

The Senior Cycle Key Competencies will be embedded in the learning outcomes. The Link Modules will be available at a common level and will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 120 hours. The development will be completed in Q2, 2025.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will consider and address the following:

- How the specification aligns with the guiding principles of senior cycle and the vision for senior cycle education.

- How the specification can support continuity and progression, including how to connect with and build on related learning at junior cycle and in other senior cycle subjects and modules including Transition Year in addition to future learning in life, study, entrepreneurship, further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and the world of work.

- The rationale for LCVP, making it transparent and evident to students, teachers, and parents and how to further widen the appeal of the Link Modules and continue to promote broader uptake of the programme.

- How the student learning set out in the Link Modules within the programme specification can be coherently linked and developed across the two modules throughout the two years of study.

- How the specification can support the development of a range of student key competencies and the development of a range of digital skills relevant to future life, work, and study.

- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

- The assessment of the Link Modules aligned to the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects and modules (Appendix 1).

- How the specification, in its presentation, can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment, and can support students in developing links and enhanced engagement with the wider community.

- How to embrace and embed technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

- How to provide multiple, diverse, and appropriate opportunities for students to achieve and demonstrate their learning across the Link Modules.

- How to potentially enhance opportunities for recognition and certification of student learning in the Link Modules.

The work of the LCVP Link Modules Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this Brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the Development Group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

Appendix 1: Overarching parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects.

Executive summary

- The Minister for Education announced an update on September 20, 2023, on the approach to be taken to the introduction of new and revised subject specifications including how assessment would be addressed in those specifications. Specifically, each subject shall have an assessment component in addition to the terminal written examination.
- This assessment component will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
- Each subject is to have one written examination; typically marks for the written examination will be 60%,
- Typically, there should be two assessment components: One written examination and one other assessment component. However, there may be exceptions to this that are justified even after extensive consideration of the overall assessment load on students.

Introduction

This document outlines the overarching assessment arrangements and parameters to guide the design of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects/ modules. These subjects/modules are:

- Accounting
- Construction Studies
- Engineering
- English
- Geography
- LCVP Link Modules
- Physical Education.

This advice is informed by ongoing work with Tranche 1 subjects and will be amended, as appropriate, for future tranches which may take account of their subject areas and existing assessment arrangements.

The arrangements as detailed here reflect the policy direction issued by the Minister of Education that all subjects will have an assessment component, to be in a form that is not a traditional

written examination, for those components to be set and assessed by the SEC and thereby lead to a reduced emphasis on final examinations in June of 6th year.

Specifically, the arrangements for all assessment components as outlined in this document are framed by the Minister's announcement(s) on March 29, 2022, and subsequently on September 20th, 2023. Underpinned by the following understandings, the assessment components:
- will not take the form of traditional written examinations.
- will be set and marked by the SEC.
- will be subject to SEC arrangements for their completion, authentication, and submission.

In developing the arrangements outlined below, the following rationale for moving towards all subjects having another assessment component is central. This rationale is informed by deliberations on research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC, and on the assessment literature more generally. From this work, it is evident that these components have the potential to:
- **Reduce dependence** on written summative examinations and therefore provide for a **broader assessment system**; written examinations have an important role but can be seen as a 'snapshot' of learning and can lead to teaching and learning having an excessive focus on examination preparation; other forms of assessment can mitigate the potential for this narrowing of learning by assessing aspects of student learning better and/or more comprehensively than written examinations alone can do; or assess learning that is not readily assessable through written examinations.
- Support and enhance teachers' understanding and assessment of **key competencies** by contributing to a greater understanding of how students' knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are assessed.
- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to **reflect on student learning,** boost students' motivation to learn and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices.
- Extend the range and diversity of assessment opportunities; **spread the assessment load** and thus contribute to a reduction in or spreading of pressure on students.
- Build and develop **teachers' assessment skills and assessment literacy** as teachers support students in working through the assessment activities as detailed within assessment briefs or guidelines.
- Generate student assessment data which can help reduce the vulnerability of the system to future unprecedented or unexpected system shocks such as COVID.
- Allow for assessment opportunities that are more **authentic** than a system relying on terminal written examinations solely.

It is also important to note that a review of the assessment literature more generally also indicates that when introducing other assessment components, it is necessary to consider how to mitigate risks, for example, of:
- over-assessment of students
- over-rehearsal of assessments
- the assessments becoming overly structured, compartmentalised, repetitive, and routine.

As is already the case where other forms of assessment apply, the new assessment arrangements will be guided by the overarching principles of equity, fairness, and integrity.

Table 1 below sets out the general parameters and processes to guide the work of the subject development groups (SDG) as they consider the most appropriate assessment for every subject. The specific parameters for each of the Tranche 2 subjects are set out in Table 2.

Table 1: Assessment parameters and processes – general application to tranche 2 subjects

Considerations	Parameters to guide the work of the development group.
Nature	The purpose and nature of the assessment component will be clearly outlined in the subject specification and accompanying guidelines to support the completion of the assessment. Details will be provided on the nature of the component. Existing examples include: • research project/extended essay • oral assessment • performance assessment • portfolio assessment • creation of an artefact • field study • experiment/ proof of concept/ practical investigation. The subject specification and the accompanying guidelines will articulate clearly what the students are required to do, the form(s) in which it can be carried out and submitted, and the workload expectations associated with the assessment. The alignment of the assessment component to a particular set of learning outcomes from the subject specification will be provided, as well as details on which key competencies and associated learning outcomes will be assessed. This does not preclude the same LOs from being assessed in the final examination.
Weighting	The assessment component in each subject will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks. There will be the option for this weighting to be worth 50% in the cases of Construction Studies, Engineering and PE, and up to 60% for the LCVP Link Modules.
Timing	The SDG will advise on the time required for the carrying out of the assessment component. While the SDG may suggest when this may occur, the final decision will need to be made following consideration of the overall schedule of

	completion dates for all assessments across all subjects and this will be finalized by the SEC further to collaboration with NCCA and DE.

The date for completion of the assessment component by the student will be published by the SEC and this detail will not be included in the subject specification. |
| **Design** | The majority of assessment components will result in an artefact/document being transmitted to the SEC and assessed by the SEC.

In some instances, the design of the assessment may require examiners to visit schools to conduct the assessment but manageability at school and system level will need to be considered. |
| **Guidance** | Guidelines to support the assessment components will be specific to each subject. These guidelines will be developed collaboratively by the NCCA and SEC. They will be informed by the deliberations of the SDG during the development of the specification and will detail:
- the purpose of the component concerned i.e., what it is intended to assess.
- the nature of the assessment component/activity.
- descriptors of quality in the form of a graduated rubric and details on assessment standards at higher and ordinary levels if deemed necessary by the assessment method.
- details on the timing of the assessment (its duration and when it could happen).
- guidance on the processes that may be used for the administration of the assessment. |

Table 2: Parameters for assessment arrangements for each Tranche 2 subject

Subject	Current arrangements	Parameters for new assessment arrangements
Accounting	One written examination. (3 hrs)	Written examination: 60% weighting.

Assessment component: 40% weighting.

Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.

Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief. |

Construction Studies	Written examination (OL: 40%; HL: 50%) 1 paper (OL: 2.5 hours; HL: 3 hours) Coursework (artefact and portfolio) (OL: 30%; HL: 25%) Practical skills test (OL: 30%; HL: 25%) Coursework and practical are examined at a common level. Written examination is examined at higher and ordinary levels.	Written examination: 50% weighting. Assessment component: 50% weighting. Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels. Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.
Engineering	Written examination (OL: 40%; HL: 50%) 1 paper (OL: 2.5 hours; HL 3 hours) Coursework (artefact and portfolio) (OL: 30%; HL: 25%) Practical skills test (OL: 30%; HL: 25%) Coursework is assessed at Higher and Ordinary levels. Practical skills test is examined at a common level. Written examination is examined at higher and ordinary levels.	Written examination: 50% weighting. Assessment component: 50% weighting. Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels. Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.
English	Two papers with a 50/50 % split. Paper 1: Broadly essay and comprehension focused (2 hours 30 + 20 minutes reading time). Paper 2: Poetry, Literature focused (3 hours + 20 minutes reading time).	Written exam: 60% weighting. Assessment component: 40% weighting. Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels. Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.

Geography	Written examination: 80% weighting (2 hours 30 + 20 minutes reading time). Geographical Investigation: 20% weighting.	Written exam: 60% weighting. Assessment component: 40% weighting. Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels. Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.
LCVP Link Modules	Portfolio: 60% weighting. Written examination: 40% weighting Portfolio submitted with written exam in March of 6th year. Written examination has 3 aspects: Case study, audio visual and extended answer questions. Portfolio has combination of core and choice aspects and completed under supervision of class teacher.	Portfolio: 60% weighting. Written exam: 40% weighting.
Physical Education	Physical Activity Project: 20% (to a common brief) Performance assessment: 30% (to a common brief) Written examination: 50% (at Higher and Ordinary Level) PAP: over an 8- to 10-week period and submitted as digital format. PA: choose one of 3 physical activities; submit as digital artefact.	Written examination: 50% weighting. Assessment component: 50% weighting. Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels. Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.

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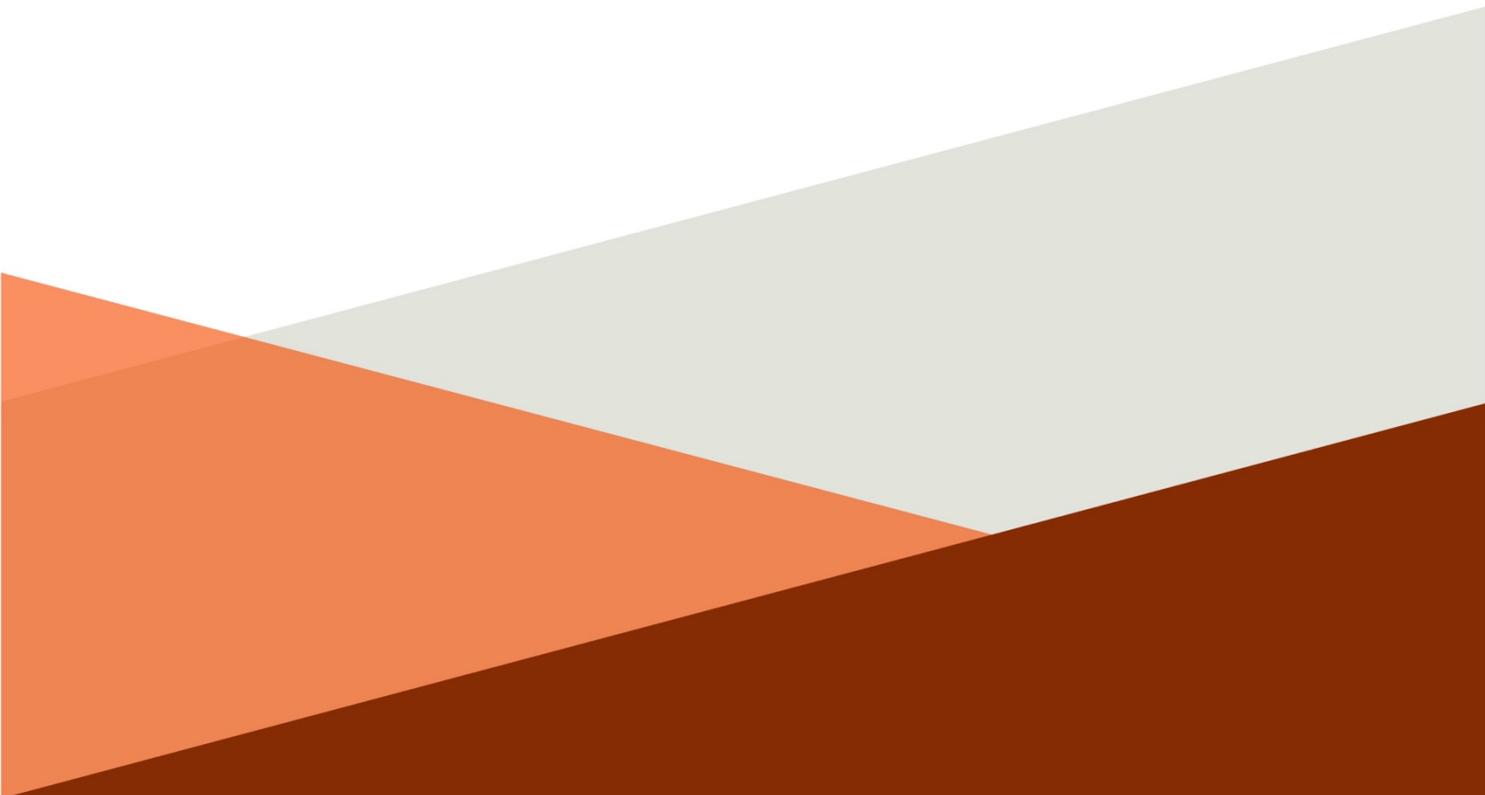
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