



NCCA

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

Senior Cycle Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

Guidelines to support
the completion of
Key Assignments

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Introduction

This document, *Senior Cycle Social Personal and Health Education: Guidelines to support the completion of Key Assignments*, provides

- detail on the nature and purpose of the Key Assignments, referred to in the curriculum specification for Senior Cycle SPHE
- guidelines and support for schools, teachers and students on completing the Key Assignments.

These guidelines are relevant for students engaging in both Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes as both groups of students are required to complete Key Assignments as part of their engagement in Senior Cycle SPHE. The Key Assignments serve a different role for students following LCA and LCE, as described later in this document.

The Senior Cycle SPHE specification (2024) replaces the LCA *Social and Health Education* Modules 1 and 2 and the LCE *Senior Cycle Social Personal and Health Education Framework*.

The guidelines should be used in conjunction with the curriculum specification for Senior Cycle SPHE, which can be accessed at [SPHE Curriculum Online](#).

Assessment in Senior Cycle SPHE

Assessment in Senior Cycle SPHE is based on the rationale, aims and learning outcomes in the specification. The purpose of assessment is to enable students to show evidence of their learning.

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

As well as varied teaching strategies, varied assessment strategies will support student learning and provide information to teachers and students that can be used as feedback so that teaching and learning activities can be modified in ways that best suit individual learners. By setting appropriate and engaging tasks, asking questions and giving feedback that promotes learner autonomy, assessment will support learning and promote progression, support the development of student key competencies and summarise achievement.

What evidence of learning is assessment in SPHE looking for?

Different assessment activities can be used to assess different learning outcomes. However, irrespective of the diverse learning experiences and assessment methods that students may engage with in Senior Cycle SPHE, all students should be able to show evidence of the following:

- an increase in knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed to be healthy, resilient, confident, responsible and empathetic young adults
- increased ability to apply the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions gained through participation in the learning to personal contexts or to practical problems
- greater awareness of their beliefs/attitudes/assumptions/values
- new strategies acquired that support their health and wellbeing
- a growing capacity to make choices and take actions in support of their health and wellbeing and that of others.

Key Assignments in Senior Cycle SPHE

This section of the guidelines sets out the nature and purpose of Key Assignments in SPHE.

Key Assignments are:

- a set of learning experiences and reflection activities, derived from the learning outcomes, that are of key importance.
- designed to provide choice and suit diverse student interests and abilities. However, students must complete Key Assignments from the choice set out in this document.
- completed as part of the ongoing teaching and learning within the SPHE classroom by all students, irrespective of whether they are following the Leaving Certificate Applied or Leaving Certificate Established programme.
- not judged in terms of marks or grades although satisfactory completion of key assignments is required and students will receive teacher feedback. Students following the LCA programme will be awarded credits for the successful completion of the Key Assignments.

Key Assignments in SPHE aim to support learning that is *relevant, deep, social and 'in the world'*.¹

- *Relevant learning* implies that Key Assignments are chosen, from the list provided, that matter personally to the students and/or to their peers/community. This plays a key role in encouraging students' intrinsic motivation and sense of ownership.
- *Deep learning* goes beyond gathering and presenting information. It calls students to delve into an issue, think about it and come up with a personal response. Deep learning is long lasting and remains with the students after the Key Assignment is completed.
- *Social learning* affirms the social dimension of learning and the value of learning from and with others.
- *'In the world' learning* allows young people to address real-world issues that merit their attention and action. It invites students to engage with real issues, real contexts and real problems and to explore real and relevant questions that call for explanation, solutions or actions.

The Key Assignments are varied in the topics they address and in the kinds of learning they enable students to demonstrate. Taken as a whole, they are designed to enable students show evidence of their growing capacity to:

- find reliable and relevant information, services and supports about health and wellbeing
- make judgements and propose solutions or strategies in relation to different scenarios
- show awareness of both the personal and social impacts of decisions and behaviours
- recognise the various influences on health and wellbeing
- reflect on what they are learning and how this learning is relevant in their lives both now and in the future
- integrate and apply learning in relevant personal and social contexts.

¹ Big Picture Thinking: how to educate the whole person for an interconnected world, OECD, 2022, p.26–36

List of Key Assignments

Students must complete a minimum of **8 Key Assignments**, chosen from the list below, ensuring that a spread of Key Assignments are chosen from across the 3 Strands of the SPHE specification. Ideally, students should complete 3 Key Assignments linked to their learning in Strand 1, 3 Key Assignments linked to their learning in Strand 2 and 2 Key Assignments linked to Stand 3.

Note: Although written in the 1st person singular, many Key Assignments can be completed in pairs or small groups, should students prefer to work collaboratively on some Key Assignments. In such instances, each individual student's contribution to the work of the group should be evident.

Table 1: List of Key Assignments

| Key Assignment | Strand Link | ✓ |
|--|-------------------|---|
| I gathered information on the factors that influence holistic health and made a plan to improve one aspect of my health. | Strand 1 | |
| I made a chart/poster/graphic/pamphlet/infographic/video to explain the difference between low mood and depression and signposted where and how young people can access reliable help and support if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental health. | Strand 1 | |
| I created a short presentation on one important factor that effects young people's emotional wellbeing and reflected on what this means for me. | Strand 1 | |
| I made a list of tips for how to stay safe when out socialising and included advice on what to do if myself or someone I know gets into difficulty. | Strand 1 | |
| I collected information on the power of sleep, reflected on what this means for me and made a plan to improve my sleep, if necessary. | Strand 1 | |
| I designed an awareness campaign for people my age highlighting the signs, risks and consequences of different kinds of addictions, and how and where to seek support for an addiction. | Strand 1 | |
| I have become more aware of my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and I created a checklist of strategies that I think will help me to manage myself better emotionally. | Strand 1 | |
| I participated in a series of role plays/scenarios, showing how to communicate effectively in different situations such as conflict, communicating boundaries, ending a relationship. | Strand 2 | |
| I created a short presentation to highlight warning signs in an intimate relationship (including signs of abuse or coercive control) and what healthy relationships look and feel like. This included signposts to relevant supports. | Strand 2 | |
| I created a fact sheet for young people entitled 'Consent – What you need to know?' | Strand 2 | |
| I created a short presentation showing how positive and harmful attitudes around gender are visible in the media. | Strand 2 | |
| I examined case-studies and/or relationship scenarios and suggested possible resolutions/responses, based on respect and care for self and others. | Strand 2 | |
| I created a short presentation on how the law protects people from abusive relationships (including stalking, image-based abuse and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence) | Strand 2 and 3 | |
| I have reflected on the skills I will need to be able to take care of myself when I move on from school and I've created a plan to develop and practice some of these skills now. | Strand 3 | |
| I gathered information about one group of people who are experiencing discrimination and I reflected on practical ways that I can show solidarity with them. | Strand 3 | |
| I designed a resource, e.g. poster, flyer, short video etc, to let my peers know about their work-place rights or their rights and responsibilities in online communications, before the law. | Strand 3 | |
| I wrote a letter to my 12 year old self, with advice about how to make it through adolescence, make healthy choices and be your own person. | All three strands | |
| I created a 'notice-board' of relevant, trust-worthy and useful websites, services and supports for health and wellbeing that would be helpful for young people to know about. | All three strands | |

Process for Completing Key Assignments

The Key Assignments derive from the Learning Outcomes of the SPHE specification and are rooted in the day-to-day teaching and learning. They are completed within class, across the two years of Senior Cycle SPHE, following these guidelines:

- After engaging with a selection of Learning Outcomes check to see which Key Assignments are relevant to the learning that has taken place. If more than one Key Assignment is relevant, students might choose which Key Assignment to compete.
- Key Assignments should be completed as close to the learning as possible. This ensures that the Key Assignment is more meaningful for the students and enables them to connect their learning with the assessment.
- Provide as much choice as possible to students in regard to how they might present their work – orally, visual, using technology or other modes – and also allow them to choose whether they wish to complete the Key Assignment individually, in pairs or small groups. Student collaboration is to be encouraged, while respecting that some students will choose to work individually.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned and what it means for them.
- Provide students with feedback both during and on completion of Key Assignments
- Keep a record of Key Assignments completed satisfactorily by the students, according as they are concluded.
- A minimum of two Key Assignments per session should be completed. (See credit allocation p7).
- At the end of each session, the credits are recorded for certification purposes for students following the LCA programme.

Remember that while there is minimum number of Key Assignments to be completed across the two years, teachers and their students may choose to engage with more.

The Role of Reflection within Key Assignments

Reflection in SPHE is essential as it provides students with opportunities to reflect on their growing self-awareness and awareness of others, consider what they are learning, and how this new learning is relevant in their lives now or for the future. The regular practice of recording and gathering reflections on learning can enrich student learning and enable them to monitor both their personal growth and their learning in SPHE.

Some Key Assignments specifically call for reflection, although all Key Assignments will benefit from a reflective approach and reflection on the learning. Students may find the reflection dimension of Key Assignments more challenging. However, by engaging in ongoing reflection, students can become more comfortable with and capable of reflection on their learning.

Teachers may suggest the use of an electronic reflection portfolio or a written reflection journal that is completed as part of weekly lessons. This is very helpful in supporting current reflection on learning and in enabling students to look back on their learning across the two years.

When encouraging student reflection, it is important to point out that Key Assignments are not marked or ranked and therefore students should not feel that a judgment is being made on their personal reflections.

Appendix A provides some reflection tools.

How are the Key Assignments used for Assessment?

There is no terminal examination in Senior Cycle SPHE. All students who engage in Senior Cycle SPHE (whether following Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes) are assessed through **Key Assignments**.

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The Senior Cycle SPHE specification replaces Social and Health Education Modules 1 and 2. Students following the LCA Programme are entirely assessed in SPHE through the satisfactory completion of Key Assignments. Therefore, teachers continue the practice of recording credits for students following the LCA Programme. These students are awarded 2 credits on completion of 4 SPHE Key Assignments at the end of year one and 2 credits on completion of a further 4 SPHE Key Assignments at the end of year two. This marks an increase in credit allocation from 2 to 4 credits for this area of learning. These credits are recorded for purposes of LCA certification.

The Key Assignments are not marked or graded although a minimum attendance of 90% is required as well as satisfactory completion of a minimum of 8 Key Assignments.

The other four modules in Social Education will remain as they are currently (until reviewed and/or updated). **The final examination of Social Education is discontinued from June 2026.** Thereafter, the allocation of the 10 credits for the final examination is set out below. Furthermore, the credit allocation for the contemporary issues task increases from 10 to 14.

Table 2: Revised credit allocation for Social Education within LCA

| | Year 1 | | Year 2 | |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | Session 1 | Session 2 | Session 3 | Session 4 |
| SPHE 1 (Key Assignment) | 2 credits | | | |
| My Community (Key Assignment) | 2 credits | | | |
| Contemporary Issues 1 (Key Assignment) | | 2 credits | | |
| SPHE 2 (Key Assignment) | | | 2 credits | |
| Contemporary Issues 2 (Key Assignment) | | | 2 credits | |
| Taking Charge (Key Assignment) | | | | 2 credits |
| Contemporary Issue Task | | | 14 credits | |

Leaving Certificate Established (LCE)

Students following the LCE Programme will complete Key Assignments, in the same manner as students following LCA. In this instance, completion of Key Assignments will not contribute to LCE certification. For these students, schools can report on assessment and learning in SPHE through the regular school reporting system and/or award a school certificate of completion of senior cycle SPHE.

Reasonable accommodations

Senior Cycle SPHE is designed around broad learning outcomes that, with careful planning, can enable all students to engage and achieve relative to their individual aptitudes and abilities. The Key Assignments are broad and allow for significant choice, and to facilitate the diversity of learners engaging with Senior Cycle SPHE. In the case of students with physical/medical/sensory and/or specific learning difficulties, accommodations and supports that are in place to support the student's learning throughout the year (e.g. the support provided by a special needs assistant or the support of assistive technologies) will remain in place when completing the Key Assignments.

Useful links

- Senior Cycle SPHE specification <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/>
- Background information on the development of the specification for Senior Cycle SPHE can be accessed at [Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education](#)
- Guidance and resources to support teachers in planning teaching and learning can be found in the SPHE Toolkits on [SPHE Toolkit Curriculum Online](#)
- Guidance and resources to support practice in assessment can be found on the NCCA Focus on Learning website [Focus on Learning](#)

Appendix 1 | Reflection Tools

Below is a selection of reflection tools which might be helpful in supporting student reflection (adapted from [Students reflecting on their learning](#) Focus on Learning Booklet 4)

What? | So what? | Now what?



Use these three simple questions to reflect on learning:

- **What** have I learned?
- **So what** does this tell me?
- **Now what** do I need to do?

3 - 2 - 1 technique for reflection

Students record

- 3 things I learned
- 2 things I found interesting
- 1 question I am left with

3 things I learned ←

3

2 things I found interesting ←

2

1 question I am left with ←

1

Self-assessment of what and how I am learning

When reflecting on their learning it can be useful to ask students to think about *what* they learned and *how* they learned it.

Some questions relating to both are set out below.

| What | How |
|--|--|
| The most important thing I learned is... | I enjoyed/didn't enjoy learning in this way because... |
| The most interesting part was... | What I found difficult was... |
| A question I have is... | A skill I used was... |

Prompts to support ongoing student reflection through journalling (written or online)

It is important that students are encouraged to consider what they have learned through their engagement in SPHE, how they have learned it and what it might mean for them now or in the future. When reflecting on their learning some useful prompts are listed below. Don't feel tied to these; use and adapt a selection as helpful.



Something I learned today...

Something that made me think...

Why this was of interest to me...

I now understand...

For me this is important because...

I now realise...

I now wonder...

My next step now is...



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