



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Background paper and brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Geography

March 2024

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Introduction

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

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

This paper provides a context for the review of Leaving Certificate Geography and has also been informed by the views of teachers, school leaders and students gathered through a programme of school visits conducted in a representative sample of schools.

It begins by considering the background of Leaving Certificate Geography, with Section 1 presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments. Section 2 sets out how Leaving Certificate Geography is currently provided for within the Irish curriculum before focusing in more detail on the current Leaving Certificate Geography syllabus. Section 3 details insights garnered from school visits into the lived experience for schools, teachers, and students. Section 4 considers similar education opportunities internationally and presents an overview of five different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discusses some issues identified for consideration in the redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Geography before finally setting out a proposed brief for this work in Section 6, which will guide the work the development group.

1. Background and context

This section sets out some of the significant developments related to geography in over two decades since the publication of the Leaving Certificate Geography syllabus (2004). It also outlines the education and broader policy landscape since 2004.

The [Leaving Certificate Geography](#) syllabus was introduced in 2004, replacing a curriculum which dated from 1971. The change attempted to address the content-based nature of the 1971 syllabus and concerns that the examination paper did not assess geographical understanding (Waddington, 2010, p.190). In response, the 2004 syllabus introduced a mandatory Geographical Investigation (GI), and the associated teacher guidelines emphasised the need to teach for understanding (DES, 2004, pp.2, 3). In the intervening period, and in line with the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), the [Junior Cycle Geography](#) curriculum was updated in 2018, replacing the 1989 Junior Certificate Geography syllabus. This update included the introduction of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) (NCCA, 2018).

At senior cycle, the publication of the Senior Cycle Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022) set out an agreed purpose for senior cycle education and outlines a vision for the redevelopment of senior cycle that is underpinned by a set of guiding principles. Responding to this report, Minister Foley initiated a programme of senior cycle redevelopment. As part of this redevelopment, a set of student key competencies are being embedded across learning outcomes in new and redeveloped subjects and modules.

From the perspective of education policy there are several strategies with relevance to geography education. The second [National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) to 2030](#) provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making towards a more sustainable future at individual, community, local, national and international levels. Young people feature prominently in the five national priorities outlined in this strategy, in terms of the opportunities that will be provided for them with regards to acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, dispositions, and to undertake ESD-related actions. Another relevant national strategy is the [Global Citizenship Education strategy 2021-2025](#). Global Citizenship Education includes environmental sustainability and climate change and a focus on systemic thinking and local/global connections. The supports arising from these strategies enable schools to engage with geography-related teaching and learning at curricular, cross-curricular, and extra-curricular levels.

The [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#) recognises the potential of digital technology in the curriculum and emphasises the role of technology in supporting students to navigate a complex digital world. Appropriate use of digital technologies in the geography classroom can enhance opportunities for students to better understand and visually represent the interconnected complexity of our world; for example, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in analysing spatial and geographical data. Technology-related topics such as digital exclusion and security, and the use of technology in disaster risk reduction, are also relevant to geography education. This is aligned with what Slater et al (2016) describe as powerful geographical knowledge, which is constantly evolving and includes the application of concepts, principles and skills.

Beyond education policy, a plethora of government policies and strategies have geographic relevance, including the:

- [National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024](#)
- [Climate Action Plan \(annual update\) 2023](#)
- [Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2027](#)
- [National Development Plan 2021-2030](#)
- [Migration Integration Strategy 2017](#)
- [Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland 2021-2030](#)
- [National Risk Assessment 2023](#)
- [Global Ireland Strategy 2018-2025](#)
- [Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [A Better World: Ireland's policy for international development](#)
- [Ireland's strategy for partnership with Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\) 2019-25.](#)

These domestic policies, together with commitments and responsibilities aligned to state membership of external organisations, such as the European Union and the United Nations, provide insights into the contemporary relevance of geography.

Bednarz (2019) proposes 'a re-envisioning of geography education with an enhanced focus on teaching for, in, and about [our] world' (Bednarz, 2019, p.520). According to Chang and Kidman (2019) 'geography education must matter to the...student and it should not be just about the subject-matter knowledge to be learnt' (Chang and Kindman, 2019, p.1). They argue that young people must be educated to thrive in their world, and urge the use of guiding geographical questions, such as "What is it?", "What is it like?", "Why is it there?", "How did it happen?", "What impact does it have?" and "How should it be managed for the mutual benefit of humanity and the natural environment?" (ibid).

Geographic knowledge, understanding and skills arguably matter more in the contemporary context of globalisation, human movement, nationalism, trade, security, fragility and conflicts linked to inequities, climate change, biodiversity loss and colonial legacies, and challenges associated with effective international bi- and multi-lateralism. A redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Geography is therefore timely, providing an opportunity to ensure that geography education is relevant for students now and in future in their daily lives, so that they can better interpret and orient themselves, as informed, critical and active citizens.

Section Summary

- The current Leaving Certificate Geography syllabus was introduced in 2004, replacing a syllabus dated 1971.
- In 2016, a new Junior Cycle Geography specification was introduced.
- National education policies, such as the second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the Global Citizenship Education strategy, and the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027, have a bearing on the review and redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Geography.
- Beyond education policies, a broad range of national and international policies and commitments can inform and impact on aspects of geography education.
- In the context of our rapidly changing world, a revised Leaving Certificate Geography curriculum is important and timely.

2. Geography in the curriculum

This section provides an overview of post-primary geography education in Ireland and briefly considers the most recent Chief Examiner's report on Leaving Certificate Geography.

Geography education in junior cycle

In 2018, a new [Junior Cycle Geography](#) specification replaced the Junior Certificate Geography syllabus (1989). This specification aims to enable 'students to become geographically literate,' to stimulate their curiosity and create opportunities to engage with 'their immediate environment and wider world' (NCCA, 2018, p.5). The specification also aims to develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours to 'allow students to explore the physical world, human activities, how we interact with our world and to recognise the interconnections between systems' (ibid). The concept of Geoliteracy underpins the three interconnected specification strands: Exploring the physical world; Exploring how we interact with the physical world; and Exploring people, place and change.

Students also have opportunities for further geography-related learning across junior cycle, for example in Business Studies, Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), History, Home Economics, Modern Foreign Languages and Science.

Geography education in senior cycle

The current syllabus for [Leaving Certificate Geography](#) was introduced in 2004 (replacing a curriculum dated 1971) and examined for the first time in 2006. The syllabus highlights the importance of understanding physical and human environments, patterns of environmental phenomena, global interdependence and the need to conserve and manage natural resources. There is an emphasis on the importance of intercultural awareness and understanding, informed participation and active citizenship. The use of technology and the development and application of geographical skills are stressed (DES, 2004, p.2).

The syllabus is structured with core, elective and optional units. All students engage with the three core units:

- Unit 1: Patterns and processes in the physical environment
- Unit 2: Regional geography
- Unit 3: Geographical Investigation and Skills.

Students study one elective unit from a choice of two:

- Unit 4: Patterns and processes in economic activities
- Unit 5: Patterns and processes in the human environment.

In core and elective units, there are common learning outcomes for both levels, with additional higher level learning outcomes. Students doing higher level are required to study one optional unit from four:

- Unit 6: Global interdependence
- Unit 7: Geoecology
- Unit 8: Culture and identity

- Unit 9: The atmosphere-ocean environment.

The Leaving Certificate Geography syllabus was designed to provide continuity from the Junior Certificate Geography syllabus (1989), but it can also be studied *ab initio*.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

Students undertaking the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme do two Link Modules: Preparation for the world of work and Enterprise Education. They are encouraged to engage in a local study of 'My Own Place', including consideration of local economic activities and community development. 'My Own Place' is integrated with learning in Preparation for the world of work (Unit 1: Introduction to working life) and Enterprise Education (Unit 2: Local business enterprises and Unit 3: Local voluntary organisations/Community enterprises). A report on 'My Own Place' can be submitted in part fulfilment of the portfolio for assessment of the Link Modules (NCCA, 2023, p.9, 14, 15 & 17).

Transition Year

In the Transition Year (TY) programme statement the Civic and Community Engagement and Career Exploration student dimensions include development indicators such as, 'sustaining more caring and respectful relationships with people, place and nature,' 'wanting to contribute to a more just world and living more sustainably', 'understanding better the interconnections of local, national and global communities' and increased awareness of the world of work and enterprise. In enabling students to align their development to these indicators, schools can design a TY programme with Geography as a subject sample, a module or other curriculum component (NCCA. 2024, p.11, 12, 14).

Leaving Certificate Geography in focus

This section draws on State Examination Commission (SEC) statistics to explore participation rates in Leaving Certificate Geography, provides an overview of assessment for certification, and insights into student engagement with different areas of the current Leaving Certificate Geography syllabus based on the 2012 SEC Chief Examiner's report.

Student participation

The number of Leaving Certificate students has increased in recent years, but Geography participation rates have decreased in the same period, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of students sitting Leaving Certificate Geography at higher and ordinary Level 2019-2023

Year	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Total Candidates	Total LC candidates	Geography as a % of total candidates
2019	19,983	4,139	24,122	56,071	43%
2020	20,506	3,644	24,150	57,569	42%
2021	21,161	3,217	24,378	59,852	41%
2022	18,496	3,370	21,866	58,056	38%
2023	16,889	3,531	20,420	58,006	35%

Assessment for certification

Leaving Certificate Geography includes two assessment components for certification:

- Report on a Geographical Investigation (GI) 20%
- Written exam 80%

Report on a Geographical Investigation (GI)

The Geographical Investigation is a compulsory unit for all students. This unit builds investigative skills, including map interpretation, photographic and statistical analysis, technology, planning, data collection, use of documentary sources, report planning, and analysis and interpretation of results and conclusions. As with all core and elective units, the syllabus outlines different outcomes in the GI unit, depending on whether students are studying ordinary or higher-level.

A list of GI topics is issued by the SEC to fifth year students. Each student submits an authenticated GI report at the end of term one in sixth year. The GI report must be submitted in the SEC booklet which includes the following headings: introduction; planning; gathering of information (primary sources should make up 60%+ of the information and all secondary sources must be acknowledged); results, conclusions, evaluation; and presentation of results (NCCA, 2004, p.17-18). In 2023, the SEC announced plans to move from handwritten pro-forma to digital booklets from 2025 (SEC, 2023).

Written examination

The Leaving Certificate Geography written examination consists of one examination paper with two parts (see Table 2). Both higher and ordinary level examinations are of two hours and fifty minutes duration (including 20 minutes reading time). Online marking was introduced for higher level in 2020 and in 2021 for ordinary level.¹

¹ The 2021 and 2022 examination papers were adjusted to compensate for disruptions to learning due to COVID-19. The 2023 examination paper was adjusted differently to 2021 and 2022. Examination papers in these years do not necessarily reflect the same structure and format as the examination papers of other years.

Table 2: Coursework and written examination structure for ordinary and higher level

Component	Assessment requirement	Marks	Weighting
Coursework			
Geographical Investigation Report	1 investigation from a prescribed list of 6	100 – OL/HL	20% - OL/HL
Written examination			
Part One: Short answer questions	12 questions to attempt 10	100 – OL 80 – HL	20% - OL 16% - HL
Part Two: Structured questions			
Core 1: Physical environment	3 multi-part questions to attempt 1	100 – OL 80 – HL	20% - OL 16% - HL
Core 2: Regional geography	3 multi-part questions to attempt 1	100 – OL 80 – HL	20% - OL 16% - HL
Elective 4 and 5	6 multi-part questions (3 per unit) to attempt 1	100 – OL 80 – HL	20% - OL 16% - HL
Optional 6, 7, 8 & 9	12 essay questions (3 per unit) to attempt 1	80 – HL	16% - HL

Insights from the Chief Examiner’s Report 2012

The most recent Chief Examiner’s Report for Leaving Certificate Geography was published following the 2012 examination, based on data from a sample of candidates that year. Highlights from this data, combined with the Chief Examiner’s observations, are summarised below.

Geographical Investigation Report

92% of students in the sample submitted field (landform study) reports. In general, students achieved high marks. However, some students did not present relevant information in the correct section, did not report sufficiently on their two tasks/methods used to gather information, or included poorly executed and labelled graphs or evidence of poor planning (SEC, 2012, p.22, 23). It was noted that the marks for often excellent illustrations of the equipment used in the GI were limited (ibid., p.22). The Chief Examiner recognised the beneficial nature of the coursework component, especially for those students who did not ‘perform well in the written examination’ but 5% of ordinary level candidates did not submit their GI report (ibid., p.6, 16, 32).

Written examination

The Chief Examiner noted that significant numbers of students attempted more than the required number of questions, especially in the short questions section. The generally high standard of graph drawing, map reading, and aerial photograph interpretation skills prompted the Chief Examiner to conclude that ‘the use of visual stimuli...facilitated candidates’ engagement with the examination’ (ibid., p.32).

Some higher-level candidates did not capitalise on potential links to GI (landform) Reports in related questions. The Chief Examiner identified poor structure and coherence as the most common weaknesses in essay responses. Teachers were urged to 'continue to teach key geographical terms,' 'provide opportunities for students to apply and practice a variety of geographical skills including map reading' and 'drawing sketch maps' and ensure student familiarity with graphical aids and the examination requirements (ibid., p.33, 18).

In terms of popularity of questions in the elective units, the Human Environment (Unit 5) questions were more popular than those on Economic Activities (Unit 4) amongst all candidates. In the questions on the optional units, Geoecology (Optional Unit 7) was followed by Global Interdependence (Optional Unit 6). The Atmosphere-Ocean Environment were the least popular of the optional unit questions.

Although dated, the 2012 Chief Examiner's Report provides information on various aspects of Leaving Certificate Geography, together with the development and application of relevant geographical skills in examination settings. Insights arising from this data can be used as context for discussion in the development of the new Geography specification.

Section Summary

- The introduction of the 2016 Junior Cycle Geography specification focuses on building student understanding of the interactions between human and physical geography, of the interconnections between systems and the acquisition of Geoliteracy skills, all of which are assessed in the Classroom-Based Assessments.
- Students have a range of opportunities to engage in geography-related learning across senior cycle in the current Leaving Certificate Established, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and Transition Year.
- The current Leaving Certificate syllabus includes 3 core units, 2 optional units and 4 elective units. Students engage with the 3 core and 1 optional unit at either higher or ordinary level. Students studying the subject at higher level engage with 1 elective unit.
- Assessment consists of a Geographical Investigation (20%) and written examination (80%). Although there is a list of options for Geographical Investigation, students usually do a landform study. Examination papers are split into short answer questions from across core and optional units and structured multi-part questions from physical and regional geography (2 core units). The higher-level paper also includes essay questions based on the elective units.
- Leaving Certificate Geography participation rates have decreased in recent years.
- The most recent Chief Examiner's report (2012) highlights the favoured type of Geographical Investigation and syllabus units that are favoured by students in the examination. The report underlines the need for students to be literate in key geography terminology and to practice geographical skills.

3. Insights from school visits

School visits were conducted as part of the scoping work for this Background Paper. A representative sample was selected from the 40 schools that expressed an interest in getting involved in Leaving Certificate Geography curriculum developments. The six schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place in January 2024 and involved focus group meetings with 32 senior cycle students (28 x 6th year, 4 x 5th year), 18 Leaving Certificate Geography teachers and 5 school leaders. The following section provides an overview of the insights gathered through these visits.

A thematic approach to examining the focus group feedback unearthed rich insights that can be categorised under the following headings:

- The aim of Leaving Certificate Geography
- Curriculum continuity and coherence
- Knowledge and skills
- Assessment
- Implementation.

The aim of Leaving Certificate Geography

The words most used by teachers and students when describing what they like about Geography were 'relevant' and 'relatable'. The importance and transferability of geographical knowledge and skills were linked to understanding and evaluating how and why our environment works, and how and why people interact with the environment. Teachers commented on the importance of geography for orientating students to our world, to help them 'connect the dots'. They talked about Geography as a scientific and practical subject, which equipped students to become informed and active citizens.

Curriculum continuity and coherence

Students indicated that they chose Leaving Certificate Geography because of the enjoyment and interest they associated with the subject at junior cycle. However, they also mentioned that Leaving Certificate Geography was less enjoyable than anticipated and, without fail, associated lessened enjoyment with assessment. Teachers perceived that the gap between junior cycle and Leaving Certificate Geography had widened with the introduction of the junior cycle specification in 2018. They talked about the value of exploration, practical skills, and geography in the news in junior cycle, but articulated that common level Junior Cycle Geography leaves students unprepared for Leaving Certificate, with the quantity of content and the extent to which success is determined by the pressurised production of essays in the exam. Some teachers talked about the additional challenge for students who came straight from 3rd year into 5th year.

The interdisciplinary nature of Geography was identified as advantageous by teachers and students alike. They highlighted that students who study History, Business Studies, Art, Craft and Design can bring the knowledge and skills from these other subjects into their learning in Geography. Some teachers referenced a heightened sense of competition with Geography from subjects such as Technology, while others mentioned subjects like Politics and Society, that they considered complementary to the study of geography.

Knowledge and skills

Physical geography (Core Unit 1) was frequently spoken of as a popular element of the course. Students and teachers like the visual nature of the content; however, they argued that the extent of content 'to get through' was problematic. They generally agreed that the regional geography content is too demanding, even though the syllabus envisages that the five regions chosen from Core Unit 2 could be used as the setting for other units (NCCA. 2004, p.11). This unit was variously described as 'boring,' 'a box ticking exercise,' 'long,' a 'struggle' and inaccessible for students who 'find it hard to visualise what's going on outside of their [own] environment'. The consensus was that the purpose of regional geography could be better realised through updated relevant case studies, more choice, and a decrease in the required number of case studies. A few teachers advised they would like to retain the European Union as a mandatory regional case study.

Geographical Investigation (GI) and Skills (Core Unit 3) was described as important, interesting, relevant and memorable, providing valuable opportunities for group work and support in examination preparation. Teachers identified the GI as a highlight, even for students who seem disengaged in class. Students and teachers alike recognised the value of cooperative learning in the field study, and some additionally mentioned the value of outdoor learning throughout 5th and 6th year, of being able to 'touch' geography in 'real life'. Students associate a sense of ownership and agency with the GI and see it as a chance to showcase their work. All six schools reported consistently doing a field (landform) study for their GI, usually in river or coastal contexts. They made no reference to the other GI options. Teachers indicated that their school location impacts, but does not dictate, where the field study takes place.

Where the Economic Elective (Unit 4) was undertaken, teachers believed students found the content enjoyable, although some students said they found it 'technical' and 'challenging' and inaccessible. Those who referenced the Human Elective (Unit 5) were generally positive. While some students were unenthusiastic about engaging with population statistics, others made powerful statements about the need for Geography to incorporate and appeal to the changing demographic in their specific contexts.

Where teachers and students engage with Geoecology (Unit 7), it is viewed as interesting, but too dense. It was suggested that Culture and Identity (Unit 8) could appear as a cross-cutting theme in Regional geography (Unit 2). A few teachers expressed interest in marine geography, feeling that this was an important topic given our island status. Students and teachers suggested more emphasis on climate. The importance of interdependence of people and planet and of sustainable development in geography education were very evident in the feedback from schools.

Teachers and students talked consistently about content overload and consequent lack of time. Technical terminology was recognised as particularly challenging for students accessing the ordinary level course. Although the syllabus envisaged a central role for geographical skills across all units, teachers identified lack of time as a challenge to building students' geographical skills and were keen that these be prioritised in the revised curriculum. In referencing important geographical skills, teachers frequently mentioned map reading.

Students spoke enthusiastically about the inclusion of geopolitics in a revised Geography curriculum. They are especially drawn to the idea of studying conflict and war and engaging with

consequent effects on people in different scales. They clearly see the relevance of geopolitics at a local level. Teachers believe that the inclusion of geopolitical content would widen the appeal of their subject.

Teachers suggested that the revised LC Geography specification should include 'more relevant local issues' and examples. They recommended that teaching and learning should integrate the use of appropriate technologies, for example to generate maps, and articulated the importance of considering the impact of technology on people and planet. Students argued for less content, a more relevant and current emphasis and what they see as a need for a better balance between physical and human geography. They expressed very strong views on the value of experiential and outdoor learning, not just in the GI, but as a pedagogical approach. They talked about the benefits of working with others from an enjoyment and a learning perspective.

Assessment

Additional Assessment Component (AAC)

In general, students like the idea of banking 40% prior to their written examination. There was an assumption that the GI will be retained within the AAC framework, but with a difference of opinion around the weighting that should be allocated – some feel 40% reflects the work involved, others felt it could be reflective with some amendment. Some students said they would find more than one project element 'too much'. A few teachers like the idea of doing the AAC in 5th year, believing this might settle students into 'Leaving Certificate mode' after Transition Year. Ideas for AACs included a field study (identical to or based on the current most popular GI option), an urban field study, a visual challenge linked to map drawing or graph creation and a Geoecology project. The idea of these separate 'practical projects' forming a portfolio as the AAC was also mooted.

From a wellbeing perspective, school leaders questioned whether the 40% was the optimal AAC weighting. Several suggested that the AAC should be divided into 'smaller chunks' so that they would be 'less high stakes.' School leaders recognised the potential of AACs to concentrate on skills development and some highlighted the value of this approach, especially for students who may not be 'motivated academically'.

Written examination

The examination dominated both student and teachers' feedback, despite repeated attempts to focus discussion on the syllabus. Students were overwhelmingly negative about the exam. They talked about learning essays off and complained that the need for essays to include a certain number of Significant Relevant Points (SRPs)² does not allow them to write freely. In their opinion, the exam is clearly about testing their linguistic capacities, their ability to memorise and manage time.

Teachers agreed that the exam measured students' recall ability rather than their understanding.

² A Significant Relevant Point (SRP) is a single piece of factual information, to which an examiner will assign a mark weighting as prescribed in the marking scheme (typically 2 marks). As advised in Circular S85/09 and in the Sample Marking Indicators available on the SEC website, each SRP should emerge from the information put forward by the candidate, leading to an overall coherent response to the question. [Leaving Certificate Geography – 2023 Marking Scheme](#).

They stated that the exam impacted on teaching and learning negatively, with preparation dominating from the start of 5th year. Some teachers argued that the exam has gotten more difficult over time, with questions now requiring students to make nuanced links across units. They also talked about the inaccessibility of language in exam questions.

Across the board, teachers spoke positively about the Covid-19 modifications to the examination. They claimed these modifications have lessened, but not eliminated, the negative impact of assessment on teaching and learning and called for the modifications to be retained. Students suggested more short answer questions and said they would like to see the inclusion of a question explicitly linked to their GI. More exam questions on geographical skills, including map reading, was suggested by several teachers.

Implementation

School leaders and teachers argued for timely and adequate teacher professional development to support senior cycle redevelopment. In their feedback, school leaders talked about the need for careful management of the Additional Assessment Components (AACs) schedule, with reference to student absenteeism, and the wellbeing of teachers and students. Speaking from an equity perspective, several school leaders articulated the need for significant investment in digital technology to support the implementation and submission of AACs.

Section Summary

- Feedback from focus groups with Geography students and teachers, and with leaders in six schools concentrated on the aim of Leaving Certificate Geography, curriculum continuity between junior cycle and Leaving Certificate, and alignment with other Leaving Certificate subjects, the knowledge and skills gained by students through the study of the current syllabus, and on assessment and implementation.
- The main challenges identified by students and teachers relate to the volume of learning in the course and the nature of the written examination.

4. International trends in upper secondary Geography education

This section considers the geography education landscape internationally. A review of upper secondary geography education in five jurisdictions (Finland, the International Baccalaureate, New South Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) illustrates the main areas of study within these international curricula and offers a range of upper secondary geography structures and assessment approaches to inform the redevelopment of the Leaving Certificate Geography specification. These five jurisdictions were selected as they offer the curriculum through English, or in the case of Finland, have published curriculum overviews in English. All five jurisdictions offer stand-alone geography specifications. The curriculum in Northern Ireland, in the International Baccalaureate and Finland are relatively recent, while the curriculum in New South Wales will be implemented from the 2024 academic year. Three of these jurisdictions were included in the Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Geography (2016), a deliberate overlap to facilitate a consideration of alignment in lower/upper secondary.

Finland

The Finnish general upper secondary is, on average, a three-year education, equipping students with six transversal competencies - wellbeing, interactive, multidisciplinary and creative, civic, ethical and environmental, global and cultural – with the aim of supporting young people to develop as good, balanced and enlightened human beings. General upper secondary instruction is modular, based on a credit system, and students decide on their individual study schedules.

Geography comes under the heading of Mathematics and Natural Sciences and is paired with Biology. The purpose of geography is to 'broaden students' geographical worldview and develop a readiness to understand global, regional and local phenomena, the temporal changes, and contextual problems and solutions' (Finnish National Agency for Education, nd.)

The main objectives of General Upper Geography are defined as follows: the student...

- gathers experiences that deepen his/her interest in geography and the geographic way of perceiving and examining the world
- recognises areas at risk in the world due to nature, human activities, and the interaction between nature and humans
- understands what kind of risks occur in different areas of the world and which factors impact these
- is able to compare and assess the susceptibility of different areas to risks and the impacts of the risks from the viewpoint of natural resources and development
- knows what kind of solutions can be used in order to mitigate risks or alleviate their impacts, and is familiar with the possibilities for predicting and preparing for risks as well as for acting according to sustainable development
- is able to analyse positive development in different areas in the world and the factors affecting it

- understands that human activity affects the viability of the globe and the wellbeing of people
- is able to use information and communication technology in acquiring, analysing, and presenting data on global issues, and to follow and evaluate critically current regional news in different media (Tani et al, 2018, p.7).

General Upper Geography consists of one compulsory course, The Changing World, which includes the following sections and is worth 2 credits:

- geography as a field of science
- key global risk areas related to the system of nature, predicting and preparing for risks
- key global risk areas related to natural resources and the environment, mitigating, preparing for, and adapting to the risks global risk areas and essential development questions of the humankind.

Geography also consists of three specialisation courses (6 credits), 'Blue Planet', 'Our Common World' and 'Geomedia: Study, Participate, Influence'. Every school must offer the specialisation courses, but they are optional from the students' perspective.

Assessment

Each study unit is assessed on completion. During general upper secondary students complete 150 competency points (credits) in total. An end of studies matriculation exam includes five compulsory tests: mother tongue and, according to student choice, four from the following: the second national language, a foreign language, mathematics, or one subject in general studies such as humanities and natural sciences. Students have the flexibility to take additional optional tests.

International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate® (IB) Diploma Programme (DP), established in 1968, is for students aged 16 to 19. As of September 2023, there were 3,686 schools offering the DP, in 155 different countries. IBDP students choose at least one subject from five groups: 1) their best language, 2) additional language(s), 3) social sciences, 4) sciences, and 5) mathematics. Students also choose either an arts subject, or a second subject from 1) to 5). At least three and not more than four subjects are taken at higher level (240 hours each), while the remaining are taken at standard level (150 hours each). In addition, three core elements—the extended essay; theory of knowledge; and, creativity, activity, service—are compulsory and central to the IBDP philosophy.

IBDP Geography integrates both physical and human geography and ensures that students acquire elements of both scientific and socio-economic methodologies. IBDP geography examines relevant concepts and ideas from a wide variety of disciplines, from the social and natural sciences, thereby supporting students to develop an appreciation of, and a respect for, alternative approaches, viewpoints and ideas.

The aims of the course are to enable students to develop:

- an understanding of the dynamic interrelationships between people, places, spaces and the environment at different scales
- a critical awareness and consider complexity thinking in the context of the nexus of geographic issues, including:
 - acquiring an in-depth understanding of how geographic issues, or wicked problems, have been shaped by powerful human and physical processes
 - synthesizing diverse geographic knowledge in order to form viewpoints about how these issues could be resolved.
- understand and evaluate the need for planning and sustainable development through the management of resources at varying scales.

The course, which was first assessed in 2019, is structured as per Table 3.

Table 3: Structure of the IBDP geography curriculum

Component	Teaching hours	
	SL	HL
Geographic themes (7 options: SL = two; HL = three)		
Freshwater	60	90
Oceans and coastal margins		
Extreme environments		
Geophysical hazards		
Leisure, tourism and sport		
Food and health		
Urban environments		
Geographic perspectives—global change (3 core units for all students)		
Population distribution—changing population	70	70
Global climate—vulnerability and resilience		
Global resource consumption and security		
Geographic perspectives—global interactions (HL students only)		
Power, places and networks	-	60
Human development and diversity		
Global risks and resilience		
Internal assessment (SL and HL Fieldwork)		
Fieldwork, leading to one written report based on a fieldwork question, information collection and analysis with evaluation	20	20

Assessment

All students are assessed on their ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant content, application and analysis of knowledge and understanding, synthesis and evaluation and selection, use and application of a variety of appropriate skills and techniques.

New South Wales

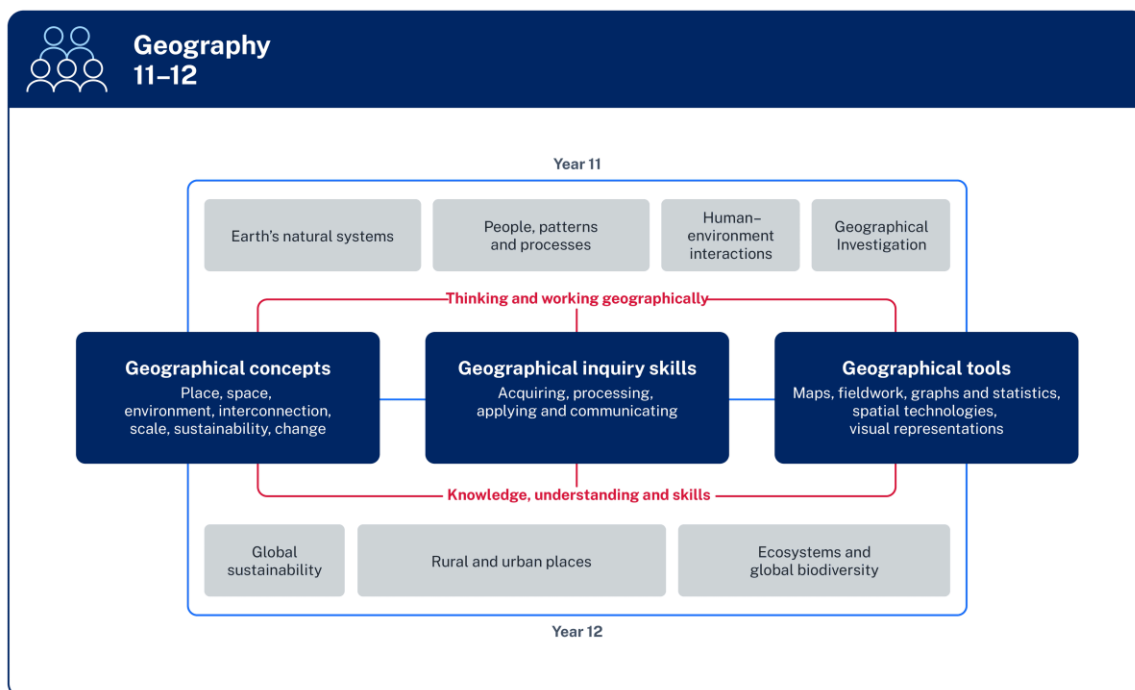
In New South Wales (NSW), upper secondary corresponds to Stage 6 – Years 11 and 12. Students can study [Stage 6 Geography](#) as a subject for their Higher School Certificate (HSC).

Stage 6 Geography enables students to:

- develop knowledge and understanding of natural and human processes, how they interact and affect each other, and how places and environments can be managed for sustainability
- apply geographical inquiry skills and tools, including fieldwork
- develop a lifelong interest in the study of geography
- prepare for informed, responsible and active citizenship in the contemporary world.

The elements of the course and the relationships between these elements are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Elements of Stage 6 Geography curriculum in New South Wales



The Year 11 course is 120 hours duration and comprises 4 mandatory focus areas: Earth's natural systems, People, patterns and processes; Human-environment interactions; and Geographical Investigation.

In People, patterns and processes, students investigate the unique character of places and how various human processes are shaping them, through one of the following:

- human resilience in diverse environments
- local places and global economic change
- place and cultural change
- political power and contested spaces
- technological advances and the transformation of places.

The Year 12 course is 120 hours duration and comprises three mandatory focus areas. In Global sustainability, students' study one global economic activity and its sustainability. In Rural and urban places, students' study one rural setting and one larger urban settlement, and one large city of 5 million people or more, outside Australia. In Ecosystems and global biodiversity, students' study two different types of ecosystems, at least one from outside Australia.

Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia must be included in Stage 6 but can be integrated flexibly and in different ways. Twelve (12) hours of fieldwork are mandatory in Years 11 and 12 and can be integrated within any of the mandatory focus areas. The geographical inquiry skills and tools content is integrated throughout the course and given real-world application. Students must be given opportunity to develop an appreciation of the relevance of geographical understanding to particular professions and to responsible management, in the context of each focus area in both years.

Assessment

The HSC mark is a 50:50 combination of a school-based assessment mark and student's external HSC examination mark.

Schools are required to develop an assessment program for Year 11 and 12. Based on a Common Grade Scale for Preliminary Courses, teachers use their professional, on-balance judgement to grade students. Schools must submit these grades to the NSW Education Standards Authority.

In Year 11, students undertake 3 assessment tasks, one of which is a Geographical Investigation (30-40%), one must be a formal written examination (20-40%). In Year 12, students undertake a maximum of four assessment tasks (10-40%), one of which is a Geographical Investigation (20-30%), and one must be a formal written examination (max. 30%).

Students do an HSC exam in Year 12. This exam is worth 100 marks and 3 hours 10 minutes duration. The paper will include a stimulus booklet, which may contain maps, graphs, statistics, diagrams, images/photographs and text-based information. The four exam paper sections will include objective response questions, short-answer questions (some with several parts), one structured extended-response multi-part question, one unstructured extended-response question (the latter two focused on rural and urban places and Ecosystems and global biodiversity). Students may be required to refer to the stimulus booklet and to apply geographical skills and tools across the paper.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Curriculum, set by the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA), provides students with a broad range of subjects for secondary education. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) marks the end of compulsory education in Northern Ireland. After the age 16 years, some students stay in school and study for the General Certificate of Education (GCE). They can do AS or A2 units or a combination of the two. For GCE level, students normally pick three or four subjects. Geography is one of the subject options.

The [CCEA GCE Geography specification](#) (2018) gives students a broad knowledge and understanding of the processes and challenges facing our world. Students can take the AS Geography units plus the A2 Geography units for a full GCE A level qualification. They can also choose to take the AS course as a stand-alone qualification.

At AS level, students investigate physical and human geography themes over 180 hours. They explore the processes that shape weather, the relationships between population and resources or how to protect the countryside. They undertake fieldwork and develop their ability to gather, evaluate and present information. Students explore a range of places at a variety of scales and have opportunities to use technologies, including Geographic Information System (GIS).

Those who continue to A2 level can, over 360 hours, explore plate tectonics, climate change, dynamic coastal environments or tropical ecosystems. They also investigate cultural geography, ethnic diversity or tourism. They develop decision-making skills and apply these in a real-world scenario.

The specification is structured under six units, three at AS level and three at A2 level:

- Unit AS 1: Physical Geography is concerned with physical processes and systems and human interaction with them. Students investigate fluvial environments, local and global ecosystems, and the processes that shape weather and climate.
- Unit AS 2: Human Geography has three themes covering key aspects of human geography. Students investigate how different human systems and relationships across our world change over space and through time.
- Unit AS 3: Fieldwork Skills and Techniques in Geography supports students to become actively involved in collecting geographical data first-hand through fieldwork. Students identify geographical questions and issues, select appropriate sources and methods and establish effective approaches to inquiry.
- Unit A2 1: Physical Processes, Landforms and Management. Students choose two options from Plate Tectonics – Theory and Outcomes, Tropical Ecosystems – Nature and Sustainability, Dynamic Coastal Environments or Climate Change – Past and Present.
- Unit A2 2: Processes and Issues in Human Geography. Students choose two options from Cultural Geography, Planning for Sustainable Settlements, Ethnic Diversity or Tourism.
- Unit A2 3: Decision Making in Geography. Students develop decision-making skills in a real-world scenario. They identify and analyse appropriate material, examine conflicting values and make and justify recommendations.

Assessment

There are six external assessment units in this specification, three at AS level and three at A2. All are examination papers, ranging from 1.5 hours to 1 hour in duration, with short, structured questions, extended writing questions (Unit AS 1 & 2), multipart compulsory questions based on a summary statement and table of data relating to fieldwork (Unit AS3), structured questions (Units A2 1 and 2), and analysis, interpretation and evaluation of case study information (Unit A2 3).

Scotland

At upper secondary, Scottish students undertake the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC). Most students take National 4/5s and Highers. Senior Cycle Geography equates to the Higher Geography course, which builds on the foundations and learning in Nationals 3-5. Higher Geography provides the basis for progression to the Advanced Higher Geography course and aims to give students good opportunities to build further on the attributes and capabilities of four, foundational capacities: to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.

The 160-hour [Higher Geography course](#) is design to support students to develop their understanding of our changing world, its human interactions and physical processes. Practical activities, including fieldwork, provide opportunities for students to interact with their environment.

The course consists of three sections:

- Physical environments: Students develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the processes and interactions at work within physical environments at different scales. Key topics include atmosphere; hydrosphere; lithosphere; and biosphere.
- Human environments. Students develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the processes and interactions at work within urban and rural environments in developed and developing countries. Key topics include population; rural land degradation and management; and urban change and management.
- Global issues. Students develop and apply knowledge and understanding of global geographical issues which demonstrate the interaction of physical and human factors, and evaluate the strategies adopted to manage these issues. Key topics include river basin management; development and health; global climate change; and energy.

Personalisation and choice are possible through context case studies, areas and issues chosen for study.

Assessment

Within the geography course, students study three mandatory units and a course assessment depending on the level they are taking. The course assessment involves three components:

- Paper 1: Physical and human environments (46%, 1 hour 50 minutes) – mandatory extended response questions
- Paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills (27%, 1 hour 10 minutes) – extended response questions with choice on global issues and mandatory on geographical skills
- Course assessment (27%) which enables students to demonstrate the application of their skills, knowledge and understanding within the context of a geographical topic or issue. SQA provides a brief for the generation of evidence to be assessed. Candidates have an open choice of

geographical topic or issue. They research the topic or issue (allocating approx. 8 hours) and are given 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete their production of evidence. This must be done in one sitting by a submission date set by SQA.

Upper secondary Geography developments in other countries provide an important reference for discussing and developing a new Leaving Certificate Geography specification.

Section Summary

- The five jurisdictions in this paper (Finland, International Baccalaureate, New South Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) offer upper secondary Geography as a stand-alone subject.
- The Finnish upper secondary Geography curriculum is modular with a high degree of student choice. The compulsory course emphasises risk identification and assessment and one of the specialisation courses seeks to activate students as ‘geomedia’ influencers.
- The IBDP emphasises the interrelationship between people, places, spaces and the environment at different scales. There is a focus on building student capacity to engage with and find solutions to ‘wicked problems.’ Fieldwork represents 20 teaching hours and students complete a fieldwork report.
- Implementation of the upper secondary Geography curriculum in New South Wales begins in February 2024. The curriculum focuses on geographical concepts, inquiry skills and tools. Core content includes global sustainability, rural and urban places and ecosystems, with an emphasis on real world application and choice integrated throughout. As part of the course, students consider the relevance of geography to particular professions. The assessment weighting is 50:50 school-based and external examination.
- In upper secondary Geography in Northern Ireland, students do physical and human geography and fieldwork courses and have a choice of cultural geography, ethnic diversity or tourism. Students can undertake further study, including a unit which focuses on decision-making skills using real world scenarios. All units are assessed via written examinations.
- The Scottish upper secondary Geography curriculum emphasises human and physical geography, global issues and fieldwork. Student choice is facilitated through the selection of case studies, areas and issues of study. Learning is assessed via two papers and coursework on a research topic or issue of choice. Students produce evidence of their coursework in a supervised setting over 1.5-hours.
- These five jurisdictions present a picture of provision and varied approaches to student choice, core and optional or specialised learning, including fieldwork and geographical skills, and assessment.

5. Issues for consideration

This section sets out issues for consideration in the development of a new specification for Leaving Certificate Geography. These arise from the nature of the subject itself, and the influence of a cross-cutting and integrated range of cultural, economic, environmental, geopolitical, social and technological factors nationally and internationally, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper.

Curriculum continuity and coherence

School focus group feedback identified a gap between Junior Cycle Geography and the current Leaving Certificate syllabus, where assessment has come to dominate teaching and learning. An important consideration in the development of the new Leaving Certificate Geography specification is the need to ensure continuity from junior cycle, so that the interest and enjoyment that motivates students to continue their geography learning is not outweighed by examination preparation.

The 2022 Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report established that a senior cycle for every student, offering a range of learning pathways, should be developed. This requires the development of curriculum components which can meet the needs of students in terms of range, continuity, consolidation, progression and transition. The aim of a senior cycle that offers a range of learning pathways raises questions of continuity beyond the individual subject specification. In the development of the specification, senior cycle programmatic level questions will need to be taken into account, such as:

- How will the geography specification interact with the revised programme statement for Transition Year?
- How will the specification align with other senior cycle subjects?

The relevance and scope of the specification

The interdisciplinary nature of geography, given by its position as both a natural and social science, points to the possibilities in terms of the subject's broad relevance. Redevelopment of the specification will take cognisance of appropriate balance between natural and social science content, recent developments in the field of geography and feedback which indicates that geopolitics and local geography resonates with the lived reality of young people in Ireland today.

The breadth of geographic possibilities will need to be tempered by the age/stage of students and the time allocation for the subject. To avoid overload, careful consideration will need to be given to the range and extent of content in the specification. Furthermore, in the context of our rapidly changing world, consideration will need to be given to ensuring relevance and value into the future. A question to be considered is how to ensure the development of a specification that is relevant to all students, applicable in the real world, at a variety of scales, and into the future.

The importance of competency and skills development

The redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Geography presents an opportunity to support students 'to develop key competencies within and across the curriculum during senior cycle' (NCCA, 2023, p.1). In addition, geography presents opportunities for the acquisition of Geoliteracy and specific digital skills, for example, through the integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Consideration of Geoliteracy in Leaving Certificate can build on student learning in Junior Cycle Geography and potentially realise the aspirations about the real-world application of geography learning in senior cycle. In embedding general and geo-specific digital skills and technology in the subject at Leaving Certificate, cognisance will need to be taken of the resource implications for schools.

Assessment

The redevelopment of Leaving Certificate Geography will feature an additional assessment component (AAC), which will carry a weighting of 40%. The introduction of an AAC offers the potential to assess a range of skills that cannot be adequately assessed through the traditional format of the written examination paper. This raises questions that might be considered by the development group, including:

- How the AAC can support and extend the agency of teachers and students, offering choices that support the inclusiveness of the curriculum and allow for students with varying literacy levels to engage meaningfully with relevant tasks, whilst continuing to develop their competencies?
How the AAC might support Geoliteracy and the application of geographical skills?
- Whether the AAC might mirror or extend Junior Cycle Geography CBAs or the existing Leaving Certificate Geographical Investigation?
- What might be the impact of the AAC on the written examination?
- The implications in terms of technical support and/or resources of the potential AAC formats, including digital formats.

Section Summary

- Geography occupies a unique curriculum space as both a natural and social science subject. Leaving Certificate Geography has great potential to speak to the lived experiences of students, their environment, and our rapidly changing world.
- In redeveloping the geography specification, consideration will need to be given to relevance and scope of the curriculum in the context of the Leaving Certificate programme.
- The revised Geography specification will need to address the current gap between junior cycle and Leaving Certificate and coherence with related learning across the senior cycle.

- Together with the key competencies for senior cycle, geo-specific skills, including digital skills, will need to be considered as work on the redeveloped specification progresses.
- Consideration will need to be given to the best way to approach the Additional Assessment Component (AAC), so that it complements the learning that can be assessed in a written examination.

6. Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Geography

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

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

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

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

The Senior Cycle Key Competencies will be embedded in the learning outcomes. Leaving Certificate Geography will be available at both Higher and Ordinary level. It will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 180 hours. The development will be completed in Q2, 2025.

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

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

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

The rationale for Leaving Certificate Geography, making it transparent and evident to students, teachers, and parents/guardians and how to further widen the appeal and continue to promote broader uptake of the subject.

- How the specification can support the development of a range of key competencies and generic and geo-specific digital skills relevant to future life, work, and study.
- How the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

The assessment of Leaving Certificate Geography that is aligned to the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 2 subjects and modules (Appendix 1).

- How the specification, in its presentation, can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment.
- How to embrace and embed technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

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

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

Executive summary

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

Introduction

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

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

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

The arrangements as detailed here reflect the policy direction issued by the Minister of Education that all subjects will have an assessment component, to be in a form that is not a traditional written examination, for those components to be set and assessed by the SEC and thereby lead to a reduced emphasis on final examinations in June of 6th year.

Specifically, the arrangements for all assessment components as outlined in this document are framed by the Minister's announcement(s) on March 29, 2022, and subsequently on September 20th, 2023. Underpinned by the following understandings, the assessment components:

- will not take the form of traditional written examinations.
- will be set and marked by the SEC.
- will be subject to SEC arrangements for their completion, authentication, and submission.

In developing the arrangements outlined below, the following rationale for moving towards all subjects having another assessment component is central. This rationale is informed by

deliberations on research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC, and on the assessment literature more generally. From this work, it is evident that these components have the potential to:

- **Reduce dependence** on written summative examinations and therefore provide for a **broader assessment system**; written examinations have an important role but can be seen as a ‘snapshot’ of learning and can lead to teaching and learning having an excessive focus on examination preparation; other forms of assessment can mitigate the potential for this narrowing of learning by assessing aspects of student learning better and/or more comprehensively than written examinations alone can do; or assess learning that is not readily assessable through written examinations.
- Support and enhance teachers’ understanding and assessment of **key competencies** by contributing to a greater understanding of how students’ knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are assessed.
- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to **reflect on student learning**, boost students’ motivation to learn and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices.
- Extend the range and diversity of assessment opportunities; **spread the assessment load** and thus contribute to a reduction in or spreading of pressure on students.
- Build and develop **teachers’ assessment skills and assessment literacy** as teachers support students in working through the assessment activities as detailed within assessment briefs or guidelines.
- Generate student assessment data which can help reduce the vulnerability of the system to future unprecedented or unexpected system shocks such as COVID.
- Allow for assessment opportunities that are more **authentic** than a system relying on terminal written examinations solely.

It is also important to note that a review of the assessment literature more generally also indicates that when introducing other assessment components, it is necessary to consider how to mitigate risks, for example, of:

- over-assessment of students
- over-rehearsal of assessments
- the assessments becoming overly structured, compartmentalised, repetitive, and routine.

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

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

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

Considerations	Parameters to guide the work of the development group.
Nature	The purpose and nature of the assessment component will be clearly outlined in the subject specification and accompanying guidelines to support the completion of the assessment. Details will be provided on the nature of the component. Existing examples include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research project/extended essay • oral assessment • performance assessment • portfolio assessment • creation of an artefact • field study • experiment/ proof of concept/ practical investigation. <p>The subject specification and the accompanying guidelines will articulate clearly what the students are required to do, the form(s) in which it can be carried out and submitted, and the workload expectations associated with the assessment. The alignment of the assessment component to a particular set of learning outcomes from the subject specification will be provided, as well as details on which key competencies and associated learning outcomes will be assessed. This does not preclude the same LOs from being assessed in the final examination.</p>
Weighting	The assessment component in each subject will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks. There will be the option for this weighting to be worth 50% in the cases of Construction Studies, Engineering and PE, and up to 60% for the LCVP Link Modules.
Timing	<p>The SDG will advise on the time required for the carrying out of the assessment component.</p> <p>While the SDG may suggest when this may occur, the final decision will need to be made following consideration of the overall schedule of completion dates for all assessments across all subjects and this will be finalized by the SEC further to collaboration with NCCA and DE.</p> <p>The date for completion of the assessment component by the student will be published by the SEC and this detail will not be included in the subject specification.</p>
Design	<p>The majority of assessment components will result in an artefact/document being transmitted to the SEC and assessed by the SEC.</p> <p>In some instances, the design of the assessment may require examiners to visit schools to conduct the assessment but manageability at school and system level will need to be considered.</p>
Guidance	Guidelines to support the assessment components will be specific to each subject. These guidelines will be developed collaboratively by the NCCA and SEC. They will be informed by the deliberations of the SDG during the development of the specification and will detail:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purpose of the component concerned i.e., what it is intended to assess. • the nature of the assessment component/activity. • descriptors of quality in the form of a graduated rubric and details on assessment standards at higher and ordinary levels if deemed necessary by the assessment method. • details on the timing of the assessment (its duration and when it could happen). • guidance on the processes that may be used for the administration of the assessment.
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Table 2: Parameters for assessment arrangements for each Tranche 2 subject

Subject	Current arrangements	Parameters for new assessment arrangements
Accounting	One written examination. (3 hrs)	<p>Written examination: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.</p>
Construction Studies	<p>Written examination (OL: 40%; HL: 50%) 1 paper (OL: 2.5 hours; HL: 3 hours)</p> <p>Coursework (artefact and portfolio) (OL: 30%; HL: 25%)</p> <p>Practical skills test (OL: 30%; HL: 25%)</p> <p>Coursework and practical are examined at a common level. Written examination is examined at higher and ordinary levels.</p>	<p>Written examination: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.</p>
Engineering	Written examination (OL: 40%; HL: 50%) 1 paper (OL: 2.5 hours; HL 3 hours)	<p>Written examination: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 50% weighting.</p>

	<p>Coursework (artefact and portfolio) (OL: 30%; HL: 25%) Practical skills test (OL: 30%; HL: 25%)</p> <p>Coursework is assessed at Higher and Ordinary levels.</p> <p>Practical skills test is examined at a common level. Written examination is examined at higher and ordinary levels.</p>	<p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.</p>
English	<p>Two papers with a 50/50 % split. Paper 1: Broadly essay and comprehension focused (2 hours 30 + 20 minutes reading time).</p> <p>Paper 2: Poetry, Literature focused (3 hours + 20 minutes reading time).</p>	<p>Written exam: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.</p>
Geography	<p>Written examination: 80% weighting (2 hours 30 + 20 minutes reading time).</p> <p>Geographical Investigation: 20% weighting.</p>	<p>Written exam: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC based on a common brief.</p>

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

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