

Curriculum Assignment

‘Describe the current process of curriculum reform in Ireland.’

In this essay I will outline the current process of curriculum reform in Ireland and reflect on how this process has evolved by glancing back at the establishment of the bodies whose aim is to ‘Improve the curriculum and learning experience for students’

(National reforms in school education 2023).

Early on after independence, secondary schools were free to choose their own curricula and textbooks, exams were not based on required texts, and results-based compensation was discontinued (Coolahan 1986). But Taoiseach Éamon de Valera's

1937 criticism of the secondary school curriculum, calling it "too narrow and too vague," signalled the return of required readings. In 1965, syllabus committees were formed; they were directed and supervised by Inspectorate members, as well as representatives from the school administration and the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI).

Today, many efforts are being made to carry out curriculum reform and improvement

in Ireland with the goal of addressing the learning needs of the student, with a structured format and curriculum devised as a response to the criticism of the post primary curriculum in 1937. The aim is to enable students to experience and develop

skills that will support them to engage in their environment and community in life

after school’ (*L1LPs and the post-primary curriculum 2023*).

In March 2022, Minister for Education Norma Foley announced her plans for a reform of Education for Senior Cycle in post primary education. 'Where the student is at the centre of their Senior Cycle experience'. The three principle beliefs instilled in this curriculum reform include; empowering students to meet the challenges of today's world, enrich the student experience and build upon the strengths of the existing curriculum and lastly, embed wellbeing in an aim to reduce stress levels to promote students mental health and wellbeing.

With this new approach, students will be able to follow a broad curriculum, grow in their areas of interest and skill, and take part in an international best practice final assessment process. All of these things will help them in their next stage of life, whether that is third level education, more training and education, an apprenticeship, or the workforce (*Plan for reform of Senior Cycle Education* March, 2022).

The current process in place for curriculum reform in Ireland is associated with the NCCA (The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) and during this process they have conducted extensive research and captured the views of education partners across every aspect of senior cycle, giving real time to the student voice and experience and the learnings of educators to conduct a report on the review, outlining changes and improvements that can be made within the curriculum. The NCCA and SEC then research and define how these changes proposed by them in their reports would operate when implemented into a post primary setting based on their research and findings.

The process under which this curriculum reform will develop is through information brought forward by the views of students and teachers in a co-creation process. The process will entail a complete re-evaluation and development of new subjects and a complete revision of the curriculum in the existing subject curriculums. This approach will be revised and powered by the new belief system and aims put forward by the NCCA and Department of Education and will include a significant revision of assessment, placing a strong focus on extra evaluation elements in addition to the traditional written final exams. "It will reduce the pressure on students that comes from final assessments based primarily on examinations. We will move to a model that uses other forms of assessment, over a less concentrated time period, in line with international best practice." (Foley, 2022). In response to this, a Senior Cycle Programme Delivery Board will be set up to take on the responsibility of overseeing the achievements of the actions of the reform.

In my opinion I think this implementation to the senior cycle curriculum comes with both strengths and weaknesses, first of all some of the advantages to this continuous based assessment alongside the traditional leaving certificate includes a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of a student's abilities over time, taking into account their progress and development, it also promotes the reduction of the stress associated with high-stakes exams, as students are assessed on an ongoing basis rather than ultimately in a single, high-pressure event which relates closely to the aims set out by the Minister. It may also better reflect the skills needed in the real world, where continuous learning and adaptation are crucial. I also think in addition to these, the addition of new subjects such as Drama, Film and Theatre Studies, Climate Action and Sustainable Development, which will be ready for students in

network schools starting in 2026, are of great importance in today's world as pressing issues surrounding global issues are of a massive importance and necessary for everyday life, also, the promotion of drama, film and theatre will engage students in creative arts to promote emotional intelligence, teamwork, and self-expression promoting an assessment based on creativity and promotes performance assessment, which allows students to demonstrate physically their learning through an open-ended task.

Some of the challenges I think could be associated with the current curriculum reform proposal for senior cycle are, the subjectivity of continuous assessment, as different teachers may have different grading standards which again leads into challenges when ensuring consistency and standardisation across different schools, while promoting continuous assessment has a more real world alignment, it is also important to note that final examinations are also something students may encounter in third level education.

Overall, Ireland's current curriculum reform process, led by the NCCA and SEC, underscores an active and inclusive methodology. Through the direct involvement of students and educators, the initiative captures immediate perspectives, ensuring a thorough reassessment of the senior cycle from real-world experiences and expectations. The dedication to collaborative creation marks a departure from conventional top-down approaches, fostering an environment for joint reflection and subject refinement. The proposed changes, guided by a fresh ideology, prioritise lifting student pressure by introducing varied assessments aligned with international standards. The creation of a Senior Cycle Programme Delivery Board emphasises the

dedication to effectively supervise the implementation. In essence, this process signals a forward-thinking transition towards a more flexible, student-centred educational framework.

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