



Subject Choice Policy

Introduction

Dominican College Wicklow is a voluntary second - level, girls-only school, with a Catholic Dominican ethos under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The Subject Choice Policy has been developed following consultation between students, staff, parents, Principal and Board of Management. This Subject Choice Policy will be reviewed regularly, as directed by the Board of Management. In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian'.

Policy Context

This policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Dominican College Wicklow
- DES Circular 0015/2017 (*Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19*)
- The Admissions Policy
- The SEN Policy
- The Guidance Plan

A. Our Mission

The Dominican motto 'TRUTH' is the inspiration of our work. The mission statement of Dominican College Wicklow (DCW) is: *Finding 'Truth' through the education of the Whole Person*. Dominican education is concerned with the education of the whole person. Strong emphasis is placed on each student attaining her full potential academically, but care is also taken to ensure that each student benefits from an enriching all round education. Strong emphasis is placed on each student attaining her full potential through an enriching, comprehensive education. We endeavour to support all students in selecting subjects that are best suited to their interests, aptitudes and ability. Dominican College offers a broad programme of studies in a six year cycle. Transition Year is compulsory for all students.

In an atmosphere of trust and friendliness, students are encouraged to develop responsibility, initiative, personal growth and leadership so as to help them take their place in society as mature citizens. We help students to make sound judgements. That is done through developing a love for truth which will not be satisfied with superficial values. The values of justice, peace, reconciliation and mutual respect are paramount. This Subject Choice Policy will play a key role in ensuring that each student realises her full academic potential in a learning environment that reflects a culture of collaboration between students, teachers, Senior Management and parents.

B. Our Vision

We aspire to create a progressive learning environment of the highest quality where students grow to become independent, respectful, resilient, responsible and caring women of integrity who live by Christian values and Dominican principles.

1. Students in DCW are encouraged to become reflective, self-directed learners, to think critically and to aspire to reach their potential academically, emotionally and socially. Students' wellbeing is an integral aspect of our shared vision for the support and education of our students. Students are encouraged to become well-informed about the various subjects offered throughout the curriculum, and to discuss with



their parents, teachers and Guidance Counsellor the subjects that may suit them best and assist with positive career choice and third level study.

3. An important facet of Dominican education is the recognition and acceptance of the difference in ability and gifts and each student. Within this broad objective we aim to:

- Create an atmosphere of Christian care and concern
- Provide a supportive environment in which students are enabled to grow to maturity
- Enable students to develop a healthy self-esteem
- Provide the educational environment and facilities to enable students to reach their full potential, including, but not restricted to, their academic potential
- Provide a calm yet stimulating learning atmosphere, which encourages respect for self and others, working with others, emotional wellbeing, and enables students to grow in confidence.

We aim to support all students in their learning needs and work in a collaborative manner with parents to help each student choose the most appropriate subjects for them individually.

C. Aims of the Subject Choice Policy

- To clarify procedures to be followed in the subject choice process in 1st Year and 4th Year
- To inform subject choice, career guidance and progression to third level and further education.

Special Educational Needs (SEN): Every effort is made to support students who have been approved for Reasonable Accommodation (RA) in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement and the Junior and Leaving Certificate exams. Reasonable Accommodations involve the use of a reader / scribe / assistive technology / tape recorder. The SEN team endeavour to provide appropriate support for students with SEN or RA and will work in collaboration with the student, Principal, Parent, Year Head and Guidance Counsellor in guiding a student with additional needs in subject choices.

D. Subject Choice and Procedures

Subject Choices – 1st Year

Step 1: Core Subjects and Subject Sampling: Subject choices for 1st Year were reviewed in the academic years 2015-2017. Students were afforded the opportunity to sample each of the option subjects through exposure to each one as part of the 'Taster Programme'. This led to changes in the procedure for making subject choices. From August 2017, all 1st Year students will study Religious Education, Irish (unless exempt), English, Maths, Wellbeing (including P.E., CSPE, SPHE and Guidance), History, Geography and Science. These subjects form the core curriculum of 1st Year in DCW as part of the new Junior Cycle programme. Students will sample each of the following option subjects at the beginning of 1st Year, for approximately one to four weeks: German, Spanish, French, Music, Art, Business Studies, Home Economics. A maximum of 10 subjects may be studied for examination certification purposes. Wellbeing as a core subject is assessed at school level and is not one of the ten subjects examined by the State Examinations Commission. Students' achievements in the area of Wellbeing will be recorded for the first time on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) in Autumn 2020. Students will be required to prepare for State examinations and complete classroom based assessments throughout their Junior Cycle.



All class periods are 40 minutes in duration. Option subjects and R.E. are afforded 3 class periods per week. English and Maths are afforded 5. Irish is afforded 4 in 1st Year. Students may take Higher or Ordinary Level exams in Irish, English and Maths. All other subjects are examined at a common level. Other areas of students' participation in school may be included in their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, awarded at the end of the three years of Junior Cycle. At Junior cycle, subjects with new specifications will be assessed through two Classroom-Based Assessments (one in second year and one in third year), reported on to parents by the school, an Assessment Task (marked by the SEC) in each subject and a Final Examination set, held and marked by the SEC. The combination of the Assessment Task and the Final Examination, marked and awarded by the SEC, will generate a grade. Slightly modified assessment structures will apply in Visual Art, Music, and Home Economic.

Step 2: Guidance Counsellor input: The Guidance Counsellor will meet with each 1st Year class to discuss subject options and offer advice on choosing subjects at the end of the 'taster' period. She discusses the choices and possible reasons for picking each of the option subjects.

Step 3: Parent consultation: Parents have the opportunity of consulting school management or relevant teachers if they have a particular query in relation to a subject.

Step 4: Subject Preference Form: Having completed the Taster Programme students will be given a form to be signed by both the student and parent, indicating which two of the four option subjects they wish to study in addition to their language choice. They will be asked to rank order their subject preferences for the option subjects. The form must be returned by an agreed date to the Year Head. The Deputy Principal will assign students to option classes on the basis of the preferences expressed, in consultation with the Principal. It may not be possible to accommodate all students' preferences where a subject is over-subscribed. A Home Economics class will have a maximum of 20 students. Music and Art classes are limited to 24 students. Other subjects have a maximum of 30 students. Every effort will be made to accommodate all students' preferences. In the event of an option subject being over-subscribed it may, in exceptional circumstances, be necessary to assign a small number of students to a second preference subject on a lottery basis. The final arrangements of all class groupings are the decision of the Principal. These procedures will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Step 5: Continuing or Changing Subject/Level: Once assigned to classes, the vast majority of students usually continue studying the selected subjects throughout the three years of the Junior Cycle. Option subjects are each timetabled for three class periods a week. If a student wishes to change to a different subject, this can only be considered where the following criteria are met:

- The student has discussed any difficulties she is having with the subject with the relevant teacher and her parent, and both the teacher and parent recommends / advises a change of subject in the best interest of the student
- The student and parent must make a written request to the Principal to change subject, explaining the reason(s) for the proposed change
- The student has discussed the possible change with the two relevant subject teachers, the Guidance Counsellor and Year Head, and checked with the Deputy Principal about any practical considerations that could prevent a change of subject (e.g. subjects blocked on the timetable may not facilitate the change)
- School management (including Year Head) must be satisfied that there is sound reason to proceed with the transfer and that it is in the best interest of the student to do so



- There must be a space available in the subject class that the student wishes to transfer to
- The teacher of that class must be in agreement with the transfer
- The 'Subject Transfer' (see Appendix i) form must be completed by both of the teachers, signed by the student, parent and Year Head and returned to the Administration office by the Year Head
- The 'Subject Change of Level' (See Appendix ii) form must be completed by the relevant teacher(s), signed by the student, parent, Year Head and Guidance Counsellor and returned to the Administration office by the Year Head. A copy of this signed form will be retained by the Year Head in the individual student's file. Students and parents must familiarise themselves with the possible impacts of a change of level that could affect CAO applications or other third level entry requirements. Consultation must take place before the Subject Change of Level form is submitted
- The student and her parent are responsible for ensuring that the correct books / ebooks are purchased in a timely manner, and that any work missed previously is caught up by the student
- The student who has been granted a subject transfer will not be permitted to transfer back to her original subject
- The latest deadline for applications of all subject transfers is 31st October each year. It is advisable that transfer requests are made as early as possible in Term 1 where it is evidenced that a student feels the need to transfer. Students are not permitted to change subjects thereafter, except in very exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Principal
- Where a subject transfer request is declined by school management, the parent of the student may appeal the matter in writing to the Principal within ten working days of the decision. Where the Principal declines a subject transfer the parent of the student may appeal the matter in writing to the Board of Management whose decision in the matter is final.

Subject Choices – 4th Year to 5th Year

Step 1: Guidance: In February, the Guidance Counsellor meets all 4th year classes and provides guidance on senior cycle subjects. She discusses the choices and possible reasons for picking subjects, with a particular emphasis on students' aptitudes and preferences, entry requirements to college and possible career considerations. Transition Year students are given the opportunity to choose their subjects for Leaving Certificate in as open and inclusive way as possible. Students are strongly advised to conduct self-directed research into the various subjects, course content, requirement of essays / coursework components prior to exams and to do so in consultation with their parents, the Guidance Counsellor and subject teachers.

Step 2: Subject – Information (Parent-Teacher) meeting: Parents have the opportunity of consulting teachers at the 4th year Subject-Information meeting with parents. The format of this meeting is different to other Parent-Teacher meetings. TY students are encouraged to attend with their parents and to speak to various teachers about each of the subjects that may be offered. Teachers will endeavour to provide information to parents and students to help them make their subject choices.

Step 3: Securing Core Subjects: The DES allocation will determine the range and number of option subjects for Leaving Certificate. All students will study Religious Education (non-exam), Irish (unless exempt), English, Maths and P.E. The majority of students will study 7 subjects for Leaving Certificate (Irish, English, Maths and 4 options) and some may also study LCVP. LCVP combines the academic aspect



of the established Leaving Certificate with a focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community.

Step 4: Subject Preference Form(s): A Subject Preference Form will be distributed by the Deputy Principal soon after the TY Parent-Teacher meeting in February. The form lists all option subjects that may be offered in the 5th Year. Students are asked to rank order their subject preferences from 1 to 5 and also to indicate if they wish to study LCVP.

Students not opting for LCVP will follow a non-exam orientated course on vocational preparation for work. The subject preference forms must be signed by the student and parent and returned to the Deputy Principal by an agreed date in February/March. The Deputy Principal collates the information and preferences of students for various subjects. Students are not committed to studying particular subjects at this stage. The information is used to determine subjects that the Principal may or may not be in a position to offer in 5th Year. It may be possible to eliminate one or more subjects from the range to be offered at this stage, depending on the preferences expressed and the DES allocation. It may be necessary to administer this form again in order to narrow down the subjects available.

Step 5: Collating and processing information on students' subject preferences: On the basis of the preliminary forms returned the number of classes needed in each subject is estimated. Various combinations of these classes are checked to find which will suit the greatest number of students. It is accepted that not all students will get all their choices – this happens in almost all schools. The number of classes needed is decided by the Principal and the various combinations tested by the Deputy Principal in consultation with the Principal. The final arrangements of all class groupings are the decision of the Principal.

Step 6: Class sizes decided: A viable class size must exist before a subject can be confirmed on the timetable, this number to be decided by the Principal in consultation with Advisory Board of Studies / Staff Advisory Group. A class size of 8 or more may be viable but this will, in part, be determined by the DES allocation, by student preferences, availability of staff and proportionate size of the particular year group. Usually (but not always) it is not possible to offer a subject with a class size that falls below 10% of the total number of students in the Year group.

Due cognisance and deliberation will be made by the Advisory Board of Studies / Staff Advisory Group of the following (not definitive):

- a) A class size of 8 students or less is seldom viable
- b) A class size of 8 or less is educationally restrictive – class dynamics are poor and interaction with very small numbers is restrictive. The richness of the shared experience is limited and the quality of the whole learning process is limited
- c) A class size of 8 or less is usually not good use of staff resources—management must take due regard in this respect—taking into account the staff allocation for the year
- d) Specialist subjects may require special consideration to keep a curriculum which is rich and broad in content, addressing modern needs and needs of students achieving at different levels. Students with special educational needs will be accommodated - including those showing academic excellence or exceptional talent
- e) Sometimes a particular cohort of students show particular tendencies which is not the norm and this should not affect the curriculum offered to students of other years



- f) A period of time – e.g. two years – should be given as ‘grace’ to a subject showing falling numbers before being withdrawn from a small number of students opting for that subject
- g) Every situation is evaluated on its own merits so that neither students, teacher, a subject or the general body of the school are disadvantaged
- h) The input and insight of Management must be taken into account
- i) The Principal will consult with the Deputy Principal and Advisory Board of Studies / Staff Advisory Group where a difficulty arises in relation to subject choice / class size. The Principal’s decision in the timetabling of subjects is final, subject to Board of Management approval.

Step 7: Subject Choice Form: The Deputy Principal will distribute the Subject Choice form in late February / early March where students will again be asked to indicate their top 5 subject preferences. Students will study 4 option subjects in total from the list offered – the 5th preference may be used where it is not possible to offer one of the four because of the way in which subjects may need to be blocked. The student and parent are required to sign this form and return it to the Deputy Principal by an agreed date in late February / early March.

The subjects offered for Leaving Certificate may vary from year to year, depending on the DES allocation and students’ preferences. The range of option subjects that may be offered in 2017-18 are as follows: History, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Social & Scientific Home Economics, Art, Music, Accounting, Business, Economics, German, Spanish, French, LCVP. It is advisable that students study a modern language for entry requirements to some third level colleges. It is important that students make informed decisions about their subjects and discuss the suitability of various subjects with the Guidance Counsellor and her parent. In most cases, the student should have completed the relevant Junior Cycle course in a subject selected.

Every effort is made to satisfy all student preferences with 5th Year option subjects but it is usually not possible to satisfy all students with the full combination of subjects they wish to study. The process continues with consultation and flexibility until all students, in so far as possible, have been accommodated in the subjects they wish to study. The objective is to be fair to all.

This does not preclude some students having to make some adjustments to their original preference where circumstances require it and where this adjustment does not exclude the student completely from a chosen career path.

The Deputy Principal will enter and run the electronic Subject Choice programme and consult with the Principal regarding the grouping of subjects, students’ preferences and class sizes. The Principal’s decision in such matters is final. Where a student is not satisfied with one subject offered she should discuss the matter with the Guidance Counsellor and her parent with a view to ensuring the best possible outcome. Students may be permitted to change to another subject up to 31st October in 5th Year. The same criteria and procedures for changing subjects outlined above will apply.

Step 8: Class Lists drawn up: On the basis of the final subject choice forms returned by the deadline, the final class lists are drawn up by the Deputy Principal. Anyone returning forms late may be placed on a waiting list for certain subjects in high demand. All late forms returned to the Deputy Principal must be signed with the date and time received, to ensure that waiting lists are fair and accurate. A student transferring from another school may only be facilitated where there is a place available for her in the



subjects chosen, having due regard for the maximum class sizes specified above. The Deputy Principal provides the information on subject blocks, class sizes, and class lists (names) to the Principal and Administration Office once the subject choice process is completed in March.

Ratified by the Board of Management on 6th April 2017

Date of next review: April 2018

Signature (Chairperson): _____



Appendix I

Subject Transfer Form

Student Name: _____ Base Class: _____

Transferring from subject: _____ Teacher: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Date Transferred: _____ Level: _____

Transferred to subject: _____ Teacher: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Year Head's signature: _____ Date: _____

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent's / Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____



Subject Change of Level Form

Student Name: _____ Base Class: _____

Subject in which level change is requested: _____ Teacher: _____

Level change from _____ level to _____ level.

Signed (teacher 1): _____ Date: _____

Signed (teacher 2, if relevant): _____ Date: _____

Date of level transfer: _____

Guidance Counsellor's signature: _____ Date: _____

Year Head's signature: _____ Date: _____

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent's / Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____