



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Returning to School Transition Year 2020/21

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## 1. Overview of the Transition Year Programme

### 1.1 Introduction

Transition Year (TY) is an optional programme. It is designed to act as a bridge between junior and senior cycle. It provides students with an opportunity to experience a wide range of educational activities, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations. The aim of TY is to educate students for maturity with an emphasis on personal development, social awareness and skills for life. This guidance for the TY Programme should be read in conjunction with *Returning to school: Guidance on learning and school programmes for post-primary school leaders and teachers* available at: [www.gov.ie/backtoschool](http://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)

### 1.2 Benefits of Transition Year

Research indicates very high levels of satisfaction among teachers, parents/guardians and students with TY and how it supports learning and the all-round development and maturity of students. TY is valued for the variety of learning experiences, often in 'taster' subjects and new areas of learning, that it offers students. It is seen as contributing in significant ways to the broad skill development of students; in this context, skills in personal and social development and lifeskills are often mentioned. Work experience and community placement are highly valued elements of the TY.

The diverse assessment and reporting methods and the opportunity for the student to gain additional qualifications are viewed very positively. Above all, the future orientation of the TY and the contribution it can make towards students facing the future with a more mature, capable, confident and assertive outlook are seen as successful features of the programme. In their feedback on TY, students frequently cite how TY helps them grow as a person, how they get to experience a great diversity of learning through TY activities, and how they learn a lot about skills that prove useful in study and in life after school.

In addition, students taking TY generally perform better in Leaving Certificate examinations, and make better choices when selecting their Leaving Certificate subjects.

## 2. Designing the TY Programme in 2020/21

As schools re-open, much of what is most valued by teachers, parents/guardians and students can continue to be central features of the school's TY programme. Continuity in TY as experienced in previous years can be maintained and sustained in many ways. It is, of course, recognised that planning for TY in the coming school year will need to take account of some areas where the impact of the pandemic may be felt, for example, in the area of work experience or in the scale of external visits and external learning activities. This guidance document offers some considerations for planning TY in this particular year.

Transition Year programmes are designed at school level and based on a multi-layered approach that includes:

- A core layer: this includes English, Irish, Mathematics, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Physical Education (PE)
- A subject sampling layer: this could include, for example, the sciences, technologies, arts and business
- School designed modules: examples of these include a mini-company, social enterprise
- A calendar layer: this includes work experience and/or visiting speakers.

A key to a successful TY programme is the use of a wide range of learning, teaching and assessment methodologies and educational activities. Curriculum content is a matter for selection and adaptation by the individual school having regard to the TY guidelines, the requirements of students and the views of parents/guardians. Content and methodology should be decided upon in the light of the ability levels and needs of the particular students. The needs of students in the coming school year will relate in part to re-engaging them fully with learning following the school closure period, monitoring and observing that re-engagement, and discussing with them the inclusion in TY of those curriculum areas and aspects of learning they may have concerns about following the closure of schools in March.

### 3. Planning considerations for TY 2020/21

In planning for TY in the coming academic year, it will be important to:

- Plan for teaching, learning and assessment in a way that builds on and progresses students' learning from junior cycle. Given the likelihood that the school closure period will have impacted on students' learning in variable ways, schools can allocate additional time to teaching the core layer of the programme, with an emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills
- Ensure that the core layer provides for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Physical Education; schools may allocate additional time to this element of the core layer in 2020/21
- Ensure that learning for students in this year's TY, as in a typical TY, involves a strong engagement with knowledge, the development of personal, social and learning skills, a focus on wellbeing and a strong emphasis on creativity; all of these components should feature through a variety of learning areas and activities
- Identify priority areas for knowledge and skills development for students entering TY in September 2020 that bridge the learning between junior and senior cycle
- Build on the recent experiences of remote learning during school closures to include opportunities within TY courses and modules for a mix of teacher-led, student-led, self-directed, and inquiry-led learning that will support progression to Senior Cycle
- Develop a specific programme on digital learning skills at the beginning of the school year

- Plan for alternative school-based or on-line activities to replace co-curricular and extracurricular programmes that may not be possible or which may need to be cancelled at short notice
- Use an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approach to design activities that draw on students' interests and experiences of learning, wellbeing, social interaction over recent months
- Work with local employers to facilitate work experience where possible. If work experience is not possible, plan for school provision of alternative equivalent learning. This could include:
  - the non-experiential aspects of work experience such as careers investigations
  - modules in employment skills including, for example, online courses/modules on Health and Safety in work
  - virtual tours of workplaces, businesses and companies
- Recognise that many families may find it difficult to pay for activities associated with TY and prioritise low cost or no cost alternatives that all students can participate in. Students and their families should not be expected to pay upfront at the start of the school year for activities that may not be possible to complete owing to public health requirements
- Negotiate the plan for learning with students. The learning experiences designed should be relevant to the students' lived experiences and interests and should support the building of their confidence and competences
- Plan for a programme that is a minimum of 28 hours instruction time per week, inclusive of work experience
- Continue the existing good practice of planning TY programmes that are creative and innovative and not three-year Leaving Certificate programmes.

## 4. Practical Planning Tips for TY 2020/21

Planning and implementing TY in 2020/21 will be challenging in a context where public health requirements restrict some of the normal activities associated with TY. Providing continuity and progression in learning for TY students is a planning priority, especially in the context of the need to re-engage students who have not experienced the normal milestones of completing the certificate examinations and receiving their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

### 4.1 TY Co-ordinator

The **TY coordinator** has a central role in leading planning. Building on established planning practice, the co-ordinator will need to plan a programme that reflects the new and changing circumstances, with specific consideration of aspects that are especially challenging such as work experience, school trips and engagement with external speakers.

## 4.2 Teachers' planning

Teachers are best placed to review all aspects of their current programmes and to adapt those programmes as necessary. Much of what is in existing TY programmes can be built on and, for the 2020/21 school year, the main additional task involves establishing continuity with Junior Cycle and monitoring student re-engagement with learning so that skills can be built upon for further senior cycle learning.

In reviewing and planning the TY programme, consideration can be given to taking an interdisciplinary, cross curricular approach to teaching and learning. This will support integrated learning as a key feature of TY programmes in 2020/21. Examples of themes that might be useful for schools to develop that reflect students' recent experiences include:

- Health and safety in the school, community and workplace (sciences, technologies, social studies)
- Promoting and supporting the local economy (enterprise, mathematics, leadership)
- Diversity and inclusion – promoting equality (social studies, literature, SPHE)
- Biodiversity and sustainable development (sciences, geography, business)
- Keeping active and well (PE, SPHE, food science, arts)
- Music and motion (PE, music, Wellbeing, digital technology)
- Home or away (heritage studies, modern foreign languages, Irish, business).

**The relevant circulars and guidelines for Transition Year remain in place.<sup>1</sup>**

## 5. Planning for teaching, learning and assessment in TY

### 5.1 Wellbeing

The impact of the Covid pandemic on all aspects of life has heightened awareness of the importance of supporting wellbeing within school communities as students return to school. Transition year provides a particular space where students' wellbeing needs can be addressed. The start of transition year is an important opportunity for building relationships and connections. Bonding activities can continue to be a part of the TY programme, provided they adhere to health and social distancing guidelines. In this context, outdoor activities merit consideration.

Transition year also provides an opportunity for students to build upon and develop the strengths and skills they need to support their wellbeing now and for the future. Students should be consulted about their learning and wellbeing needs and how the transition year programme can support both, despite restrictions brought about by living with Covid19.

### 5.2 Core Layer

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<sup>1</sup> M31/93, M47/93 and M1/00: [circulars.gov.ie](https://www.circulars.gov.ie)

Transition Year Guidelines: [transition\\_year\\_school\\_guidelines.pdf](#)

### **5.2.1 Mathematics**

Schools have great flexibility in designing mathematics programmes for TY. While the specification for Junior Cycle and the syllabus for Senior Cycle advocate experiential learning through investigative activities and group problem solving, TY provides even more scope to engage in such activities, unconstrained by the pressures of a terminal examination.

The year ideally consists mainly of a series of key assignments which could take the form of project work or case studies that consolidate the learning from Junior Cycle and to begin to integrate some concepts from Senior Cycle, ideally in a way that is student led and task led. The key assignment approach can be used within a broader modular approach to TY Mathematics. Modules that could be considered include:

- A remediation module to address gaps from Junior Cycle mathematics learning and to re-inforce Junior Cycle concepts using opportunities to reason and make sense of the mathematics students have already engaged with, and to problem solve and discuss and justify strategies with their peers
- A module on the skills of 'learning to learn' and the development of independent learning skills; such a module could include some form of self-selected project
- A module of Applied Mathematics; this should not be restricted to the Leaving Certificate Applied Mathematics syllabus which is currently mechanics-based. The authentic application of Mathematics to other subjects in the curriculum is advised.

### **5.2.2 English**

The TY course in English is often designed in modules and can include film studies, oral communication, and drama to extend students' experience of language and literature. Approaches to assessment in English during TY vary; best practice involves a series of assignments throughout the year, leading cumulatively to a record of achievement in the subject.

School-designed TY English courses often incorporate online resources; the emphasis that such courses often place on individual exploration of texts and topics is well-suited to building on the skills developed by students in working with digital resources during the 2019/20 school closure period.

It is important to note that the Department issues a circular each year to inform schools of the prescribed Leaving Certificate texts for the incoming fifth years. It explicitly gives direction about the appropriate use of Leaving Certificate English texts in TY to ensure that TY cannot be used to cover material for the Leaving Certificate.

### **5.2.3 Irish**

Planning for Irish in TY provides an opportunity to address students' varied learning experiences and competences in Irish and to create learning experiences that will enable them pursue the study of Irish at the highest level in accordance with their ability. Those learning experiences should be negotiated with the students, designed in a way that is relevant to the students' lived experiences and interests, and should support the building of their confidence and competences as Irish language users.

Language skills are interdependent and their development should be integrated. To enhance and improve students' learning, the integrated development of the language skills should be supported by the use of authentic texts from a range of genres and media including literature. The use of prescribed Leaving Certificate material should be minimal; where aspects of this material are used, the approach should be innovative and creative.

The development of language awareness skills will be an important aspect of all students' learning. In the case of Irish-medium schools, the plan for TY Irish should reflect the important role of the Irish lessons in supporting students' access to the rest of the curriculum through Irish and their role as active members of the school community.

A modular approach should be adopted to planning for Irish. All modules should aim to develop, as a priority, students' listening skills (including familiarity with the main dialects) and their competence in speaking and interacting through Irish with their teacher(s) and peers. The development of students' creativity and problem-solving skills should be a central focus of the modules. Student learning can be demonstrated in a range of ways, including through projects which focus on the process rather than the product. Project themes could be based on concepts and content in other curricular areas while avoiding any material that forms part of study for Leaving Certificate in that particular subject.

#### **5.2.4 Physical Education**

The Senior Cycle Physical Education framework is designed to provide a flexible collaborative approach to planning for physical education in senior cycle. The importance of planning within the unique context of each school is recognised. School settings, facilities, personnel, expertise, the characteristics of the particular class and students' interests are all significant considerations in the selection and sequencing of appropriate learning outcomes and approaches to assessment. A double period per week is required to support this learning.

Physical activities should be chosen on the basis of what is safe and practical and in line with the public health advice available at the time of selection. In the context of physical distancing, it may be advisable to consider, as appropriate, the selection of physical activities that involve less direct contact such as divided court activities. Use of physical equipment and resources during physical activities must comply with the relevant health requirements.

Transition Year physical education can be planned exclusively using the framework for Senior Cycle Physical Education. Alternatively, there are a number of transition units designed for physical education, for example, sports coaching, which may be used in conjunction with the framework. Teachers are also encouraged to design their own transition units. Guidelines for the design of such units are available at [www.ncca.ie/SeniorCycle](http://www.ncca.ie/SeniorCycle)

#### **5.2.5 RSE**

A core aim of Transition Year is the promotion of the personal and social development of the student. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. In line with all other year groups, TY students should receive a

minimum of five to six timetabled periods of RSE.<sup>2</sup> The guidelines state that the RSE programme can be supplemented by learning that is happening in other subjects. They also emphasise that while visitors to the classroom can be a useful addition to RSE, the delivery of the programme remains the responsibility of the teacher. The latter point has been reiterated in *Circular 0023/2010 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*.

### **5.2.6 Modern foreign language**

Most schools also include the study of a modern foreign language within the core layer to provide continuity from Junior Cycle. Additional resources to support language teaching in TY can be found at [www.ppli.ie](http://www.ppli.ie) and [pdst.ie](http://pdst.ie)

## **5.3 Subject Sampling Layer**

The subject sampling layer of TY provides students with opportunities to experience subjects for the first time, to engage with subjects in a different way or experience other areas of learning such as through drama. The range of subjects and learning areas will be dependent on the availability of teachers to provide subjects and on access to specialist rooms, particularly if class groups have to be divided owing to the impact of social distancing. In this context, the range of Transition Units available on the NCCA website are relevant and available at: <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/programmes-and-key-skills/transition-year>. Schools could also consider other areas of learning such as Environmental studies.

## **5.4 TY Specific Layer**

School developed modules should emphasise the key skills of TY including:

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Creativity
- Innovation
- Communication
- Negotiation
- Report writing
- Projects
- Presentations
- Digital technology.

Advice on the design of school developed modules is provided by the NCCA, and is available [here](#). Schools also often include programmes provided by outside agencies in, for example, the areas of student enterprise or social innovation. Many schools have developed their own modules and may choose to adapt those, taking a thematic approach across a number of modules and subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> In line with *Circular 0027/2008 – Relationships and Sexuality Education*, a student may not be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student, or, in the case of a student who has reached 18, the student.



## 5.5 Calendar Layer

### 5.5.1 Co-curricular Activities

One of the key features of many TY programmes in schools is the extensive co-curricular and extracurricular activities that support the four interdependent layers of the programme. These aspects often involve students travelling to locations outside schools on private or public transport to participate in the activities. However, restrictions that may exist in the context of COVID-19 could place considerable constraints on these aspects of a school's programme. In planning for these activities, alternative arrangements should be considered. For example, many of the usual providers of these activities/experiences have adapted to providing online access.

### 5.5.2 Work Experience

Two main approaches are taken by schools in scheduling work experience:

- **Block release:** In cases where it is possible for students to safely complete their work experience in accordance with public health advice and social distancing requirements, they should do so. Where it is not possible for all or some students to do so during the block(s), they should attend timetabled classes as normal during the designated weeks
- **One day per week:** While this approach is not encouraged, some schools have adopted it. It is highly unlikely that students will be able to complete work experience on this basis in the earlier part of the school year. Students should be provided with access to synchronous or asynchronous teaching and learning opportunities on the scheduled work experience day. Attendance should be checked and activities including the completion of work preparation modules, careers investigations, and journals should be planned for the day.

### 5.5.3 Visiting Speakers

A common feature of TY programmes is the involvement of visiting speakers or outside agencies in delivering talks or programmes to students. In this regard:

- 'Virtual Visits' rather than face-to-face visits should be considered and appropriate arrangements put in place
- Visits to the school during the school day should be by prior arrangement
- Prior to the visit, speakers should comply with any advance health requirements in place at the time
- Visitors should be received at a specific contact point (for example the school office) and should be subject to the same controls that apply to staff entering the school
- Speakers should meet initially with teachers and the meeting should be facilitated in a way that observes social distancing requirements
- Physical distancing in line with the relevant health requirements should be maintained
- Visiting speakers' engagement with students should be in line with the school policy on visiting speakers and *Circular Letter 0043/2018* is available [here](#)

## 6. CPD Supports

The Professional Support Service for Teachers (PDST) has a series of online supports and webinars planned for September 2020 to support teachers and TY co-ordinators with planning; these include:

**Webinar:** *Planning for an effective Transition-Year programme*

**Webinar:** *Leading a Transition-Year programme*

**Webinar 1 & 2:** *Formative Assessment using Digital Portfolio*

**School Support for TY**

**TY Future Leaders Programme**

The PDST will be in contact with schools in relation to this provision.

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