



IRELAND

INFOPACK - RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

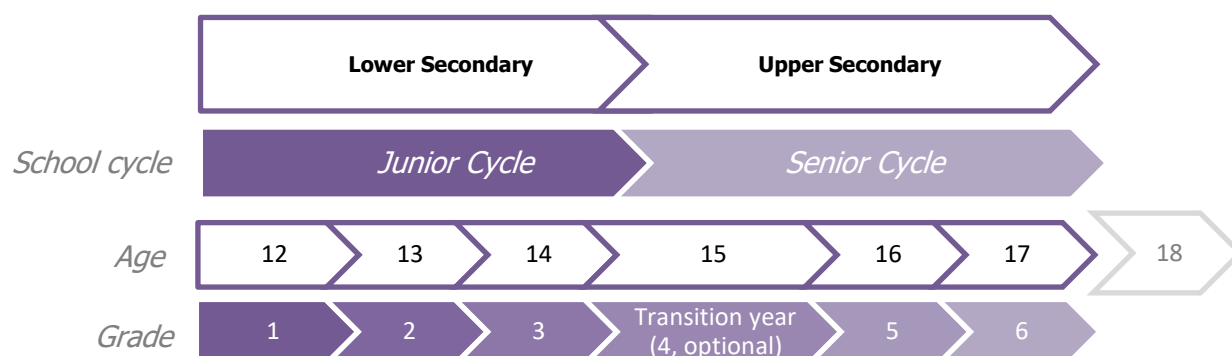
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The information below gives an overview of procedures¹ for the recognition of learning periods abroad in general secondary school. It can be consulted by pupils, as well as their families and teachers, who are or plan to be involved in long-term individual pupil mobility programmes abroad. Please note that this general overview does not include details on different programme types (which may be run by governmental agencies, civil society organisations, private companies or schools themselves) and such information can be obtained directly from the provider of the respective mobility programme.

¹ Based on data gathered in February 2021.

GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM



Education is compulsory until 16 years of age. Secondary school is a 6-year cycle divided into Junior and Senior Cycle. The Transition Year (TY) is part of the Senior cycle and is designed to act as a bridge. TY provides an opportunity for pupils to experience a wide range of educational inputs and work experiences over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations. Currently some 550 out of 723 schools offer the programme, and TY may be optional or mandatory for pupils depending on the school's policy.

During the final two years of the Senior cycle pupils participate in programmes offering a mix of academic and vocational subjects under the national curriculum leading to the end-of-school examinations, the Leaving Certificate. There are three programmes leading to the Leaving Certificate², and all of them are considered general upper secondary education.

Graduation and Certification

At the end of the Senior cycle pupils are required to take examinations in at least 5 subjects, if they wish to meet matriculation requirements for higher education. However, most students usually take examinations in 7 subjects and it is the 6 best that count towards university entrance. Each school decides which subjects they offer, out of the 36 available. There are three core subjects - English, Irish and Maths-, though a small number of pupils have an exemption for Irish. In addition, there are Leaving Certificate examinations in 18 non-curricular languages on offer to pupils whose mother tongue is an EU language which is neither English nor Irish. The Leaving Certificate examination leads to State-recognised certification and is managed and administered by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

The Leaving Certificate is used as a means of assessing pupils for entry into further and higher education.³ Pupils apply for university through a centralised system called CAO – Central Applications Office. The universities decide on the number of points required for each course, which can vary from year to year depending on the number of applicants. The CAO then offers students the course

² Established Leaving Certificate (ELC), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), more information at <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/programmes-and-key-skills/>

³ Eurydice, National Education Systems, Ireland, Organisation of General Upper Secondary Education https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-upper-secondary-education-5_en

they applied for if they meet the points requirements. Depending on the uptake of a course, students with fewer points might be offered a place in their first-choice course in a second or third round.

For more information on the structure and features of the different national education systems in Europe please see the Eurydice overview: National Education Systems | Eurydice (europa.eu).

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS GOING ABROAD FROM IRELAND

Age and grade

Transition Year (TY), when pupils are 15-16 years old, is the year most usually chosen by pupils to study abroad. Each secondary school in Ireland may decide their own policy on pupil study abroad experiences during TY, such as duration, required subjects, school reports, examinations, etc. Pupils can spend either a trimester or semester abroad during the 5th year of secondary school, although it is not common. Pupils cannot spend a period abroad during the 6th and final year as the final written exams are held in June but the orals are held earlier, and pupils focus completely on the end-of-school examination for the whole year.

Registration in the sending school

Your school will decide whether to support your application to study abroad based on their own school policy, and generally they are supportive. Ideally you need to stay registered at the school during TY so that you are guaranteed a place in the next grade.

Funding for the sending school

The funding from the Department of Education is based on the number of pupils present on the 30th September, so starting the period abroad after 30th September would be preferable.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD

There is no information on whether a learning agreement between sending and host school has ever been used as a tool for recognition.

There are no clear Department of Education guidelines or any policy on studying abroad and its recognition at secondary school level. Schools decide autonomously whether to offer the possibility of spending a period abroad during TY, and whether and how to re-admit you if you go abroad for a trimester or a semester during the 1st or 2nd year of the Senior cycle.

The Department of Education has a 2017-2026 strategy for Foreign Languages in Education⁴ which encourages more Senior cycle, especially TY pupils, to avail of language exchange opportunities.

⁴ Strategy for Foreign Languages in education: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/fls_languages_connect_strategy.pdf

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS HOSTED IN IRELAND

Registration in the host school

Schools decide autonomously on admitting exchange pupils for a term or a school year, involving also the sending school or the non-profit and commercial agency organising the exchange programme. Depending on class size and language ability, as a hosted pupil you are generally put in a grade that corresponds with your age. The host school determines the parameters of your study programmes. Transition Year is a good year for you to be hosted in Ireland as you get to try different subjects, and there are no official exams: each school has its own policy in relation to assessment during this optional year.

You are unlikely to be accepted as a hosted pupil during the final year of the Senior cycle as you would be unlikely to have covered the various subject curricula for the Leaving Certificate, and both teachers and pupils are very exam-focused in this year.

Funding for the host school

As the funding from the Department of Education is based on the number of pupils present on the 30th September, a lot of schools insist that exchange pupils must have arrived by that day. They can then leave any time after that date. Schools might also receive a commission from the for-profit agencies who bring exchange pupils to Ireland.

Certification for hosted pupils

There is no rule in terms of your certification as a hosted pupil. You get the same school reports as other pupils only if you stay long enough. Quite often the school you attend in your country of origin sends a form that teachers in the host school fill in for each subject. The school may be willing to write a letter to state that you have completed the grade, and the private exchange agency would issue a certificate which states that you have completed a term or a year in an Irish school.

Possibility of graduating in the host country during the exchange

It is very uncommon for pupils to graduate in Ireland during their exchange. Some boarding schools welcome pupils from abroad who complete their entire secondary education in Ireland, including sitting their Leaving Certificate, however that is completely different to a learning period abroad.

Implementation Plan of Strategy: Mobility Opportunities: 1.D.1. https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/fls_languages_connect_implementation_plan.pdf

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TESTIMONIAL

Ellen from Ireland: 6 months to Spain

"I learnt to appreciate the things I had."

I went on exchange mainly to improve my language skills, which would be useful to pass the final examination at school, and in life in general.

Before leaving I took some Spanish classes and a language level exam. During the exchange I became more fluent by practising a lot, making mistakes and allowing others to correct me. This proved to be very useful for my Spanish class back at school.

Apart from the language, navigating life in a foreign country, as well as adapting to a new culture, was not easy at first. For example, once I asked my host family at 5pm what time dinner was and I was told at 9pm. You cannot imagine my shock; I was so hungry!

Transition Year: the perfect year to have your exchange recognised

Enrolling back in my home school after the exchange was very easy: I didn't have to repeat the year as it was called "Transition Year", when there are no exams and you do not run the risk of falling behind. The perfect year to go on exchange!

This experience gave me the chance not only to improve my Spanish skills, but also to grow personally, I felt more mature and independent. In recommending it to other students, I would advise them to leave without too many expectations and to respect the different way of life of your host country.

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