



NCGE submission to NCCA Consultation on Senior Cycle Review

November 1st, 2019

Preamble

NCGE is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with responsibility to inform the policy of the DES on guidance in education and training sector and to support the development of quality guidance practice in post-primary and FET. NCGE represents the Department of Education and Skills and Ireland at EU Commission level on the development of EU policy on lifelong guidance and was directly involved in the development of the guidelines and publications of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN).

The EU Council Resolution, 2008, on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies¹ states :

“...the definition of Guidance as referring to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.”

The following document outlines the submission of the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) to the NCCA Senior Cycle Review public consultation process 2019 in addition to the bi-lateral meeting between NCGE and NCCA in October 2019. Within this document, NCGE will refer to the term “Guidance” as the overarching concept for the provision of careers guidance, careers education/development and guidance counselling.

NCGE welcomes the NCCA review of Senior Cycle as this provides an opportunity to reflect the successes to date of the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the positive developments to date in the new Junior Cycle. NCGE also welcomes the fact that this Senior Cycle Review provides an opportunity to consider those aspects of the current system which are no longer fit for purpose in the context of lifelong learning within a new, nationally agreed senior cycle curriculum.

As the role of NCGE is to inform the development of guidance policy and quality guidance practice, this submission will focus, in the main, on the Guidance element of senior cycle and how this relates to the core curriculum in a revised senior cycle.

¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf

CORE GUIDANCE REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

NCGE recommends that NCCA refers to core legislation, DES documents and guidelines and NCGE resources developed with support of DES, to support the development of whole school guidance provision in post-primary schools as outlined below:

1. **Irish Education Act (1998) Section 9²** states that a school shall use its available resources to

(c) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.

2. **Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance.**³ (DES 2005)

The details within these Guidelines will need to be revised in the light of new curricular development, this document remains the core DES Inspectorate Guidelines stating that Guidance in post-primary schools is a whole school activity that is integrated into all school programmes and defining that:

Guidance in schools “refers to a range of learning experiences provided in developmental sequence, that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance”.

It is the requirement of the DES that a suitably qualified guidance counsellor is central to the development and delivery of the whole school guidance plan.

3. **DES Circulars⁴** published for each academic year clarify the allocation of hours to whole school guidance in each school.

Each school receives an allocation in respect of Guidance Provision. It is currently calculated by reference to the approved enrolment, including PLC students. Appendix 3 of the 2019-2020 Circular outlines the requirements for the development of the whole school guidance plan:

“Guidance plans should outline the school’s approach to guidance generally and how students can be supported and assisted in making choices and successful transitions in the

² <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html>

³ https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/ncge/uploads/pp_guidelines_second_level_schools_9c.pdf

⁴ https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0012_2019.pdf

personal and social, educational and career areas. The guidance plan should also distinguish between the competencies available within the school to support a student in situations where referral to the Health services or advising parents on the need to consider individual referral to a medical professional is warranted”

4. **DES Circular on Assessment**⁵ outlines the DES approved list of assessment tests for use in guidance and/or learning support in schools and the recognition of the requirement for guidance counsellors to be appropriately qualified and professionally competent in the use of such tests:

“This circular provides a list of assessment instruments, including ability and achievement tests and web-based resources that are approved for use in guidance and/or learning-support contexts in post-primary schools. The Register of Psychometric Test Use: guidance counsellors, which is maintained by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) (www.psychologicalsociety.ie) endorses the professional competence of guidance counsellors in the administration of psychometric tests and supports the implementation of good practice in psychometric testing in schools”

5. **Wellbeing Policy Statement**⁶

The DES requires that by 2023

“the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education” and “all schools and centres for education will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to promote the wellbeing of all their children and young people”

6. **DES Programme Recognition Framework (2016)**⁷ provides criteria and guidelines for the Higher Education Institutions providing post-graduate qualifications in guidance. HEIs are required to adhere to these guidelines in order that their graduates will be considered eligible for employment in post-primary schools and centre for Further Education and Training (FET) of the DES. This Review process was completed in 2019 with DCU, UL and Maynooth University applying for recognition of their programmes.

DES defined activities relating to the work of the guidance counsellor in *all education and training* service settings including post primary schools are outlined on page 8 of this Framework:

⁵ https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/archived-Circulars/cl0035_2017.pdf

⁶ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-2018%E2%80%932023.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Programme-Recognition-Framework-Guidance-Counselling.pdf>

- *Designing, delivering and evaluating guidance learning and developmental programmes relating to personal and social, educational and career development for individual, group and classroom settings*
- *Developing effective teaching, learning and assessment strategies for the guidance class*
- *Providing individual and group counselling to facilitate personal and social, educational and career development and at moments of personal crisis*
- *Providing labour market, learning and career-related information through Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and blended learning approaches*
- *Planning and organising workplace learning and establishing links with the wider business community, agencies and voluntary sector*
- *Using psychometric tests (i.e. ability and aptitude tests and career interest inventories) to facilitate career decision-making and personal development, and to support learning and educational choices*
- *Providing support to, and working in collaboration with, school and ETB management and staff in the planning, leading, delivery, review and evaluation of the guidance service/programme and the whole school guidance plan*
- *Working with parents (as appropriate) and referral agencies in facilitating the personal and social, educational and career development of students and service users*
- *Referring students and service users to external agencies and professionals, as appropriate*
- *Establishing close ties with feeder schools, where appropriate, and with centres of further education and training and higher education*

7. Department of Health CORU registration of Counsellors and Psychotherapists⁸

The QQI Awards Framework for Counselling and Psychotherapy⁹ outlines the qualifications standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists. This Framework is informing the work of the Dept of Health CORÚ registration process for Counsellors and Psychotherapists. NCGE, on behalf of the DES has submitted to the Dept. of Health, that Guidance Counsellors working in the education and training sector have a specific role (as outlined above) and therefore there should be a derogation of the term and role of Guidance Counsellors in this context. DES and NCGE do not agree that Guidance Counsellors should be registered under CORÚ as Health and Social Care professionals.

⁸ <https://www.coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/registration/>

⁹ <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Counselling%20and%20Psychotherapy%20-%20QQI%20Award%20Standards%202014.pdf>

The decision of Dept of Health and CORÚ will have a direct impact on the work of guidance counselling provision in post primary schools.

8. NCGE Whole School Guidance Framework (2017) ¹⁰

The Whole School Guidance Framework provides a resource to post-primary school management and guidance counsellors to support the planning, design and delivery of the whole school guidance programme in line with the requirements of the Education Act (1998). The Framework was developed by NCGE in consultation and co-operation with a national working group comprising NCGE, NCCA, NEPS, NAPD, DES Inspectorate and IGC.

The Whole School Guidance Framework (WSGF) is informed by national and international good practice in guidance delivery in schools, considering all of the relevant DES guidelines and requirements in ensuring provision through group/classroom activities *AND* one-to-one guidance counselling support.

WSGF outlines a continuum of support model for the school guidance programme, similar to the school support model of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): *Guidance for All, Guidance for Some* and *Guidance for a Few*. The continuum comprises a whole school approach to guidance through guidance-related learning to individualised supports for students.

The WSGF identifies three areas of learning to facilitate students' development in eight areas of competence. These include: *Developing Myself* (i.e. learning relating to ones' personal/social development), *Developing My Learning* (i.e. relating to educational opportunities and development) and *Developing My Career Path* (i.e. relating to career decision making and career development).

In 2017 - 2018 NCGE successfully piloted the use of this Framework with 16 schools nationally. Phase 2 of this pilot will continue in 2019-2020.

In 2019 NCGE provided CPD to over 220 schools on the use of the WSGF in their school with School Principals and Guidance Counsellors attending the CPD workshops as a school team. Evaluations of this CPD to date indicate a broad welcome for this approach and highlight the need for further classroom- based guidance resources for schools.

9. NCGE website www.ncge.ie provides links to all relevant DES guidance policy documents and related research. ¹¹

10. National Guidance Forum report 2007¹² provided an outline of the National Lifelong Guidance Framework with the guidance competences developed across the lifespan ¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework>

¹¹ <https://www.ncge.ie/policy/post-primary>

¹² <https://www.ncge.ie/national-guidance-forum-2007>

¹³ www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/nationalguidance/documents/NGF_Guidance_for_Life%20final.pdf

11. In 2007, NCCA published a Draft Curriculum for Guidance in post-primary schools. This document was never finalised.

12. The DES Indecon Review Report¹⁴ recommended the improvement of careers guidance tools and careers information; the implementation of a programme with the enterprise sector to highlight the benefits to enterprise of participating in career guidance; and to initiate supports for employers to facilitate career guidance inputs and quality work experience.
To develop such resources and programmes effectively, a core provision of careers education and career development within the whole school guidance plan and programme is required

GUIDANCE IN SENIOR CYCLE

In recognition of the DES definition of Guidance in Schools on page 1 above, NCGE proposes that Guidance should provide a core element of the new Senior Cycle programme.

In the context of The Whole School Guidance Framework encompassing Guidance Related Learning *and* Guidance for ALL, SOME and a FEW, guidance provision in Senior Cycle would include a compulsory time-tabled dedicated Careers Education/Career development module *and* time allocated to one-to-one meetings with senior cycle students.

This Careers Education/Career Development module could be timetabled along with core modules of CSPE / SPHE /PE as per the current Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme.

NCGE proposes that such Guidance or “Treoir” modules would be scheduled for 6 classes per year for each of 4th, 5th and 6th year and include opportunity for connections to a work experience module which could be included in 4th and/or 5th and/or 6th year as required and appropriate to the student.

Time-tabled Classroom/group guidance activities AND dedicated one-to-one guidance counselling sessions are core requirements for the delivery of quality guidance provision in senior cycle.

NCCA REVIEW CONSULTATION

In response to the NCCA outlined consultation paper, NCGE submits the following key points as discussed during the bi-lateral meeting of NCGE and NCCA:

1. **Purpose and vision for senior cycle emerging from the review**
 - Consideration in the Senior Cycle review should be given to clarification of whether senior cycle is designed to prepare students for end – of – school exams and entry to further / higher education or training OR is senior cycle the final element of our

¹⁴ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/indecon-review-of-career-guidance.pdf>

compulsory education system where we prepare student for life beyond education & school?

- The Senior Cycle review must be considered in the context of the RSE revised curriculum and the agreed developments with Junior Cycle reform
- Students require support for coherent transitions into senior cycle and into post – school opportunities
- Students require support to navigate through the range of subject choices and options and this will be even more necessary with extended range of senior cycle educational and vocational options
- Focused Career guidance and work experience have a role to play in supporting what NCCA refers to as “wise” choices
- Interagency collaboration is required at national level and at community / local and regional level to support senior cycle developments
- The Consultation paper refers to “Skills development” focusing on the development of intra- and interpersonal skills of self - management and organisation skills and the development of Life skills such as learning about the world of work, personal social / health etc. These concepts and personal skills development are included within the WSGF guidance related learning and competence development in Developing Myself, Developing My Learning and developing My Career Path.
- Skills development is possible with the development of competences through classroom / group based development of career development skills and not focusing just on consideration of choices for post- school activities.
- There is currently *too much emphasis* on the CAO process and systems. It is important that the Higher Education Institutions and Universities and CAO are involved in discussions about the changes required . Example: What is the rationale behind continuing with the requirement for 6 formal level subjects to plan for the Higher Education college applications, especially considering that “mature” student entry requirements are different, therefore alternative requirements already exist.
- Wellbeing and Stress: wellbeing is the responsibility of the whole school, all teachers, management and the guidance counsellor. “ Exam Stress” and “ pressure” can be overwhelming for some students, this adding to levels of anxiety and mental health issues for some young people. While some level of stress is appropriate and learning to deal with stress is a vital life skill, it is incumbent on us all to find an appropriate balance.
- Group teaching and use of digital technologies is important in all new developments I senior cycle and in the provision of careers education / development and guidance counselling in post primary schools.
- In guidance provision in schools, active teaching and learning approaches and development of portfolios is important.

2. Pathways and Programmes

There is an opportunity with the review of Senior Cycle to introduce vocational education and skills development as part of the core Leaving Certificate. Where there may be a view held by some of the wider public that the Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) is “less than” in value to the Leaving Certificate Established, combining the range of subjects available within the Leaving Cert. could reduce the mistaken opinions that LCA is “less than” in value.

- Enhancing career guidance at Junior Cycle level, as is required now would support subject choices decisions and career related decisions
- Revised pathways from the Leaving Cert into FET and HE needs to be addressed, especially if developing a more vocational approach in senior cycle. Opportunities arise here to collaborate with SOLAS on the development of FET related pathways during Senior Cycle and post – school options.
- Explore wider opportunities to access Traineeships and pre-apprenticeship programme in schools as part of the Leaving Cert, to develop a formal pathway and encourage parents to see this as a viable option for students
- Providing inclusion supports necessitates enhanced guidance supports i.e. a DES provision of minimum guidance hours allocation and school employment of dedicated qualified guidance counsellor in every school.
- Student groups considered “At risk” can be support through the Whole School Guidance Framework “Guidance for Some” and “Guidance for a Few” approach.
- Clarification is required that career education / career development is a key element of guidance provision along with the provision of one-to-one guidance counselling provision for the support of personal and social development and supports .
- Requirement for dedicated Post Primary school *Counselling* Psychologists (i.e. not NEPS Education Psychologists as their role is assessment not counselling) and suitably qualified Counsellors / Psychotherapists in accordance with Dept of Health – CORÚ. Opportunity here for partnership between DES and Department of Health. Thus, freeing the guidance counsellors to focus on the personal, social, educational and career developments, supports and planning for post school / lifelong learning options.
- Consider the opportunities to include work placement or part time work during school holidays as credit towards vocational modules – employers might be very interested in exploring this option.
- For students who do not enter or complete TY and therefore do not get work experience options, there is a need to consider this in the context of the wider senior cycle careers education module, so that every student will get the opportunity for work experience.
- Expand delivery systems and access to adult returnees to the senior cycle process

3. Curriculum Components

- The current process of a holistic education at senior cycle is welcome and should be continued. However, where students are choosing Higher Education or FET or employment as their post-school options, the level of engagement required with various subjects may differ.
- Combining major subjects with minor subjects or short / modular courses could allow for the breadth of learning required in a holistic education system. Credits for Short courses /Modular subjects could be included as part of the overall Leaving Certificate assessment - which lead to the overall Leaving Certificate - which could in turn be included in the CAO points process.
- Restriction of subjects offered based on the “teaching subject” of the teachers is no longer appropriate in supporting inclusion and wider holistic education. Consideration and exploration of a system for “shared teacher positions” at regional level (especially within the ETBs) is crucial.
- In the context of Wellbeing and general health developments, the continued inclusion of PE supports healthy lifestyle, helps concentration , helps students to de-stress and is promoted for a healthy lifestyle. Further opportunity here to engage with the Dept of Health.
- Careers education/ Career Development (i.e. the careers element of Guidance and work experience could and should be a module for Senior Cycle as outlined above. This could be facilitated with dedicated Careers education / Career Development classes in 4th and 5th year with class – based review programme and individual focus for post-school planning sessions in 6th year
- In the provision of Modular sessions, Careers education / career Development could be continued as per the current Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme and alternated with PE / CSPE / SPHE.
- **GAEILGE** in Senior Cycle. As NCGE is a national agency of the DES and thus supports the development of our national language, heritage and identity. Consideration and reference should be given to all relevant DES and government policies on Gaeilge.
- One option might be to include Gaeilge as a Compulsory subject at senior cycle, but student could decide whether taking this as a state Exam subject or a Modular (i.e. assessment based) subject would be more appropriate for his/ her future plans.
Maths, as above for Gaeilge would remain a compulsory subject, with different levels available as required . As an example, providing a distinction between Academic level Maths for Higher /Further Education and Training requirements, or Vocational /Life skills Maths i.e. Maths for life and work). Here the student would choose whether to take Maths as a State Exam or Modular subject for credits .
- Consideration of the DES Literacy and Numeracy Strategy could inform development of Maths at senior cycle level

- The final award of Leaving Certificate would combine compulsory subjects and modular / short courses and/or work experience module, all of which would involve appropriate accreditation and recognition.

4. **Assessment and Reporting:**

NCGE welcomes the changes to the landscape of assessment with the introduction of the Junior Cycle. The review of the senior cycle at large brings with it the potential to change the nature, culture and modality of assessment which NCGE welcomes as significant and ground-breaking. Changes to the system of assessment at senior cycle will have significant ramifications for mechanisms of application to further opportunities as they currently exist.

NCGE advocates for an 'inclusive' and 'student centred' system of assessment at senior cycle, one which attributes value to a broad spectrum of skillsets. This 'renewed' system of assessment will subsequently support an entirely 'inclusive' and 'student centred' system of access of to a range of (newly) valued pathways post-senior cycle. It is with this philosophy and a focus on 'inclusion,' 'student-centredness' and 'access to a range of (newly) valued pathways' that the following points are raised with regard to assessment and reporting at senior cycle.

NCGE recognises that 'the purpose' of Assessment is a key element in decision making around any change to the senior cycle system. The 'purpose' of assessment at senior cycle should include a means to:

- Access a wide range of opportunities irrespective of school context / perceived ability e.g. participation in 'The world of work,' practical links with Apprenticeships/ Further Education / Higher Education.
- Recognise a wider range of skills and achievements e.g. interpersonal / intrapersonal skills, the ability to work as part of a team, extra-curricular participation and associated skills etc.
- Support students' holistic development through formative assessment: Assessment should not be done 'for assessments sake.' The process of assessment would ideally be a learning exercise in itself.
- Support students' holistic development through summative assessment: Recognise wider-achievements in senior cycle education and value participation in school life in a summative way through certification in order that post-primary education be viewed as a worthwhile, cumulative experience in itself.
- Foster a culture of inclusion and acceptance: Being included and accepted, irrespective of their chosen path / direction / level of participation in senior cycle i.e. elimination of stigma within the system and amongst stakeholders (teachers, students and parents etc).

In consideration then, of this 'purpose' of assessment, NCGE advocates for a system of assessment which:

- Includes a broader range of assessment methodology (written exams, orals, project- based work, classroom- based assessments, portfolios, work experience records, personal

statements, reflective journals, demonstrations of activities within school life e.g. student council, etc)

- Includes a vocational element for all students e.g. work experience in Ireland or abroad
- Includes an optional interaction with opportunities in Europe . (For example the NCGE – Euroguidance Euro-Quest Module¹⁵ for Transition Years and consideration of Erasmus+ funded projects¹⁶ at school level)
- Is continuous and developmental in nature over the full duration of senior cycle (rather than one set of high-stakes exams at the end of the final year of senior cycle).
- Includes multiple, differentiated options for progression (e.g. a student can ‘bank’ a result or ‘repeat’ an assessment if necessary)
- Includes a range of subject options for students (in terms of the variety of subject content, subject level and number of subjects taken).
- Is inclusive and non-discriminatory: Ideally no element of the renewed senior cycle curriculum would be ‘downgraded’ by an assessment that in itself devalues the subject (e.g. CPSE was the one and only ‘common’ level assessment at Junior Certificate).
- Requires an E-portfolio of learning as part of assessment: showcasing ICT skills and providing students with a valuable interactive resource to promote themselves, their skills and their achievements in future situations i.e. a portfolio that serves as a lifelong asset (example Europass ¹⁷) students could transfer with the student to their ‘next step’ irrespective of the option they choose.
- Provides students with a newly designed Leaving *Certificate* designed in the context of the proposed E-portfolio showcasing key-personal achievements (academic, vocational, Europewide, extra -curricular etc) as a representation of the holistic development of the person within senior cycle education.

The role of Guidance in the context of assessment and reporting includes:

- Guidance will be imperative for students in navigating their way both with regard to subject choice in post-primary education and also where navigating future options is concerned.
- A Guidance Counsellor , through the careers education/ career development module would support the development of an E-portfolio with anticipated future interactions in the world of work / higher / further education and training in mind.
- Support with accessing and preparing for vocational work experience

5. Priorities, supports and next steps

Senior Cycle would include Guidance as a curriculum element with Careers education/ Career Development *AND* Guidance as a support element with guidance counselling through targeted supports in Guidance for Some and Guidance for a Few.

¹⁵ <https://euroguidance.ie/euro-quest>

¹⁶ <https://www.leargas.ie/programmes/erasmusplus/>

¹⁷

Priorities

- Development of a formal career guidance programme in Senior Cycle, developed in the context of the whole school guidance approach.
- Development of a curriculum for career guidance – i.e. for the delivery of Careers Education / Career Development, through implementing the NCGE Whole School Guidance Framework competences of Developing myself, Developing My career and Developing My Learning will support the career guidance provision.
- Access to appropriate Labour Market Information (LMI), with the development of online careers information and tools and Work Experience and review of same is crucial .

Supports and Next Steps

- A national information and promotional process will be required to inform students, parents and communities of the relevant developments in Senior Cycle.
- A co-ordinated approach with Higher Education Institutions is required to ensure changes to the progression paths to Higher education.
- Exploration of opportunities to include vocational education and skills training within the Leaving Certificate programme could be included in the development of the next FET Strategy 2020-2024, though early engagement with SOLAS
- Requirement for national DES funded upskilling programme for all post-primary guidance counsellors in context of the development of delivery of a curricular programme of careers education / careers development and the introduction and use of the EU Commission E-portfolio Europass.
- With focused approach at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle for guidance provision with specific curricular requirements for career development in Senior cycle - it will necessitate DES reviewing and allocating dedicated enhanced provision for Whole School Guidance in schools, with specific hours allocated to the qualified Guidance Counsellor/s.
- SEN and Students with other specific needs (e.g. English as a Second Language EAL) are supported through the provision of Guidance for Some and Guidance for a Few and career education and one-to-one guidance counselling tailored to their specific requirements.

IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NCGE welcomes the NCCA review of Senior Cycle and advocates for the exploration of opportunities and initiatives to develop a fit-for-purpose Senior Cycle programme for the 21st Century.

While we await the DES decisions on the recommendations of the Indecon report in the development on online careers information and tools and the Department of Health CORÚ legislation, the development of senior cycle requires consideration of all other developments in our country at this time, with the focus on inclusion and wellbeing for all citizens and a global outlook to our education and economy.

NCGE looks forward to working with NCCA on these developments in Senior Cycle and wishes NCCA every success with this process.

Submitted on behalf of NCGE

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