NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

SENIOR CYCLE

SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Senior cycle

Learners in senior cycle are approaching the end of their time in school and are focusing on the directions they would like to take in their future lives. Senior cycle plays a vital role in helping learners to address their current needs as young adults and in preparing them for life in a changing economic and social context.

Senior cycle is founded on a commitment to educational achievement of the highest standard for all learners, commensurate with their individual abilities. To support learners as they shape their own future there is an emphasis on the development of knowledge and deep understanding; on learners taking responsibility for their own learning; on the acquisition of key skills; and on the processes of learning. The broad curriculum, with some opportunities for specialisation, supports continuity from junior cycle and sets out to meet the needs of learners, some of whom have special educational needs, but who all share a wide range of learning interests, aptitudes and talents.

The range and scope of the curriculum components offered at senior cycle—subjects, short courses, transition units and curriculum frameworks—have been developed to allow for choice and flexibility, for a balance between knowledge and skills, and for the promotion of the kinds of learning strategies relevant to participation in and contribution to a changing world where the future is uncertain.

Assessment in senior cycle involves gathering, interpreting and using information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and can be used for a variety of purposes. It can be used to determine the appropriate route for learners through a differentiated curriculum, to identify specific areas of difficulty or strength for a given student and to test and certify achievement. Assessment can support and improve learning by helping learners and teachers to identify next steps in the teaching and learning process.

The experience of senior cycle

The vision of senior cycle sees the learner at the centre of the educational experience. That experience will enable learners to be resourceful, to be confident, to participate actively in society, and to build an interest in and ability to learn throughout their future lives.
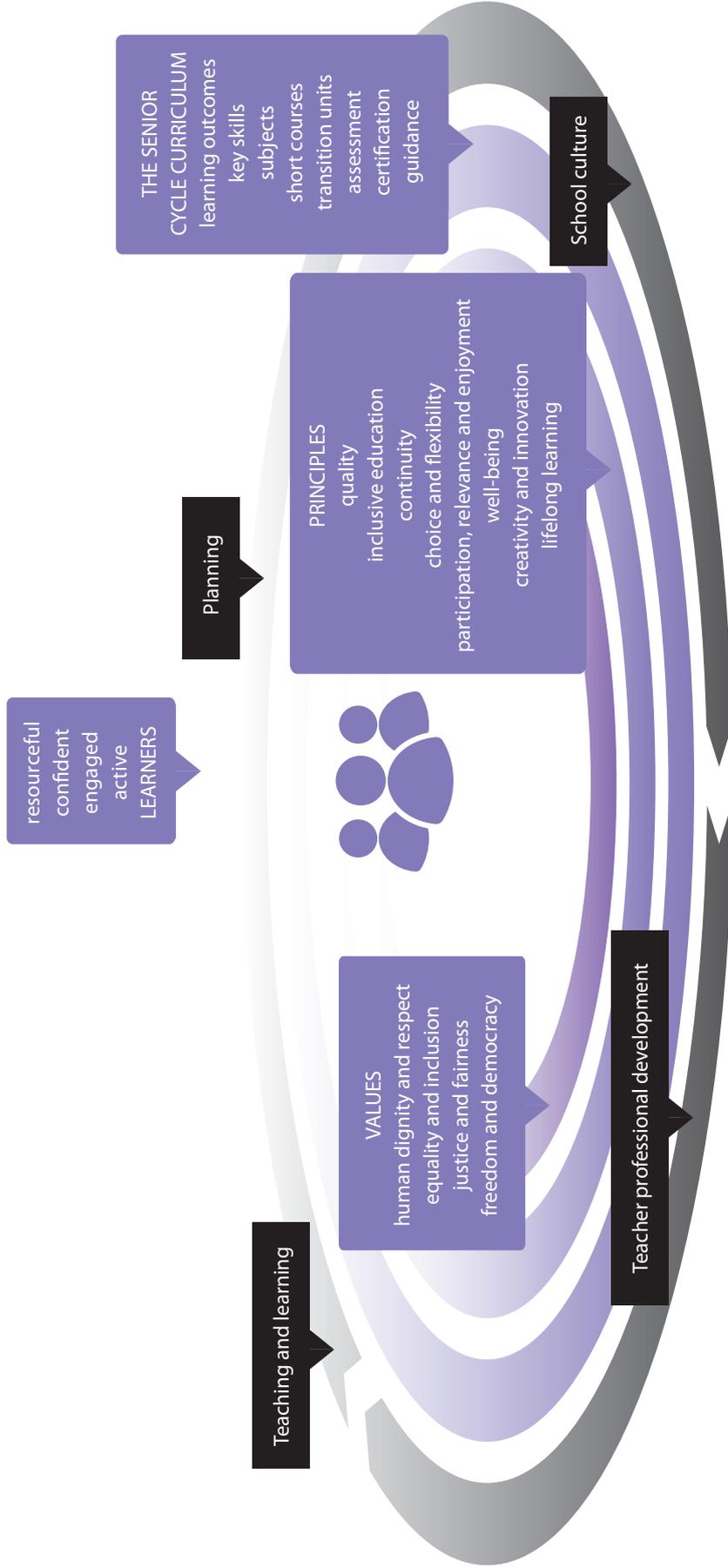
This vision of the learner is underpinned by the values on which senior cycle is based and it is realised through the principles that inform the curriculum as it is experienced by learners in schools. The curriculum, made up of subjects and courses, embedded key skills, clearly expressed learning outcomes, and supported by a range of approaches to assessment, is the vehicle through which the vision becomes a reality for the learner.

At a practical level, the provision of a high quality educational experience in senior cycle is supported by

- effective curriculum planning, development, organisation and evaluation
- teaching and learning approaches that motivate and interest learners, that enable them to progress, deepen and apply their learning, and that develop their capacity to reflect on their learning
- professional development for teachers and school management that enables them to lead curriculum development and change in their schools
- a school culture that respects learners, that encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning over time, and that promotes a love of learning.

Senior cycle education is situated in the context of a broader education policy that focuses on the contribution that education can make to the development of the learner as a person and as a citizen. It is an education policy that emphasises the promotion of social cohesion, the growth of society and the economy, and the principle of sustainability in all aspects of development.

Overview of senior cycle

THE SENIOR
CYCLE CURRICULUM
learning outcomes
key skills
subjects
short courses
transition units
assessment
certification
guidance

PRINCIPLES
quality
inclusive education
continuity
choice and flexibility
participation, relevance and enjoyment
well-being
creativity and innovation
lifelong learning

resourceful
confident
engaged
active
LEARNERS

Planning

VALUES
human dignity and respect
equality and inclusion
justice and fairness
freedom and democracy

Teaching and learning

Teacher professional development

School culture

Vision

LEARNERS COMPLETING SENIOR CYCLE ARE

RESOURCEFUL
they show their imagination, intelligence, intuition and other talents through
curiosity

enquiry

open-mindedness

reflection

connecting learning

innovation

problem solving

creativity

CONFIDENT
they develop their physical and mental well-being and
become self-aware

have high self-efficacy

engage with ethics, values and beliefs

welcome opportunities

can cope with setbacks

can effect positive change
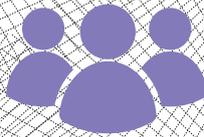
ENGAGED
they participate in the social, community, national and international dimensions of their lives by
showing respect for others

forming and sustaining caring relationships

making informed decisions

building practical know-how

taking interest in and responsibility for their social and physical environment

developing moral/ethical and political understanding

making lifestyle choices that are sustainable

contributing to their own material well-being and the material well-being of society

ACTIVE LEARNERS
they pursue excellence in learning to the best of their ability and develop a love of learning by
seeking and using knowledge, and understanding how knowledge is created

experiencing passion for, rigour in and commitment to learning

developing intellectual and critical thinking skills

exercising autonomy and independence in learning

managing their learning and making learning choices

setting and achieving learning goals

pursuing learning qualifications

SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

RELATED LEARNING

AIM

OBJECTIVES
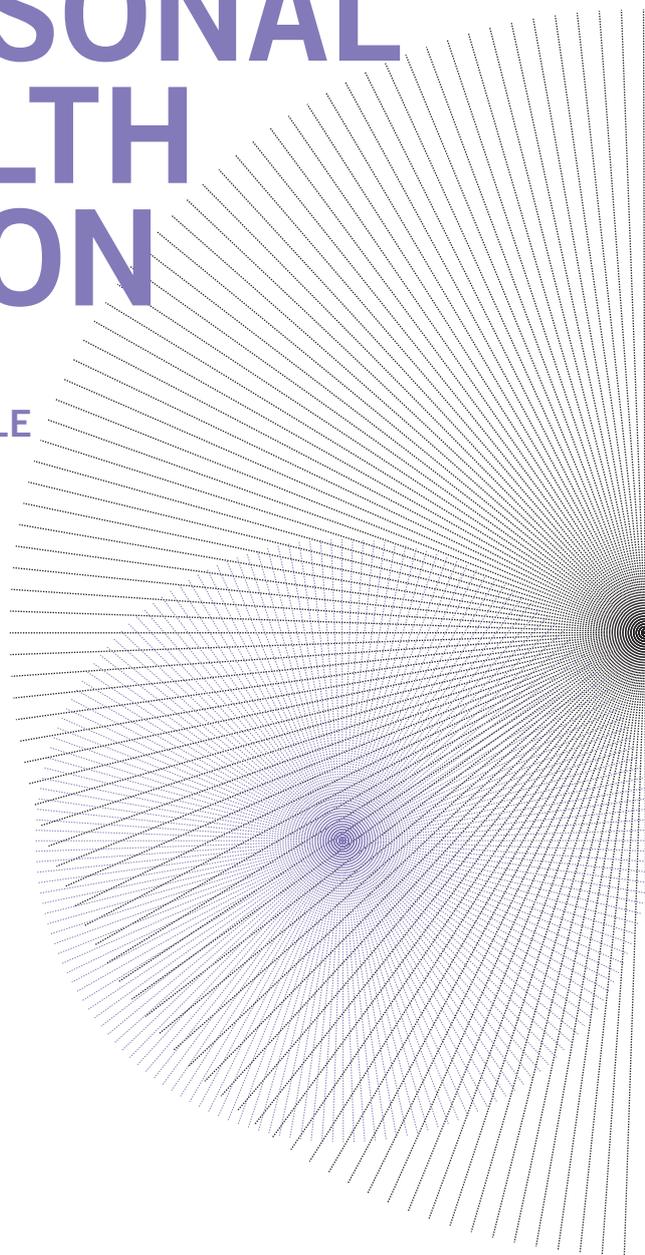
SPHE

Introduction and rationale

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) aims to support students in making choices for health and wellbeing now and in their future lives. Among the aims of senior cycle education is to contribute to the personal well-being of the learner and to their quality of life now and in the future, in particular their capacity to establish and sustain caring relationships with family, friends and other people. Students in senior cycle are poised at the interface between the close of formal compulsory schooling and the world of work, further education and independent living. Adolescence is both a period of opportunity and a time of vulnerability and risk. It is a time when new options and ideas are explored. Many lifestyle behaviours are established at this time, often lasting a lifetime. These lifestyle behaviours not only affect students themselves but ultimately the health of their communities and society. The whole-school community and each subject area can support students in addressing the many personal and social challenges that they face at this time by developing supportive policies and adopting teaching and learning approaches which enhance students' sense of belonging and self-esteem. SPHE provides the dedicated space and time where students can further develop knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and the life skills they need to live healthy lives and to contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of others and their communities.enterprise, to become aware of what is fundamental to being enterprising and to demonstrate enterprise in a specific context.

The World Health Organisation defines health as being

> the extent to which an individual or a group is able on the one hand, to realise aspirations and satisfy needs; and on the other hand, to change and cope with the environment. Health is therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not an object of living; it is a positive concept emphasising social and personal resources as well as physical capacities (WHO 1984)

Students' health and education are inextricably linked. Health is important in its own right and for what it enables us to do and achieve. In SPHE, health is understood as a multi-dimensional concept; it includes not only our physical wellbeing but also our mental, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing. Being healthy is fundamental to our positive experience of and participation in everyday life and education. One's health depends on physical resources, personal capacities and a social support network. SPHE acknowledges that the individual is not solely responsible for his/her personal and social health and wellbeing and neither can an individual expect the school, the wider community and legislators to take sole responsibility for the health and wellbeing of individuals. Instead, SPHE aims to improve the individual's personal capacity to be healthy and to build an appreciation of the wider influences on one's personal health and wellbeing.

SPHE must be inclusive of the many diverse groups in Irish society. These differences may be due to a variety of influences including culture, family background, beliefs, gender, health, physical and intellectual abilities. It is important to recognise that students coming from these diverse backgrounds may need to meet more than one set of cultural expectations, for example, those of the school, their family, their culture and/or their religious beliefs. It is important that all students learn to listen to one another, developing empathy and remaining sufficiently open minded to be accepting of and sensitive towards difference. In developing SPHE in the school, the richness that diversity brings to SPHE should be embraced. Consultation as part of planning for SPHE should be inclusive of all cultural groups. The language, teaching practices and resources used in SPHE should be similarly inclusive.

SPHE is built around the key principles of health promotion. Health promotion can be defined as

> the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, an individual or a group must be able to identify and realise aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment.
>
> (WHO 1986)

In health promotion, health is about more than physical health and wellbeing. It is also concerned with social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. This complex and multifaceted understanding of health recognises not only the need for the individual to take responsibility for their health but also the importance of supportive environments, policies and legislation in support of health and wellbeing. Health education is one aspect of health promotion where the particular focus is on knowledge and information, personal development and life skills. SPHE aims to develop students' commitment to and responsibility for their health and wellbeing. This is supported by developing their appreciation of the wider influences on health and wellbeing.

SPHE in senior cycle aims to develop health literacy, both for the individual student and for groups. Health literacy is the capacity of individuals to obtain discerningly, interpret and understand health information; this includes the confidence to access health services and the competence to use such information and services in ways that enhance health. Once students' health literacy skills are developed, they will be able to seek out relevant knowledge and information using a variety of sources including digital sources. They will be able to critically evaluate it and use self management and interpersonal skills to act in support of health and wellbeing. Students' actions will be further informed by their understanding of the factors that contribute to, and those that are detrimental to, health and wellbeing.

Increasingly today, there is a culture where children and young people are accessing and building relationships in a virtual environment. This may include for example, texting, belonging to an online community, a chat room or web platform. While these practices can be fun, creative and a positive experience, SPHE offers a forum where students can learn the responsible and respectful use of these forms of communication and interaction.

Supportive whole school environment

Every teacher and member of staff, every class and extra-curricular activity can provide opportunities to enhance the personal and social development of the student. The ways in which members of staff relate to one another, to students and to parents or guardians and the quality of relationships between the students themselves, form the foundation for personal and social development in the school.

A supportive school community with health promoting policies and practices is essential if SPHE is to be effective. In such an environment:

- people feel valued
- self-esteem is fostered
- respect, tolerance and fairness is evident
- teaching and learning approaches enhance students' sense of belonging and self-esteem
- high expectations and standards are promoted
- there is support for those experiencing difficulties
- open communication is the norm
- effort is recognised and rewarded
- uniqueness and difference are valued
- conflict is handled constructively
- initiative and creativity are encouraged
- social, moral and civic values are promoted
- students are encouraged to get involved
- the school works in partnerships with parents/ guardians, students and the wider community.

The whole school community should be involved in developing supportive policies and procedures including those in relation to substance use, healthy eating, physical activity and critical incidences. Healthy school communities have a commitment to health and wellbeing which is reinforced not only in the SPHE classroom but also in every class and throughout the whole school community and in positive relationships with staff, parents, guardians and students.

Student councils are increasingly part of effective and democratic schools. The representative nature of student councils can allow all students to have a voice in decision making in school. It is clear that students do better academically, feel more integrated and are less likely to drop out when they believe that their opinions and suggestions are taken into consideration. School

development planning in relation to social, personal and health issues is more informed and more likely to succeed when students are actively involved in the planning process. It is important that schools invest the time and resources to work towards a shared understanding of social, personal and health concerns of students. Students in turn benefit from their involvement by having opportunities to develop and practice personal and social skills including decision making skills, conflict management skills and the ability to recognise and accept difference.

The role of parents and guardians

Social, personal and health education is primarily the role and responsibility of parents or guardians and they have much to offer schools in planning the SPHE curriculum. SPHE is designed as an enabling curriculum. The flexibility of the curriculum framework enables schools to develop an SPHE curriculum that is informed by the needs, interests and concerns of students, parents and guardians. Furthermore, learning is most effective when students can make links between what they learn in SPHE, the school, home, the wider community and virtual communities. Schools can work in partnership with parents and guardians by engaging them in ongoing consultation and providing them with information in relation to the school's SPHE curriculum and related policies.

In line with the requirements of the Education Act 1998, school development planning addresses the development of school policies, including policies on substance use, relationships and sexuality education and bullying. These policies impact on the whole school environment and can support and reinforce learning in SPHE. Parents and guardians have an important contribution to make to the formulation of these policies. Working in partnership with parents and guardians, schools can ensure that policy formulation is cognisant of the realities of the students' lives in the wider community and the particular concerns of parents and guardians for their children in the context of the particular policy.

Related learning

SPHE is part of the curriculum in primary schools and for junior cycle post-primary education. SPHE in senior cycle builds on students' prior learning in SPHE by providing students with opportunities to examine social, personal and health issues and concerns at this stage of mid to late adolescence. There is an added emphasis on students understanding the wider influences on health and wellbeing and how these impact on their experience of health and wellbeing.

SPHE has potential links with the following senior cycle subjects:
- Religious Education
- Home Economics
- Biology
- Physical Education.

Each of these subjects include content which may also be addressed in SPHE, for example, the characteristics of life in Biology, moral decision making in Religious Education, diet and nutrition in Home Economics, physical health and wellbeing in physical education. It is important to emphasise the potential value of cross-curricular links in adding to students' appreciation of the integrated nature of their lives and the value of different perspectives.

The unique experience in SPHE however, is that students are provided with dedicated space and time where they can develop their knowledge and understanding about health and wellbeing. They can be encouraged to set realistic and worthwhile personal goals for themselves. Students can also develop interpersonal skills by participating in a wide range of learning activities with other students from various social and cultural backgrounds. In doing so, students learn to respect different points of viewpoint while gaining an understanding of why different people make different lifestyle choices. Finally, students can be given opportunities to examine how they might cope constructively with life challenges including personal stress, change, loss, peer pressure, and conflict.

Aim

Senior cycle SPHE aims to support students in making choices for health and wellbeing.

Objectives

The objectives for SPHE in senior cycle are to:

- develop self-awareness through opportunities to reflect on thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings
- enhance students' knowledge and understanding of essential health concepts and the wider influences on health and wellbeing to enable informed decision making
- develop students' self-efficacy; the confidence to think and behave independently especially in the face of social pressure
- strengthen students' capacity to empathise with another person's situation, feelings and motives in order to enhance relationships with other people
- develop coping strategies for adolescence and adult life in support of greater resilience
- develop students' health literacy skills, including the ability to obtain, critically evaluate and act on health information in support of health and wellbeing
- develop a willingness to participate in the creation and maintenance of healthy communities and environments.

SPHE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK
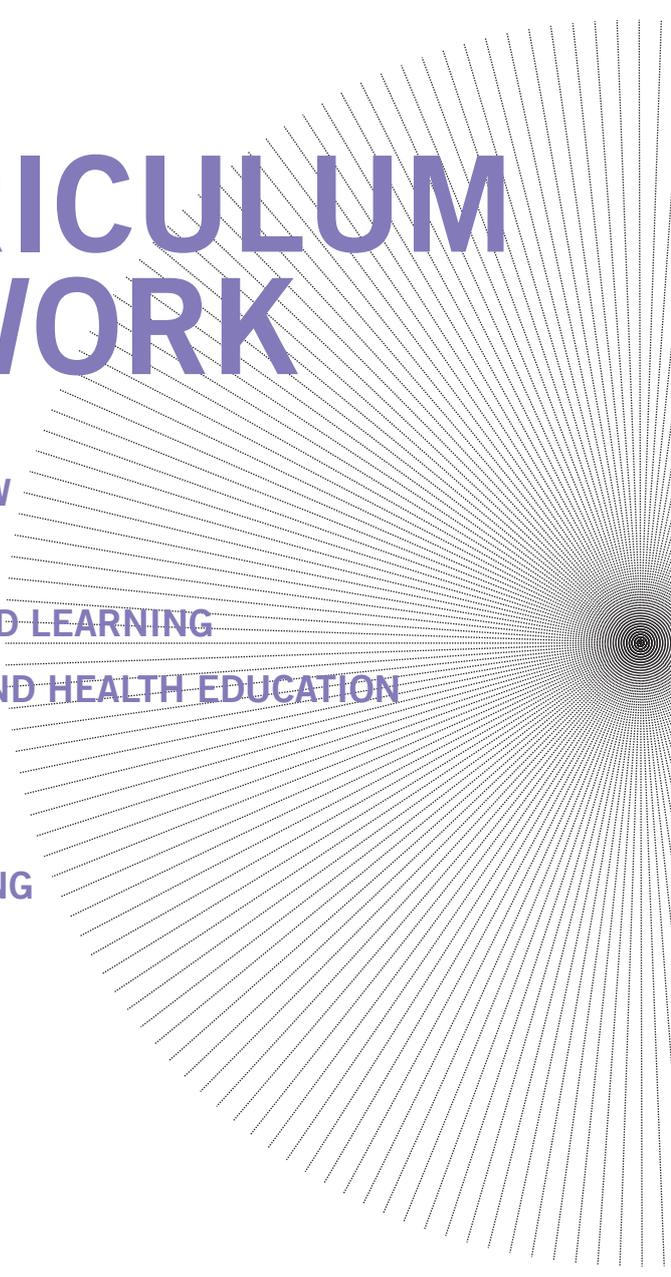
Curriculum Framework Structure

Course overview

The SPHE curriculum framework is an enabling curriculum. Individual schools are encouraged to use the flexible nature of the framework to plan SPHE in their unique setting, choosing learning outcomes which are of interest to and important for their students. The learning outcomes describe what students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of their learning experiences in SPHE. This outcomes-focused approach recognises that different students have different needs, cultural perspectives and life experiences. The framework builds on students' learning experiences in primary and junior cycle post-primary SPHE. Students achieve the learning outcomes at an increasing level of complexity as they move through their education.

The emphasis on what students should be able to do having studied SPHE provides an effective basis for monitoring, evaluating and reporting to parents and others in the wider school community. The SPHE curriculum framework emphasises the particular importance of a supportive whole school environment, effective learning practices and authentic approaches to assessment.

SPHE in senior cycle is built around five areas of learning. These areas of learning focus on what is important for students in senior cycle to know, understand and be able to do in order to make and maintain healthy lifestyle decisions. The five areas of learning are:

- Mental health
- Gender studies
- Substance use
- Relationships and sexuality education
- Physical activity and nutrition.

For each area of learning, there is a rationale and a list of learning outcomes which identify what students should understand and be able to do.

The learning outcomes draw on three interrelated perspectives which emphasise the multi-dimensional nature of health and wellbeing:

- **Emotional and social health and wellbeing** focuses on the knowledge and understanding, values, attitudes and skills students need to inform decisions about emotional, social and spiritual health and wellbeing
- **Physical health and wellbeing** focuses on the knowledge and understanding, values, attitudes and skills that students need to inform decisions about physical health and wellbeing
- **Personal and group health and wellbeing** focuses on knowledge and understanding of the wider influences on the health and wellbeing, an awareness of relevant supports and agencies in the community and the development of advocacy skills.

Time allocation

SPHE is designed as a ninety-hour course in senior-cycle education.   It is recommended that schools offer SPHE as a double period, weekly, over two years. One year of the SPHE course should ideally include the student's final year in senior cycle. The double period time allocation is considered optimal to maximise the effectiveness of the active methodologies recommended in SPHE.   These methodologies are planned in relation to the experiential cycle of

learning, which depends on each student having opportunities to actively engage with the learning experiences. The particular teaching and learning methodologies that support the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of SPHE are best facilitated within small class sizes.

Planning for teaching and learning

Planning for teaching and learning should include a selection of learning outcomes in each of the five areas of learning. It is envisaged that the five areas of learning will be addressed over two years of the senior cycle, although not all of the learning outcomes will be included.   Selected learning outcomes should represent learning experiences related to each of the three perspectives: emotional and social health and wellbeing, physical health and wellbeing and personal and group health and wellbeing. They should also require students to develop their knowledge and understanding, examine values and attitudes and develop life skills relevant to the particular area of learning. In addition, teachers and students may design an area of learning specific to their particular school context by selecting learning outcomes across the five areas of learning.

The diagram below illustrates the way in which students' learning in the five areas of learning is interwoven with the three different perspective as well as addressing knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and lifeskills.
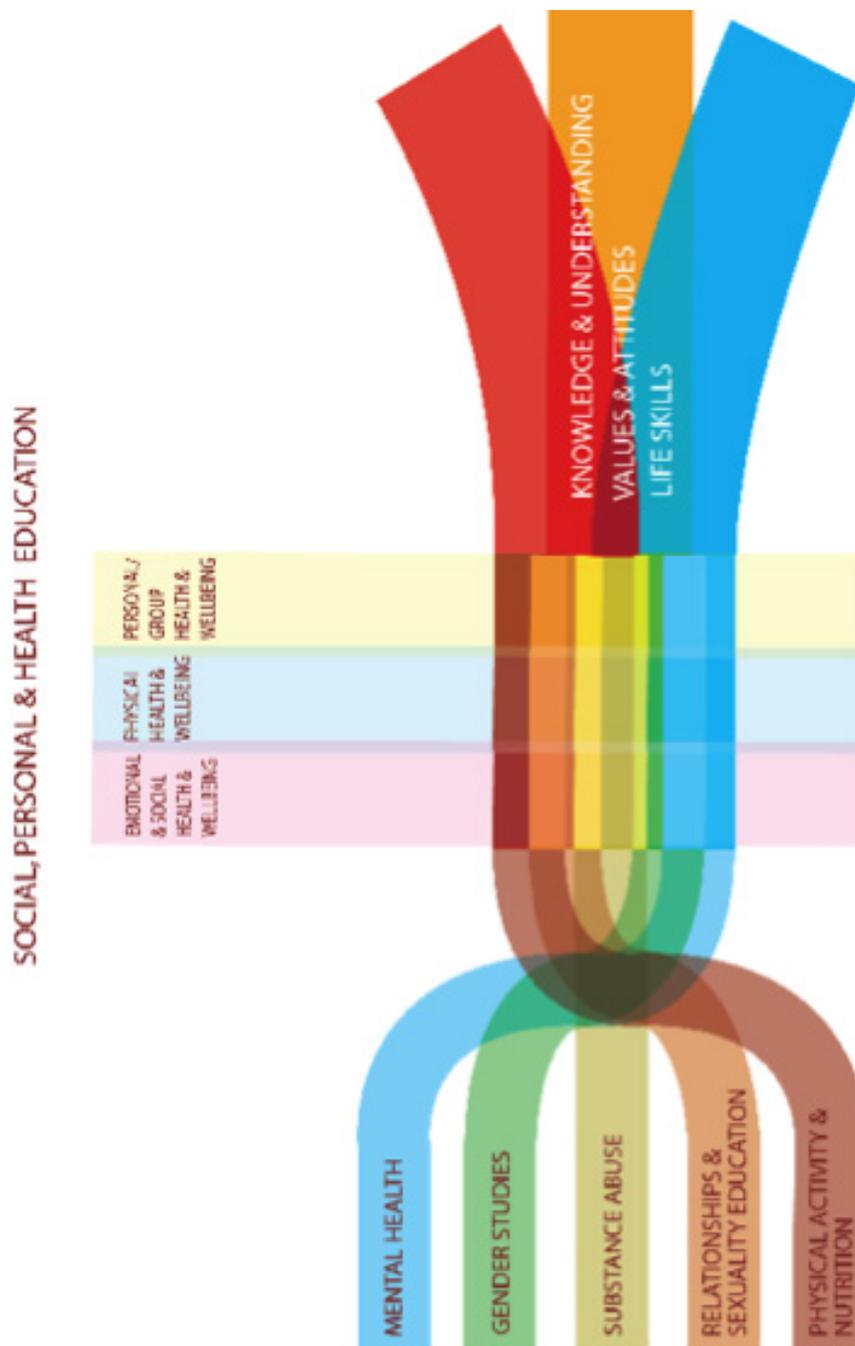
Perspectives in Social, Personal and Health Education

Selected learning outcomes in each of the five areas of learning – mental health, gender studies, substance use, relationships and sexuality education and physical activity and nutrition should reflect learning in each of the three interconnected perspectives.

Emotional, social and spiritual health and wellbeing	Physical health and wellbeing	Personal/group health and wellbeing
This perspective focuses on the knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and skills that students need in the context of emotional, social and spiritual health and wellbeing. For example: • What knowledge, understanding and skills do I need to strengthen my personal identity and enhance my self-esteem? • How can I develop my personal and social skills to enhance relationships?	This perspective focuses on the knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and skills that students need in the context of physical health and wellbeing. For example: • What knowledge and understanding do I need about physical health and wellbeing to support informed decision-making? • How do my lifestyle choices impact on my physical health and wellbeing and that of others? • What changes would support my physical health and wellbeing?	This perspective focuses on the interdependence between the individual, family, friends, the community and the wider environment in the context of health and wellbeing. Students are encouraged to challenge current ways of thinking and acting and to use new insights to be proactive about their own health and wellbeing and that of others. For example: • What happens in my community that supports or hinders health and wellbeing? • What would help to address the barriers? • What could I/we do to promote and support these changes?

Assessment

The SPHE curriculum framework is designed as an enabling curriculum where students and teachers select learning outcomes which are of interest and relevance to their school or class. Assessment for learning (AfI) is an integral part of this teaching and learning. AfI approaches can be used in a wide variety of ways in SPHE to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning by reflecting privately or in a more public way on what they have learned.

There are many learning outcomes in SPHE which support students making learning their own and relevant to their personal and social contexts, e.g. examine, explore, discuss, reflect. The outcomes of these learning experiences can be both personal and private and may not be appropriate for the student to share with others. However, there are learning outcomes where students can present their work through activities such as reflecting, debating, designing campaigns, researching and advocating. Students collect evidence of this learning in their SPHE portfolio (page 35).

Irrespective of the diverse learning experiences which different students may engage with in the enabling curriculum for SPHE, all students should be able to include evidence of learning in the following aspects, in the SPHE portfolio:

- demonstrate personal and social skills that enhance personal self-esteem and that of others, in support of health and wellbeing
- discuss the various influences on health and wellbeing, e.g. family, peers, community, media, culture and legislation
- demonstrate the ability to use self management skills including the capacity to assess risks associated with different lifestyle choices
- demonstrate interpersonal skills when working with others to enhance health and wellbeing
- demonstrate the ability to critically access and use knowledge and information including where to find professional advice relevant to health and wellbeing
- discuss the role of policy, strategies and/or legislation in promoting health and wellbeing
- demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family or community health and wellbeing.

Differentiation

SPHE in senior cycle is designed as an enabling curriculum for all students. It is envisaged that planning for teaching and learning will take into account students' levels of maturity, needs and interests, different cultural contexts and the level at which they can engage effectively with the learning outcomes.
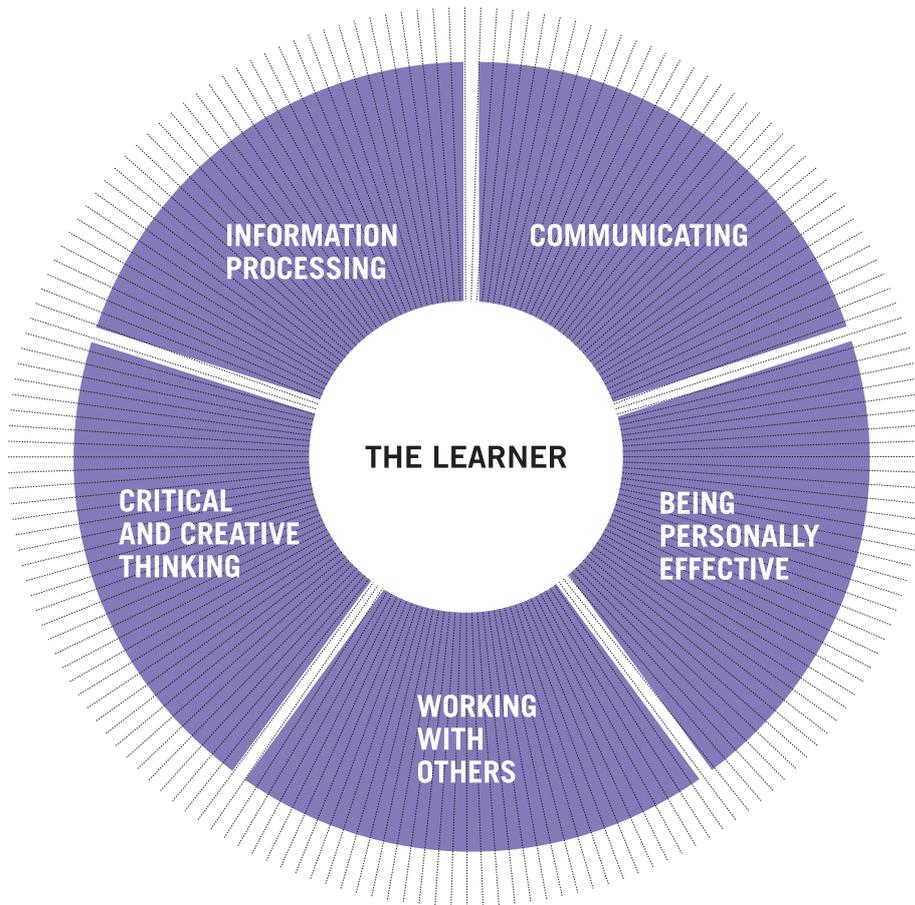
Key skills

There are five key skills identified as central to teaching and learning across the curriculum in senior cycle. These are information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working with others. These skills are important for all students to achieve their full potential, both during their time in school and into the future. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also advocates a skills based approach to health education where opportunities to model, observe and socially interact are at the centre of teaching and learning. The focus of WHO is on creating and maintaining healthy lifestyles through the development of knowledge, attitudes and especially skills, using a variety of learning experiences, with an emphasis on participatory methods. There are significant similarities between the skills promoted by WHO and the five key skills identified as being central to teaching and learning in senior cycle.

Key skills in senior cycle education
Information processing
Critical/creative thinking skills
Being personally effective
Communicating
Working with others

Who life skills
Decision making / critical thinking skills
Coping / self management skills
Communication / interpersonal skills

The five key skills in senior cycle education are embedded in the learning outcomes in SPHE, e.g. in Substance use, students should be able to

- examine the use and misuse of substances including over the counter drugs, alcohol and tobacco and so called 'recreational drugs' (information processing, critical and creative thinking)
- demonstrate assertiveness skills in support of lifestyle choices about substance use (being personally effective, communicating)

In addition, the active methodologies used in SPHE provide numerous opportunities for students to develop the key skills. Students learn individually, in pairs and in groups. Learning activities include opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences, critically examine issues from different perspectives and to reflect from an individual or group perspective.

Effective learning

Teaching and learning in SPHE is built around an open and facilitative teaching style where active, participative and experiential methodologies are essential. The teacher's role is one of facilitation. The teacher recognises the significant learning that takes place between the students themselves as well as between the teacher and students. SPHE encourages a learning culture where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning through the development of critical and creative skills, communication skills, information processing, personal effectiveness and the ability to work effectively with others. The embedding of the five key skills in the learning outcomes requires students to be actively involved in and to take responsibility for their own learning. Assessment for learning practices can encourage students to reflect regularly on their learning in relation to the key skills and the different learning outcomes in SPHE.

While all teaching is challenging, teaching SPHE brings particular demands and responsibilities. The development of classroom relationships that are respectful, genuine and empathetic underpin successful learning experiences in SPHE. The teacher's familiarity, confidence and competence with each area of learning and the use of active methodologies ought to enhance students' active participation in class. Each student's active engagement with different aspects of understanding including explaining, interpreting, applying, empathising, evaluating and reflecting is at the heart of learning in SPHE. The particular learning needs of students with special educational needs ought to be reflected in planning for teaching and learning in SPHE.

Ongoing professional and personal development for SPHE teachers can provide support for teachers and their teaching in SPHE. For example, it is important that teachers are aware of their own attitudes and beliefs towards health and wellbeing and how these might impact on the SPHE class. Teachers also need to consider the variety of beliefs, attitudes and values which students bring to SPHE and how these, in turn, influence students' participation in SPHE. It is, therefore, essential that teachers assigned to SPHE are positively disposed to the subject and appreciate the importance of continuing professional development in this area. Their capacity to relate to students in an empathetic and respectful way and to work in partnership with students to negotiate the learning environment is at the centre of good SPHE classroom relationships.

Planning for effective learning can also draw on the support and involvement of the many agencies in the community who have particular expertise and experience in areas including sexual health, mental health, substance use and community development. Professional and personal development opportunities provided by these agencies, which are informed by the SPHE curriculum at senior cycle, provide a valuable resource for SPHE teachers in senior cycle.

From time to time, SPHE teachers may decide that some students require additional support and advice. It is important that teachers and school management consider how links can be made with other supportive groups within, and beyond, the school—class teachers, year heads, pastoral care team, guidance and counselling team and/or school management, and community youth health services.

AREAS OF LEARNING

MENTAL HEALTH

GENDER STUDIES

SUBSTANCE USE

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION

Mental Health

Mental health is integral to our daily lives. It is central to our ability to live full and satisfying lives and to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that come our way. Having a positive, proactive approach to mental health can support our capacity to initiate, develop and maintain mutually satisfying relationships. It can support us in our efforts to deal with life's ups and downs and cope with change. Mentally healthy individuals develop emotionally, creatively, intellectually and spiritually and are best placed to enjoy life and have fun.

Today, change is part of all of our lives. Young people are experiencing increased demands and challenges due to the accelerated pace of personal, social and cultural change. At another level, a significant minority of people will experience mental ill-health at some stage in their lives, to the extent that they will require professional support. Young people and their families are all too often faced with the tragedy of young people engaging in self-harm behaviours and/or completing suicide. Mental health education provides a dedicated space for students to examine the personal, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that influence their mental health. Students can explore ways in which they can be proactive in support of mental health, including an awareness of relevant support agencies and how to access them. It emphasises people's capacity to engage with these services positively when the need arises and to look forward to recovery with optimism.

There is a strong international evidence-base demonstrating that curriculum-based programmes which enable students to develop a foundation in life skills can both prevent and reduce mental health difficulties when used in a whole-school context. School policies and practices that promote equality, fair play, respect, tolerance and fairness, equality, respect and inclusion will support students' positive experience of school and, in turn, promote positive personal identity and self-esteem.

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. develop students' confidence and competence to act in support of mental health and wellbeing
2. develop students' self-awareness about the attitudes, values and beliefs that underpin healthy personal lifestyle behaviours and choices
3. develop students' capacity to empathise with others through a greater understanding of different life experiences, motives and feelings of other individuals and groups
4. examine the factors which impact on mental health and wellbeing and develop young people's ability to act on behalf of personal and group health and wellbeing

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
defining mental health	• explain what mental health is, including consideration of the physical, emotional and social aspects of mental health • examine with others the different factors which impact on mental health and wellbeing
self-awareness and personal skill	• examine with others the personal attitudes, values and life experiences which enhance or damage self-esteem and ways to deal with the different demands of these situations • review personal lifestyle choices about substance use, in the context of mental health and wellbeing, considering the short and long term consequences of such choices • plan for a balanced approach to study, work, rest and leisure, including being physically active • receive positive and negative feedback constructively • compare with others how we use coping skills including the use of constructive self-talk in challenging situations • design a resource for young people advocating the importance of seeking help in times of difficulty or when feeling hopeless • draw on a range of mindfulness practices such as meditation and breathing techniques in support of their mental health and wellbeing.
emotional health	• demonstrate appropriate ways to express feelings using a range of approaches e.g. role play, art, drama, mime, poetry • agree ways to manage and/or resolve conflict and manage anger respectfully and effectively
relationship skills	• demonstrate effective communication skills including skills of negotiation, conflict management and assertiveness in a variety of contexts • examine the role of responsible social networking through virtual communication and its importance for young people • plan to design a resource, e.g. poster, flyer, pamphlet, which outlines how young people can give and receive support in challenging times
stress management	• recognise the signs and symptoms of stress in themselves and others • design a group presentation for their class on the signs and symptoms of stress and strategies for managing stress in a healthy way
bereavement and loss	• examine the different experiences of bereavement and loss • explain the different stages in bereavement and loss • discuss how they might best support themselves and others in times of bereavement and loss

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
mental ill-health and mental illness	• explain the continuum of mental health and wellbeing, ranging from mental health to mental ill-health to mental illness • clarify personal understanding of and attitude to mental ill-health and mental illness • create a case study using a written, visual or audio approach, which outlines the signs, possible causes and the effects of the more common experiences of mental ill-health or mental illness, on the health and wellbeing of the individual and those close to him/her • look into the care of those with mental ill-health and mental illness in the community
being health literate	• prepare a short presentation on the relevant health and safety regulations, part-time employment legislation and their importance for the health and wellbeing of young people • express different points of view about the code of practice for employers and employees on the prevention and resolution of bullying in work • explain their choice of three professional and voluntary agencies that support mental health and wellbeing • plan to advocate on behalf of a mental health concern of young people
dealing with abusive behaviour	• recognise the different types of abusive and bullying behaviour and the impact of such behaviour on individuals and their relationships • explain homophobic bullying, its effects and consequences • demonstrate personal and interpersonal skills to protect themselves and others in bullying situations

Gender Studies

Gender studies aims to develop students' understanding of how a person's gender impacts on their physical, emotional and social health. Gender refers to the social differences as opposed to the biological ones, between females and males. These differences are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures. The characteristics and roles ascribed to males and females in the different cultural groups within a given society affect the behaviour, experiences, expectations and opportunities of both male and female individuals. Until recently, the study of gender issues has been primarily focused on improving the status of women and girls. However, in SPHE, gender studies will examine the significance of gender for both sexes in relation to their health and wellbeing.

Girls and boys have different educational and health behaviour profiles. Because of their socialisation, their experiences of similar situations are different. Within both groups, there are also significant differences in how individual boys and individual girls approach and experience life events. Their values, attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, determined by cultural influences including social class, ethnicity, religion and gender, contribute to these differences. SPHE in senior cycle examines the particular influence of gender.

Greater awareness of gender issues, at a personal and social level, enables both male and female students to appreciate the impact that sex-role stereotyping has on the lives of both females and males. This, in turn, can begin a journey of understanding in relation to other groups in society who may have compromised social, personal and health experiences because of, for example, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and special education needs.

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. develop students' knowledge and understanding about the influence of gender on one's experience of health and wellbeing
2. explore personal experience of gender and gender stereotyping and the impact of these experiences on their lives
3. explore the differences and similarities between both genders in their approach to health and wellbeing
4. develop personal and interpersonal skills which support the development of respectful, dynamic relationships for both genders
5. examine the different influences on sex-role stereotyping and the implications for health and wellbeing
6. examine how different males and different females support or hinder their own and others' effective participation in education.

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
the difference between sex and gender **gender stereotyping**	• outline the difference between sex and gender • discuss with others the influence of gender stereotyping on socialisation and lifestyle choices including the impact on health and wellbeing
gender and cultural influences	• research using a variety of sources, gender and socialisation in different cultural settings including consideration of the impact on health and wellbeing
self-awareness and self-management skills	• compare personal experiences of gender and socialisation with others • clarify personal attitudes and values about gender and reflect on how these might impact on lifestyle choices
being health literate	• discuss the supports for male and female health and wellbeing in the community • examine the different ways in which males and females access/do not access health services • provide examples of gender stereotyping in various media including discussion of the possible impact on health and wellbeing • debate the provisions of the equality legislation in the context of gender • investigate the ways in which individual males and females experience school differently • identify five aspects of school that could be changed to assist the full participation of individual boys and individual girls in their education
male and female experiences of health and wellbeing	• compare the different ways in which individual men and individual women view health and wellbeing • select examples of the similarities and differences between what individual males and individual females value in relationships and the different ways which they deal with problems, from popular songs, literature or other media • design a presentation highlighting gender differences in workplace illnesses and injuries and suggest possible causes and solutions
gender, power and authority	• identify, using case studies, examples of the use and misuse of power and authority in relationships from a gender context. • discuss different strategies for coping with abusive and bullying behaviour in the context of gender

Substance use

Decision making in relation to the harmful and healthy use of various substances is part of our everyday lives. One of the challenges of adolescence is learning to cope with the pressures presented by the availability of mood-altering substances, including alcohol and drugs. Young people are making these choices in a world of conflicting and ambiguous messages. Media and marketing pressures are compounded by the example set by significant adults and their attitude towards substance use.

Substance misuse presents many problems for society. It affects not only those who misuse substances but also those with whom they have relationships. It can limit a person's capacity to develop and take up life's opportunities and is a significant factor in mental and physical illness.

The dedicated SPHE class presents students with opportunities to examine their personal attitudes and values in relation to substance use generally and, specifically, in relation to alcohol. Students build on their understanding from junior cycle, continuing to examine the consequences and dangers associated with the misuse of alcohol and other substances. Students can consider the choices they are making and the consequences of these choices. Developing life skills which support healthy choices is central to substance use education.

The community and culture in which students live significantly influence lifestyle choices in relation to substance use. Young people need alternatives to alcohol, drug and tobacco use. The creation of supportive environments where young people are provided with other options is recognised as the way forward. SPHE has an important contribution to make in raising awareness and encouraging students to be proactive in relation to healthy attitudes to substance use. Students ought to consider if their local communities provide young people with alternatives for a healthy lifestyle and how they themselves might organise or support these alternative activities. Students can evaluate the kinds of role models that they themselves are for younger people and identify other positive role models in relation to substance use.

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. enhance students' knowledge and understanding about substance use and misuse
2. develop awareness of personal experiences, values, attitudes and feelings which influence lifestyle choices about substance use
3. develop students' personal and interpersonal skills so that they might have the confidence to act appropriately in the face of social pressures to behave differently
4. examine life stories associated with the harmful use of substances to develop understanding and empathy with those involved
5. examine the external influences on substance use including the media, peers and community.

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
substance use and misuse	• design an awareness campaign which defines what is healthy use and misuse of substances including over the counter drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco and so called 'recreational' drugs • analyse the relationship between alcohol consumption, disposable income and the possible negative consequences for life style choices • highlight the personal and social implications of substance misuse when in education and employment settings
self-awareness and personal skills	• discuss their own experiences, values, attitudes and feelings in relation to substance use • examine the different influences that impact on personal lifestyle choices about substance use, including family, friends, work, culture, gender, personal finances and the media • analyse the impact of the harmful use of substances on personal relationships and on sexual health • demonstrate personal skills to build confidence and self-esteem, including problem solving and decision making skills
relationship skills	• provide examples of how lifestyle choices about substance use can impact on the health and well-being of others • create a role play or mime which demonstrates assertiveness skills in the context of peer pressure and substance use • demonstrate how to respond in an emergency situation caused by substance misuse • design an awareness campaign highlighting how young people can support themselves and/or each other in dealing with substance misuse by friends, family and/or work colleagues
stress management	• recommend to other young people, strategies for managing stress in a healthy way, when feeling lonely, depressed or under pressure

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

The three themes of RSE at post-primary level are:

- Human relationships
- Human growth and development
- Human sexuality.

Young people in senior cycle are involved in many different relationships with family, friends, teachers and others. Everyday, students are forming, maintaining and/or ending relationships. There can be a dramatic change in the level of intimacy experienced and the quality of relationships. Students' ability to interact effectively depends on a personal sense of self-worth and having the life skills to negotiate their way respectfully through the cycle of various relationships. Parallel to this, young people are maturing sexually and are growing in awareness of their sexuality.

RSE emphasises the importance of self-awareness and self-esteem in understanding these changes. It emphasises the development of one's ability to interact respectfully with others. It provides students with an opportunity to understand different types of relationships and the attitudes, values and life skills that support the healthy development of these relationships.

Students can continue to develop a positive and respectful attitude to their own and others' sexuality and sexual health. They can make informed choices about themselves as sexual beings, which respect both their own needs and rights and those of others. Students can develop an understanding of familial, cultural and religious values and consider how these values support healthy informed choices in relation to relationships, sexuality and sexual health. In an increasingly multicultural society, SPHE can provide students with opportunities to listen to others in order to understand the different perspectives which inform the choices they make about their lives, their relationships and their sexuality from their own cultural perspective.

The school policy on RSE should be drawn up in consultation with teachers, students, parents and school management. The policy provides clarity and consensus on how RSE will be taught in the individual school.

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about relationships
2. develop an understanding of the different types of relationships, what is important in them and the skills to enhance relationships
3. promote empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality
4. develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in support of sexual and reproductive health
5. develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
6. develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships
7. develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
self-awareness and personal skills	• compare what they value in relationships with what is valued by significant other groups, e.g. family, church, older people, friends, different cultures
	• compare what they value in relationships with the values portrayed in relationships in the media
	• identify the personal strengths that they bring to relationships
	• construct a personal life plan including consideration of their personal, social and vocational goals and the place of parenthood in this plan
	• analyse the concepts of love, being in love and the importance of love in its various aspects, including closeness, intimacy, distance, pleasure and commitment
relationship skills	• demonstrate genuineness, empathy and respect in different types of relationship scenarios
	• demonstrate relationship skills which support the setting up, maintenance and ending of relationships
	• design an awareness campaign highlighting different ways to negotiate sexual relationships in order to avoid unwanted sexual activities and/or unprotected sexual intercourse
	• devise an SPHE class for junior cycle students which focuses on healthy and safe engagement in online and virtual communications
sexual and reproductive health	• explain the different stages of adolescent development, including the physical, emotional and sexual changes that take place in puberty
	• explain the reproductive process including an understanding of fertility from both a male and a female perspective
	• research sexually transmitted infections including Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) and the importance of early medical intervention for STI's
	• compare different methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy
	• examine different lifestyle choices about sexual activity, the arguments for delaying sexual activities and the consequences of being sexually active for themselves and their personal relationships
	• discuss the complexity of moral, social and cultural issues that impact on sexual behaviour including the pressure on youth to be sexually attractive and sexually available
	• discuss different cultural values and beliefs about sex and sexual health
sexual identity	• distinguish between sexual activity, sexuality and sexual orientation
	• clarify their understanding of and comfort with different sexual orientations
	• demonstrate how to relate respectfully to others of a different sexual orientation
STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
parenting	• compare their understanding of the responsibilities of being a parent/guardian with parents/guardians' understanding of their responsibilities • discuss the role of commitment and relationship skills in marriage and other committed relationships, that help to support lasting relationships and family life • compose an 'open' letter to adults/guardians emphasising the importance of supportive adult/child relationship on the development of self-esteem and independence and how this might be achieved • design a scenario which explores the consequences of crisis pregnancy, teenage pregnancy and/or parenthood for different males and different females
personal rights and personal safety	• argue in support of their right to personal safety, privacy and their own space, and the consequences for them when these are not respected • explain what sexual harassment is, including issues of power and control • make a short presentation explaining sexual harassment and the law as it applies to it • demonstrate skills for dealing with sexual harassment including how to assess risk and take steps to deal with it including where to access help and support • formulate suggestions for a school policy on sexual harassment • design an information campaign highlighting safety tips to protect against rape and sexual assault including where to access help and support if one is a victim
being health literate	• discuss the law as it relates to the age of consent for sexual activity • research the services offered by statutory and voluntary agencies in the community which support the sexual health and wellbeing of young adults • describe the statutory and voluntary agencies which offer support to those experiencing relationship difficulties • evaluate the reliability and credibility of two sources of information about sexual health, sexuality and sexuality orientation. • design an awareness campaign about young people's rights and responsibilities in relation to online/virtual communications

Physical activity and nutrition

Regular involvement in physical activity has multiple benefits for young people. As well as the physical benefits, it can enhance feelings of psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. It can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety and provide opportunities for social and moral development.

Learning to balance the daily intake of food with physical activity levels is at the heart of maintaining a healthy body weight and a physically fit body. Making informed choices about what and how much is healthy to eat is difficult when we live in a world of conflicting and competing messages about food.

In senior cycle SPHE, students have an opportunity to examine the importance of physical activity and nutrition in their lives. They can explore how and why they might choose to increase or maintain their current activity patterns. Students can also be encouraged to examine the supports and/or barriers that exist in relation to their participation in physical activity. Students can be encouraged to use self management skills in relation to the recommendations for physical activity in adolescence.

Students can learn to evaluate the plethora of messages about nutrition and diet that they are targeted with every day. Many students in senior cycle have increasing responsibility for their diet and nutrition. It is important that opportunities to reflect and plan for healthy nutritional choices are provided.

The influence of different factors including gender and culture on body image, physical activity participation and choices about nutrition can be examined and the implications for healthy lifestyle choices can be considered.
The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. provide students with opportunities to reflect on personal experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs about nutrition and physical activity
2. enhance students' knowledge and understanding about the role of physical activity and nutrition in a healthy lifestyle
3. develop the confidence and competence to make and maintain healthy lifestyle choices about physical activity and nutrition
4. examine the concept of body image, including an understanding of how students can promote a positive body image for themselves and others
5. explore the social and environmental factors which enhance or hinder the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyle choices about physical activity and nutrition.

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
physical activity and nutrition	• examine what it means to be fit for different people and the relationship between physical fitness and health and wellbeing • analyse the factors which influence physical activity participation and nutritional choices including gender, culture, socio-economic background, peer group, media and advertising • recognise that not all groups in society have similar access to physical activity opportunities and healthy nutritional choices • design a short presentation highlighting the recommendations for physical activity and diet and nutrition at different life stages
self-awareness and personal skills	• examine personal values, attitudes and beliefs about physical activity participation and nutritional choices • demonstrate self management skills including decision making, goal-setting and reflection about physical activity participation and /or healthy eating • examine the concepts of body image and self-esteem and their impact on relationships with self and others • examine the role of physical activity and nutrition in developing positive body image and self esteem
relationship skills	• discuss the influence of their relationships with others on the choices they make about physical activity and nutrition • plan to make and maintain positive changes about physical activity, participation and healthy nutritional choices • collaborate in planning and/or preparing a menu of healthy lunch ideas for senior cycle students
being health literate	• compose an 'open' letter highlighting the extent to which their 'built' environment does/does not support physical activity participation • prepare a short presentation highlighting the extent to which the environments of the school and their community support healthy nutritional choices • design a pamphlet advocating the use of community facilities for physical activity participation, e.g. parks, leisure facilities and school or community clubs • examine food labelling practices and the extent to which they support informed nutritional choices • select food advertisements which reflect different principles of food advertising and the different approaches used to influence young people's nutritional choices • design an awareness campaign critiquing the claims of different fad diets • prepare a list of tips for students for budgeting, shopping and cooking healthy nutritional meals • contribute to school policies which support healthy lifestyle choices about physical activity and nutrition • implement a 'Healthy Living' week with students, parents and school management

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT	STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO
gender and physical activity and nutrition	• discuss the reasons for differing physical activity participation levels amongst individual males and individual females • highlight the barriers and supports for physical activity participation for both males and females in school and in the community • analyse the different pressures exerted on males and females by peers, media and others in relation to diet and nutrition, physical activity and physical appearance
stress management	• design a campaign highlighting the role of physical activity, relaxation and informed nutritional choices in stress management for senior cycle students.

ASSESSMENT

ASSESMENT FOR LEARNING

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

SPHE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning in SPHE. This ensures that

- students take responsibility for their learning in SPHE
- teachers and students plan for teaching and learning in SPHE, informed by the outcomes of assessment for learning approaches
- students' learning in SPHE can be made explicit
- there is a framework for reporting to interested parties, including parents.

Assessment in SPHE is concerned with assessment at two levels:

- assessment for learning which takes place as part of teaching and learning
- assessment of learning, which takes place at the completion of an area of learning and/or at the completion of the course.

Assessment for learning (AfL)

Assessment for Learning is about using assessment in the classroom as a tool to improve students' learning. It is characterised by

- sharing the learning intention with the students
- sharing the success criteria with the students
- involving the students in assessing their own learning
- providing feedback which helps students recognise what they must do to close any gaps in their knowledge or understanding
- communicating confidence that every student can improve
- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of the assessment.

The learning outcomes in the five areas of learning provide a clear background against which students' progress can be considered. Ongoing engagement in assessment for learning practices can develop students' capacity to make sense of what they are learning and reflect on how it might inform decision-making. Systematic recording of reflective exercises can enrich students' experience of assessment for learning tasks.

Assessment of learning

Assessment of learning is about gathering and interpreting the evidence of learning in SPHE over two years. The outcomes of students' learning in SPHE are personal in nature but some may also be suitable for sharing. Assessment of learning therefore is more appropriately carried out within the class and school. Students assemble their selection of evidence in a student-centred SPHE portfolio where the content is the work of the student and the student has selected what to include in the SPHE portfolio.

SPHE Portfolio

The SPHE Portfolio will include the following elements:

1. Opening statement
2. Diary and review
3. Summary report of group action
4. Case study/Personal Action Plan
5. Final statement

SPHE PORTFOLIO	WHAT'S INCLUDED
1. Opening Statement	Opening statement about SPHE in senior cycle including the aim, objectives, areas of learning and the particular learning outcomes that have been the focus for that class and their work in SPHE.
2. Diary and review	2.1 Reflective log on a selection of four SPHE classes. This log should include: • reference to related area of learning • explanation for the inclusion of this particular lesson • learning outcome(s) for the class • reflection on learning including how the student's learning might be applied in another context • evidence in support of the portfolio entry, i.e worksheet or other work completed may be included. and 2.2 Summary of two areas of learning. For each area of learning include: • the important knowledge and information gained • student's appraisal of her/his own learning experience including particular skills addressed • peer and/or teacher appraisal • relevant supports in the community
3. Summary report of group action/ rich task	Summary report to include • the objectives for the particular task • overview of research undertaken • outline of at least two different perspectives on the issue, e.g. parent, adolescent, youth worker • outline of possible approaches to the action, choice made and reason for same • description of the 'action' including supporting evidence, i.e. photographs, video, completed evaluations • record of personal contribution to the process • conclusions and recommendations.

SPHE PORTFOLIO	WHAT'S INCLUDED
4. Case study report (pair or individual)	A case study on an individual, a group or service involved in supporting the health and wellbeing of young people, eg. Al Anon. The report will include comment on • relevance to the particular area of learning • the service(s) offered • personnel profile(s) and their responsibilities • relevance for parents/guardians and/or adolescents at different life stages • challenges and successes that are encountered by the individual, group or service • benefits to young people accessing service • review and evaluation of the service from the student's perspective
OR	
4. Personal action plan	Outline of a personal action plan including decision making and goal setting skills. The personal action plan should include: • relevance to particular area of learning • overview of available supports • record of progress including photographs, diary entries etc • reflection and evaluation
5. Final statement	Summary review of student's main learning in SPHE in senior cycle. The summary chould include: • what the students enjoyed or did not enjoy and why, • what he/she would have preferred more of and why, • issues that he/she would hope to look at in the future • what he/she would/would not recommend to a friend about SPHE in senior cycle • what should be considered in future planning in SPHE and why.

The SPHE portfolio should reflect evidence of students' learning in relation to each of the assessment statements outlined on page 15.

It is not envisaged that SPHE will be assessed externally for examination, but will be assessed as part of the teaching and learning in the SPHE curriculum of the school.

SPHE programme evaluation

It is important that schools engage in ongoing evaluation of SPHE in senior cycle. This evaluation can happen at a number of different levels: Students can be given opportunities to comment on their experience of the SPHE programme and/or on particular areas of learning. Their comments and recommendations can be used to inform future developments in the school's SPHE programme.

SPHE teachers' reflections and feedback can be used to identify and prioritise their personal and professional requirements in support of their teaching of SPHE.

Parents are a significant voice in the evaluation of SPHE in senior cycle. It is important that parents are made aware about what is being included in SPHE in senior cycle, to facilitate their informed involvement in the evaluation of the programme.

One of the three perspectives in SPHE in senior cycle, personal/group health and wellbeing, focuses on the wider influences on health and wellbeing. Schools are encouraged to make links with voluntary and statutory agencies in the community that also have responsibility for aspects of health and wellbeing. It is important that schools review their links with these agencies and continue to plan for their effective development.

School policies which directly impact on SPHE, for example, RSE policy and substance use policy ought to be reviewed regularly by representatives of the whole school community, parents, students, teachers and school management. It is important that the school's SPHE programme reflects and supports the values inherent in these policies.

Finally, it is recommended that school management is involved in the ongoing evaluation of SPHE so that they can fully support the recommendations for ongoing development and provision of resources for SPHE in the school.

NCCA