

Transition year: a broad educational experience offered within the Irish school curriculum

Transition Year provides a bridge to help pupils make the transition from a highly-structured environment of the Junior cycle to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision making.

During the Transition year pupils participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable **critical thinking** and **creative problem-solving** skills.

The Department for Education and skills recommends that the following **aims** which are interrelated and inter-dependent, should be strongly reflected in every Transition Year programme:

1. Education for maturity with the emphasis on **personal development** including **social awareness** and increased **social competence**.
2. The promotion of general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on **interdisciplinary** and **self-directed learning**.
3. Education through **experience of adult and working life** as a basis for personal development and maturity.

The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school. Schools providing Transition Year programmes have responsibility for **setting appropriate goals** and defining the objectives necessary for their achievement. The schools should **involve parents, work providers and the wider community** as educational partners in all aspects of the programme and ensure efficient and effective delivery of the programme.

Curriculum content is a matter for selection and adaptation by the individual school having regard to these guidelines, the **requirements of pupils** and the **views of parents**. In establishing its curriculum, the school should also take into consideration the **possibilities offered by employers** and other work-providing agencies and the wider interests in the local community.

The Transition Year should offer pupils space to learn, mature and develop in the absence of examination pressure. The school should ensure therefore that, in all areas studied, there is a clear distinction between the Transition Year programme and the corresponding Leaving Certificate (upper secondary) syllabus. A Transition Year programme is not intended to be part of the Leaving Certificate programme, and should not be seen as an opportunity for spending three years rather than two studying Leaving Certificate material. This is not to say that Transition Year programmes should lack intellectual content; it is essential that they offer a challenge to pupils in all areas of their development. Pupils entering the Leaving Certificate programme on completion of a Transition Year should be better equipped and more disposed to study than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of this year. Those who enter the world of work after the Transition Year should do so as well developed and reflective young adults. Where Leaving Certificate material is chosen for study it should be done so on the clear understanding that it is to be explored in an original and stimulating way that is significantly different from the way in which it would have been treated in the two

years to Leaving Certificate. For example, if a module on drama is included, the production of a play which is on the English syllabus could be considered; in French, pupils might engage in a project of a type which would be of benefit subsequently for the Leaving Certificate course; for Business Studies, the setting up of a mini-company would help enrich syllabus.

A key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a **wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations**. The goals and objectives of the programme can best be achieved by placing particular emphasis on:

- Negotiated learning;
- Personal responsibility in learning;
- Activity-based learning
- Integration of appropriate areas of learning;
- Team teaching approaches;
- Group work: discussion, debate, interview, role play;
- Project work and research;
- Visiting speakers and seminars;
- Study visits and field trips;
- Work experience, work simulation, community service.

Educational activities undertaken should enable students to have a valid and worthwhile learning experience with emphasis given to developing study skills and self-directed.

It is intended that the Transition Year should create opportunities to vary the learning environment and to dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or even most effectively, within the classroom. One of the ways of doing this, and of providing an orientation towards the world of work, is to include a component of **actual work experience**. In cases where there is a limited availability of work experience placement, it is important for the school to prioritise such placements as are available in favour of vocational programmes in the senior cycle, e.g. the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. In these circumstances, work experience should take the form of **work simulation** and/or **work shadowing** for the purposes of Transition Year. It is important that both pupils and prospective employers are fully briefed about what is involved and what is the wider intent of the programmed. The normal work experience period is **2 weeks** (either together or on 2 separate occasions during the year) in order that pupils may obtain maximum benefit from their work experience, it is important to allow sufficient time and opportunity after each work period for de-briefing, reporting back and follow-up exercises.