Reconnecting with School: Guidance on Summer Programme
For post-primary schools participating in the DEIS programme
Introduction

This guidance from the Department of Education and Skills provides a framework for a summer programme in DEIS post-primary schools for students at risk of educational disadvantage. The programme will run for one week in schools and may be offered in either July or August. It is provided in the context of school closures associated with Covid-19.

During those closures continuity of schooling was provided. Schools used a variety of electronic platforms to email work and to provide online learning. Some schools sent hard copies of learning materials, tasks and worksheets to encourage students to engage with learning in the home environment. However, a number of students were ‘hard to reach’ or ‘out of reach’ and disengaged with learning very quickly.

Some of the key difficulties reported as barriers to learning in DEIS post-primary schools included:

- Poverty and the digital divide; lack of digital devices and lack of connectivity to the internet in the home.
- Students not having the necessary technological skills to access online learning effectively.
- Lack of correct contact information for parents and students, particularly incorrect phone numbers.
- Students not having appropriate space or facilities to work in at home.
- Poor early experience of online teaching and learning and fear among students of being seen, or their living space being seen on camera.
- Significant challenges for students around working independently.
- Lack of scaffolding of learning that would take place in classrooms meant students could not complete tasks.
- Lack of ability to self-motivate or persevere at tasks.
- Students whose domestic circumstances or home environments are not conducive to learning.

RATIONALE FOR PROVIDING A SUMMER PROGRAMME

While many schools made significant efforts to establish what the barriers were and provide solutions, many were unable to reach all students. It is clear that some students, who were already at risk of educational disadvantage, did not engage or engaged very little in the continuity of schooling from the time schools closed up to the end of May 2020.

The learning loss that typically occurs for these students during the school summer holidays is likely to be significant. In the current situation, by September 2020 these students will have missed out on formal education for approximately six months. It is therefore considered appropriate to provide a programme in DEIS post-primary schools, for those students who are now deemed to be at significant risk of disengagement or of dropping out of the school system.
By availing of the Summer Programme schools can support those students to reconnect and continue their education. The emphasis in this programme is on supporting those students to re-engage with education, on building their confidence and increasing their motivation, and thereby preparing students to reintegrate into the school system in September.

This programme is separate to summer programmes run under the School Completion programme, and is a specific initiative in response to school closures from March 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

This programme is intended to complement, not replace, the School Completion Programme which is a targeted programme funded by Tusla and operationalised by Local Management Committees. Further information regarding the School Completion Programme is provided in Appendix One.

AIMS OF THE SUMMER PROGRAMME
The aims of the Summer Programme are to:

- Provide targeted students with the opportunity to reconnect with school, with teachers and peers and to re-establish these important relationships.
- Support students’ physical, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Support students to reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers.
- Build confidence amongst the learners so that they can continue into the next phase of their education.
- Provide students with the practical and technological skills they need to engage in a meaningful way with blended learning in the future.

WHICH STUDENTS SHOULD BE INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THE PROGRAMME?
In the context of a school’s DEIS plan the school has already identified a list of those students most at risk of educational disadvantage. The school should review their available data regarding the level of engagement these particular students have had since school closures, and identify those who are now deemed to be most at risk of educational disadvantage or early school leaving. Other students who are shown to have disengaged should also be considered for inclusion in the summer programme. Cognisance will also need to be taken of what stage the learners are at and what point of transition between stages that they are at.

The principal, ideally in conjunction with the HSCL and other relevant members of staff, will need to decide which students should avail of this programme and ensure that the resources provided are targeted at those most in need.

When selecting students for the programme, the school may need to determine who should be offered a place. This is more challenging if there are many candidates that schools believe could benefit from this provision. In order to prioritise the educational and social needs of young people from disadvantaged communities, the DEIS themes should be considered to identify students most in need of the support of the summer programme.
Where there are raised levels of concern, on more than one theme, these students should be prioritised for inclusion.

Students can be prioritised using the following scales aligned to DEIS themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of concern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Numeracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, Retention,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership with parents and others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who are not availing of any other summer programmes (for example, those run by the School Completion Programme) should be prioritised for selection. This will ensure that there is not duplication of supports and resources for some students at the loss to another student, who is also in need of support. Schools linked to SCP should liaise with the SCP coordinator to avoid duplication. TESS will advise SCP coordinators to likewise make liaise with principals within their SCP cluster.

PARAMETERS OF SUMMER PROGRAMME

All Post-primary schools participating in the DEIS programme will be offered the opportunity to provide a summer programme. This will allow schools a block of time to re-establish important relationships with students and to allow students to build confidence across a range of skills, thus enabling them to be better placed to transition to the next year of schooling. Participation by schools in the scheme is voluntary.

It is considered that the optimal timing of delivery of the summer programme is as close to the official reopening of schools as possible. Scheduling this programme directly in advance of the beginning of the new academic term of the school year 20/21 will help to build on the momentum of the re-established connection and relationships that have been facilitated as result of participation in the programme. However, schools have autonomy to deliver the programme at a time which suits the school, depending on availability of staff and other ongoing programmes e.g. School Completion Programme. This means that the programme may be offered in either July or August.

The time allocated should be based on the existing school timetable in terms of beginning and end times each day. Teachers should use time at the beginning and end of the day for planning and review. Students should begin no later than 10.00 am and finish no earlier than 3 pm. Time spent on different activities should be flexible, and therefore, it is not necessary to adhere to forty minute or one-hour lessons. Time for lunch should be factored in to the day. In this context, students should be encouraged to be involved in the preparation of food and eat together. This will contribute to their sense of social wellbeing and connectedness.
CONTENT OF SUMMER PROGRAMME

The content of a programme that supports the reintegration and reconnection of students should be flexible enough to meet the needs of the particular learners who avail of such a programme. The programme is delivered at school level, and schools therefore have the autonomy to design their own programme within the guiding framework that is presented in this document.

The most important focus of the Summer Programme at school level is to ensure that students are provided with the skills necessary to engage in a productive way with the new school term. Therefore, it is suggested that less focus is placed on subject areas or subject content, as it is not within the scope of this programme to mitigate the learning loss that has taken place across the curriculum. Consideration should be given to providing opportunities for students to participate in project-type activities, music, sports etc.

The guidance in this document is intended to form a framework or a menu of options. The suggested content of the Summer Programme can be drawn from the following six components in line with the students’ prioritised needs and the schools’ resources, with a key focus on student wellbeing:

A. Student Wellbeing
B. Technology
C. Learning to Learn
D. Literacy
E. Numeracy
F. Academic Content

A. STUDENTS’ WELLBEING

Wellbeing is both a prerequisite for, and an outcome of, successful learning. It is a prerequisite, as students need to have a sense of wellbeing in the first place to engage with education. It is an outcome of learning, as students’ wellbeing is enhanced through experiencing success in school.

Schools will need to be particularly mindful of students’ wellbeing when they reengage with school. Issues such as learning loss, varying levels of student engagement with interim measures, and the impact of Covid-19 on students and their families are of concern for all students but particularly those who have been hard to reach or who have disengaged completely.

The consequences of not attending school for a prolonged period, being confined to the home environment and not having social interaction with their peers is likely to have had a negative impact on the wellbeing of these young people.

Measures to support students on their return to learning will be necessary and should be included in summer provision. These measures might include a holistic wellbeing plan drawn up to support students in the coming school year. Physical, social, and emotional wellbeing activities should be integrated into the summer programme to develop resilience.
Physical, social, and emotional wellbeing

Students should be supported to:

- Be healthy
- Stay physically active
- Eat nutritious food
- Manage their sleep and screen time
- Demonstrate care and respect during interactions with teachers and other students
- Have fun during positive social interaction activities
- Identify their emotional support network
- Use a range of strategies to support themselves when feeling anxious

MANAGING MYSELF AS PART OF WELLBEING

Some students may have experienced de-motivation and disengagement when the formal structure and routine of school changed. Students may need to be re-oriented towards a more positive view of themselves as learners. Rather than merely address difficulties experienced by students, interventions should enhance future functioning of students. Self-management strategies which encourage students to have greater ownership of their learning goals will lead to improved overall wellbeing.

Students should be supported to:

- Set personal short term and medium term education, life and career goals which are obtainable and will give the student a sense of success and confidence.
- Identify what they need to do to achieve their goals and develop an action plan.
- Ask for help and know where to go to get help, both academic and other types of emotional support.
- Reflect on their own learning and the progress they are making.
- Improve their remote and in-school study and organisation skills.

There is a comprehensive range of supports available from NEPS to support student wellbeing.

B. TECHNOLOGY

It is very likely that students will need upskilling on the use of technology to support their learning. Ensuring that students have the necessary digital skills to continue their learning is a key enabler of participation in education and a vital outcome of this summer programme. Students may also require inputs on online safety.

In the first instance, teachers delivering this programme need to assess the areas where students need the most support in terms of learning digitally with a view to closing the digital gap as much as possible.
For some students, managing online learning platforms is a challenge. Students who have been working mainly off their phones and who are provided with new digital devices may need training in how to use them optimally. Some students may need to learn how to navigate the school’s learning platform in order to become sufficiently proficient to be able to access assignments, upload completed work, communicate with their teachers, engage with online lessons and engage with peers.

In some schools, a digital student leadership programme is in operation, in which students who have very good technical skills support fellow students to develop their own skills. The development of such a peer support system merits consideration as part of this programme where feasible.

Students should be provided with as many opportunities as possible to engage with digital technology in a meaningful way throughout the programme. Tasks should be devised to ensure that students practise a variety of digital interactions that include: student-content, student-teacher and student-student.

C. LEARNING TO LEARN
In order to support students in reintegrating into school life, it will be very important to focus on skills associated with learning to learn.

Suggestions for supporting students:

- Reflect on past successes and how these were achieved to help students to become more aware of their existing good strategies.
- Revisit school routines that help students to succeed in daily school life and inform students about newly-introduced routines that will exist as a result of the health crisis.
- Focus on developing effective task and organisational skills.
- Explicitly teach students metacognitive strategies on how to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning.
- Model the use of metacognitive strategies by providing students with opportunities to talk about how they are learning, what helps them learn best and give them opportunities to present learning in a variety of ways.
- Teach students how to organise and manage their learning independently through guided practice.

D. LITERACY
Good literacy skills remain the foundation of all learning. Encouraging students to focus on improving literacy skills will be very important in the programme and this can be done through any subject area or any task assigned to students.

Some guidelines for developing good literacy skills:

- Build in discussion time to learning tasks and activities to promote oral literacy.
- Develop students’ oral skills by asking them to talk about their learning.
- Teach skills of reading comprehension in an explicit manner.
Use pre-reading strategies such as activating prior student learning, prediction techniques and questioning in advance of reading any text.

Build student vocabulary through encouraging them to reuse newly-acquired words.

Provide lots of opportunity for students to explain the meaning of new words and concepts orally.

Give students opportunities to read for pleasure and to read materials that they are interested in.

Increase student motivation by having competitions for a short story/ a short poem or a film or book review.

E. NUMERACY

Developing students' numeracy skills are vital to improve their outcomes in a wide range of subjects. Research shows that learning loss in the summer months typically impacts most on students' numeracy skills. It is important therefore to ensure a strong numeracy component, ideally in cross-curricular components in the programme.

Students should be supported to:

- Use mathematical understanding across a range of subject areas and contexts.
- Encourage a problem-solving approach to tasks.
- Estimate time/length/space and guess outcomes.
- See patterns, trends and relationships.
- Gather and use data.
- Apply mathematical understanding to a range of contexts.
- Develop positive attitudes to numeracy and to the value of studying Mathematics and subjects with a strong numeracy foundation.

F. ACADEMIC CONTENT

The priority learning needs of some students may be deemed to be more academic in nature. In such cases, catch-up strategies in relation to academic content could be provided, where resources permit. Teachers are encouraged to integrate the other components, such as digital strategies, literacy or numeracy skills, skills associated with learning to learn into subject areas. Taking such a cross-curricular approach will support many of the students' needs associated with learning loss.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' NEEDS

At the beginning of the programme students should be provided with a short questionnaire to establish what they believe are their learning needs and how they could be best supported. Alternatively, it may be possible to interview each student to ascertain their needs. The purpose of the questionnaire or the interview is to enable teachers to provide as much individualised support as possible for the students and to ensure that their priority learning needs are met.

At the end of the programme, it is of paramount importance that an assessment of students' ongoing needs takes place. The information should be passed to the Student
Support Team. This information will assist schools to identify students that can be supported through existing school structures or those presenting with more complex and enduring needs which may require differentiated and tailored responses.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The role of the principal in ensuring successful outcomes for participants in the summer programme is paramount. The principal should ensure that optimal use is made of available funds to support and enhance students' learning.

The principal needs to ensure the oversight of the smooth running of the programme. This function may be delegated to a suitable member of the school staff. At the end of the programme, the principal should ensure that there is a coherent structure in place to transfer the data gathered on individual students to the relevant school personnel. This data should be used to inform any extra supports in relation to the ongoing wellbeing and learning needs of students when the school officially reopens.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

It is acknowledged that available personnel will dictate the components of the programme that can be delivered. Post-primary teachers are subject specialists and depending on how many teachers can be available to teach on the programme in any individual school, there will be a limit to the subject content that can be delivered. For that reason, it is very important that in conjunction with the subject expertise, teachers plan to provide the students with opportunities to learn the other skills referred to in the content section.

Teachers delivering this programme will be very familiar with their students, will be experts in their field and will already have strong relationships with their students. This relationship is the most important platform on which to help students reconnect with school and regain some of their learning loss.

TEACHING APPROACHES

When devising the programme effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting learners to achieve and to experience success.

Guidelines for effective teaching approaches:

- Clear identification of the needs of the learners.
- Provision of clear learning intentions and time for reflection on learning.
- Incremental scaffolding of knowledge and skills.
- Letting students know that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake but it is a fundamental step in the process of effective learning.
- Asking of open questions.
- Provision of wait time for thinking and answering questions.
- Use of graphic organisers and mind maps.
- Use of pedagogical approaches which require active learning.
- Use of technology wherever possible and appropriate.
- Provision of opportunities for the learner to work collaboratively with peers in the digital setting.
- Promotion of autonomous student learning.
- Provision of regular feedback to encourage the student to the next steps.
➢ Use of quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and make learning fun.
➢ Provision of opportunities to consolidate and reflect on learning.

THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE

Students’ motivation to learn increases when they are given opportunities to give meaningful contributions to how and what they learn. Students who avail of the programme should be actively encouraged to express their learning needs and to assess their own progress. This approach aligns with the rights based approach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to involving children and young people in decisions that affect them, and the principles of the Lundy Model of Participation. They should also be given opportunities, where feasible, to co-create aspects of the programme to meet their learning needs. This could result in reassessing the content and style of delivery of aspects of the programme in order to meet students’ needs in an authentic way. Resources that are available on the DCYA sponsored Our Voices Our Schools website may be useful in this regard.

THE ROLE OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

In order for a Summer Programme to be successful in achieving its aims, it is very important for schools to encourage parental engagement with the programme. The parents of learners who will be most in need of availing of this Summer Programme are likely to have concerns about their child’s lack of engagement with schooling for such a long period. Schools may wish to seek the input of HSCL co-ordinators in this regard.

When engaging with parents around the Summer Programme schools should:
➢ Assess parental needs in relation to supporting their children’s engagement with learning.
➢ Communicate very clearly with parents about the value of engaging in such a programme for their child.
➢ Use the opportunity to provide reassurance to parents that every effort will be made to support their children to continue with their post-primary education.
➢ Let parents know that there will be no repercussions regarding previous engagements or lack thereof during school closure.
➢ Reassure parents that their child will be encouraged and supported in their learning.
➢ Provide positive reassurance that participating in the programme is a real opportunity for their child to reconnect with the school in a positive way.
➢ Tell parents that the emphasis of the programme is to build their child’s confidence to enable them to move onto their next stage of learning.
➢ Make parents aware that the invitation for their child to take part in the programme is a sought-after opportunity.
➢ Provide assistance to parents in relation to understanding and monitoring online learning platforms.
Share the timetable of the summer programme and other related organisational information with parents. If possible, daily text reminders should be sent to keep parents engaged and supportive of their children’s engagement with the programme.

Be mindful of parents for whom English is an additional language and seek to support their communication needs.

CONCLUSION

The document is designed to provide schools with guidance on the design and delivery of an education programme which supports students at significant risk of educational disadvantage in their return to school. The desired outcomes for the learners are that they will experience a sense of reconnection with the school, a better sense of their own wellbeing and an increased skillset to continue with their education. Through the delivery of this Summer Programme, principals and teachers should work towards instilling in students a strong sense of safety and security, a positive mindset and self-belief to continue their education.
Appendix one – School Completion Programme

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) funds 122 School Completion Programmes (SCPs) and on average each SCP runs 4 weeks of summer activity with approximately 20 students participating each week.

It is estimated that approximately 9,500 places is the scope of SCP summer camps in a typical summer period. TESS has asked SCPs to ensure that summer programmes focus on their target group and particularly those most vulnerable within this group.

SCPs are also asked to reimagine their provision so ensure participants are engaged in face to face activities within health guidelines. Where feasible, schools buildings will be made available for SCP and other school business requirements, having regard to public health advice and school management agreement and patrons.

Funding of SCP is a matter for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TESS. The Department of Education and Skills is liaising with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TESS to align provision to maximise supports for children at risk of educational disadvantage.
Appendix two

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

To support and further develop literacy and numeracy skills:

- Literacy and Numeracy resources such as workbooks are available to download from the website of the Junior Certificate School Programme at under JCSP workbooks.
- The NCSE website outlines a wide range of resources suitable for the general development of learners’ literacy and numeracy skills. The site contains a section for teachers: of which learners can access and avail of the resources. There is also a section for parents. The website has links to many useful educational websites to direct parents and teachers towards further online supports. There is a short section on useful apps for home use which is currently updated twice a week.
- The national library system is providing free online access to get eBooks, audiobooks, online magazines and newspapers for free.

To support learners’ wellbeing and guidance:

- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) website provides valuable advice for schools and families on topics such as wellbeing, distance learning and provision for student routine and structure.
- Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) is the school supports service under Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Important information information is available for schools, parents and guardians and young people.

- The National Centre for Guidance for Guidance in Education has prepared materials to support post-primary schools and the further education and training sector in their engagement with students.
- Webwise provides a range of free primary and secondary school teaching resources addressing a range of topics including cyberbullying, image-sharing, social media and more. Webwise offers a range of resources to help teachers integrate internet safety into teaching and learning and information and advice for parents and children themselves.
- HSE website Mental Health Support Services for Young People. Where a range of services and resources are listed to help young people cope and manage themselves in the current crisis: Jigsaw; BeLong To; Reach Out; Spunout; Childline; etc. like the others listed here. Topics include; Leaving Certificate in a time of COVID-19, exercise, managing routines, COVID-19 anxiety, family conflict, and staying connected. There are also resources for parents.
- The Scoilnet website identifies resources for learning across all subject areas, including literacy and numeracy, and provides links to the Department’s support services.
• For an extensive list of resources see the Appendices in the following Guidance document