

Ireland

A Partnership with Africa (APA)



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Curriculum case studies

Case study #1:

Junior cycle (lower secondary) Geography, 12-15 years, 200 hours over 3 years. Geography is optional at junior cycle but studied by approximately 84% of young people in Irish secondary schools.

"The study of geography empowers the person to explore and understand the world around them. ... encouraged to appreciate the processes that shape their world and view global issues as ethical citizens. Geography provides a platform to analyse world events, empowering young people as informed, active citizens." (NCCA, 2017, 4)

Case study #2:

Junior cycle (lower secondary) Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), 12-15 years, 100 hours over 3 years. CSPE is compulsory but suffers from a low status in many schools. One of the contributing factors is that many teachers do not have a relevant CSPE qualification and yet can be 'conscripted' to teach the course.

CSPE "helps students to question, critique and evaluate what is happening in the world; provides students with an understanding of their human rights and social responsibilities; prompts students to consider how to create a more sustainable future for all; fosters an awareness of what it means to live responsibly in a democracy; and most importantly, it places active reflective citizenship at the centre of the learning process by providing students with the opportunity to take action and influence change around local, national and global issues." (NCCA, 2021, 4)

Case study #3:

Junior cycle (lower secondary) History, 12-15 years, 200 hours over 3 years. History is studied by all students in lower secondary. "The study of history instils in students a respect for integrity, objectivity and looking at issues from different perspectives. This capacity for critical thinking helps them to interrogate sources of evidence and make judgements about the viewpoint expressed, including the capacity to identify propaganda. Hearing and telling the stories of people who lived in the past helps students to understand more about how people live today; and can help students to learn from the past when thinking about how to address the problems of today." (NCCA, 2017, 6)



Main findings Climate Change



- Junior Cycle CSPE offers the most alignment with GET climate change LOs, followed by Junior Cycle Geography and lastly, by Junior Cycle History.
- **CSPE:** The term 'climate change' is explicit in one CSPE LO. However, CSPE LOs that include 'global' or 'sustainability' issues or challenges provide additional openings to address the GET climate change LOs.
- **Geography:** Although sustainability is a contextual element that underpins all Junior Cycle Geography LOs, there is only significant or moderate evidence/emphasis in the specification for 3 of the 7 GET climate LOs.
- **History:** Although there are some limited opportunities to address climate through History LOs, History teachers would need a specific intervention to 'see' curriculum opportunities for any environmental related learning in the context of their discipline. Even with an intervention, they could, with some justification, argue that students are already encountering the topic of climate change across a range of junior cycle subjects, e.g. CSPE, Business Studies, Home Economics, Geography and Science. Explicit inclusion of climate change in History may therefore be perceived as ill-advised from a student wellbeing perspective and/or crossing accepted disciplinary boundaries.

Main findings Gender inequality



- Junior Cycle CSPE offers the most alignment with GET gender equality LOs, followed by Junior Cycle History and lastly, by Junior Cycle Geography.
- **CSPE:** Considering the ranking, it may be surprising to note that the term 'gender equality' does not appear in the CSPE specification. Instead, learning about gender equality is possible through CSPE LOs that refer to human rights and discrimination legislation. Identity, gender and gender inequality at a personal level are addressed in-depth in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), a compulsory course for all students at both lower and upper secondary levels. Explicit inclusion of gender equality in CSPE may therefore be perceived to cross accepted disciplinary boundaries.
- **History:** In JC History, there is one LO which states that students should be able to explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century. LOs that focus on human experiences or the impact of significant historic personalities also offer opportunities to address gender equality.
- **Geography:** Of the four big ideas across the three case studies, the opportunities for 'gender equality' were weakest in Junior Cycle Geography. However, as stated above, this may be because Junior and Senior Cycle SPHE deals comprehensively with this big idea at the level of the individual person.

Main findings International inequality



- Junior Cycle CSPE Junior Cycle Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) offers the most alignment with GET international inequality LOs, followed by Junior Cycle History and lastly, by Junior Cycle Geography.
- **CSPE:** There are explicit references to both local and global inequalities in CSPE. In addition, learning about this big idea can be supported through CSPE LOs focused on human rights. CSPE includes opportunities for students to learn through human stories and case studies and to understand that those who experience inequality are not without power and agency to improve their own situation. This approach is a strength of the CSPE specification, which goes beyond the GET LOs.
- **History:** Although international inequality is not explicitly referenced in Junior Cycle History, there are opportunities to address this big idea when engaging with History learning outcomes focused on war/conflict, colonialisation and human rights. Classroom based assessment also offer opportunities to engage with this (and other) big ideas.
- **Geography:** The term 'international inequality' does not appear in Junior Cycle Geography. However, Geography does support some moderate engagement with 3 of the 7 GET international inequality LOs.

Main findings Migration



- Junior Cycle CSPE offers the most alignment with GET migration LOs, followed by Junior Cycle History and lastly, by Junior Cycle Geography.
- **CSPE:** Considering the ranking, it may be surprising to note that the term 'migration' does not appear in the CSPE specification. However, students can access learning about migration through LOs that refer to human rights, human dignity, affecting global change, law (discrimination legislation) and media.
- **History:** There is one JC History learning outcome which explicitly deals with migration. This LO is important in the context of history of emigration in Ireland, however the wording and placement of the LO (Strand 2: The history of Ireland) potentially limits the scope of learning about historic migration to the Great Famine and the Irish diaspora. History teachers need to be able to effectively 'see' migration possibilities in combining this LO with or in other learning outcomes, such as those focused on patterns of settlement in history and the impacts of colonisation.
- **Geography:** There is one JC Geography learning outcome which references migration. This LO is open to different interpretations and some teachers may need to be supported to consider a range of migration types.



Conclusion and recommendations for education stakeholders

1. GET project personal, especially those with responsibility for TLU development, should have a comprehensive understanding of curriculum documents, not just the documents for specific (most likely) subjects.
2. Where GET LOs are not explicit in specific subjects, there is a greater need to support these subject teachers to 'see' curriculum opportunities (where they exist). However, in targeting these subjects/teachers, there is a need to be mindful of the core/mandatory nature of the specific subject, disciplinary boundaries and subject time allocation.
3. In the Irish context, Junior Cycle CSPE offers the richest opportunities for GET related LOs. Although CSPE is mandatory for all lower secondary students, it is a course that suffers from lack of status and a teacher cohort that lacks confidence and are time poor. The GET project should orient TLUs development and teacher capacity building towards CSPE where possible. Additionally, every opportunity to advocate for CSPE in terms of a sustained investment for resources and teacher capacity building should be pursued with relevant education stakeholders.
4. Where issues with specific aspects of national curriculum documents were identified, these should be addressed in TLU development and communicated to the body responsible for curriculum development during relevant public consultation processes.
5. GET LOs should be revised according to the feedback in the curriculum case studies. For example, the numbering of the LOs should be consistent across big ideas. Where missing LOs or content in associated notes has been identified, this should be considered. The final version of the LOs should be age/stage appropriate (for students aged 11-16 years). It may be worth considering a decrease in the number of current GET LOs (#49 in total), into a single set of 'global' LOs that would work across the 4 big ideas. The revised LOs and associated notes should be integrated into the big idea documents.

Lead Partner



Project Partners



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