Ireland
Full Review

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Aim and purpose

- What is the stated aim and purpose of this stage of education, e.g. linked to entry to higher education, the world of work; a broad aim of personal and societal enrichment etc.?

- What is the context to the development of the aims and purposes for this stage of education and what vision do they present for the future of this stage of education?

- Are these aims and purposes influenced by an overarching national plan for education or do they reflect the influence of international organisations such as the OECD?

The aim of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest quality as measured by international standards. The mission statement of the DES is directed towards an education system that will enable individuals to:

- develop to their full potential

- participate fully as citizens in society, and

- contribute to social and economic development

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The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) states, in its framework syllabus documents / subject specifications that 'the general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure'.

Aims for Senior Cycle (upper secondary) education, for students aged 15- to 17/18 years, are that learners completing Senior Cycle are:

- Resourceful - they show their imagination, intelligence, intuition and other talents through curiosity, enquiry, open-mindedness, reflection, connecting learning, innovation, problem-solving and creativity.

- Confident - they develop their physical and mental well-being and become self-aware; have high self-efficacy; engage with ethics, values and beliefs; welcome opportunities; can cope with setbacks; and can effect positive change.

- Engaged - they participate in the social, community, national and international dimensions of their lives by showing respect for others; forming and sustaining caring relationships; making informed decisions; building practical know-how; taking interest in and responsibility for their social and physical environment; developing moral / ethical and political understanding; making lifestyle choices that are

sustainable; and by contributing to their own material well-being and the material well-being of society.

- Active learners – they pursue excellence in learning to the best of their ability and develop a love of learning by seeking and using knowledge, and understanding how knowledge is created; experiencing passion for, rigour in and commitment to learning; developing intellectual and critical thinking skills; exercising autonomy and independence in learning; managing their learning and making learning choices; setting and achieving learning goals; and pursuing learning qualifications.

Senior Cycle programmes have a particular emphasis on the preparation of students for the requirements of further education or training, for employment and for their role as participative, enterprising citizens. They aim to offer a broad curriculum, with opportunities for some specialisation, and to support continuity and progression from the previous phase. Senior Cycle seeks to support learners to shape their own future; develop knowledge and understanding; take responsibility for their own learning; and gain key skills and an understanding of the processes of learning. This phase also sets out to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of learning interests, aptitudes and talents, some of whom have special educational needs. All Senior Cycle Leaving Certificate programmes emphasise the importance of self-directed learning and independent thought; a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-reliance, initiative and enterprise; and preparation for further education, for adult and working life, and for lifelong learning.

Action plans for education

The overarching strategy statement for education is the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* (DES, 2016a). This is supported by detailed annual action plans (e.g. the *Action Plan for Education 2017* (DES, 2017a), published in February 2017), and by:

- the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People 2011-2019 – Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (DES, 2011)

- the National Strategy and Action Plan for Foreign Languages in Education – *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017e)

- the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion – *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES, 2005), and the revised plan for equality of opportunity launched in 2017 (DES, 2017d) (see the subheading 'Inclusion' for further information)

- the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* (DES and SOLAS, 2014), and

- the National Skills Strategy 2025 (DES, 2016b).

The central vision of the *Action Plan for Education* (DES, 2016a) is that, through adopting a 'whole-of-system' approach, the Irish education and training system will become the best in Europe. The Plan focuses on five high-level goals:

- improving the learning experience and the success of learners

- improving the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs

- helping those delivering services to continuously improve

- building stronger bridges between education and the wider community

- improving national planning and support services.

At the heart of the Action Plan is the aim to improve the impact of the education and training experience on the lives of all learners, particularly those who are likely to face greater obstacles because of disadvantage or special needs.

In terms of Senior Cycle (upper secondary) education, the *Action Plan for Education* and the *Action Plan for Education 2017* (DES, 2017a) focus on:

- Increasing subject choice for students in Senior Cycle education: this is viewed as important for student motivation and engagement and to equip them with the skills and knowledge to participate in a changing world.

- Ensuring that curriculum development continues to respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

- Improving transitions between the levels of the education and training system to better support children and young people. In Senior Cycle education in 2017, this involves the introduction of a new grading system and a new common points scheme for the Leaving Certificate (see the subheading 'Assessment and reporting').

- Creating a greater diversity of learning opportunities beyond school, with a view to enhancing capacity to meet national and regional skills needs, including strengthening apprenticeships and traineeships as an alternative learning and employment pathway for young people.

- Enhancing support for learners to make informed career choices through career information and guidance services, and through work experience which provides an opportunity for students to gain insight into the world of work and help in identifying possible career paths.

- Creating a stronger focus on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation to develop the national skills base and meet the challenges of growth in the modern world.

The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy (2011-2020) (DES, 2011 and 2017c) aims to ensure that all young people are able to read; communicate orally, in writing and in digital media; and able to understand and use maths in their everyday lives and in further learning. These are the literacy and numeracy skills that they will need to participate fully in the education system, to live satisfying and rewarding lives, and to participate as active and informed citizens in society. At post-primary level (age 12+), the strategy aims to improve outcomes by:

- ensuring that all post-primary schools set goals and monitor progress in achieving targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of their students in a school improvement plan

- extending the national assessment of maths and English reading to assess the performance of students at the end of the second year in post-primary education (age 14)

- increasing awareness of the importance of digital literacy and including assessment of post-primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading

- increasing the percentage of 15-year-olds performing at or above Level 4 (i.e. at the highest levels) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests

- reducing the percentage of 15-year-olds performing at or below Level 1 (the lowest level) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by 2020
- increasing the percentage of students taking the higher level maths exam at the end of Junior Cycle (lower secondary education) (age 15) to 60 per cent by 2020 (from 55 per cent in 2016)

- increasing the percentage of students taking the higher level maths exam in the Leaving Certificate (age 17/18) to 30 per cent by 2020 (from 28 per cent in 2016).

The national strategy for foreign languages in education – *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017e) has been developed in the context of Action 1.6 of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* (DES, 2016a), which aims to enable learners to communicate effectively and improve their standards of competence in languages and so fulfil the ambition of making Ireland's education system the best in Europe. The strategy seeks to improve language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment; diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned; increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages; and enhance employer engagement in the development and use of languages for trade.

Senior Cycle education in Ireland (pupils aged 15+) is also influenced by the broader *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* (DES and SOLAS, 2014) and the *National Skills Strategy* (DES, 2016b). The latter, for example, has six key objectives:

1. Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy.

2. Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.

3. The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education will be continually enhanced and evaluated.

4. People across Ireland will engage more in lifelong learning.

5. There will be a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market.
6. The Government will support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market.

The above policy documents, strategies and action plans sit within the context of the Programme for Government for the Government elected in May 2016 (Government of Ireland, 2016).

Structure of the education system

- How is upper secondary provision for students structured, e.g two-year / three-year / varied approach; around subjects or broad areas of learning; broad/comprehensive or specialised / narrow in focus?

- When does compulsory education end?

- What is the age profile of students in this stage of education?

- How well does the structure of the system reflect the stated aim as outlined above

Education is compulsory until age 16, or until a student has completed lower secondary education. By law, all children are required to attend school, or otherwise receive a suitable minimum education, from age six to 16. In practice, the norm is to start school at age five. Children normally attend primary schools from age five to age 12. They then transfer to a secondary (second level or post-primary) school of their choice and follow a three-year programme of lower secondary education, known as Junior Cycle, leading to the award of the Junior Certificate. (This is a national exam run by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).) They then move on to Senior Cycle (upper secondary) education for ages 15-18 and follow:

- an optional one-year programme called the Transition Year (TY) – an estimated 66 per cent of students follow this option – which aims to provide an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal exams

- and / or a two-year Leaving Certificate (Established) programme, or a Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), or a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The Leaving Certificate marks the end of Senior Cycle / upper secondary education. The Leaving Certificate (Established) is available in more than 30 subjects and students are required to take at least five, with the aim of providing them with a broad and balanced education which offers them some specialisation towards their future career. Students who follow the LCVP study a specified combination of Leaving Certificate subjects plus two vocational 'link modules'. Their Leaving Certificate includes a statement of these link modules. The LCA involves a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure. (See the subheading 'Specified curriculum within pathways' for further information.)

Lower and upper secondary education (Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle education respectively) is provided in second level, post-primary schools. These may be secondary schools, community schools, comprehensive schools or vocational schools. A network of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) is responsible for around 30 per cent of schools. All second level schools offer a mix of academic and vocational subjects.

The structure is summarised in the table below.

Year	Age range	School Level
Pre-school education and childcare	Age 0-3	n/a
Pre-school	Age 3-4	Pre-school year
Pre-school	Age 4-5	Pre-school year
Junior infants	Age 5-6	Pre-primary education provided in primary school; compulsory education begins at age 6
Year 1	Age 6-7	Primary school / first level education
Year 2	Age 7-8	Primary school / first level education
Year 3	Age 8-9	Primary school / first level education
Year 4	Age 9-10	Primary school / first level education
Year 5	Age 10-11	Primary school / first level education
Year 6	Age 11-12	Primary school / first level education
Year 7	Age 12-13	Junior Cycle (lower secondary second level education)
Year 8	Age 13-14	Junior Cycle (lower secondary second level education)
Year 9	Age 14-15	Junior Cycle (lower secondary second level education)
Year 10	Age 15-16	Transition Year
Years 11-12	Age 16-18	Senior Cycle (upper secondary second level education)
Years 10-11	Age 15-17	Senior Cycle (upper secondary second level education)

Available pathways / programmes

- What pathways / programmes are available to students - academic / vocational / professional / flexible?

- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

- At what stage are decisions about the student choice of pathway finalised and who has an input into these decisions?

- Where do these pathways lead - entry to higher education; accreditation for professional life; further training?

- What percentage of the overall cohort of students progress through each pathway?

- How many students progress to higher education / further education / workforce / apprenticeships?

Students in Senior Cycle education, aged 15-18, can follow a range of pathways.

On completion of compulsory phase Junior Cycle (lower secondary) education and the Junior Certificate, students aged 15-16 may opt for a Transition Year (TY) programme. Those who do not follow a Transition Year usually move directly into a two-year Leaving Certificate programme – either the Leaving Certificate (Established), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

The Transition Year (TY) is a one-year programme designed to act as a 'bridge' between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. It provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal exams. The Transition Year may be optional or mandatory for students depending on policy in an individual school; not all second level (secondary / post-primary schools) offer a Transition Year.

The Transition Year was introduced (as a pilot in 1974, and as a mainstream option in 1994) following concerns that students were leaving the education system at too early an age; had insufficient opportunity to sample subject areas

before making subject choices at Senior Cycle which would influence their career choices; and needed a greater focus on personal development, social awareness and skills for life. The key aims of TY are for students to:

- experience a wide range of educational inputs

- sample subjects which they haven't taken at Junior Cycle (lower secondary) level

- experience a strong focus on personal development, collaborative and experiential learning, learning in the community and work experience.

Transition Year offers students an opportunity to mature while engaging in group work, project work and self-directed learning; provides a bridge to enable students to make the transition from the more dependent type of learning associated with Junior Cycle to the more independent learning environment associated with Senior Cycle; and encourages the development of a wide range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

The introductory note to the guidelines for schools for the Senior Cycle Transition Year states that:

A Transition Year offers pupils a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity, before proceeding to further study and / or vocational preparation. It provides a bridge to help pupils make the transition from a highly-structured environment to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision making. Pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving

skills. The Transition Year should also provide an opportunity for pupils to reflect on and develop an awareness of the value of education and training in preparing them for the ever-changing demands of the adult world of work and relationships (DES, 1994).

The **Leaving Certificate (Established)** is a two-year programme that aims to provide learners with a broad and balanced education while also offering some specialisation towards their future career options. It leads to the Leaving Certificate exam - the terminal exam in post-primary Senior Cycle education, taken when students are typically 17 or 18 years of age (depending on whether they have taken a Transition Year). Syllabuses / subject specifications are available in more than 30 subjects and students are required to take at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LVCP) students choose a specified combination of Leaving Certificate subjects and study two additional 'link modules' which have a vocational focus. They receive the Leaving Certificate with an additional statement of the

vocational link modules they have followed. The emphasis in the LCVP is on enterprise and preparation for working life. The two-year programme combines the academic strengths of the Leaving Certificate (Established) with a focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work, and the community. It aims to cater for the diversity of student needs and to prepare young people for adult life, by ensuring that they are educated in the broadest sense, and develop the ability to cope and thrive in an environment of rapid change through developing skills and competences fundamental to both academic and vocational success.

The **Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)** programme is a two-year pre-vocational course intended to meet the needs of those students whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not adequately catered for by the other Leaving Certificate programmes, or who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education. It is a learner-centred course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-based structure. It aims to prepare students for the demanding transition to adult and working life by

recognising their talents; being responsive to their aptitudes, abilities, needs and interests; offering them the opportunity to develop in terms of responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge; and by developing their communication and decision-making skills so that they can achieve an independent and enterprising approach to learning and life. The LCA aims to provide opportunities for developing personal responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge; and to help students apply what they learn to the real world. It emphasises the development of participants' literacy and numeracy skills and personal and social development; provides opportunities to develop skills of self-evaluation and reflection; encourages strong community links; uses a broad range of teaching methodologies; and encourages experiential, participant-centred active learning, and practical project and portfolio work.

Entry to higher education is usually based on achievement in the Leaving Certificate (Established) or the LCVP (see the subheading 'Assessment and reporting' for further information).

Students usually make a decision on their participation in the Transition Year (TY) and / or on their Leaving Certificate programme towards the end of Junior Cycle education. In making this decision, they are encouraged to consider their abilities; what type of learner they are; what style of exam they are most suited to; and their after-school options and realistic goals. They are also encouraged to choose subjects they enjoy, are good at and are likely to need for their future career, but also to make a balanced choice that doesn't overly limit their options. They usually consult with their parents / carers, guidance counsellors and teachers.

The option of a Transition Year or of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme is not available for all students as not all schools offer the TY or the LCVP.

Statistics

40,451 students took a Transition Year in 2015/16, representing around 66 per cent of students. The Transition Year is offered in around 620 second level (post-primary / secondary) schools.

Each year in Senior Cycle education, around 95 per cent of students receive the Leaving Certificate (Established) – of which 26 per cent (around 15,000 students), who have followed specified course options and studied two vocational link modules, are LCVP students. The remaining five per cent (around 2,750 students) receive the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Year	Leaving Certificate (Established) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Progamme (LCVP)	Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)	Total
2013	52,767	2,810	55,577
2014	54,025	2,964	56,989
2015	55,044	2,887	57,931
2016	55,708	2,758	58,465
2017	55,770	2,773	58,543

2013 figures include 2,743 external candidates and 1,948 repeat candidates.
2014 figures include 2,578 external candidates and 1,768 repeat candidates.
2015 figures include 2,616 external candidates and 1,670 repeat candidates.
2016 figures include 2,819 external candidates and 1,445 repeat candidates.
2017 figures include 2,623 external candidates and 1,172 repeat candidates.

State Examinations Commission (SEC) (2017b). *Leaving Certificate Examinations 2017.* Press Release, 16th August [online]. Available: https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/BI-PR-39399451.pdf [1 December, 2017].

Around 90 per cent of each year's cohort completes Senior Cycle education. After that, around 55 per cent of students enter higher education, and a further 28 per cent go on to further education or training. Two reports on those who left post-primary education in 2010/11 were published in March 2016. These show that, of those who completed upper secondary education, 52.3 per cent progressed to higher education, 28.2 per cent went on to further education or training, 7.3 per cent were employed and 6.9 per cent were welfare recipients.

Specified curriculum within pathways

- How is the curriculum within these pathways organised? Is it broad / comprehensive / specialised / narrow?

- Are there core subjects that are central to the curriculum?

- What degree of choice is afforded to students within each pathway?

- Is the curriculum presented in subject specifications / syllabi / learning outcomes?

- Is there differentiation of learning outcomes in terms of stage and / or ability?

- What degree of autonomy do teachers / schools have in shaping and implementing the curriculum?

- What is the place of well-being / social, personal and health education (SPHE) / citizenship education within the curriculum?

- What competences / key skills are promoted in the curriculum?

- To what extent are skills and competences central to the curriculum structure? How do they feature i.e. are they embedded in learning outcomes?

- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

The curriculum an individual student follows is determined by their choice of pathway.

The 'mission' for the curriculum in the **Transition Year** is that it should promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society. Transition Year (TY) programmes should be designed to develop students' social awareness and social competence and their general, technical and academic skills, and the emphasis should be on interdisciplinary and self-directed learning. Each school offering a Transition Year designs its own programme within the context of this mission, and in accordance with guidelines set by the (then) Department of Education and Science (DES, 1994), to meet the needs and interests of its students. Transition Year programmes include the continued study of core subjects and the opportunity to sample new subjects. In addition, in establishing their own distinctive programme content, schools usually take into account the possibilities offered by local community interests. The aim is to offer a broad and balanced curriculum including four 'layers':

- Core subjects, which are subjects that students take for the full year. They can include, for example, physical education (PE), information technology (IT), maths, English, Gaeilge (Irish), and religious education (RE).

- Subject sampling, which may involve giving students a 'taster' module of the Leaving Certificate subjects available. This is with a view to helping them to make informed choices when choosing their Leaving Certificate subjects. Subject sampling may also expose students to new subjects they have not experienced before. It usually includes subjects and modules devised within the school and by external agencies supporting the programme in schools. Subjects can include, for example, environmental studies, science, Spanish, drama, history, business studies, and information and communication technology (ICT).

- The Transition Year specific layer, which includes involvement in initiatives such as 'Mental Health Matters', 'Mini Company' or 'Young Social Innovators', or courses in photography, tourism awareness, or psychology.

- The Transition Year calendar layer, which includes one-off activities such as work experience, outdoor pursuits, social outreach, field trips, visiting speakers, or a drama / musical production.

Schools, sometimes working with other agencies, may also develop Transition Year courses known as 'transition units'. Transition units (TUs) are curriculum components that are timetabled for approximately 45 hours. Alongside shorter modules and other learning experiences, schools may include a variety of TUs as part of their Transition Year programme. Transition units are not intended to be exam courses but are assessed as part of the teaching and learning in the unit. Assessment for TUs is ongoing and school-based. Sample transition units are available from the NCCA webpages.

The **Leaving Certificate (Established)** is available in 34 / 35 subjects:

- 13 language subjects – Gaeilge (Irish), English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Latin, Ancient Greek, Hebrew studies, classical studies

- 7 maths and science subjects – physics, chemistry, biology, maths, applied maths, physics and chemistry (combined), agricultural science

- 2 arts subjects – music, art (including crafts)

- 9 applied / business subjects – home economics (social and scientific), engineering, construction studies, design and communication graphics, accounting, business, economics, agricultural economics, technology

- 3 humanities subjects – history, geography, religious education.

In addition, a new Leaving Certificate subject 'politics and society' began to be introduced in September 2016 and will be introduced in all schools by 2018. The subject, which builds on what is a mandatory area of learning for all students in Junior Cycle (ages 12-15) has four main strands of study – power and decision-making; active citizenship; human rights and responsibilities; and globalisation and localisation.

Two further Leaving Certificate subjects will be introduced in September 2018 – computer science and physical education (PE).

Students are required to study at least five subjects for the Leaving Certificate (Established), one of which must usually be Irish. They will normally study six or seven subjects during Senior Cycle. All subjects are offered at two levels – ordinary and higher. Irish and maths are also available at foundation level, to cater for the needs of students who might have difficulty with these subjects at ordinary or higher level.

From the range of subjects offered for the Leaving Certificate (Established), students on the **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)**:

- take a minimum of five Leaving Certificate subjects (at higher, ordinary or foundation level), including Irish and two which are selected from one of the designated vocational subject groupings (see below)

- study a recognised course in a modern European language (other than Irish or English), and

- complete two additional courses, known as link modules, in the areas of preparation for the world of work and enterprise education

The vocational focus of the LCVP is achieved by arranging Leaving Certificate subjects into vocational subject groupings (VSGs), and through the provision of additional courses of study in work preparation and enterprise education known as the link modules. The vocational subject groupings (VSGs) from which students select two are reviewed annually and new combinations of subjects are introduced in response to changing needs. There are two groups of VSGs – specialist groupings which consist of subjects which complement one another naturally, and service groupings which comprise subjects which complement one another in a commercial context. The VSGs for 2017/18 are summarised in the table which follows.

Vocational subject groupings (VSGs) 2017/18

Specialist groupings	
1.	Construction studies; engineering; design and communication graphics; technology – students select any two
2.	Physics and construction studies, or engineering, or technology, or design and communication graphics
3.	Agricultural science and construction studies, or engineering, or technology, or design and communication graphics
4.	Agricultural science and chemistry, or physics, or physics / chemistry
5.	Home economics; agricultural science; biology – students select any two
6.	Home economics; agricultural science; biology – students select any two
7.	Accounting; business; economics – students select any two
8.	Physics and chemistry
9.	Biology and chemistry, or physics, or physics / chemistry
10.	Biology and agricultural science
11.	Art – design option or craft option and design and communication graphics
Service groupings	
12.	Engineering, or technology, or construction studies, or design and communication graphics and accounting, or business, or economics
13.	Home economics and accounting, or business, or economics
14.	Agricultural science and accounting, or business, or economics
15.	Art - design or craftwork option - and accounting, or business, or economics
16.	Music and accounting, or business, or economics

The school has discretion in determining what constitutes a recognised course in a modern European language for the LCVP and there are various options open to students. They may take a language at Junior Certificate (lower secondary) level or the school's language teacher can devise a school programme in the language. Students may also follow a Leaving Certificate modern European language course, or a vocational (FETAC, Further Education and Training Awards Council) module. Students must take the language class for a minimum of one class period per week, or equivalent, over the two years of the programme within school time. It is not assessed externally; the school can decide how to assess the course.

The link modules are delivered as an integrated unit in conjunction with the vocational subject groupings over the two years of the programme.

The preparation for the world of work module is designed to develop students' general understanding of the world of work and provide them with the knowledge and skills to find employment. As part of this module each student is expected to research and investigate local employment opportunities / complete

a career investigation; develop job seeking skills such as letter writing, CV presentation and interview techniques; engage in a work experience or work shadowing placement to gain practical experience of the work of work; and interview a person in a career area that interests them.

The enterprise education module aims to develop creativity, resourcefulness, self-confidence and initiative. Students are encouraged to meet and interview enterprising people on site and in the classroom; investigate and organise visits to local business and community enterprises; and to plan and undertake interesting activities, such as their own enterprise projects, as vehicles of learning to build self-confidence, creativity, and initiative and to develop teamwork, communication and computer skills. The content of the module is flexible to allow a school to utilise local resources and enable learning to take place in as wide a variety of settings as possible.

Typically, LCVP students take seven Leaving Certificate subjects plus the link modules.

In general, Leaving

Certificate subjects are designed to be delivered over 180 hours of learning per subject over the two-year period. Subject content is determined by subject syllabuses / specifications and prescribed materials for the Leaving Certificate exams which are available online.

In addition to the subjects in which the Leaving Certificate is normally available, some European Union (EU) students may take Leaving Certificate exams in one of a range of 'non-curricular EU languages'. These students must be following a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate, come from a member state of the EU, speak the language in which they wish to take the exam as their mother tongue, and be studying Leaving Certificate English. The available non-curricular EU language Leaving Certificate subjects are Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Slovenian, Modern Greek, Finnish, Polish, Estonian, Slovakian, Swedish, Czech, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, and Croatian.

The two-year **Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)** programme is modular and

credit based. The maximum number of credits a student can achieve is 200. These credits are gained during four half-year blocks, known as sessions, which make up the course, and achievement is credited in each session.

The curriculum comprises courses (modules) in three main areas: vocational preparation, general education, and vocational education. A module is of 30 hours' duration and, over the two-year duration of the programme, participants complete 44 modules.

In vocational preparation, students follow modules in vocational preparation and guidance, and in English and communication. In general education, they study arts education (drama, dance, visual arts, music), social education, languages (Irish and a modern European language), and leisure and recreation (including physical education, PE). In the vocational education area, they study mathematical applications and information technology, and select two vocational specialisms from a range of 11 available subject areas:

- agriculture / horticulture
- hotel, catering and tourism

- engineering

- technology

- office skills and retail distribution

- community care

- construction / manufacturing

- craft and design

- information technology (IT)

- hair care

- leisure studies.

In total, students are required to take courses in each of the areas in the table below.

Schools must make elective modules available to students. In doing so, they choose from the available suite of modules and courses, including modules in science and religious education. Should schools wish to develop a new course or module to suit local needs or interests, these courses / modules must be submitted to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to undergo a process of validation, and can then be implemented subject to final approval by the Department of Education and Skills.

Courses	Number of modules
Vocational preparation	
Vocational preparation and guidance	8
English and communication	4
Vocational education	
Vocational specialisms (two full courses)	8 (4 x 2)
Mathematical applications	4
Introduction to information and communication technology	2
General education	
Social education	6
Languages – Irish (Gaeilge)	2
Languages – modern European language	2
Arts education (dance, drama, music, visual arts)	2
Leisure and recreation (including PE)	2
Elective modules	4
Total modules	44

In terms of the place of **well-being**, **social, personal and health education (SPHE) and citizenship education in the Senior Cycle curriculum**:

- Physical education (PE) is included as part of the curriculum requirements.
  - For Leaving Certificate students, it may be studied in two ways – as a formally assessed Leaving Certificate subject for those students who select it as part of their Leaving Certificate, or in accordance with the draft Senior Cycle physical education (SCPE) framework, which is in the process of development by the NCCA. The SCPE framework is intended for those learners who do not take PE as a Leaving Certificate exam subject. It has been developed as a flexible planning tool to enable schools to offer their Senior Cycle students access to a managed and coordinated programme of PE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum during Senior Cycle. It is recommended that a double period (two hours) per week is made available as the minimum requirement for teaching Senior Cycle PE (although this may take place in settings outside the school).
  - Leisure and recreation (including physical education, PE) is a compulsory subject for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Students must complete two (of 44) modules in this area.
  - Students in the Transition Year also study PE and may follow a Senior Cycle physical education (SCPE) framework programme and / or Transition Units designed for PE, such as a Transition Unit in sport coaching, for example.

- Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is also a Senior Cycle curriculum requirement. There is a similar framework for SPHE to the draft framework for PE in Senior Cycle education. Like PE, this recommends that students in this phase of education have the opportunity to study SPHE for at least two hours each week. The framework is built around five areas of learning – focusing on what is important for students in Senior Cycle to know, understand and be able to do in order to make healthy lifestyle decisions. The five areas of learning are: mental health, gender studies, substance use, relationships and sexuality education, and physical activity and nutrition. Students in the Transition Year may also be involved in mental health initiatives, outdoor pursuits or social outreach initiatives.

- A new Leaving Certificate subject 'politics and society' is being introduced during the period 2016-2018. This has four main strands of study – power and decision-making; active citizenship; human rights and responsibilities; and globalisation and localisation.

- Enhancing well-being in school communities is a focus of the *Action Plan for Education 2017* (DES, 2017a), which seeks to foster the personal development, health and well-being of learners and the wider school community, and to help to ensure that young people develop resilience, have respect for diversity, learn to create and maintain supportive relationships, and become active and responsible citizens in society. Actions for Senior Cycle education in the 2017 Action Plan include supporting schools in implementing the *Well-being in Post-primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*, which recommend that 'opportunities to promote the health and well-being of young people should permeate all aspects of school life' (page 14).

The curriculum documents for Senior Cycle education – mostly in the form of syllabuses / specifications for individual Leaving Certificate subjects – identify five key skills as central to teaching and learning across the curriculum. These are:

- information processing

- being personally effective

- communicating

- critical and creative thinking

- working with others.

These key skills are embedded within the learning outcomes for each subject and are assessed in the context of the learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are statements of the skills, knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes which it is expected learners will be able to demonstrate as a result of the learning associated with a particular subject (or strand / topic within a subject).

There is also a focus on the key skills of literacy and numeracy across all phases of education, including Senior Cycle, linked to the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy 2011-2020 (DES, 2011; 2017c).

Note: The key skills and learning outcomes are being embedded in the curricula for Senior Cycle education as these are being updated. This is happening as part of current reforms to this phase of education. The reforms also aim to:

provide for a greater range of modes of assessment (although there are no plans to move away from assessments which are externally set and marked for the Leaving Certificate) encourage active learning and innovation, and address issues concerned with rote learning and the predictability of exams.

These changes are being introduced on a phased basis as subject syllabuses are revised, and taking account of the changes which are being implemented in Junior Cycle.

Inclusion

- How is inclusion addressed?

- How are the learning needs of all students catered for, including students who have completed a reduced curriculum at lower secondary school, students with challenging behaviour patterns who find it difficult to function in larger classes, international learners for whom the language of instruction is not their first language, students with special educational needs?

- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

One of the overall objectives of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is to:

- support inclusion and diversity, particularly for learners with disabilities and special needs, those from disadvantaged communities and those with language, cultural and social differences.

DES policy supports including students with special needs in mainstream education where possible. This includes education for newcomer (migrant) students, students from minority groups and students with special educational needs.

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of the education and training system, and Goal 2 of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* (DES, 2016a) focuses on equity and equality of educational opportunity and ensuring that young people from different backgrounds and needs are adequately supported so that they can experience success in the education system. Goal 2 specifically aims to 'improve the educational outcomes of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs'.

The main policy initiative to combat educational **disadvantage**, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme was launched in 2005. For Senior Cycle education, it has an overarching goal of improving the number of students in DEIS schools who remain in school until their Leaving Certificate examination. This proportion has grown to 82.7 per cent for those students who began second level (post-primary / secondary) school in 2009 (and compares with a retention rate for non-DEIS schools of 92 per cent). The DEIS programme, which was reviewed in 2017 and a new action plan introduced (DES, 2017d), provides additional funding and a range of targeted support to schools identified on the basis of the socio-economic demographic of their pupil cohorts. The additional funding and support provided, which can include additional teaching resources, or priority access to psychological and behavioural support services, or to school meals schemes, aim to mitigate educational disadvantage and enable these schools to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities and / or at risk of social exclusion are prioritised and addressed.

Schools provide additional

language and / or learning support to meet the needs of **'newcomer pupils'** for whom English is a second language. They use language assessment kits for the accurate initial and on-going assessment of language proficiency of pupils that require language support, and teachers devise and deliver appropriate language programmes, and record and monitor pupils' progress. (To help parents of pupils for whom English is an additional language, the DES also publishes information on its website in six languages: Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Spanish and German.) The NCCA has produced guidelines to support schools in developing inclusive intercultural learning environments and in providing pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in a diverse society. It has also produced guidance on providing for pupils for whom English is an additional language. This guidance is available from the inclusion pages of the NCCA website.

The EPSEN (Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs) Act 2004 requires that children and young people with **special educational needs**

should be educated in an inclusive environment with children who don't have such needs, unless their needs are such that this would not be in their best interests, or in the interests of effective provision for others in the classroom. As a result, young people with special educational needs are placed either in integrated settings in mainstream classes; in special classes attached to mainstream schools; or in special schools (depending on their degree of need). (EPSEN defines special educational needs as a restriction of the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.)

Where placement in an integrated setting is considered to be the appropriate response, provision is usually supported by additional resources such as adaptive technologies, or special needs assistant (SNA) support, or both, depending on the pupil's assessed level of need. Special schools and special classes attached to mainstream schools

usually cater for a particular disability group and operate at reduced pupil:teacher ratios.
Note: The EPSEN Act is not fully enacted; some aspects of its requirements may not be fully implemented.

DES guidelines for post-primary schools on supporting students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms state that every student should be taught a curriculum that is appropriate to his / her developmental level and that, in matching programmes to student need, school leaders in Senior Cycle should examine the range of curriculum options available, including in particular the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The guidelines recommend also that all subject teachers should implement teaching approaches that facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs such as collaborative problem-solving activities; heterogeneous group work; differentiation; interventions to promote social and emotional competence; and the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment.

Students with special needs

may have an individualised education plan, or a Student Support File, which outlines targets appropriate to their specific needs. Outcomes for students are routinely assessed and recorded in this plan / file and used to review progress. Transition planning is important to prepare Senior Cycle students for the next stage of their education and adult life. Guidance (NCSE, 2016) recommends that this planning process takes place well in advance of students leaving school; involves consultation with the student, their parents and relevant external professionals; results in the development of a post-school plan identifying the student's next steps / chosen career path; and that, if students have an individualised education plan for their Senior Cycle education, this should include targets to help students to develop skills for the workplace or further / higher education. Post-school options for students with special educational needs include Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, which can act as a stepping stone to employment or to further studies; vocational courses offered by SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards; courses of apprenticeship training or of higher education

in universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education and private bodies; and employment.

Leaving Certificate exams are designed to be as accessible as possible for all students, e.g. by using clear and straightforward language and well-designed layouts. Some students with special educational needs taking Leaving Certificate exams may, however, need 'reasonable accommodations' to be made under the 'Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations', known as the 'RACE scheme'. Reasonable accommodations can include students being exempted from being tested on something that other candidates are tested on, such as having accurate spelling. They can also include use of the type of assistive technologies that students usually use in class, such as a laptop, or the use of screen readers or magnifiers; the provision of a reader; the provision of enlarged or braille exam papers or a scribe; or a rest break / additional time. The overriding principle is that these accommodations should remove, as far as possible, the impact of a disability on a candidate's

performance, and so enable a candidate with special needs to demonstrate his or her level of attainment, while ensuring that these arrangements do not give the candidate an unfair advantage over others in the same exam. Deaf students may study modules in sign language rather than in Irish / Gaeilge and a modern European language in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

An alternative entry system to higher education is in place for students with special educational needs whose disability has had a negative effect on their second level (secondary) education. The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) enables school leavers with a disability, under the age of 23, to access university places with a reduced points score compared to that of other students. Students still have to meet any minimum entry requirements and specific programme requirements. See the subheading 'Assessment and reporting' for more information on entry to higher education for students with Leaving Certificate qualifications.

Assessment and reporting

- How is the curriculum assessed?

- What variety of assessment modes and methods are in evidence? For example, external assessment / internal assessment / online assessment / portfolios / formative / summative / synoptic etc.?

- How does the system recognise varied learning / skills / competences?

- How does assessment link to certification / qualifications / a qualifications framework / selection for further and higher education?

- How is vocational / technical education assessed and accredited?

- How is achievement reported? What is reported?

- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

The assessment and reporting framework is determined by the Senior Cycle pathway a student is following.

There is no external assessment (state exams) at the end of the Transition Year (TY). The programme is usually assessed on an ongoing basis through a portfolio of achievement prepared by the school, and / or through school-based assessment of projects and oral, aural, practical and written activities. In addition, evaluation of activities such as work experience or community service will often involve the providers or hosts of such activities.

The guidelines on Transition Year programmes (DES, 1994) state that pupils should be assessed on all aspects of their TY programme as part of the normal assessment process in school, and that appropriate modes of assessment should be chosen to complement the programme, e.g. formative assessment; summative assessment in the form of an overall statement of pupil performance by teachers; written, practical, oral and aural assessments; reports of work experience; projects, portfolios and exhibitions of work; pupil diaries / log books to record personal progress; and rating scales / records of skills and key competences

attained. It states also that pupils should participate in the assessment process to improve their self-awareness and develop their ability to take responsibility for their learning and performance, and that the outcome of the assessment process should be a Pupil Profile. This should include a statement of achievement in all areas of study and learning activities engaged in during the TY and, although compiled in the main by teachers / tutors, should also include a significant contribution from pupils and, where feasible, observations from parents. At the end of the programme, each pupil should have:

- a completed diary / log book or journal

- a Pupil Profile and record of achievement from the school.

Schools offering a TY programme usually also develop their own Transition Year certificate for pupils. This is often graded at distinction, merit and pass levels.

Some modular courses open to TY students, such as first aid courses, or the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) have linked testing and certification.

The Leaving Certificate exams mark the end of Senior Cycle **Leaving Certificate (Established)** programmes and of the **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)**. They are external exams developed, operated and assessed by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) (www.examinations.ie) and include:

- a written, terminal exam – at the end of the final year of schooling - in each of the subjects a student has studied

- oral and aural tests in the subjects of Irish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Japanese

- practical exams in the subjects of engineering, construction studies, art, and music

- practical coursework in the subjects of engineering, construction studies, agricultural economics, and agricultural science

- practical coursework for the subjects of history, geography, religious education, design and communication graphics, and technology

- a combined portfolio of coursework for the two LCVP link modules (in enterprise education and preparation for the world of work) (60% of total marks for the link module)

- a combined, terminal written exam in the two LCVP link modules (40% of total marks for the link module).

The written exams take place in June each year and most Leaving Certificate (Established) subjects are assessed by exam only. For the new subject of 'politics and society', which will be available in all schools by 2018, 80% of marks will be awarded for a final written exam, and 20% for a report on a citizenship project (incorporating portfolios and reflective journals).

Exams are marked by examiners who are appointed, trained and monitored by the State Examinations Commission. They are typically experienced teachers in the particular subject. Provisional statements of results are issued to students by the SEC in mid August. At the same time, the SEC also sends the results electronically to the Central Applications Office to facilitate the processing of applications for entry to higher education (see

below). Students can also access their results via the Internet using a Personal Identification Number (PIN) and their examination number.

For the Leaving Certificate (Established) subjects – taken by students following the Leaving Certificate and LCVP courses - the certificate shows the grade and level achieved in each subject. Until 2017, this was spread over 14 grade bands (A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, D1, D2, D3, E and NG [no grade]). In 2017, the grades were reduced to eight bands – H1 / O1 to H8 / O8, which are awarded for results as follows:

Grade	% marks
H1 / O1	90 - 100
H2 / O2	80 < 90
H3 / O3	70 < 80
H4 / O4	60 < 70
H5 / O5	50 < 60
H6 / O6	40 < 50
H7 / O7	30 < 40
H8 / O8	0 < 30

The 'H' denotes that a student has taken a subject at higher level; the 'O' that the subject was taken at ordinary level.
For the LCVP link modules, an additional statement of the grade received is appended to the certificate. Link module grades are awarded as pass (50-64%), merit (66-79%); and distinction (80-100%).

Achievement in the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the LCVP is at levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) – depending on the grade achieved.

The State Examinations Commission publishes sample exam papers and previous years' exam papers. Marking schemes are also published, as are national level results for each subject.

Given the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate, which is a major pathway to higher education, candidates given their initial results may ask to view their scripts. They can then appeal their results, having compared their scripts with published marking schemes

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) results 2013-2017

Unsuccessful	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Unsuccessful	Total
2013	1,707	7,622	5,117	1,233	15,679
2014	1,730	7,538	4,750	1,256	15,274
2015	1,620	8,326	4,148	830	14,924
2016	1,870	7,454	4,291	1,022	14,637
2017	1,542	7,793	3,942	748	14,025

Source: State Examinations Commission (2017): published here

Assessment for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is through assessment tasks over the two years of the course, which take place on completion of modules, and through a final exam in each of the following areas:

- English and communication
- two vocational specialisms
- mathematical applications
- language (Irish and modern European language)
- social education.

Credits are awarded for the satisfactory completion of modules and 90 per cent attendance; for performance in seven student tasks; and for performance in the written, terminal exams.

There are 200 credits in total, available as follows:

Satisfactory completion of modules (and of four key assignments for each module) and 90 per cent attendance, internally assessed. Evidence of the key assignments can be presented in a variety of forms, e.g. written, visual, artefact, photograph, video, audio.	62 credits	31% of overall mark
Performance in seven student tasks, externally assessed These are practical activities which apply the learning from the range of courses / modules which students have taken. They may include, for example, the development of a product or artefact; the investigation of an issue or topic; the staging of an event; the provision of a service; or a performance by a group of students or an individual.	70 credits	35% of overall mark
Performance in final exams, externally set and marked	68 credits	34% of overall mark

Students who successfully complete the programme are awarded a Leaving Certificate at one of three levels – pass, merit or distinction, awarded as follows:

- 120-139 credits, 60-69% = pass
- 140-169 credits, 70-84% = merit
- 170-200 credits, 85-100% = distinction.

Students who acquire less than 120 credits or who leave the programme early, receive a 'record of experience'. Achievement in the Leaving Certificate Applied is at Level 4 / 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) results 2013-2017

Unsuccessful	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Record	Total
2013	552	1376	477	405	2810
2014	609	1496	406	453	2964
2015	544	1442	430	471	2887
2016	529	1369	396	464	2758
2017	588	1337	378	470	2773

State Examinations Commission (SEC) (2017b). *Leaving Certificate Examinations 2017.* Press Release, 16th August [online]. Available: https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/BI-PR-39399451.pdf [1 December, 2017].

Ongoing student assessment in post-primary schools is the subject teacher's responsibility and is an integral part of the learning process. Many teachers give regular tests within class periods to stimulate the learning process and, for pupils taking Leaving Certificate (Established) subjects, schools usually organise tests, often known as 'house exams', before Christmas and towards the end of the school year. These school-based exams are generally formal in nature and are set by subject teachers, individually or as part of a collaborative subject departmental process. Schools are required to provide access by parents to records regarding their children's progress. Reports giving grades or marks attained and some comment on progress are normally sent to parents.

Access to higher education

The Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) both give access to higher education. However, because of competition for places, a student leaving school in Ireland and possessing the academic qualifications for entry to a higher education institution is not automatically entitled to a place. Places are usually allocated in order of merit on the basis of points achieved in the Leaving Certificate. In general, prospective undergraduate students are not interviewed by the institution they would like to attend, although entry to some courses, such as art or architecture, requires portfolio submissions and, sometimes, aptitude tests. Subjects such as engineering and medicine may require applicants to have a particular Leaving Certificate subject, such as maths or science, at a particular level (ordinary or higher).

Applications for entry to undergraduate courses in universities, colleges of education, institutes of technology and some other institutions of higher

education are processed by the Central Applications Office (CAO). Applicants submit one application form which allows them to choose up to 10 courses from the higher certificate / ordinary bachelor list and / or up to 10 courses from the honours degree list. In both cases, courses must be listed in order of preference. The aim of the system is to process applications centrally and to deal with them in an efficient and fair manner. The participating institutions retain the function of making decisions on admissions,

Points scores for university entry are determined from the grades achieved in the Leaving Certificate subjects and the link modules (for the LCVP). With the introduction of the new grading system H1/O1 to H8/O8 for the Leaving Certificate subjects, the 'Common Points Scale' awards the following scores for individual subject grades:

Higher		Ordinary	
Grade	Points	Points	Points
H1	100		
H2	88		
H3	77		
H4	66		
H5	56	O1	56
H6	46	O2	46
H7	37	O3	37
H8	0	O4	28
		O5	20
		O6	12
		O7	0
		O8	0

A student's six best scores from a single Leaving Certificate exam session count toward their higher education points computation. A grade of H6 or higher in Leaving Certificate higher level maths is worth 25 additional bonus points.

In addition, all institutions of higher education set minimum course entry requirements – known as basic matriculation requirements. These can require prospective students to have:

- two H5 and four O6/H7 Leaving Certificate grades

- five O6/H7 grades, or

- three H5 and three O6/H7 grades.

The changes to the Leaving Certificate subject grading scale and the points computation, introduced in 2017, aimed to:

Grades from the LCVP link modules are allocated the following points:

Grade	Points
Distinction	66
Merit	46
Pass	28

- continue to ensure the relative value of ordinary level and higher level subjects in the points scale and so fairly reward scholastic achievement

- encourage the take-up of higher level subjects

- reduce the probability of students receiving the same overall points score and so minimise the need for higher education institutions to use random selection in the allocation of places

- continue to reward achievement in higher level maths.

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) gives access to courses in the further education and training sector, such as the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC). Those who achieve the PLC at Level 5 or 6 (on the National Framework of Qualifications, NFQ) may progress from there to higher education in institutes of technology. Students with the LCA do not, however, have direct access to higher education through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Those who progress to an appropriate further education award can become eligible for admission to some higher education courses in institutes of technology and, following that, to some degree courses in institutes of technology and universities.

Students with the LCA can also progress directly to employment. The programme places particular emphasis on preparation for the world of work.

Flexibility and transfer options

- What flexibility is inherent in the system for movement between or within pathways?

- What are the student transfer options?

- Can students combine study across schools / institutions?

- Can credits / certification be transferred? `

It is the stated policy of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) that all students should progress from their current year group to the next one at the end of each school year. In certain instances, schools may permit students to repeat a year. Nearly all students progress from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle within the same post-primary school and success in exams is not a pre-requisite for progression to the next year of schooling. As a result, success in the Junior Certificate exam is not essential for progression to the Leaving Certificate.

Students cannot normally transfer from one Leaving Certificate programme to another. They can, however, retake the Leaving Certificate programme if they don't receive the results they need and, each year, a small number of students opt to do so. This usually amounts to around two to three per cent of all candidates taking the Leaving Certificate exams that year.

Maths and Irish Leaving Certificate exams are available at an additional level – foundation level – as well as at ordinary and higher level. Foundation level is geared to the needs of students who might have difficulty with these subjects at ordinary or higher level.

Leaving Certificate students may also take Junior Certificate programme courses in French, German, Spanish or Italian as part of their approved Senior Cycle course, if their schools offer this option. Schools also have discretion in determining what constitutes a recognised course in a modern European language for the LCVP and the LCA.

Students who have left school without taking a Transition Year or Leaving Certificate programme may follow one of a range of options. They may have access to an employer-led craft apprenticeship programme; to a traineeship programme; or to courses offered under the Youthreach programme.

Craft apprenticeships are available for employed young people (aged 16+) who have chosen not to follow a Leaving Certificate programme. They are workplace- and classroom-based educational and training programmes aimed at developing the skills of the apprentice to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. The curriculum for each apprenticeship programme is based on uniform, pre-specified standards which are agreed and determined by industry. Craft apprenticeships are available in a wide range of craft trades ranging from agricultural or aircraft mechanics to plastering, or plumbing or electrical instrumentation to print media. They combine seven

alternative phases of on- and off-the-job training (three off-the-job and four on-the-job). The off-the-job phases are provided in a training centre or through a training provider. A craft apprenticeship usually lasts for at least four years

Young people aged 16 may also enter a national traineeship programme. This is an occupational skills development programme, which combines formal training with a local Education and Training Board (ETB) and workplace coaching with an employer. Traineeships are tailored to the needs of Irish industry and local businesses and offer programme participants occupationally relevant training and industry-recognised qualifications. They are targeted at occupations which are not designated as apprenticeships, but entail significant skills requirements which are best acquired through a combination of alternating periods of on- and off-the-job-training. The programmes, which last between six and 20 months, are available in areas including business, retail, care, construction, engineering, fashion and beauty, finance, information and communication

technology (ICT), hospitality, sports and leisure, and logistics. They combine transversal and technical skills development and are designed for flexible delivery, e.g. through online or face-to-face learning, or a combination of the two (as a blended learning course). A minimum of 30 per cent of learning takes place on-the-job.

Early school leavers may also enter a two-year Youthreach programme. This programme of integrated education, training and work experience is intended for unemployed early school leavers between the ages of 15/16 and 20, without any qualifications or vocational training. Provided in Youthreach centres or in community training centres, the programme emphasis is on personal development and the core skills of literacy and numeracy, communications, and information technology (IT). The programme also offers participants a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme, and may also include foundation and progression courses leading to recognised awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Examples of foundation and

progression courses offered include initial vocational skills training; information and communication technologies, including database applications; desktop publishing; digital media; and applied employment skills, providing training in areas including catering, information technology (IT), art and design, tiling, and painting.

Entry requirements for programmes outside Leaving Certificate or Transition Year programmes may also be flexible. For entry to a craft apprenticeship, for example, young people must be aged 16 or over and must also usually have a minimum of a grade D in at least five Junior Certificate subjects. If an applicant does not meet these criteria, he or she may still become an apprentice if they complete an approved preparatory training course and assessment interview; or, if they have a minimum of three years' relevant work experience. That said, in reality, many employers prefer to take on craft apprentices who have a Leaving Certificate qualification.

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

CAO	Central Applications Office	Processes and coordinates applications for entry to undergraduate courses in universities, colleges of education and institutes of technology.
ETB	Education and Training Board	The 16 Education and Training Boards operate some second level (secondary) schools. Policy, funding and co-ordination of the ETBs is the responsibility of the Further Education Authority, SOLAS.
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence	A standalone qualification that may be included as part of a Transition Year programme.
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council	n/a
n/a	First level education	Primary level education for children aged five to 12.
ICT	Information and communication technology	n/a
IT	Information technology	n/a
n/a	Junior Cycle	Lower secondary education for young people aged 12 – 15. Ends with the Junior Certificate (Junior Cert) exam.
n/a	Junior Infants	The first class in primary school catering for children aged five to six. It is not compulsory for children to attend.
n/a	Leaving Certificate (Established)	The Senior Cycle programme which offers learners a broad and balanced education and some specialisation towards a particular career option. Required for access to higher education.
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied programme	A modular and credit-based Senior Cycle programme focused on vocational education, general education and vocational preparation. Does not grant direct access to higher education.
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	A Senior Cycle Leaving Certificate programme which has a focus on technical and vocational subjects. Required for access to higher education.
n/a	Link module	The completion of two link modules in 'preparation for the world of work' and 'enterprise education' is a required component of the LCVP.

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	n/a
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications	See QQI.
PLC courses	Post Leaving Certificate courses	Courses of further education and training accessible to students with the LCA. Successful completion of PLC courses may grant access to higher education.
n/a	Post-primary (education)	Secondary education for young people aged 12 – 17/18.
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland	The QQI is responsible for maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which covers all awards in Ireland - in public, private, workplace and community settings.
n/a	Second level (education)	Secondary level education for young people aged 12 - 17/18.
n/a	Senior Cycle	Upper secondary education for young people aged 15 – 17/18.
SOLAS	*An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna*	The Continuing Education and Skills Service, which is responsible for policy, funding and co-ordination of the 16 regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs).
SNA	Special needs assistant	SNAs assist in the care and education of pupils with special educational needs. They may be appointed to a special or mainstream school.
SEC	State Examinations Commission	Responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the second level examinations of the Irish state: the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. The State Examinations Commission is a non-departmental public body under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills.
TY	Transition Year	An optional one-year programme for 15- to 16-year-olds designed to act as a bridge between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. It provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal exams.
VSGs	Vocational subject groupings	To receive the LCVP, students must study two Leaving Certificate subjects selected from vocational subject groupings. The VSGs are reviewed annually and new combinations introduced in response to changing needs.