

Extracts Hyland Report (Launched 12/4/'14)

Conclusions

- “It is not sufficient to describe a high-stakes examination programme in terms merely of topics and learning outcomes, as the NCCA has done in the draft syllabi.” (p. 5 Hyland Report)
- “While the current NCCA draft specifications may be a valid first step in outlining the syllabi, this researcher agrees with the ISTA that it is not sufficient to describe a high-stakes examination programme in terms merely of topics and learning outcomes. More detailed information about the depth of treatment of subjects and the requirements for examination must be provided at national level in Ireland to bring the syllabi into line with international good practice.” (p. 42 Hyland Report)
- “In every public examination system identified for this report, the syllabi for the end of senior cycle examinations include considerable detail about depth of treatment, examination specification, practicals and laboratory experiments and other advice for teachers and pupils. While learning outcomes are specified in all the syllabi, they are only one element of the detail provided. (p. 5 Hyland Report).
- “This researcher has not come across any centralised or public examination syllabus at this level which provides only a list of topics and learning outcomes. (p. 5 Hyland Report).
- “While learning outcomes are a very valuable tool for identifying what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a course or programme, it is not appropriate to use learning outcomes alone to define a syllabus and its assessment.” (p. 5 Hyland Report).
- “It would appear that for international benchmarking purposes, the NCCA has used the curriculum framework *Curriculum for Excellence* of Education Scotland, and the national curriculum framework for the whole of Australia, set by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), rather than the examination syllabi provided by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which in the view of this researcher are the more relevant benchmarks.” (p. 41 Hyland Report).
- “Comparing these three chemistry syllabi with the NCCA draft specification for Leaving Cert chemistry, one notes a significant difference in approach between the three systems chosen and the approach of the NCCA. While the NCCA document resembles, to some extent, the national curriculum and assessment guidelines of Education Scotland, or the curriculum and assessment guidelines of the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority it does not resemble the detailed examination syllabi provided by the examining and awarding bodies in Scotland (the Scottish Qualifications Authority), in Victoria, Australia (the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment

Authority) and the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO).” (p. 41 Hyland Report).

- “Learning outcomes are statements of essential learning, and as such they are written at minimum acceptable or threshold (pass / fail) standard. If teachers focus only on learning outcomes, there is a real risk that the teaching and learning targets will be at a minimum rather than a maximum level, that the bar will not be set high enough for student learning, and that as a result, standards will fall.” (p. 5 Hyland Report)
- “The current Leaving Certificate physics, chemistry and biology syllabi, which have been implemented since the early 2000s, are highly regarded by teachers and have contributed to a reversal of the decline in the numbers of pupils taking science subjects at senior cycle” ((p. 40 Hyland Report).

Recommendations

- “More detailed information about the depth of treatment of subjects and the requirements for examination must be provided at national level in Ireland to bring the syllabi into line with international good practice.” (p. 5 Hyland Report).
- “It is the considered view of this researcher that the final versions of the proposed new syllabi for physics, chemistry and biology, should contain at least the same depth of treatment as is available in the current syllabus documents, as well as detailed examination specifications and Teachers’ Notes. When approved by the Minister, the full range of documentation in relation to each syllabus should be published online and in hard copy under the logo of the Department of Education and Skills, prior to the implementation of the syllabi.” (p. 44 Hyland Report).
- “The full range of syllabus documentation (including teachers’ notes, examination specifications etc.) should be officially published at the same time as the syllabus itself, under the logo of the DES as has been the case in the past. This elaborated documentation should be available well before the syllabus is due to be implemented, to enable teachers to become familiar with the new material and to undergo appropriate professional development and up-skilling.” (p. 5 Hyland Report).
- **“The three science syllabi are the first existing LC subjects to be revised under the new framework.** Hence it is particularly important that the proposed design and format of the proposed syllabi be scrutinised and analysed to ensure that the theoretical framework is meaningful and capable of implementation. All education partners share the same vision – Ireland must continue to provide a high quality curriculum for all its young people and in particular the Leaving Certificate must maintain its highly-respected national and international status”. (p. 17 Hyland Report).
- “From 1989 to date, the advice provided by the NCCA to the Minister has included the level of detail that teachers expect and need to enable them to

prepare their students for the Leaving Certificate public examinations. That level of detail has also been used and will continue to be required by the SEC to enable them to set and mark the Leaving Certificate examination papers. It is the considered opinion of this researcher, that the issue of depth of treatment and clarity of examination specifications will become an issue for all Leaving Certificate subjects as the revision of Leaving Certificate syllabi proceeds. It is almost inevitable that the concerns raised by ISTA will be echoed by other subject teachers and associations as well as by third level representatives if the matter is not addressed now.” (p. 43 Hyland Report)

- “In coming to a decision about the detail to be provided for the Leaving Certificate examination syllabi, consideration might be given by the Minister to collaborating with other bodies, either nationally or internationally to provide appropriate state-of-the art materials thereby avoiding unnecessary and expensive duplication or “re-inventing the wheel”. As science subjects are less culturally bound than some other subjects, resources developed for science teaching in one country are likely to be relevant and suitable for teachers and learners in another country. All the documentation accessed for this report is in the public domain, and is accessible for anyone (teacher or pupil or member of the public) who wishes to use it.” (p. 44 Hyland Report).
- “The syllabus committees /development groups should continue to be involved in the identification and where relevant, the development of resources to support the new subject syllabi. Members of development groups contribute invaluable expertise and experience, on a pro bono basis, to Irish education. They help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between the ideal and the possible. Teachers, in particular, have an important role to play as they are at the chalk-face on a daily basis and bring knowledge of the on-the-ground constraints to the discussion. Third level representatives and employers help to ensure that the revised syllabi prepare future pupils appropriately for further learning and for work. The partnership model has served Irish education well in the past and will hopefully continue to do so in the future” (p. 44 Hyland Report).