

Submission to NCCA

Review of Senior Cycle Education

Submitted by Foróige, National Youth Development Organisation

Introduction

Foróige welcomes the review of Senior Cycle education and in particular the emphasis on the inclusion of young people and their voice throughout the review process. Senior Cycle comes at a pivotal time in young people's lives, a time where they are leaving adolescents and entering adulthood. Yet this is also a time where young people face many challenges and require an education system that meets their needs. There is a profound gap between the knowledge and skills students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need to excel in 21st century communities. There is a growing movement, echoed by this review, to address this gap and develop a more rounded version of student success.

We believe that if young people are provided with skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, planning, communication and teamwork and then given the opportunity to practice them they can not only have a positive influence in their own development but also in the development of Ireland's economic future.

Founded in 1952, Foróige has a long and highly respected tradition both nationally and internationally. The organisation has guided generations of young people to lead happier, healthier and more fulfilled lives. Today, Foróige works with over 50,000 young people and 6,000 volunteers across all 26 counties, every year. Or to look at it another way, one in ten of all young people in Ireland are part of Foróige.

Foróige was founded to enable young people develop through hands on learning (learning by doing) and to complement formal education in schools. Over the years we have developed a range of programmes and methodologies, which are evidence based, extensively evaluated and have excellent outcomes for young people. The skills developed by young people engaged in Foróige are those most highly sought by employers and skills best developed through non formal education.

Young people who are involved in Foróige are empowered to develop their own abilities and attributes, to think for themselves, to make things happen and to contribute to their community and to society. As a result, they develop greater self-confidence, self-reliance and greater capacity to take charge of their lives.

We believe that in order to make real, impactful change within the Senior Cycle, non formal learning must be valued within the formal system.

Purpose & Vision of Education

When we think about young people leaving Senior Cycle, we envision young people exiting equipped with a broad range of skills and knowledge, empowered to think for themselves, positively contribute to the world around them and ready for active participation in the knowledge economy. To achieve

this, reform to Senior Cycle education may have to be revolutionary rather than evolutionary, as outlined in the consultation document and this 'revolution' is needed now; without it, current and future generations of young people in Ireland will continue to be failed by the current education system.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, whose members include Microsoft, Apple and Cisco, identify these skills as the 4 C's;

1. Critical thinking and problem solving
2. Communication
3. Collaboration
4. Creativity and innovation

Education systems, by their very nature, can be slow to adapt. Therefore, non formal education programs are ideally placed to facilitate young people to develop and practice these skills. They bring a mix of innovative learning methodologies, including a strong emphasis on learning by doing, coupled with rigorous evaluation to ensure young people achieve the outcomes essential for success in today's world.

Achieving this vision for Senior Cycle education will require the creation of a full 3 year cycle. In this framework, year 1 will focus on the development of these skills, similar to the current Transition Year model, with year 2 and 3 building on this learning while also focussing on core subjects.

Programmes provided over the three years but particularly in year 1, should include an emphasis on entrepreneurship, leadership, active citizenship, relationships and sexuality, health and wellbeing and practical life learning skills.

This approach will ensure the curriculum is flexible and responsive to individual needs of students and allow for personalised, blended and mixed methodologies learning. Combining full subject curricula with these programmes also creates the real potential for the Senior Cycle to be constantly updated. A challenge currently highlighted by this review

Pathways and Programmes

The current Senior Cycle places an over emphasis on a single pathway for students to achieve 'success' measured only by the achievement of points. This needs to be balanced in favour of all young people by the provision of a multitude of individualised pathways capable of assessment throughout the 3 year cycle.

Allowing young people to choose modules within year 1 of the 3 year cycle provides the opportunity for them, with mentorship and guidance, to create their individual education pathways and collect 'credits' for achievement and learning.

Foróige has developed a suite of evidence based programme (listed below) using international best practice and backed by UNESCO, that have proven positive outcomes for young people in key areas. Across a range of disciplines, research has conclusively shown that programs that focus on

development of skills such as leadership, citizenship and entrepreneurship and engagement in local society, are related to positive social, psychological and personal development outcomes.

With a partnership approach between the non formal and formal education systems, these programmes could be made available to students in Senior Cycle in schools across Ireland in the very near future.

Assessment

A desire to broaden and rebalance existing assessment approaches, building on key strengths already evident in senior cycle assessment emerged from the review. It was also suggested that assessment could be further spread out over time. This could have a range of benefits giving students an opportunity to be assessed in a variety of areas which in turn will broaden what is assessed and what success looks like. Placing a value on non formal education within the formal education system creates the opportunity to recognise “service learning” altruism, empathy, volunteering and the practice and mastery of a wide range of skills. In the current Senior Cycle young people experience too much unnecessary stress feeling the pressure of single examination.

The new cycle need to explore ways to provide assessment arrangements that enhance second-chance opportunities for learners in general, scope ways to broaden assessment and examination approaches and methods so that students have opportunities to display a wider range of learning in a variety of ways.

This can be introduced through further developing existing assessment arrangements experienced in LCA, LCVP, TY and LCE, for example by exploring the possibility of utilising portfolios, interviews, task completion and accumulation of credits in aspects of senior cycle assessment for non formal education programmes.

Foróige programmes in the Senior Cycle

Our programmes strengthen the curriculum for young people to bring real and transformative change to the lives of the learners. Education is considered a key driver of Economic and Social Success for Individuals and Employers. A higher level of education can lead to series of positive outcomes for both the individual and society related to employment, higher salaries, better health, less crime, higher social cohesion, lower public and social costs, and higher productivity and growth (European Commission /EACEA/ EURYDICE/Cedefop, 2014). It is vital that together we can provide the highest standard of education to all young people in Ireland with equal opportunities for all. The cascading impact will positively affect their future careers, their families, their community and society as a whole. At the heart of the programmes is a belief that young people, no matter what their circumstances, inherently want to succeed in life and our programmes will create opportunities for young people to successfully navigate a successful career and a brighter future. It is the importance of a partnership between formal education and training and non formal education.

Foróige Programmes

1. The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship Programme

The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is a world renowned, youth entrepreneurship education and development programme. It is managed and provided by Foróige in Ireland and is affiliated to NFTE International.

Involvement in the Foróige NFTE programme improves the business, academic and life skills of young people. It gives young people the opportunity to create, develop and sell their product/service while learning skills in the areas of business planning, marketing and finance.

Research collated by Harvard University on the impact the NFTE programme concluded that:

- Career aspirations increased by 44%
- Interest in attending college increased by 32%
- Students' business knowledge increased by 20 times vs. control group
- Leadership behaviour increased by 13.2%
- Belief that attaining one's goals is within one's control significantly increased

Young people who engage in NFTE participate in a 40 hour (minimum) programme facilitated by a teacher or youth worker who has been trained in the delivery of the programme. The young people come up with a business idea, do a business plan and importantly trade in the real world environment. All through the process the young people are supported to reflect on what they are learning and how this can help them in their future lives.

2. Leadership For Life

This is a year long program which consists of 30 hours of taught material and 30 hours of practical work. The program aims to enhance the vision, passion and idealism of young people by teaching them key leadership skills and challenging them to use these skills for their own and society's benefit.

The program encourages young people to develop and practice leadership skills including critical thinking, problem solving, goal setting, communication and public speaking. The program is accredited in Ireland by the National University of Ireland, Galway with a Certificate in Youth Leadership.

3. Be Healthy Be Happy

The Health & Well-being Program is a holistic 12 hour program that explores mental, physical, social and spiritual health. This programme aims to engage young people in a process of exploring characteristics that impact their health and well-being, and to position them so that they have the tools to lead healthy, happy lives.

Topics explored across the four focus areas of include; nutrition, hygiene, stress management, substance use, healthy relationships, bullying, social identity, community involvement, problem solving skills, understanding and expressing feelings, strategies to deal with negative thinking, fairness, love and forgiveness, understanding mindfulness and practicing relaxation techniques.

4. REAL U (Relationships Explored & Life Uncovered)

Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered (REAL U) allows us to express and explore our own, and others, views on issues that affect us all around Relationships and Sexuality.

REAL U covers topics that affect us both personally, and in our face to face and online relationships, with our; friends, siblings, parents/guardians, crushes, partners and any other relationship we have, or will have throughout our lives! REAL U provides a safe space to engage in a range of fun activities while building knowledge, confidence and self-awareness.

It explores conversations around relationships, sexuality, as well as, our own personal development and journey in uncovering some of the tools for life:

5. Youth Citizenship Programme

This is a one year taught program which sets out to enable young people to explore pertinent social and cultural issues and examine how they can impact on society. The program is broken down into 3 components; awareness, action and evaluation. The awareness and evaluation components of the program takes approximately 20 hours to complete with the action component varying depending on the project chosen.

The program aims to instil personal responsibility so that young people are able to deal with the challenges of anti-social behaviour and drugs. The program also aims to help to instil respect and understanding of different cultures and religions and helps to create a more compassionate society.

6. Ready Steady Life

The Ready, Steady, Life programme aims to serve as a resource for youth workers working with young people who are preparing to make the transition to independent living. Deciding to leave home is a change that many young people go through as they make their way to adulthood. We believe that this change need not be a daunting experience for young people. This manual has been developed in conjunction with young people, who have already experienced living independently, to help make this transitional change as smooth as possible for other young people.