Background paper and brief for the review and revision of the Transition Year Programme Statement

For consultation

November 2022

Contents

1. Introduction

The *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report* (NCCA, 2022) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD. The Advisory Report records and responds to the views of teachers, students, parents and stakeholders gathered during the four-year review about how Senior Cycle could evolve to meet the needs of all our young people. It provides strong foundations for the phased redevelopment of Senior Cycle in the coming years.

The Advisory Report identifies key areas for attention which will be crucial to realising the vision for a redeveloped Senior Cycle. These include providing more flexible pathways through senior cycle for all students; a greater mix of subjects and modules, including technical, creative, and vocational options; broader assessment and reporting arrangements. The Advisory Report informed the Minister's ambitious plans for the redevelopment of senior cycle. In relation to Transition Year (TY), the Minister announced that:

> *Transition Year will remain as a standalone programme in Senior Cycle*
>
> *a revised Transition Year programme statement will be developed and available for schools from early 2024*
>
> *All students will have the opportunity to take the Transition Year programme. Therefore, schools that have not previously provided TY will be encouraged to do so.* (DE, 2022b)

This paper provides a background for revising *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools*. These guidelines serve as the current TY Programme Statement which is now the focus of review and revision. The background paper forms the basis of a consultation which will seek to elicit the views of a range of interested parties, including teachers and students, to contribute to the development of the revised TY Programme Statement.

Section 2 outlines the origins and growth of the TY programme, and the current educational and policy context in which the programme continues to evolve. Section 3 discusses the enactment of the current TY Guidelines in schools using inspection reports published by the Department of Education and existing research. The existing research was reviewed as part of a desktop analysis conducted by the NCCA. The desktop analysis was the first of two components of an audit of TY. The second component of the audit is presented in Section 4 - the insights gained into effective aspects of TY programmes from school-based visits carried out in September and October 2022. Section 5 draws on the previous sections to set out issues for consideration. The final section presents a proposed brief for the development of the revised TY Programme Statement.

It is intended to disseminate this paper for wide consultation. The feedback from this process will inform the work of the TY Development Group.

2. Background and Context

This section offers an overview of the origins and evolution of the TY Programme, including a summary of the composition of the current *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools* which were introduced into schools in 1994. The current policy and educational context are discussed from national and international perspectives.

Origins and Evolution of TY

The TY Programme was introduced in September 1974, across three schools on a pilot basis. The rationale given by the Minister for Education was that:

> *Because of growing pressures on students for high grades and competitive success, educational systems are becoming increasingly academic treadmills. Increasingly, too, because of these pressures the school is losing contact with life outside and the student has little or no opportunity 'to stand and stare', to discover the kind of person he is, the kind of society he will be living in and, in due course, contributing to, its shortcomings and its good points.* (Burke, 1974)

In 1979, the first evaluation of TY took place and concluded that the programme made a positive impact on the climate of the school citing more openness to educational innovation, changing attitudes to increased parental involvement, improved attitudes from schools towards early school-leavers and fewer barriers to the world outside the classroom (Egan and O'Reilly, 1979). Despite this positive feedback, the uptake across schools was low and a decade after its introduction, fewer than 1,000 students in less than 20 schools were offering TY (Jeffers, 2007).

The first significant increase in uptake was recorded in 1986 when an additional 115 schools introduced the TY Programme, which coincided with the publication of more comprehensive guidelines in 1986 (Jeffers, 2007). It is important to note that the Transition Year Option (TYO) and a 3-year Junior Certificate programme were introduced the previous year, in 1985, as part of wider structural changes to the post-primary curriculum. These changes offered schools some flexibility around a 5- or 6-year post-primary education (ESRI, 2004). Yet it also had implications for schools that had previously offered a 4-year programme at junior level, as part of a 6-year post-primary education; the introduction of the 3-year Junior Certificate programme would have reduced their post-primary education to 5 years. TYO offered these schools the opportunity to maintain a 6-year post-primary education (Jeffers, 2015).

In 1993, at which point there were 163 schools offering TY (ESRI, 2004), the Department of Education (DE) published the current *Transition Year Programmes - Guidelines for Schools* which preceded the most significant structural change to senior cycle education in 1994 when all schools could offer four programmes: Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme(LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate (LCE).

The number of schools offering TY increased to 450 in 1994, following the restructuring of senior cycle and assisted by European funding secured for professional development (Jeffers, 2015). The number of schools offering TY and the number of students participating in the programme has since grown steadily. Based on the data obtained from the Department of Education, 98% of schools are currently offer the TY programme (DE, 2022g). The TY participation rate amongst

students in September 2021 was approximately 74%, based on the 3rd year enrolment in September 2020.
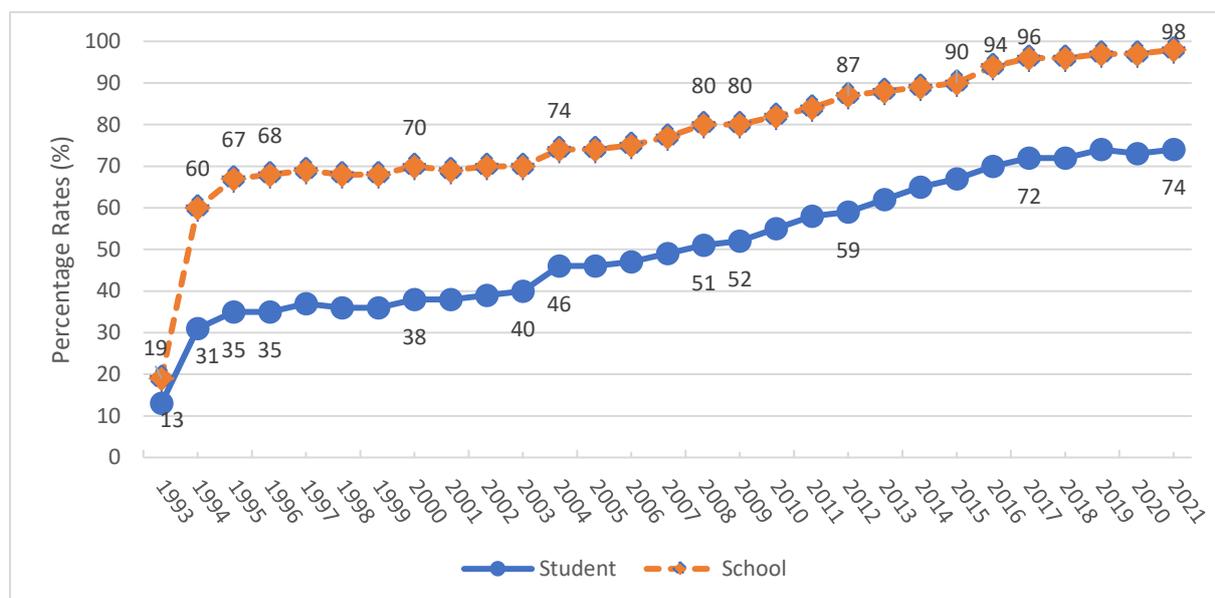

Figure 1: Student participation rates and school provision rates for Transition Year 1993-2021. (Based on data from Clerkin (2018) and from the PPOD section of the Department of Education.)

Composition of the *TY Programmes – Guidelines for Schools*

The TY Guidelines are divided into two sections: Curriculum Principles and Organisation. An appendix provides further support by setting out possible areas of experience for inclusion in a school's curriculum. These guidelines were seen to be more focused than the 1986 guidelines and remain the bedrock of all TY programmes in schools (Jeffers, 2015). The guidelines aim to develop personal, social, academic, and vocational competences through experiences in the classroom and beyond.

The Curriculum Principles section is presented under the headings: Content, Remediation and Compensatory Studies, Interdisciplinary Work, Work Experience, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Approaches, and Assessment.

Under the first principle it is stated that TY content should augment the Leaving Certificate experience, lay solid foundations for further study and enhance vocational skills while *catering for the pupils' personal and social awareness/development* (DES, 1993). It emphasises the *development of basic competences in key areas according to the needs of individual pupils* (ibid) as a central aspect of a school's TY programme, including remediation for students who might otherwise be disadvantaged. Enacting the principles is expected to positively enhance the confidence and attitudes of students and build their capacity for more effective and self-directed learning. The guidelines encourage an integrated approach to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting underpinned by a varied range of active, innovative and relevant learning experiences. The guidelines recommend the outcome of the assessment process of TY is described in a *Pupil Profile* (ibid) which would *incorporate an evaluation of a wide range of qualities* (ibid), compiled mainly by teachers with significant inputs from students and where feasible, from parents.

Another central aspect of the TY programme as described in the guidelines is the development of personal and vocational skills through work experience and community-based activities. The guidelines also suggest that TY presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary work to *create that unified perspective which is lacking in the traditional compartmentalised teaching of individual subjects* (ibid).

The Organisation section is presented under the headings: Whole-school approach, Co-ordination and Teamwork, Planning, Staff Development and Inservice, Certification, and Evaluation.

This section of the guidelines places a whole-school approach at the heart of developing and implementing the TY curriculum. Given the centrality of activities beyond the classroom to the TY curriculum, the guidelines emphasise the importance of building quality relationships with partners such as parents, employers, and community agencies.

Nurturing a TY programme is a complex challenge requiring a TY coordinator surrounded by a core team of teachers with a diverse range of expertise and skills. The guidelines describe planning being *informed by the need for balance, flexibility, and realistic perspective; and it should facilitate programme development and documentation* (ibid). It recommends that a documented programme should be reviewed annually, using *appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators* (ibid) and its implementation revised accordingly. A condition of participation for schools in the TY programme is engagement with staff development and in-service education. Appropriate use of certification at local level is suggested, for specific modules for example, but the guidelines rule out national certification by the Department.

Review of Senior Cycle

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022) emerged directly from an extensive review of senior cycle which took place from 2016 to 2020, and which gathered and distilled the views of teachers, students, school leaders, parents, education partners, researchers, and wider civil society about what they would like to conserve from the existing Senior Cycle and what they would like to change.

During the review, TY was viewed as a valuable programme for students that offers opportunities for personal, social and academic development, and experience of adult and working life. The local autonomy afforded to schools in the development of their TY programme was viewed as a positive feature of TY. However, there was also some concern around equity of student access to the programme, and the activities and opportunities for learning and development within TY. It was also noted that TY provides a valuable opportunity for students to further develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions without the pressure of external state examinations.

While the Advisory Report captures and acknowledges this diversity of perspective expressed during the review of senior cycle, it identifies the common ground that emerged. Much of this common ground is expressed in a renewed purpose, vision and guiding principles for a redeveloped Senior Cycle which will provide the base from which to shape a dynamic TY Programme Statement that enables schools to genuinely meets their students' needs in the ever-changing education environment.

The Advisory Report also sets out areas of action specific to the redevelopment of TY, which include conducting an audit, informed by the review findings, to help identify the most effective aspects of TY programmes in schools. The findings from this audit are set out in sections 3 and 4 of this paper.

Policy Context

Department of Education's Statement of Strategy

The Department of Education's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 sets out a vision that is committed to supporting the academic and personal development of every child and young person (DoE, 2021). The Statement of Strategy describes key policies and strategies that will respond to the global changes and, in turn, drive the changes required to realise its vision. The key policies and strategies that are most relevant to the development of a revised TY Programme Statement are set out below.

Wellbeing
The Wellbeing Policy Statement requires schools *to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle* (DoE, 2018, p22). The incorporation of wellbeing promotion into school policies and practices is seen as one of the key indicators of success.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
Key actions of the 2nd National strategy on ESD are intended to further embed ESD principles across all levels and all stages of the curriculum. The principles include the promotion of lifelong learning, active citizenship, inclusion, linking the local to the national and global, and pedagogical techniques to support participatory learning (DoE, 2022f).

Digital
Societies and schools have lived through an accelerated digital transformation, in many cases in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021). The Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 frames digital competence as a means *to develop competent, critically engaged, active learners while supporting them to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world*. (DoE, 2022b, p1).

STEM
The STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 is, by its nature, interdisciplinary and describes STEM education as *multi-faceted, that goes well beyond the main disciplines that constitute the acronym STEM* (DoE, 2017, p5). The statement also seeks to enable students to develop critical thinking and creative skills in authentic contexts, make informed career choices and avail of *co-curricular and out-of-school STEM learning opportunities*. (DoE, 2017, p15).

Languages
The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 emphasises oral and aural competences and a shift towards Irish as a living, community language (DES, 2010). The Chief Inspector's Report, in an evaluation of the Languages Connect strategy, suggested *Greater emphasis should be placed on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and the merits of introducing CLIL into Transition Year programmes in post-primary should be investigated.* (DE, 2022d, p275).

The Statement of Strategy also outlines the contribution that education can make in achieving several national cross-government objectives, including fulfilment of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, in which ESD will continue to play a key role, mitigating climate change, exploring innovative approaches to an inclusive model of education, delivering diverse progression pathways for students and creating a culture of citizen-centric innovation.

Skills and Further Education Strategies

Other national strategies complementing the DoE Statement of Strategy include Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 and the National Further Education and Training (FET) strategy, Future FET: Transforming Learning.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 identifies global trends, challenges and drivers such as: technological advances, new ways of working which include a rising demand for interpersonal skills, changing consumer patterns which is creating demands for greater digital, design and creative skills, an ageing demographic, and pressure on natural resources (DFHERIS, 2021). It is these types of global challenges and drivers that are *influencing the development of education and training systems which will need to continue to adapt as people's lifestyles and work demands change* (DFHERIS, 2021, p32). The National Skills Strategy 2025 describes how 21st century skills are supported across the continuum of education. In relation to TY, it suggests the following as most pertinent: Subject Tasters, Experiential Learning (work experience and project work), Portfolios, Reflective Journals and Researching Courses and Careers (DFHERIS, 2021).

The conclusion of NCCA's review of senior cycle coincided with the launch of the Future FET Strategy by SOLAS. Unsurprisingly there are many synergies between the ambitious agenda set out in the new FET strategy, aimed at transforming learning over the next 5 years, and the actions arising from the review of senior cycle. They can be broadly encompassed by the idea of looking at pathways from school to FET. This section concludes with a snapshot of some of the links that currently exist between FET providers and TY programmes across the country.

Links between TY and Further Education and Training

In early 2022, NCCA and SOLAS established a technical working group to scope how to create systemic opportunities for schools and local FET providers to co-construct TY modules. In March 2022, a survey was conducted by the technical working group to gain a better understanding of the experience of FET providers to date, highlighting their engagement in their local areas with students in TY. The survey responses are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of findings from the March 2022 survey of TY - FET provision

Survey Participants	30 FET centres across 11 of the 16 ETBs, collaborating with 50 schools in the 2021/22 academic year.
Level of Engagement	50% of the FET providers engaged (2021/22) in learning activities with schools and over 50 schools participated from within and outside the ETB region.
Range of Modules	Barista Courses; Culinary Arts; Health and Beauty; Hairdressing; Mechanics, Aviation, Electrical and Plumbing courses; Careers in Outdoor Education & Training; Engineering; Advance Manufacturing.
Duration of Modules	Range from 1 day a week over a limited block of time, to blocks of 2 weeks, to 3 hours per week over the entire year.
Types of Provision	Flexible approaches enable a wide diversity of approaches, including practical courses, workshops and taster programmes, taking place on the school or FET site.
Reasons for Engagement with TY	Raise awareness of FET pathways; broaden career options for students and challenge misconceptions; offer TY students experience of specific vocational areas; encourage progression pathways into apprenticeships and PLC courses.
Challenges	Mainly centred around the staffing and space capacity of the FET provider and resources needed to engage with TY. Managing the annual calendars of the schools and the FET provider was also highlighted.
On Creating Future Opportunities	Ideas included: co-construct targeted programmes aligned to the school's TY programme; build stronger links with TY coordinator and guidance counsellors; hold more open days in the FET centre; establish and resource a FET TY coordinator role.

The survey also explored areas and actions for further consideration. Among them were the sharing of approaches and models of collaboration amongst the schools and FET providers, exploration of a suite of blended options, including taster modules, possibly with some form of related accreditation, and the development of guidelines for FET pathways and taster modules in TY that make the aims clear to stakeholders while retaining the current flexibilities.

Section Summary

- Five decades of growth and innovation has seen TY become a bedrock of the senior cycle landscape. Approximately 98% of schools and 74% of students participate in the TY programme.

- The current *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools* aims to develop the personal, social, academic and vocational competences of students. Schools have the autonomy and flexibility to develop unique curricula that meet the needs of their incoming junior cycle students while empowering those students for future senior cycle experiences.

- From the findings of NCCA's review of senior cycle, a renewed vision and purpose were identified and eight guiding principles emerged to guide the redevelopment of senior cycle which includes the development of a revised TY Programme Statement.

- The global challenges and drivers facing students in the 21st century demand different skills, values and dispositions. They inform national educational strategies, in areas such as wellbeing, ESD, STEM and languages, in the acquisition of skills to meet the global challenges and the provision of diverse pathways.

- Supporting students to access diverse futures by providing pathways for transitions to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment has emerged as a strategic priority across the education system.

- There are localised examples of practice being ahead of policy where schools and local further education and training (FET) providers are collaborating to co-construct transition year (TY) modules.

3. Enactment of current TY Guidelines

The section discusses the curriculum from early childhood to senior cycle, and the place of TY in this curriculum. The enactment of the TY Guidelines in Irish schools is then examined through recent inspection reports, including the Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020. The section concludes with the findings of the desk-based component of NCCA's recent audit of TY which examined existing research and other relevant sources exploring the enactment of the TY Programme in schools. The effective aspects of TY programmes were analysed through 5 themes and a summary of the analysis is presented below, along with challenges associated with implementing TY programmes.

Curriculum Overview and Developments

Early years and primary

Earlier phases of education have seen the introduction of new frameworks and new curricula. In 2009, Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for childhood from birth to six years was introduced and is underpinned by 12 principles which concern children and their lives, children's connections with others, and how children learn and develop holistically through, for example, play, active learning, meaningful experiences, communication and language. Learning and development are described through the themes of Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking.

The 1999 primary curriculum seeks to provide a broad educational experience through a rich tapestry of learning experiences, in which all dimensions of a child's life are nurtured. The curriculum is broad and balanced, comprising seven areas, all of which are interrelated and designed to accommodate an interdisciplinary approach. The curriculum is designed to encourage students to be active agents in their own development.

The curriculum is currently subject to review and redevelopment. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020) provides the vision and principles of learning, teaching and assessment, upon which the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum will be based. The framework builds on the principles and themes of Aistear and connects with the learning experiences provided in Junior Cycle. In choosing pedagogical strategies, teachers are encouraged to focus on strategies to support, engage, motivate and progress children's learning. The framework promotes the use of varied and flexible approaches to pedagogy. There are seven key competencies that will seek to equip children with the *essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals* (NCCA, 2020, p7).

Junior Cycle

The implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015) introduced a wider range of curriculum components and assessments to facilitate broader learning, improved SEN provision, renewed focus on learning in the area of wellbeing, and a broader form of reporting through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). While the implementation was impacted by the

Covid-19 pandemic, the end of the 2021/2022 academic year has seen all new junior cycle specifications complete their first full cycle in schools. There are a range of views on the impact of the structural changes at junior cycle, and while research is ongoing into the impact, the implementation of the Framework is arguably the curricular development that has the greatest impact on TY since the programme was introduced in schools three decades ago.

Aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle, such as the flexibility afforded to schools to have more control over the design of the curriculum at junior cycle, the introduction of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) with an emphasis on formative assessment to support teaching and learning, and encouragement of students into a more participative role in their own learning, could increase the potential for greater alignment with the experience in TY.

The Framework has also seen the introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes for students with general learning disabilities. The programmes are based around priority learning units which are designed to develop social, pre-vocational and life skills for these students with special educational needs.

Senior Cycle

Whilst senior cycle has been characterised more by conservation than change (DE, 2022d; NCCA, 2022) over the last two decades, there have been many important developments in recent years, most notably since 2016. These changes include the introduction of new subjects such as Politics and Society, Computer Science, Physical Education, Mandarin Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese, as well as the review and redevelopment of existing LCA module descriptors and Leaving Certificate subjects.

Key features of all of these new and revised subject specifications include; a learning outcomes approach to curriculum design; the integration of the five key skills of senior cycle into learning outcomes; and the introduction of second assessment components worth at least 20% of a student's final marks.

The most recent, and arguably, the most significant development has been the announcement by the Minister for Education of her plans for the reform of senior cycle. These plans build on the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022). Some of the changes announced by the Minster have already been introduced, including the opening up of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) to all students in schools where the programme is available.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the TY Programme

Monitoring the implementation of the TY Guidelines is the responsibility of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education. There is evidence from recent inspection reports that many recommendations from a 1994-95 evaluation of TY Programmes (DES, 2000) appear to have been enacted, to varying degrees, across many schools.

An analysis of TY Inspection reports from 2019-2020 (DoE, 2022e) shows that most schools aspire to fulfil the aims and ethos of TY as a standalone year (and not the first year of a three-year Leaving Certificate Programme). There is evidence that schools tend to implement whole school approaches to TY, support the TY programme coordinator, regularly evaluate the programme with

a wide range of stakeholders, and include a vocational dimension. However, the inspection reports also highlight that many of these aspects, and other aspects of the TY Guidelines, are unevenly, or less widely, implemented.

Over the past two decades, from Circular M1/00 in 2000 to the 2021/2022 advice note to schools (DoE, 2021), the Department of Education has reiterated some of these areas of which schools need to be particularly mindful: continue good practice of creative and innovative programmes, with breadth and balance across all aspects; ensure the TY programme is standalone and not part of a 3-year Leaving Certificate Programme; maintain a clearly documented TY Programme that is regularly revised and updated; develop a wide-ranging assessment and reporting system referred to in the TY Guidelines as a pupil profile; implement an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approach to *learning, wellbeing and social interaction* (DoE, 2021, p1); consider the financial implications of TY participation for some families; provide an RSE programme in TY; introduce guidance *as a whole-school activity and treated as a specific component*. (DE, 2021, p3); and identify skills and knowledge that could bridge the transition from junior to senior cycle, for individuals and for the general cohort.

The Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020 concluded that TY remains *a successful element of senior cycle provision* and *has been one of the major innovations in Irish education*. (DoE, 2022d, p134). It does suggest, based on inspection reports, that in subjects such as Irish, History and Geography more stimulating, relevant and inspiring curricula could be developed incorporating interdisciplinary, cross-curricular elements (DoE, 2022d).

Existing Research into TY Programmes

As noted above, this concluding piece sets out the findings of the desk-based component of NCCA's recent audit of TY, which examined a number of studies of the TY programme in schools which were completed since the publication of the current TY Guidelines. It should be noted that internationally TY remains unique as a mainstream year of a national education system designed to provide space for the academic, personal, social and vocational development of students (Clerkin, 2016). A summary of the analysis of TY programmes is presented below by drawing attention to Positive Features and Challenges.

The desktop audit used the following **five lenses** to identify positive features of TY programmes:
- Programme components
- Teaching, learning, assessment and reporting
- Vocational learning and skills
- Personal development and social awareness
- Programme planning and evaluation.

Positive Features

Across the studies examined in the audit, there was general consensus on positive features of TY programmes. These centre on a whole-school approach to planning and implementation, a student-centred vision, clear communication to stakeholders about the vision and goals, imaginative and adaptive co-ordination and top-down support that is consistent and authentic. In addition, breadth of modules, core subjects, tasters and once-off events across the curriculum and

a balance of learning inside and outside the classroom, with coordinated guidance, underpin effective programmes.

Programme Components
A key feature tends to be a balance and breadth to the structure of the programme components, where the programme components are consistently renewed to be relevant and stimulating. This is especially true of core senior cycle subjects but applies across sampling of senior cycle subjects and TY-specific modules. In many cases, this is allied to both imaginative timetabling and responsiveness to the needs of the students and the wider school community (Jeffers, 2007; Clerkin, 2019).

Beneficial programme components tend to explicitly interconnect the learning experiences in the classroom with experiences outside the classroom such as work experience, community placement, competitions, educational trips and once-off TY events. The benefits of the components seem to be intertwined with reflective teaching practice in the classroom, and where new skills and a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning are often implicit gains for the students (Jeffers, 2015; Clerkin, 2019).

Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Reporting
Students and teachers describe the classroom as liberated due to the learning-led focus of TY and the absence of exam-pressure. The TY Guidelines state that *appropriate modes of assessment should be chosen to complement the variety of approaches used in implementing the programme* (DE, 1993). Balance and breadth re-emerge consistently as key considerations. Students report that they value learning beyond the classroom and democratic, participative classrooms can build confidence, esteem and capacities for self-directed learning. The interconnectedness of learning inside and outside the classroom seems to be highly valued by students. Jeffers (2007, p321) states that *the preparedness of students for the activities, how well resourced they are, teachers' levels of engagement and the quality of the de-briefing or follow-up afterwards, all contribute to the quality of the learning*.

Students maintaining evidence of learning and achievements, through portfolios for example, dovetailing with schools accrediting students in a regular and consistent manner, are reported as a positive factor in the personal, social and vocational development of students across all studies and reports. Also, some form of meaningful concluding event at the end of a module or project, such as a skills demonstration, shared learning events, structured reflection or end-of year interviews, can also support student development.

Vocational Learning and Skills
One of the aspects of TY most cited as positive and purposeful is work experience. Apart from its intrinsic potential for social and emotional development in a workplace setting, this module appears to be most effective when it is viewed as informing subsequent subject and career choice, and when the work-place learning is integrated into a broader vocational education programme (Jeffers, 2015, p43-52; Clerkin, 2019, p48-50). This is echoed by parents as part of the review of senior cycle education:

> *TY work experience and community placement over a month in total makes for a realistic real world experience where relationships with adults outside school have to be established, leading to self-awareness and resilience.*

Clerkin (2019) reported a coordinated vocational aspect of TY as fundamental to a successful TY programme. Specific enterprise and self-employment modules are often cited by students as transformative experiences. Jeffers (2007) found similar importance attached by schools to the vocational dimension of TY, including its potential as a platform for focussed career guidance in Leaving Certificate programmes.

Many other broader TY modules, internally and externally provided, can particularly complement the acquisition of vocational skills, in that they are a mix of transferable, creative and practical skills. Examples include modules or workshops on digital skills, time-management and study skills, self-regulation and self-awareness, and developing leadership and communication skills.

Personal Development and Social Awareness

One of the most common responses from teachers, students and parents is the positive impact of TY on the personal development of students. It is difficult to isolate single positive features of TY that explicitly link to enhanced personal development and social awareness. In speaking to the best aspects of TY from student perspectives, Clerkin (2019) states that the various aspects *contribute to a positive cycle of development where new experiences promote new skills and encourage personal growth in a self-reinforcing loop.* The challenge for TY programmes is the provision of these aspects, coordinated within the structure of school life in senior cycle. A *positive cycle of development* seems to include, as a minimum, a balance and breadth of learning inside and outside the classroom, variegated opportunities to develop social awareness, social skills and make new friendships, community outreach, vocational education and experiences, and relevant activities that develop student agency.

The interconnectedness of learning inside and outside the classroom seems to strengthen student development. Given the aspects that contribute most positively to this dimension of TY are in place, it seems coordination and guidance are key. TY programmes that increase the number of settings where relationships with peers and adults can flourish seem to be critical to the aim of increasing maturity (Jeffers, 2007). Reference to guidance in the reports tends to focus on career guidance, and proactive guidance in career options seems to be a contributory, positive factor in a TY programme.

Programme Planning and Evaluation

In a chapter on *Listening to Young People's Voices* (2015), Jeffers states that a successful TY programme continually seeks students' views. Listening to these young voices assists the school in deepening everyone's understanding of TY (Jeffers, 2015). On listening to parents' voices, a principal noted, *It's important for schools to know what they are doing well and have it supported with hard evidence. We also pick up pointers for improvement* (Jeffers, 2015, p96).

Another positive feature seems to be ensuring that relevant information about TY is disseminated to parents and students in advance of the year (Clerkin, 2019; Jeffers, 2007). The importance of year-long programme and subject planning, evaluation and re-design, supported by senior management and inclusive of a broad team, appears to be one of the solutions to what Clerkin (2019) identifies as a problem regarding engagement across the year:

it appears as though the density, or spread, of activity throughout TY is of some importance to students. That is, it is not sufficient to have one (or even several) major event(s) if the rest of the year is spent listlessly. (Clerkin, 2019, p63)

Creating a successful TY programme is a complex challenge. Given the autonomous nature of curriculum-planning in TY, every TY programme is as individual as the school itself. In this sense *a committed coordinator and support from the wider school staff are critical to the creation and ongoing rejuvenation of a school's Transition Year programme* (Clerkin, 2019, p61).

Challenges

An inevitable tension associated with stepping off the academic treadmill, is students may be less invested in academic activities, and have higher expectations of other activities than their previous post-primary experiences. This is evidenced across all the studies and reports. This tension in turn has implications for schools managing the expectations of the school community and managing delivery of the programme. It is perhaps unsurprising in this context that Clerkin (2019) found up to 40% of students said TY was not what they hoped it would be, to varying levels of expectation. Another tension associated with stepping off the treadmill is the absence of formal certification of the TY programme as part of senior cycle, simultaneously a potential weakness and strength. One of the findings of the senior cycle review was that TY provides opportunities for a more varied approach to assessment and reporting but the lack of formal certification often de-valued the achievements in the eyes of students and parents (ESRI, 2019).

The TY Programme is designed to be an optional year for students. Both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, across the studies, report similar barriers to students choosing TY: fear of losing the habit of study, the financial expense and feeling like a year has been wasted when they could go straight to 5th year. The optional nature of the TY Programme results in two cohorts of students entering Leaving Certificate programmes for whom progression and continuity from junior to senior cycle is a different kind of experience.

In grappling with the complex reasons around individual students making a decision to opt in or out of TY, a minority of schools make TY compulsory. The reasons can vary from the viability of the size of the class to schools' desire to ensure all students experience the advantages of participation in the TY programme. The evidence from studies suggests that in some contexts, compulsion, as opposed to persuasion, can impede the programme's effectiveness, reduce some students' sense of agency and create the risk of spreading negative attitudes towards participation by those who felt compelled to participate against their will.

The challenges of providing a TY programme seem to be more acute for smaller schools, and for schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage or geographical isolation. Based on DE data for 2021, of the 2% of schools not offering a TY programme, 65% of these schools have a total enrolment of less than 200 students and 70% of the schools are designated DEIS.

It is also difficult to circumvent the reality that for a minority of students, the advantage of a year away from state examination pressure can transform into the disadvantage of having a *doss year* mentality with decreased motivation and the experience of an uneven spread of activities across the year (ESRI, 2004; Jeffers, 2007; Clerkin, 2019).

Section Summary

- Early childhood, primary and junior cycle curricula and frameworks introduced during the lifetime of the current *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools*, have focused on the personal, social and academic development of the child, allied to themes of student agency, wellbeing, and meaningful experiences. These curricula and frameworks have been characterised by more autonomy and flexibility afforded to schools.

- Senior cycle development, in that same period, has been characterised more by conservation than change. The most notable development has been the introduction of new subjects and the revision of existing modules and subjects, with a greater focus on skills and knowledge. New and revised subjects now have a range of additional assessment components alongside written examination.

- Research and inspection reports confirm that the majority of schools aspire to the aims of the TY programme as a standalone year offering personal, social, academic and vocational activities to students.

- The desktop component of the TY audit suggests that there are specific actions and approaches that schools can take to create a worthwhile programme for the school context that meets the aims of the current TY Guidelines. This includes a whole-school approach to planning and implementation, a student-centred vision, clear communication to stakeholders about the vision and goals, imaginative and adaptive co-ordination and top-down support that is consistent and authentic.

- While positive aspects are evident, implementation of various aspects of the TY Guidelines varies widely across schools. This variation is most notable in the teaching, learning and assessment of core subjects and some optional subjects, vocational experiences, an uneven spread of activities over the year and a lack of emphasis on cross-curricular elements.

- Research indicates that some of the challenges facing TY include the absence of formal national certification, reduced motivation in some students, high costs and very specific contextual factors such as size and location of the school.

4. School-based component of the audit of TY

This section outlines the approach adopted for conducting a school-based review of TY, which was the second component of NCCA's recent audit of TY. As noted earlier, this audit was one of the actions arising from the Council's review of senior cycle. A brief description of the methodology used for the school-based review follows after which the effective aspects and practices identified during the school visits are presented as insights under eight headings.

Methodology

The school-based component began with an open call to all post-primary schools in April 2022. The expression of interest form was structured around the five lenses used to examine positive features of TY programmes (see Section 3. This enabled schools to be identified whose TY programmes demonstrated the positive features described in the existing research. For the selection process, the schools identified were anonymised and then chosen to form a stratified sample, representative of the national profile of post-primary schools, based on school type (Education and Training Board (ETB), Community and Comprehensive, Voluntary Secondary), DEIS status, gender profile and school size. Two additional Irish-medium schools; an island school and a gaelcholáiste were also included to ensure the sample was representative of the diversity of school contexts. Visits were undertaken in all schools to gain further insights into the effective aspects of their TY programmes.

The research outlined in section 2 highlighted that a majority of schools offer TY as an option, while TY programmes are also compulsory in some schools as part of a 6-year post-primary curriculum, though each has its own complexities and variations for each school context. Of the 14 schools visited as part of the school-based review, TY was compulsory in 5 schools (36%) and optional in 9 schools (64%).

The school visits were completed between early September and early October 2022. During each visit, data was collected from 4 focus groups meetings:

- Senior management comprising Principal and/or Deputy Principal
- TY coordinator and Guidance Counsellor
- 6 teachers, including some from the core TY team, teachers who delivered TY-specific modules and teachers who taught across post-primary year groups
- A sample of 10 students reflecting the range of abilities, dispositions and backgrounds that comprise the general cohort of TY students in the school.

Insights from the school-based component

Across the schools involved in the review, there were common effective aspects and practices identified in their TY programmes which are described below. The insights gained from the school visits are grouped under eight headings: Vision, Culture, A Committed Core Team, Purpose and Belonging, Opportunities for students, Opportunities for teachers, Credit-based System, Reflective Practice.

Vision

The qualities which the schools hoped to instil in their students through their TY programme were mirrored and evident in how the schools delivered their programme. The vision of the TY programmes tended to focus on education for ways of being' and 'education for ways of working'. When attending to education for ways of being, the schools incorporated qualities such as being adaptable, open, flexible, reflective, responsive, confident, curious, empathetic and aspirational throughout their programmes. A focus on education for ways of working tended to incorporate skills-based qualities such as interpersonal, collaborative, vocational, creative, practical, global and digital skills. The vision is bespoke to the school but within a framework of meeting a set of aims for the students' development, aligned to the aims of the *Transition Year Programmes - Guidelines for schools.*

Schools spoke with pride of the high status of TY in the school and the community and of the widespread belief in, and buy-in for, the programme. Many schools linked this back to the vision they set out for their programme. Through the visits, questions that schools posed to themselves emerged in the form of *does the vision create and sustain the belief and buy-in? Does belief and buy-in embed itself into a whole-school culture when there is a genuine vision to which the school community subscribes*? Irrespective of how schools grappled with these questions, an integrated whole-school culture takes many years to establish and needs to be tailored to the evolving needs of the school community. It is a clear direction chosen by the school and a path followed with dedication and determination.

Culture

The whole-school culture was evident in the forward planning and early awareness raising of the TY programme. It was found that awareness of TY and its status tended to be informally raised throughout junior cycle with formal induction for the TY programme beginning in September or spring when students are in third year, typically with an information night event. During or shortly after these events, some schools tended to seek inputs from 3rd year students to assist with forward planning of the TY programme, for example, seeking expressions of interest in TY-specific modules or ascertaining the areas of interest they would like to explore in TY. Schools felt that inviting 3rd year parents and students to some of the TY graduation/celebration, capacity permitting, was an effective approach to raising awareness of TY amongst students and parents.

An outcome of having confidence in an effective TY programme was the spread of TY practices into the wider school culture. Teachers and coordinators spoke of TY as a 'breeding ground' for innovation and a place for experimentation. These practices were then transposed into other years. Examples of this included trialling initiatives on formative assessment and the use of digital portfolios with 2nd years or the spread of reflective practices adopted in TY into junior cycle years.

A committed core team

Building a committed team of people who consistently strive to realise the vision was a common effective practice found in the schools. The composition of the core team was often reflective of the programme enabling and nurturing the creativity and passions of the teachers. It was evident across many schools that the senior leadership team and the core team collaborated throughout the year. The core teams felt genuinely encouraged and tangibly supported by senior leadership, in terms of planning, pedagogical practices and an openness to innovative ideas. In all schools, a dedicated TY programme coordinator with a strong sense of collegiality was central to the core

TY team. The core team tended to include a mix of some, or all, of the following: the TY programme coordinator, the TY Year Head, a guidance counsellor, and 4-5 TY teachers.

Purpose and Belonging

It became evident that the integrity of the schools' vision for TY was served by a shared sense of purpose and belonging. There was a strong culture in many of the schools where their motivation was grounded in a sense of belonging, and where purpose was reinforced in almost every aspect of the programme through daily interactions, a shared identity, and belief and trust in what they were doing.

The question around what constitutes a programme for TY became relevant when purpose was discussed. The schools were clear that their TY programme was not the first academic year of a Leaving Certificate programme while at the same time they emphasised that the academic development of the student was a core element of their programme. They viewed their programme as providing multiple opportunities for students to transition from junior to senior cycle and to develop the skills needed for senior cycle and beyond.

Purpose and belonging must encompass the development of autonomous young people who have greater self-acceptance and empathy thus increasing the likelihood of healthy social interactions. They must have time and opportunities to nurture their own sense of agency and autonomy, while being motivated to gain a greater sense of what they need and be responsible learners in TY and beyond into senior cycle, further education and potential careers.

The school visits revealed nuanced perspectives on the rationale for schools offering an optional or compulsory TY programme. Schools that introduced compulsory TY programmes as part of a 3-year senior cycle had high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of their TY programme and had a strong, established culture of TY in their school. Also, it became evident that these schools are deeply aware of the enormous responsibilities associated with a compulsory TY programme. Whether their programmes are optional or compulsory, a shared sense of responsibility to their students appears to increase the desire to create a highly effective programme that realises the vision, while also managing the financial cost so as not to disadvantage some students. An optional or compulsory TY programme is a highly contextualised decision for schools where issues, such as equity and access, need deep consideration.

Creating a TY programme from within the school's resources, most especially where the school has enabled teacher talents and passions, was found to be a highly effective aspect of programmes as it also facilitated cost efficiencies while enhancing teacher-student relationships and student development. The autonomy granted to schools under the current *Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools* was viewed as being highly important for each school's curriculum.
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Opportunities for students

One of the most common effective aspects found across the schools related to the opportunities created for students. Programmes tended to be built purposefully to create as many varied opportunities for the students as possible. Understanding and offering experiences to all students with differing skills and qualities was considered essential to ensure that everyone had multiple

opportunities to achieve success, including support for students with special educational needs or specific individual needs. Students in these programmes found their appetite for discovery, for being engaged and busy across the entire year, and for being responsible school citizens became a self-sustaining, self-regulating dynamic.

Trust in the programme was founded on the belief, held across the school community, that the students would be better prepared for their futures. Each successive programme became more effective if it was built on the previous year's successes and lessons are learned from perceived failures.

Students and teachers often referred to the fact that their TY had different aims to the rest of the programmes in school. Generally, it was more student-centred and outward looking, with a greater sense of belonging. For example, when asked if the amount of activities took them away from classes, especially core or sampling, they responded by saying as the year progressed they didn't want to miss out on that lesson and so they tended to follow it up, often because they had been allowed out of the class to pursue another project or take part in an event.

The schools spoke often of how student confidence and maturity grew as the year progressed. To respond to this, the schools endeavoured to allow students to re-visit choices made earlier in the year around activities, volunteering programmes and modules. While logistical constraints impinged on the degree of flexibility, there was an awareness of how the changing landscape of student development required a response from the school's programme.

Opportunities for students within the wider community were highly valued and nurtured carefully, especially community outreach activities and work experience. Across the schools, these wider community links supported the vision of the programme and in many cases well planned outreach activities could often create symbiotic networks and relationships that reached back into the school.

These community activities were linked, where possible, to vocational education, relevant subjects and modules designed around personal development and social awareness. Integration of the experiences into the overall realisation of the vision was consistently reflected upon and evaluated.

In particular settings where the school was more geographically isolated than some urban settings, the relationship between the school and the local community tended to be more symbiotic and arguably more important to the viability of the TY programme. For example, annual local events initiated by the school or community often became events run on a mutual basis. In settings where there may be several local schools, communication and collaboration with these schools was generally embraced.

Opportunities for teachers

Mirroring the importance of opportunities for students, an effective aspect across the schools was how they built programme modules from internal resources, primarily from the passions and talents of the teachers. There was an active, rigorous and open-minded system for teachers to bring their passions and talents into the classroom, or out of the classroom, for the benefit of the students. Empowering teachers in this manner was one lever by which the vision was embedded

across the breadth of the programme and purpose was reinforced while simultaneously empowering the students.

When teacher talents, skills and passions were genuinely sought and enabled, through components or activities for example, leadership teams for TY tended to emerge organically. This enabled further opportunities to be created for teachers and students. This approach towards empowering teachers is what tended to sustain TY as the breeding ground for innovative techniques and creativity inside and outside the classroom. It seemed to be an engine for continuous, internally driven professional learning and collaboration across the entire school - another example of effective aspects of TY spreading across the school.

The range of modules offered through the talents and skills of the teachers ensured the diversity of opportunities for students was self-sustaining. In focus groups with teachers, they said the subject matter in many ways was not the most important thing. It was an approach to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting across the entire programme that enabled the students to learn: teamwork, interpersonal and presentation skills, responsibility for one's own work, how to use feedback, respect for other views and cultures, greater digital competence, problem-solving skills, and positive adaptive approaches to new situations. Schools noted how students were building on skills developed from their experiences in junior cycle, citing improved oral skills from presenting their CBAs, more exposure to research projects and improved self-direction in their own learning.

Credit-based system

The absence of external examinations seemed to induce schools to embrace the freedom and autonomy needed to create an effective programme. As mentioned in Section 3, previous research highlighted the absence of formal certification as both a potential weakness and strength. A common feature across the schools was a deliberate effort to embed some form of credit-based system in TY that everyone could believe in. A credit system, coordinated with assessment and reporting and linked to a student portfolio was either embedded in schools, or they were investigating its introduction. Where schools had adopted this approach, the key to its success seemed to be that it was intrinsically linked to an integrated whole-school culture that incorporated the qualities promoted in the school's vision.

The collaboration of the coordinator, teacher and student underpinned the system's credibility. There tended to be particular times in the year when teachers must input credits into the system. Student interest peaked during these times. A successful credit system was also intrinsic to a year of sustained activities and motivation. Some schools introduced new modules or short course units to peak interest and reinvigorate the programme for students, while simultaneously students and teachers were encouraged to compete in local and national competitions. There was continuous consideration given to motivating and engaging students on various projects throughout the year.

The most common form of evidence-building that students engaged in was an e-portfolio. The template varied but the schools had, or were striving to have, a structure that reflects the learning of the student rather than only a collection of content. In schools where they interview students towards the end of the year, students would choose their most significant learning experiences and reflect on how they had developed from the goals they set at the start of the year and reviewed during the year. This mode of assessment was itself part of the personal development of

the student, as well as evidence of having reached their goals and how they had aspired to the vision of the school. It is assessment of, as and for learning. Students tended to find building a portfolio difficult, so coordination and encouragement across the whole school was essential. The students need to have some sense of the overall success criteria for the component, evidence that aligns to these criteria and some form of reflection on their learning from the component. Many of the schools had co-opted descriptors of student work from those used in junior cycle and in LCVP.

Students spoke with pride of their achievements and certifications over the course of the year. Certification of a standard achieved in a module tended to be more valued by students than certification of participation with examples given from First Aid courses, QQI, digital skills modules, Gaisce awards or driving certification.

Reflective Practice

A fluid and adaptable TY programme requires a lot of planning. The planning and renewal process in schools seemed to renew itself each year. The starting point was where the incoming students were at, and it evolved from there throughout the programme. Each year would be a different experience built on an interconnected system of programme components and vocational learning. Constant evaluation of individual components and the wider experiences was a necessary element of learning for tomorrow from the experiences of today. Involving the students and teachers in this evaluation process embedded reflective practice within the TY programme and often across other aspects of the school curriculum.

There were examples across the schools where subjects that were timetabled for the year, such as Mathematics or French, were modularised following periods of evaluation and reflection. This was intended to offer students as many different experiences within the subject as possible and generate greater engagement both during TY and in subsequent years of senior cycle.

Interventions from guidance counsellors also offered insights into effective aspects. In one school for example, career guidance was timetabled in a modular setting. The timings of some events in the year meant they couldn't meaningfully address the students about certain key moments. Having reflected on this, the timetabled element of guidance was removed and replaced by planned interventions, in collaboration with the teachers in the classroom. Similar reflective guidance practice, sometimes planned across the 3 years of senior cycle, was also evident across schools.

Section Summary

- The school-based component of the audit of effective aspects of TY programmes was conducted in September and October 2022 involving 14 schools. The schools reflected national profiles and included an Irish-medium school and an island school.
- The insights confirm many of the findings from existing research on effective aspects of TY programmes and address the influence of recent educational developments in the post-primary curriculum. The effective aspects of TY programmes are categorised as:
  - Vision: The qualities envisaged for the student are embodied by the TY programme itself and the educators involved.
  - Culture: This tends to be a natural outcome of a whole-school culture and pride in the status and effectiveness of the programme. Benefits include the emergence of new practices across the school, based on the TY experience.
  - A committed core team: Effectiveness is linked to a visionary, collaborative TY coordinator and a culture that genuinely nurtures the creativity of the teachers and values professional autonomy.
  - Purpose and Belonging: A sense of shared purpose acted upon daily in the school community, especially by students and teachers, safeguards the vision and nurtures a sense of belonging. Every aspect of the programme has its own purpose while serving the realisation of the vision. The choice of an optional or a compulsory programme is highly valued with deeply contextualised responsibilities and consequences.
  - Opportunities for Students: Programmes are built to deliberately create as many varied opportunities for learning and development as possible, for all students.
  - Opportunities for Teachers: Programmes built purposefully on the passions, talents and creativity of teachers tend to become self-sustaining platforms where professional learning and innovative techniques can flourish.
  - Credit-based System: A system that everyone believes in and values is a highly effective aspect. When used purposefully, it enables reflective practice, encourages self-reliance, motivates and stimulates across the year. Structured portfolios show evidence of what the student learned, the student's reflections upon their own learning, and enable students to self-assess their goals for TY.
  - Reflective Practice: Fluid, adaptable TY programmes require constant planning. The renewal of the programme is built on evaluating its successes and failures.

5. Issues for Consideration

Drawing on the preceding sections, this final section sets out issues for consideration during the review and redevelopment of the TY Programme Statement, and in planning for its implementation.

Scope and nature of a revised TY Programme Statement

Achieving a balance between prescription and autonomy will result in better, more informed practice and improved outcomes for students, and will be fundamental to the development of a revised Programme Statement. More specifically, this will require deliberation on the extent to which elements of the programme statement are prescribed within the statement while ensuring that flexibility and autonomy are afforded to schools to construct a TY programme that is most appropriate to their school and students.

The outcomes of these deliberations will have implications for the technical form and organisation of the TY Programme Statement, which will also be informed by ongoing research by NCCA on the technical form of the curriculum in a redeveloped senior cycle.

Purpose, vision and guiding principles for the redevelopment of senior cycle

The purpose, vision and guiding principles of the Advisory Report capture much of the common ground from the diverse perspectives expressed during NCCA's review of senior cycle. A redeveloped Programme Statement will need to articulate a clear and concise aim which is specific to TY and which fully supports the realisation of the purpose and vision for senior cycle as articulated in the report.

Building on current provision of TY

Currently, 98% of all post-primary schools offer TY programmes to students who have completed junior cycle. Careful consideration will be needed in supporting all schools to offer effective TY programmes, while at the same time balancing student agency and school autonomy. While it is beyond the remit of the review and revision of the TY Programme Statement, from a policy perspective, schools will need clear guidance on whether they can provide a compulsory TY programme or not. As outlined in previous sections, there are many issues to be considered when students do not have the choice whether to-take part in a 2 or 3 year senior cycle experience.

Continuity and progression

Work on a revised TY Programme Statement will need to consider how the knowledge and skills developed in junior cycle can be built upon and how the needs of students progressing into senior cycle, further education and future careers can be addressed.

The Framework for Junior Cycle has afforded schools greater flexibility in curriculum design. It places greater emphasis on formative assessment and students being encouraged towards more self-directed learning. During the school-based component of the TY audit, schools drew attention to the changing skills and dispositions acquired by junior cycle students entering TY, citing the positive impact of CBAs on research skills and exposing students to tasks requiring more initiative and self-direction.

In terms of progression through senior cycle, the insights gained from the TY audit suggest that developing a TY programme, grounded in the effective aspects identified in section 4, will support students in their transitions from junior cycle, through TY and on to Leaving Certificate programmes and beyond.

Continued inclusion from junior cycle

The introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes in junior cycle has been viewed as having a positive impact on the holistic development of the students undertaking the programmes. Currently at senior cycle, work is underway to develop modules for students currently completing Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programmes and who are progressing into senior cycle. As both developments will progress in parallel—work on the TY Statement and work on the modules—and towards the same implementation date, careful consideration will be required to explore the potential for integration of these modules into a revised TY programme in a school.

Empowering students through TY

The challenges and global trends facing students in the 21st century, such as climate breakdown, new ways of working and increased digitalisation of society, requires a response that can empower our young people. The educational strategies discussed in Section 2 also highlight areas of particular relevance to this issue. The development work will need to consider how the relevant aspects of the various education strategies can inform a revised TY Programme Statement.

Supporting learning

Pedagogical approaches that support self-directed learning, incorporate formative assessment, and enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed for diverse futures should be considered as part of the development of a revised TY Programme Statement.

Assessment, reporting and certification

The development of a revised TY Programme Statement will require extensive deliberation on the most appropriate assessment, reporting and certification arrangements. Schools reported that an assessment, reporting and certification system that everyone can believe in resulted in higher levels of engagement with, and ownership of, the TY programme.

While the absence of external assessments is cited as both a strength and a weakness, schools have developed a range of innovative approaches. There are good examples of practice in schools, such as credit-based systems, that merit consideration when developing the revised Programme Statement. The extent to which such systems could be prescribed centrally will need to be examined carefully, as embedding a centrally devised credit-system into a school's TY programme could run the risk of a loss of autonomy in how a school would design their programme and assess learning. Another potential risk is a reduction in the creativity and innovation that currently characterises good practice in TY.

Central to these discussions will be the extent to which the language and format of reporting should or should not be prescribed in the revised Programme Statement.

Diverse pathways

Enabling schools to support and promote diverse pathways during TY will need to be considered in the revision of a TY Programme Statement. Provision of diverse progression pathways is a feature of each of the national educational strategies discussed in Section 2. NCCA's Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report looked at 'Pathways and flexibility' as one of the three aspects of senior cycle education that could help to realise the vision of a redeveloped senior cycle.

The audit of TY programmes highlighted the importance of increased experiential education around pathways available for students. TY can provide an integrated environment of work experience, vocational learning, subject sampling, off-site learning opportunities, increased awareness of diverse career options, and access to FET and higher education tasters and modules. Creating as many varied opportunities as possible for students emerged as one of the most effective aspects of TY programmes, reinforced by the findings of the survey of FET provision in schools during TY.

The role of career guidance

Career guidance is a key element to support students in understanding and accessing learning pathways throughout school, and beyond. TY presents a significant opportunity for students to engage with career guidance, particularly in areas such as work experience and subject choice. A revised TY Programme Statement will need to consider how a TY programme can interact with career guidance to support students in exploring career choices, learning pathways and subject choice selection for Leaving Certificate programmes.

6. Brief

NCCA will establish a development group to undertake the task of developing a new TY Programme Statement. 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.

The Programme Statement will be aligned to the purpose and vision of a redeveloped senior cycle as set out the Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022). The guiding principles, as described in the Advisory Report, provide a touchstone for the Development Group as they undertake the task of preparing a new TY Programme Statement.

Through the development work, the new TY Programme Statement should address how:
- TY will align with the purpose, vision and guiding principles of a redeveloped senior cycle as outlined in the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report.
- to support schools in designing a curriculum for TY that is tailored to meet the needs of all students and creates links with the local/wider community.
- to create opportunities for all students to experience continuity and progression as they move from junior cycle into senior cycle and into future learning in life, study, further and higher education, apprenticeships and traineeships, and the world of work.
- the role of career guidance can help students in their chosen pathways
- schools will have autonomy and flexibility to design their TY programme, within the parameters and context of the revised TY Programme Statement.
- to encourage the uptake of the TY programme within schools and facilitate more equitable access to the programme across all schools.
- work experience is integrated into the overall vocational learning and education experience.
- in its technical design, the statement can support teachers in planning for teaching and learning.
- in its technical design, the statement can support the provision of multiple, diverse and appropriate assessment opportunities for students.

In addition, the development group should make recommendations for successful enactment of a revised TY Programme Statement, including specific TY resources designed to align to the new programme statement and to encourage continued uptake of the programme. The work of the development group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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