AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | **EDUCATION**
AGUS SCILEANNA | **AND SKILLS**

Lifeskills Survey 2015

Report on Survey Findings

July 2017

Contents

FOREWORD

I welcome the publication of the findings of the Lifeskills Survey carried out in 2015. Previous surveys were completed 2009 and 2012. The Lifeskills Survey data provide important information which will help inform priorities, policies and programmes of work into the future. Its findings will help to promote wellbeing in our school, Youthreach and Community Training Centre communities and to support success for learners in their education and life. In this context, it will enable goals and actions for student wellbeing, as set out in my *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, to become a reality.

I also welcome the partnership approach between the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive and my own Department in developing the survey and analysing the data. The issues addressed in the survey are cross cutting and are directly relevant, in particular, to the Government's *Healthy Ireland 2013 – 2025* agenda.

I would like to extend my thanks to the schools that completed the survey. I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage those schools that did not complete the survey on this occasion to consider doing so next time around. The information provided directly by schools highlights to us the vast amount of work, particularly relating to the wellbeing of our young people, that is a normal part of everyday school life.   We should acknowledge and affirm each school's commitment to providing a high-quality learning environment for their young learners.

The 2015 Lifeskills survey was for the first time distributed to Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres. The centres were included in the survey in view of the important role they play in providing a different educational experience for many of our early school leavers and young unemployed.

The 2015 survey, for the first time, included questions on entrepreneurship and education for sustainable development. Such engagement enhances students' learning experiences as it relates to their innovative creativity in the context of entrepreneurship and to their role as responsible citizens as they consider how their education will help them as they encounter topics related to sustainable development. This now links directly to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals agenda adopted in 2015.

I would like to thank the Department of Health for providing prizes of sports equipment vouchers to schools to encourage them to participate in the survey. I would like to congratulate the following schools who won vouchers and wish the students enjoyment with their new sports equipment.

Primary Schools

SN Seachnaill Naofa, Dunshaughlin, Co Meath.

St Mary's Primary, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

Post-Primary

Ballymakenny College, Ballymakenny Road, Drogheda, Co Louth

Muckross Park College, Donnybrook, Dublin 4.

It is expected that a fourth Lifeskills survey will be conducted in 2018 as I believe it is important to benchmark results over a number of years.

Richard Bruton T.D.

Minister for Education and Skills

Executive Summary

The findings from the 2015 Lifeskills Survey highlight, as in the 2009 and 2012 surveys, the very good work that schools do to equip their students with a range of essential Lifeskills; including physical activity and healthy eating, aspects of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), as well as addressing anti-bullying, substance use and road safety. In 2015 the survey included Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres (CTC) for the first time.

The survey is conducted entirely online. The 2015 survey continues to add to the longitudinal trends that now provide valuable information on many topics.   The 2015 Survey issued to schools and centres in April 2015. It included new questions on:

- links between primary schools and early years settings
- education for sustainable development
- interaction with the entrepreneurial sector – both business and social

The response rate in 2015 was 53% at primary level and 33% at post-primary level compared, in 2012, to 68% at primary and 52% at post-primary. This sample size in 2015, although lower than in 2012, is well representative of the two levels with a margin of error of about 2% at primary level and 5% at post-primary level.

The development of Lifeskills within educational settings will compliment work originating from other sectors including, for example, the Government's *Healthy Ireland 2013 - 2025* agenda, the *National Sexual Health Strategy* published in 2015 and the *National Physical Activity Plan* published in 2016. Close collaboration between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive enables this cross-sectoral work to become a reality.

Primary sector: Key Findings, challenges and possible opportunities

85% of primary schools engage to a greater or lesser extent with local pre-schools, of these 41% only have some contact. The extension of the Universal Provision of pre-school from one to two years by the Government from September 2016 provides many future opportunities in this area. The NCCA is currently developing reporting templates that can be used by pre-schools and primary schools to create

a co-ordinated information sharing process. Such information sharing is important for supporting children as they make the key transition from pre-school to primary.

92% of schools have a healthy eating policy in place and in 88% of schools the pupils' parents have been involved in creating the policy. 99% promote healthy lunches and do not have vending machines. All schools teach their pupils about the importance of a balanced diet.

94% of schools are allocating at least one hour per week to physical activity and 82% report participating in physical activity or sporting competitions outside of school time. Only 4% have a policy that prevents running in schools.

88% have a policy on substance misuse or are currently developing one. 90% address the topics of drug and alcohol abuse and the risks related to smoking. 97% address resisting peer pressure and making sound decisions. 94% have an RSE policy in place and 5% are in the process of developing one. All schools have the *Stay Safe Programme* in place. 99% have anti-bullying policies in place and all schools cover road safety as part of their curriculum.

73% connect with enterprise through the provision of talks and presentations. 60% of primary schools are familiar with the *National Strategy on Sustainable Development*, in fact, over 98% seek to reduce their amount of waste going to landfill and are also trying to reduce energy usage. *The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development* was published in 2014. As it is rolled out it is expected that familiarity with sustainable development practices will become more widespread.

The survey findings also identified challenges that primary schools are facing. Lack of physical space and poor facilities hamper the delivery of physical activities in some cases.

Over 60% of schools are involved in the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative*, while others report being involved in alternative schemes. However, even with participation in the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative* and resources such as Walk Tall being used by some 94% of schools, 56% of schools found addressing substance misuse challenging. 74% of schools found teaching RSE either challenging or very challenging even with almost half of the schools using external facilitators to help them. A quarter of schools found it very challenging to teach about mental health and 58% found it challenging.

It will be important to reflect on these wellbeing areas that have been identified by primary schools as challenging or very challenging to teach, in order to

determine opportunities, through CPD and the provision of resources, to enable schools to address these significantly important areas with greater confidence.

21% of primary schools now have student councils compared to 2009 when only 8% had, but over 70% report actively involving their pupils in decision making. Pupils in primary schools should be given the opportunity to have their voices heard through formal structures.

Table 1.1 provides the findings across a number of topics in the 2012 and 2015 surveys for primary schools.

LIFESKILLS SURVEY	Primary	
	2012	2015
% Response Rate	**68%**	**53%**
Have Student Council/Voice	**14%**	**21%**
Have RSE Policy	**87%**	**94%**
Have Substance Use/Misuse Policy	**88%**	**88%**
Have Anti-Bullying Policy	**98%**	**99%**
Have Healthy Eating Policy	**88%**	**92%**
Have Sport Outside School Time	**81%**	**82%**
Have Stay Safe Programme	**99%**	**100%**
Have Walk Tall Programme	**94%**	**94%**
Have Road Safety Programme	**98%**	**100%**
Resisting Peer Pressure	**99%**	**97%**
The Food Pyramid	**99%**	**99%**

Table 1.1 2012 and 2015 survey results for primary schools.

Post-primary sector: Key Findings, challenges and possible opportunities

93% of post-primary schools promote healthy lunches and 74% have a facility to sell fresh fruit. Just over a quarter of schools have a vending machine or school shop which sells "junk" food.

97% report that their students participate in physical activities outside of formal school time. Only 4% of schools offer two hours or more of physical education per week in first year, while 35% do so in Transition Year. Lack of physical space and poor facilities are noted as the main challenges to delivery of more physical education and associated activities. The new Senior Cycle Physical Education

Framework, when implemented, will assist schools in designing their PE programmes. In addition, it is proposed to introduce a new Leaving Certificate PE specification, as an examination option offered by SEC, for students.

Significant work is ongoing in the area of wellbeing. 93% or more schools reported that they have or are currently developing a substance misuse policy, teach road safety, help their students to identify risks and give guidelines on how to maintain personal safety. 99% have an anti-bullying policy and 87% have an RSE policy in place. But teaching about substance misuse, RSE and mental health can be challenging or very challenging for over two thirds of schools. 86% are using the *Well-being in Post-Primary schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* and *Suicide Prevention* to assist them in teaching this challenging area.

Almost two thirds of post-primary schools reported that they are participating in the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative* (HPSI). It is intended to review the HPSI to develop a model that is more user-friendly for schools. In addition, the HSE *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme* along with the Department's Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST) are planning to re-develop the *B4uDecide* resource materials to support the new Junior Cycle wellbeing programme.

The introduction of Wellbeing as an integral part of the Junior Cycle programme from September 2017 will raise its profile and make it more formally visible to the students. It will enable students to enhance their Lifeskills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and their community.

The partnership between the DES, the Department of Health and the HSE will continue so as to provide suitable wellbeing resources for schools (both primary and post-primary).

Just over half of schools were familiar, in 2015, with the *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development* which was launched in 2014. In fact, schools are already putting sustainable development practices into place with 96% encouraging reduction in energy usage and 90% trying to reduce waste going to landfill.

95% of post-primary schools reported that they engaged with enterprise / industry or social entrepreneurs at local level and 73% engage at a regional level.

The place of the formal student voice is strong in the post primary sector with 99% of schools reporting that they have a Student Council in place.

Table 1.2 provides findings across a number of topics in 2012 and 2015 surveys.

LIFESKILLS SURVEY	Post-Primary	
	2012	2015
% Response Rate	52%	33%
Healthy Eating Policy	37%	32%
Have RSE Policy	77%	87%
Have Student Council/Voice	97%	99%
Have Sport Outside School Time	85%	97%
Encourage Physical Activity During Breaks	86%	89%
Have Anti-Bullying Policy	99%	99%
Have Substance Use/Misuse Policy	93%	95%
Have Road Safety Programme	84%	93%
Part of Health Promoting Schools	37%	63%
Use 'Your Road To Safety' Programme	44%	78%

Table 1.2 2012 and 2015 survey results for post-primary schools.

Youthreach and CTCs: Key Findings, challenges and possible opportunities

Healthy eating is addressed by 96% of Youthreach Centres and 88% of CTCs while 91% have facilities in place to make fresh fruit available. 65% of centres are challenged to provide PE because of the lack of facilities but 85% report that they offer more than one hour of PE per week to their groups.

88% of centres inform learners on how to maintain personal safety, 90% are addressing awareness of and combating alcohol and drug misuse and the health risks relating to smoking. 97% have a substance misuse policy in place and the remaining 3% are developing one. 92% and 96% of CTCs and Youthreach centres respectively have an anti-bullying policy in place. Mental health and RSE are seen as challenging to teach.

97% of centres are engaged with enterprise/ industry or social entrepreneurs at a local level. These centres, along with primary and post-primary schools, have noted that the creation of an on-line register of industry would be a beneficial initiative for all.

80% of the centres work to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, 67% monitor energy usage and almost half are working to reduce water usage.

92% of Youthreach Centres and 83% of CTCs involve their learners actively in decision making.

This is the first Lifeskills survey that involved Youthreach and Community Training Centres. The survey tool used was adapted from the one devised and used previously by schools. The survey results indicate that the categories and terminology used may not have been as appropriate for the centres as for schools and may not have successfully captured all the work that is being done by the centres, especially the CTCs where the operating practices differ most widely from those in schools.

Summary

The DES is very aware of the many pressures that schools and Youthreach/ CTCs are facing and therefore the time taken to complete this optional survey is much appreciated. The findings highlight the very significant amount of Lifeskills development that is provided for our learners. But the findings also raise a number of challenges being faced by schools and centres. Such identified challenges should inform future actions. Collaboration both from within this department but also through working with key external partners in particular the Department of Health, the HSE, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment along with IBEC and the enterprise sector should assist in providing solutions. Parents and the learners are key partners to this process.

Through their education, learners are being enabled to develop the key skills and necessary resilience to cope with the many life demands and pressures they face both within and outside their learning environment. Gaining such skills is as important as achieving in the academic sphere. It allows for a more holistic development of the young learner.

Lifeskills are for life. They are not confined to life in the school or centres, but to learners throughout their lives. Today in our schools, in our Youthreach Centres and CTCs our learners are gaining good habits, becoming informed decision makers and are given the opportunity to develop the resilience needed to live healthy, confident and happy lives.

The findings from the 2015 Survey highlight valuable information regarding Lifeskills practices in Youthreach Centres and CTCs. It is intended to repeat the Lifeskills survey in our primary and post-primary schools in 2018.

But as Youthreach and CTCs are different in their ethos and approaches to learning from primary and post-primary schools, it is recommended that into the future SOLAS will decide whether to carry out its own Lifeskills survey and how best such a survey can be designed to reflect the learning in the centres. This will probably be a consideration within the pending evaluation of the centres that SOLAS is to carry out to inform future policy decisions.

1. Introduction

In 2015, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) conducted its third 'Lifeskills' survey in our primary and post-primary schools. The Lifeskills survey which seeks data on a number of Lifeskills related issues, was first completed in 2009 and repeated in 2012.

The DES supports a number of measures to promote the overall Government *Healthy Ireland* agenda that is being led by the Department of Health. Data from the survey will feed into a number of the Government's *Healthy Ireland* initiatives. The survey complements and supports the work of both Departments.

In 2015, for the first time, the survey was also issued to centres delivering the Youthreach Programme i.e. in Community Training Centres (CTCs) and Youthreach Centres.

The survey is voluntary and conducted entirely online. All schools, Youthreach Centres and CTCs were requested to complete the survey. Data gathered through the survey provides information on a number of issues, including physical activity and healthy eating practices within schools and Youthreach Centres/CTCs. The survey also provides information on other important Lifeskills areas such as the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), along with the implementation of anti-bullying, substance misuse and road safety policies. At post-primary level, the survey is also being used to support an evaluation of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) being carried out by the Health Service Executive (HSE) Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SH & CPP).

The 2015 survey collated data from schools for the first time on their engagement with enterprise and also their engagement with education for sustainable development. At primary level, information was also collected, for the first time, on the extent to which primary schools engage with the early years sector. A copy of the survey questionnaires is provided in the Appendix.

1.1 Considerations Regarding Survey Results

There are some key considerations and certain limitations to the data on which this report is based.

Firstly, not all schools/centres responded to the survey. The 2015 Lifeskills survey had an overall response rate of 53% at primary level, 33% at post-primary level, and 54% for Youthreach Centres/CTCs. Responses for primary and post-primary

in 2015 were down from 2012 (68% at primary level, 52% at post-primary) so direct comparison cannot be made without taking sample size variance into account. This reduced level of response, despite a number of reminders, is regrettable. However, the sample size is well representative of the two levels with the margin of error of about 2% at primary level and 5% at post-primary level.

Secondly, not all schools/centres that responded answered all of the questions posed. For each question presented, the number of total responses varies.

Thirdly, there were differences in the Lifeskills survey structure and question format for schools and Youthreach Centres/CTCs. Direct comparisons cannot be made between school and Youthreach/CTC settings. Youthreach/CTCs are very different to post-primary schools. The centres are an integral part of the national programme of second chance education and training in Ireland. The Youthreach Centres focus on unemployed young early school leavers aged 16 – 20 years. The CTCs focus on early school leavers but also include older unemployed learners and other client groups. The Centres provide participants with the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, personal development, vocational training and work experiences. In general, learners in Youthreach/CTS undertake certification at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) level 3 and 4. Some learners also participate in the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied examinations.

When established in 1988, the Youthreach Centres were funded by the Department of Education and Science and managed by the former Vocational Education Committees. In contrast, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment funded a network of CTCs through the former FÁS organisation. They are independent community-based organisations, owned and managed by local community groups.

Today both Youthreach and Community Training Centres are funded by the DES, through SOLAS, and operated by the national network of Education and Training Boards.

Fourthly, there was also a rationalisation of some questions between the 2012 and 2015 surveys to avoid duplication or over questioning on a topic.

The main findings, for the primary and post-primary schools, are separately provided in sections 2 (primary) and 3 (post-primary) respectively. No comparisons between the two sectors are made in sections 2 and 3. In section 5 an outline of the main positive findings and challenges for primary and post-primary are given.

The findings for Youthreach/CTCs are presented in Section 4. They have been given to SOLAS and will provide a rich source of data and be a very useful snapshot in time for SOLAS as it prepares to shortly carry out an evaluation of their Youthreach programmes, in both Youthreach Centres and CTCs. SOLAS will, in their evaluation, identify the main positive findings and challenges in relation to Lifeskills for Youthreach/CTCs.

Finally, the data provided in the Lifeskills survey are quantitative rather than qualitative.

Despite these identified caveats, the survey constitutes an important source of information for the DES, in particular, but also for the Department of Health and the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme. It is a rich source of data that indicates what is happening across key Lifeskills areas.

The findings provide evidence of the very good work being undertaken by respondent schools/centres in helping their learners to develop the key skills and resilience necessary to cope with the many demands and pressures they face both within and outside their learning environment.

This report concentrates on the main findings to emerge from the survey.

A bibliography is provided at the back of this report.

2. Main Findings from Primary Schools

2.1 Respondent Information

All three-thousand one-hundred and thirty seven primary schools were invited by letter to respond to the primary school Lifeskills survey. A total of 1,676 schools participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 53%, down from 68% in 2012. Of the respondent group, 19% were from Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) primary schools and 81% were from non-DEIS primary schools. This split for responding DEIS/non-DEIS schools is representative of the split for the total population of primary schools.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skill's main policy instrument to address and prioritise educational disadvantage for children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). The DEIS Plan 2017 was launched in February 2017.

The findings outlined below are based on those received from the responding schools.

2.2 Links with Early Years

The 2015 survey, for the first time, included questions on the links between primary schools and early years' educational settings. The free Pre-School Year scheme was introduced in January 2010 and from September 2016 there has been an increase in the number of weeks available under the scheme. The scheme is administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Under the scheme, all children are entitled to a free pre-school experience of appropriate programme-based activities. It is now well-established that investment in early years' education improves outcomes for children and families. As the 2015 Report on Future Investment in Childcare[1] noted, "research has demonstrated that such investment in high quality care and education services can support children in benefiting more from school as well as compensating, to a degree, for inequalities in other factors related to disadvantage and parental income."

A strong and collaborative relationship between early years' education settings and primary schools has been shown to be a benefit for both children and parents

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1 http://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/20150722IDGReportonEarlyYrsInvestmentReport.pdf

at the time of transition from early years' settings into primary school. Research has highlighted the significance of smooth transitions between educational settings and how they can support children's current and future capacities for learning and development (Dockett & Perry, 2002, Fabian & Dunlop, 2002, 2005, O'Kane and Hayes, 2006). These transitions are highly dependent on effective partnerships and communication between early years' education settings and primary schools which are characterised by consultation and sharing of information.

Respondents were asked the extent to which they interacted with local pre-schools. Almost half of school principals (45%) engaged with local pre-schools very frequently or frequently. Only 15% of schools never engaged with pre-schools in their local areas.

In October 2009, the NCCA published *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Aistear supports the learning and development of children aged 0-6 years and is used in a range of educational settings including infant classes in primary schools. The Framework has both implicit and explicit links with the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and is influencing the current review of the primary curriculum for languages and mathematics. It uses four interconnected themes to describe the content of children's learning and development: Well-being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and Thinking. Aistear highlights the critical role of play, relationships and language for young children's learning.

Some 70% of schools reported using the *Aistear Framework*, either very frequently (41%) or frequently (29%). DEIS schools are more likely to use the resource more frequently than non-DEIS (48% vs 39%). Frequent use (i.e. very frequent or frequent) of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, is much lower at 7%, with 73% of schools reporting that they never use it. However, the requirements on Primary schools is to implement the School Self-Evaluation process in order to evaluate quality provision. Working with *Síolta* complements this work.

Schools were asked to indicate their view of the extent to which children benefited from pre-school education across a range of areas, including physical health and wellbeing, social competence, language and cognitive development. While all areas were deemed to be beneficial (see Fig. 2.1), social competence (the ability to make friends, show empathy, demonstrate responsibility and respect for others, and work collaboratively) was the area in which most schools reported that children can 'benefit greatly', followed by their independent ability to carry out simple personal care routines and emotional maturity.

Fig. 2.1: Benefit to children from pre-school education
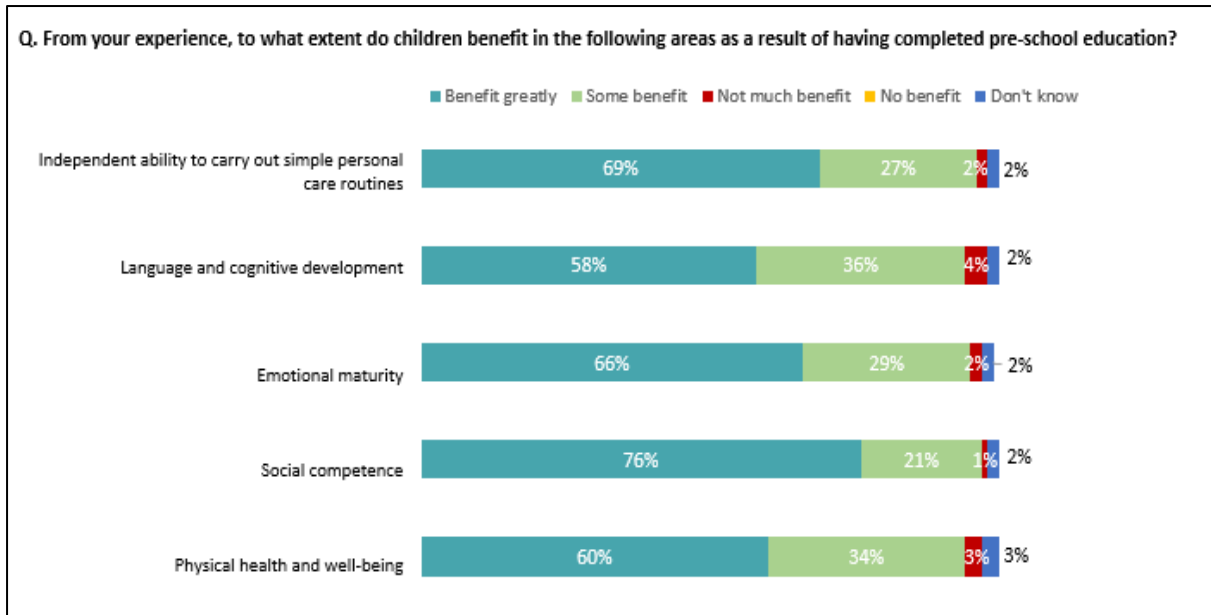
Schools were asked an open-ended question on the biggest challenge for children starting in Junior Infants. The main challenges reported (see Fig 2.2) were larger class sizes in schools compared with pre-schools, language and communication difficulties, changes in routine and getting used to a new structure and environment.

Fig. 2.2: Challenges to children starting primary school

2.3 Healthy Eating

Schools were asked a number of questions about the promotion of healthy eating within the school setting. These questions included whether a healthy eating policy was in place; if so, whether parents contributed to the development of the healthy eating policy; whether vending machines are available within the school selling healthy or unhealthy food; and questions about whether physical health and nutrition are taught in the school setting.

2.3.1 Healthy Eating Policy

92% of primary schools reported that they had a healthy eating policy in place. This is similar to the level reported in 2012. 3% reported that they were in the process of developing a healthy eating policy, and 5% reported having no healthy eating policy in place.

2.3.2 Parental Involvement

The vast majority of schools with a healthy eating policy in place, reported that parents had been involved in the development of the policy (88%), reflecting a high level of communication and information sharing between home and schools in this area.

2.3.3 School Lunches and Access to Healthy/ Unhealthy Food

99% reported that healthy lunches for pupils are promoted by the school. Two per cent of schools reported that they provide an on-site facility for selling fresh fruit to pupils.

With regard to on-site vending machines, 99% of schools stated that they do not facilitate the sale of fizzy drinks, sweets and crisps in school, either through vending machines or a school shop. This is the same response as in 2012.

2.3.4 Teaching Physical Health and Nutrition

100% of primary schools reported that they taught pupils about the importance of a balanced diet and 99% include the food pyramid as part of these lessons. 81% of schools indicated that physical health and nutrition was *not* challenging to teach.

2.4 Physical Activity

Schools were asked a number of questions about physical education and physical activity. These included; whether a physical activity policy/plan was in place; whether parents were consulted to support the development of this policy/plan;

the number of hours schools allocated to physical education per class, per week; whether the school promotes physical activity during pupil break-times; whether the school participates in extra-curricular sporting activities outside of school time. Schools were also asked to identify barriers to encouraging or promoting physical activity on-site.

2.4.1 Physical Activity Policy/Plan

65% of schools reported that a physical activity policy/plan was in place. 14% reported that they were in the process of developing a physical activity policy/plan, while the remainder reported that no plan was in place.

This is very encouraging even though primary schools are not required to have such a policy/plan. They are, of course, expected to allocate time for Physical Education and this is addressed in Section 2.4.3. This question about the policy/plan was asked in 2015, for the first time, in the context of *Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2026* and its later initiative – the *Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan* (NPAP) which was published in January 2016.

The questions in this section are broader than Physical Education. Responses to these questions will assist in future policy considerations since the NPAP seeks to "within school settings, for children to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviours which are likely to enhance lifelong engagement in physical activity and good health. This must be complemented by their family life and the ready availability of initiatives and programmes to become active in their community". Schools do so much in this area that a plan or policy around what is happening, including the teaching of PE but also their involvement in extra-curricular activities, will highlight what they offer across the physical activity area.

2.4.2 Parental Involvement

Half of the schools which have a physical activity policy/plan in place reported that parents were consulted on the formation of the policy/plan.

2.4.3 Class Time Allocated to Physical Education

The DES recommends that primary schools allocate one-hour per week to physical education in each year of primary school. The survey found that 94% of schools are meeting this requirement. The results found that pupils in higher classes (3rd-6th classes) were more likely to be allocated more than the recommended requirement than children in lower classes, as set out in Table 2.1.

However, there is a small number of schools which identified themselves as not meeting the existing requirement for provision in this area. This is most prevalent in the infant classes, where 12% of schools are not meeting the minimum requirement.

The position is broadly comparable to that reported in the 2009 and 2012 Lifeskills surveys.

Table 2.1: Total number of hours allocated to PE by Class

Class	Zero hours	<1 hour	1 Hour	> 1 hour	Total number of schools allocating one hour or more per week
Infants	1%	11%	75%	13%	88%
1st & 2nd class	0%	5%	74%	20%	94%
3rd & 4th class	0%	3%	66%	31%	97%
5th & 6th class	0%	3%	62%	35%	97%

2.4.4 Physical Activity Outside of School Time

82% of schools reported that their school participates in physical activities or sporting competitions outside of school time. Of this group, 91% of schools reported involvement with the GAA, while many reported that swimming (59%) and soccer (57%) were activities participated in outside of school time. With regard to physical activity initiatives and programmes, 87% of schools take part in Sport for All Day, an increase of 13% from 2012, and 64% take part in Active School Week[2].

2.4.5 Physical Activity during Break-Times

All schools reported that they encourage physical activity during breaks. Only 4% reported that they have a policy that prevents running in the yard.

2.4.6 Challenges to Physical Activity

100% of schools indicated that they teach the importance of taking regular exercise to the pupils in their school. However, 51% of schools reported facing

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[2] *The ASW initiative is about providing fun and inclusive physical activity opportunities for all members of the school community. It allows schools to reinforce the message that not only is physical activity good for you but it also very enjoyable.*

challenges to delivering physical activity in their school. Lack of physical space (especially indoor) and poor facilities were the main challenges with 44% of the schools reporting these issues. The challenges reported are set out in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Challenges to the promotion of physical activity in schools

Main Challenges to physical activity in school	
Lack of space/poor facilities	44%
Budget	23%
Time pressure/focus on curriculum	18%
Availability of staff/inadequate supervision	12%
Transport	2%
Lack of interest from pupils	1%

2.5 Substance Misuse

Schools were asked about their approaches to teaching about substance misuse. This included whether a substance misuse policy was in place; whether parents contributed to the development of the substance misuse policy; and about the type of approaches and challenges faced in teaching substance misuse.

2.5.1 Substance Misuse Policy

Of those that responded to the question, 88% reported that they had such a policy in place or were in the process of developing one, 12% of schools reported having no substance abuse policy in place. This is the same level as 2012.

2.5.2 Parental Involvement

Of those schools that had a substance misuse policy in place, 66% reported that parents were consulted on the development of the policy.

2.5.3 Teaching about Substance Misuse

90% of schools reported that they address the topics of drug abuse, alcohol abuse and the risks of smoking with pupils. This represents an increase of two percentage points on the position in 2012 and three percentage points increase on the position in 2009. Schools reported addressing awareness of and combating drug abuse, awareness of and combating alcohol abuse and awareness of health risks of

smoking with pupils. In addition, over 97% of schools reported that they addressed resisting peer pressure and making sound decisions. These findings are all similar to 2012.

56% of schools that responded to the question reported that substance misuse was challenging or very challenging to teach, while 44% reported that it was not challenging to teach.

In terms of the resources used by primary schools to support them in teaching about substance misuse, 94% of primary schools reported using the *Walk Tall* programme. This programme, which was introduced in the mid-1990's and revised in 2016, supports the prevention of substance misuse and aims to give children the confidence, skills and knowledge to make healthy choices.

22% of schools reported using an external agency to help them to deliver their substance misuse programme. The main agencies used by schools were An Garda Síochána (local Gardaí) and the local drugs taskforce.

2.6 Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

2.6.1 RSE in Primary Schools

RSE is delivered through the SPHE programme in primary schools. Through the SPHE programme children can develop a framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills that will inform their decisions and actions, both now and in the future.

2.6.2 RSE Policy Development

The DES requires that all primary schools have an RSE policy in place. 94% of schools reported that they have an RSE policy in place, 5% reported that they are in the process of developing one; and 1% reported that they do not have an RSE policy in place.

2.6.3 Contributors to RSE Policy

91% of schools with an RSE policy in place reported that the Principal had made a major contribution to its development. 80% of schools reported that their teachers had made a major contribution to the development of the RSE policy. Other key contributors, as set out in Fig. 2.3, included school Boards of Management, parents, outside facilitators and pupils.

Fig 2.3 Contribution to RSE policy

Q. Please indicate the extent to which the following groups contributed to your school's RSE policy?
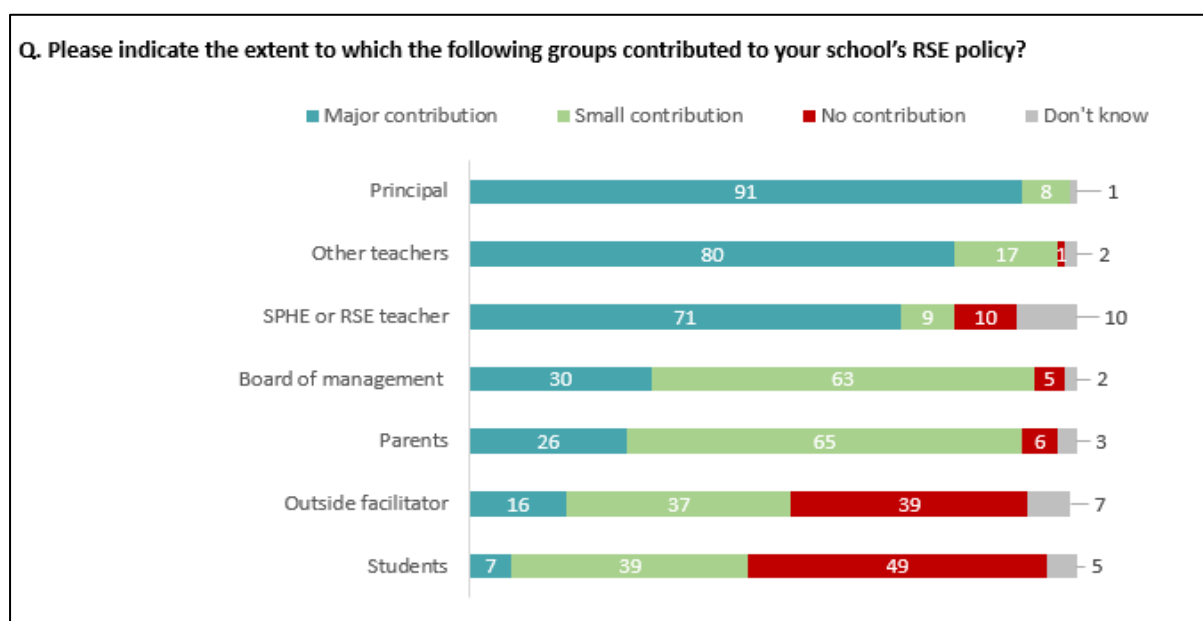
2.6.4 Perceived Parental Attitudes to RSE

79% of primary schools reported that parents of pupils in their school were supportive of the delivery of RSE. 20% of schools reported that parents were 'neither supportive nor unsupportive' of RSE being delivered.

2.6.5 Topics Addressed in RSE in Primary Schools

Schools were asked about the different topics covered in RSE and whether they had been covered with pupils. Table 2.3 below indicates the strand units covered.

Table 2.3 Implementation of the Strand Units of the RSE curriculum

Strand units of the RSE curriculum	2015 (%)
Personal hygiene	100
Growing and changing	100
Empathising with others	100
Taking responsibility for oneself	100
Sharing feelings	100
Respecting others	100
Accepting difference	100
Naming parts of the body	99
Changes at puberty	97
Different forms of friendship	97
Conception and birth	95

2.6.6 Level of Challenge Experienced by Schools in Teaching the RSE Programme

The majority of schools reported that teaching RSE is either challenging (62%) or very challenging (12%).

2.6.7 Delivery of RSE

40% of schools that answered the question stated that RSE is delivered exclusively by teachers. In 48% of schools, RSE is delivered by teachers with assistance from external facilitators. A trained health professional (e.g. public health nurse, local nurse, school nurse, GP) is the most frequently used, followed by Accord, the Catholic Marriage Care Service.

2.7 Child Protection

Lessons and programmes in the area of child protection are reported to be implemented to a very high degree. All of the schools that responded reported having the *Stay Safe* programme in place. The *Stay Safe* programme is the primary school-based approach to the prevention of child abuse. 100% of schools indicated that they covered the topic '*knowing when and how to seek help with regard to child protection'* and '*identifying safe and unsafe situations',* while 99% of schools reported covering the topic '*saying "no" to keeping secrets'* with pupils.

2.8 Anti-Bullying and Mental Health

99% of schools reported having an anti-bullying policy in place, while the remaining 1% were in the process of developing one. This represents a one percentage point increase on the position in 2012. The high level of compliance is not surprising since, under DES Circular 45/2013 - Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, all schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy in place.

Schools were asked about the different topics covered relating to anti-bullying and mental health and whether they had been covered. One hundred per cent of schools reported covering the topics '*understanding bullying'* and '*how to seek help regarding/about bullying'.* Ninety-nine per cent of schools indicated that their pupils would know what to do if they were being bullied. This was the same proportion as in 2009 and 2012. 100% of schools provide information on how to seek help if bullying is encountered. The same level of response was reported in 2009 and 2012.

The vast majority of schools reported that mental health is a challenging topic to teach. Of the schools that answered the question, 25% reported that it was very

challenging and 58% reported that it was somewhat challenging. 17% schools reported that it was not a challenging subject.

2.9 Road Safety

All primary schools reported covering road safety as part of the curriculum. Of these 63% reported using the *Safe to School* programme. This is an increase of 18 percentage points since 2012, and an increase of 38% since 2009. 80% of schools reported that they promote the *Seatbelt Sheriff Initiative* which is the same result as reported in 2012. Both initiatives are supported by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

54% of schools reported using external agencies to help deliver education around road safety; An Garda Síochána and the RSA are the main external agencies engaged by primary schools.

2.10 Health Promoting Schools

Of those that responded to the question, 62% of schools reported that they are part of or in the process of becoming part of the *Health Promoting Schools* (HPS) *Initiative*. HPS provides a framework for a school to assess health needs and begin a process of working towards better health for all who learn and work within the school setting. In Ireland, the *Health Promoting Schools* Framework is underpinned by the *HSE's Strategic Framework for Health Promotion (2011)* and is part of the Schools for Health in Europe Network. The concept was developed by the World Health Organisation based on the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986).

A number of schools that were not participating in the HPS initiative reported being involved in an alternative scheme that is run in their school.

The DES has issued circulars to both primary (0013/2016) and post-primary schools (0051/2015) encouraging and promoting healthy lifestyles. The circulars focus on the importance of physical activity and healthy eating and acknowledge that mental and psychological well-being are a key part of healthy lifestyles. The circulars encourage schools to participate in the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative*.

2.11 Enterprise in Schools

It is important to encourage and enable the embedding of entrepreneurship across all of school life in a transversal and cross-curricular manner. For the first time in the 2015 survey, schools were asked how much interaction they have with

enterprise at various levels. Schools could select more than one category. See Fig 2.4.

Fig. 2.4: Level of Engagement with Enterprise/Industry or Social Entrepreneurs

	% Yes	% No
Does your school engage with industry at local level?	56	44
Does your school engage with industry at regional level?	24	76
Does your school engage with industry at national level?	14	86
Does your school engage with industry at international level?	4	96

Local engagement is the most common way for schools and enterprise to interact. Just over 50% of schools that responded reported engaging with between one and three companies within the last year. Only 10% engaged with more than three companies, while 40% reported engaging with none in the last year.

73% of schools connect with enterprise through talks and presentations. This is followed by participation in awards/competitions (65%), provision of resources (39%), support for teachers (34%), curricular support (32%), and mentoring (14%). See Fig 2.5.

Fig. 2.5: How Schools Engage with Enterprise
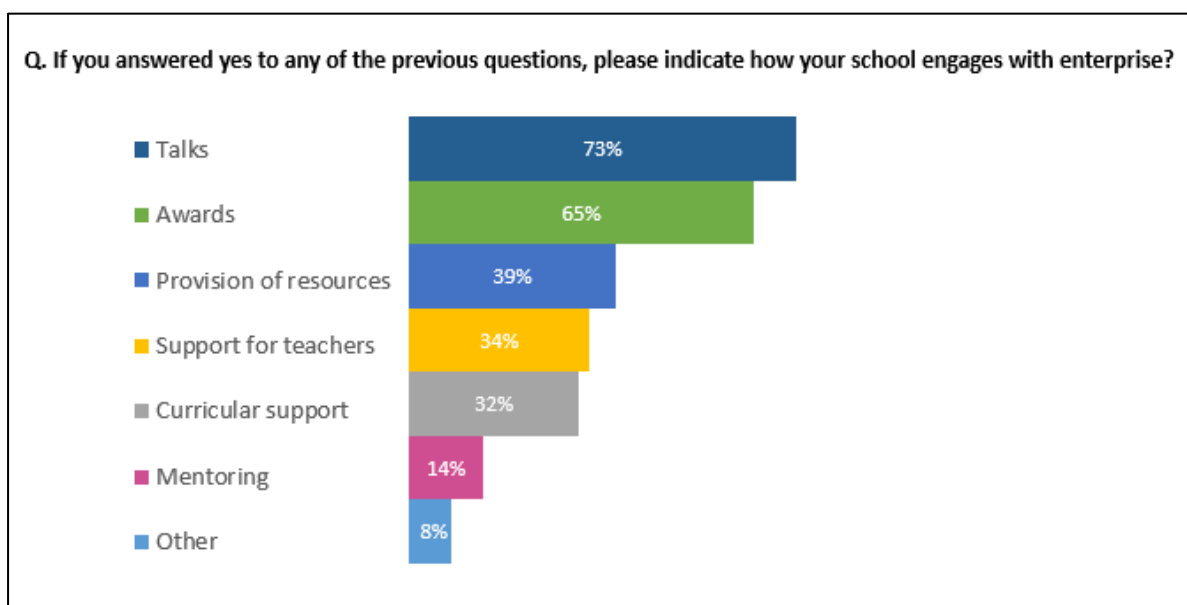
Primary schools were asked to what extent each listed initiative would be helpful in encouraging their school to engage with enterprise and/or industry. Of those that responded, 63% of schools stated that 'less pressure from school timetable' would be the most helpful initiative, followed by an online national register of industry/companies (50%).

2.12 Education for Sustainable Development

The *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014 – 2020* was developed by the DES, in consultation with key stakeholders. It provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a more sustainable future at a number of levels: individual, community, local, national and international. This strategy is primarily influenced by the national strategy on sustainable development, *Our Sustainable Future - A Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland*, which was published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2012. Moving into the future, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (set in 2015) will become a key driving force in this area.

Schools were asked if they were familiar with the National Strategy on ESD. 60% of respondents indicated that they were familiar with the Strategy.

They were also asked about the extent to which pupils in their schools are given the relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to make more sustainable choices in a range of areas including energy and water consumption, environmental awareness, globalisation, sustainable travel and active citizenship. 89% indicated that their pupils were supported to develop the relevant knowledge and skills; 2% indicated that they were not. A further 9% of respondents did not know.

Schools were also asked if their teachers were adequately prepared to support pupils in developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions to make sustainable choices. 71% of respondents indicated that teachers were adequately prepared, 10% indicated that they were not, while a further 19% of respondents were unsure.

Schools were asked if they delivered Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through the curriculum, through cross-curricular activities, or through project-type activities (such as Young Environmentalist awards, Green Schools etc.). See Table 2.4.

Table 2.4   How ESD is delivered:

	Yes %	No %	Don't know %
Through the curriculum	91	3	6
Through thematic cross-curricular activities	81	8	11
Through project activities	88	9	3

Schools were also asked to identify the extent to which they engaged in sustainable activities. 54% of schools reflect ESD in their school plan. 85% of schools monitor their energy efficiency and 99% encourage their pupils and teachers to reduce energy usage. 98% are actively seeking to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.

Just over three quarters of schools (78%) monitor their water usage, while 96% encourage their pupils and teachers to reduce water usage. Just over a quarter of schools (29%) have a school travel plan.

Schools were asked to identify the main challenges to implementing ESD. The main obstacle identified was the lack of time. It encompassed a feeling that the curriculum was already overloaded.

Another obstacle identified was the physical infrastructure of the school building (e.g. building built a long time ago, with poor insulation or other issues) or the school's geographical location which mitigated against children walking or cycling to school.

Financial constraints, and the lack of resources available to support sustainability were also identified as issues. Other issues included a lack of CPD in this area, the lack of middle management and posts of responsibility in schools to highlight ESD, and a lack of parental engagement or cooperation.

2.13 Student Voice

Traditionally Student Councils are more associated with post-primary schools. The proportion of primary school respondents that have established student councils

is reported at 21%. While this remains low, this is a seven percentage point increase since 2012. The proportion of student councils in 2009 was 8%.

71% of schools indicated that they actively involve pupils in decisions that affect them. Similarly, 80% of respondents encouraged pupils to get involved in local issues.

3. Main Findings from Post-Primary Schools

3.1 Respondent information

All seven-hundred and thirty post-primary schools were invited by letter to respond to the *2015 Lifeskills Survey*. A total of 242 schools participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 33%, down from 52% in 2012. This drop in participation is very significant and a concern for the Department.

65% of respondent schools were mixed gender schools, 18% were boys-only schools and 17% were girls-only schools. 27% had DEIS status. The breakdown of school type of respondents closely mirrors actual categories of post-primary schools in Ireland. The split for DEIS/non-DEIS schools was also representative of the split of the total population of post-primary schools.

3.2 Healthy Eating

Schools were asked a number of questions about the promotion of healthy eating within the school setting. These questions included whether a healthy eating policy was in place; if so, whether parents contributed to the development of the healthy eating policy; whether vending machines are available within the school selling healthy or unhealthy food; and questions about how physical health and nutrition are taught in the school setting.

3.2.1 Healthy Eating Policy

While not a requirement, 32% of schools reported having a healthy eating policy in place and a further 30% reported that they were in the process of developing one. Almost 38% of post-primary schools reported having done no work on developing a healthy eating policy.

3.2.2 School Lunches and Access to Healthy/Unhealthy Food

93% of schools reported that they promoted healthy lunches with their students compared with 66% in 2012 and 64% in 2009.

Some 27% of schools reported having a vending machine or school shop which sells 'junk food'. This represents an improvement on the position in 2012 when 30% of schools were in this category, and in 2009 when 35% of schools in this category. Some 74% of those schools that responded have a facility for the sale of fresh fruit. This is a significant improvement on the position reported in 2009 and 2012 when 64% of schools had such a facility in place.

3.2.3 Teaching about Physical Health and Nutrition

All of the schools that responded to the survey reported that they covered the importance of a balanced diet with their students. Teaching physical health and nutrition to students was not considered to be challenging to teach by the vast majority of schools – of those that responded 63% of schools reported that the topic was *not at all* challenging and 35% said that it was *not* challenging to teach.

3.3 Physical Activity

Schools were asked a number of questions about physical activity. These included; whether a physical activity policy/plan was in place; the number of hours allocated to physical education per week; whether the school promotes physical activity during student break-times; whether the school participates in extracurricular sporting activities outside of school time; and to identify barriers, if any, to promoting physical activity on-site.

3.3.1 Physical Activity Policy or Plan

In total, 59% of schools have a physical activity plan/policy in place or have undertaken some work on a physical activity policy/plan. This is very encouraging even though such a policy/plan is not formally required by the DES.

They are, of course, expected to allocate time for Physical Education and this is addressed in Section 3.3.2. This question about the policy/plan was asked in 2015, for the first time, in the context of *Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2026* and its initiative – the *Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan* (NPAP) which was published in January 2016.

The questions in this section are broader than Physical Education; they include determining if physical activities outside of school time and external support are promoted. Responses to these questions will assist in future policy considerations since the NPAP seeks to "within school settings, for children to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviours which are likely to enhance lifelong engagement in physical activity and good health. Such a lifestyle must be complemented within their family life and the ready availability of initiatives and programmes to become active in their community". Schools do so much in this area that a plan or policy around what is happening, including the teaching of PE but also their involvement in extra-curricular activities, will enable them to have an overview of what they offer across the physical activity area.

This is the first time a question on physical activity planning was asked in the *Lifeskills Survey*.

3.3.2 Class Time Allocated to Physical Education

The DES recommends that post-primary schools offer two hours of Physical Education per week. In 2015, 4% of schools reported that they offer two hours or more of physical education per week in 1st year, 3% did so in second year and 1% did so in third year. No schools reported that they offer two or more hours in 5th or 6th year.   35% of schools reported that they offer 2 or more hours of physical education per week in their transition year.   These figures have decreased since 2012, when 10% of schools reported that they offered 2 hours or more of physical education per week in Junior Cycle, 6% did so in Senior Cycle and 43% did so in Transition Year. See Table 3.1 for more details.

Table 3.1 Class Time Allocated to Physical Education

	Zero time (%)	< 1 hour (%)	Between 1 and 2 hours (%)	2 hours (%)	> 2 hours (%)
Junior Cycle year 1	1	5	90	2	2
Junior Cycle year 2	2	9	87	2	1
Junior Cycle year 3	3	15	80	1	0
Transition year	2	3	60	23	12
Leaving Certificate year 1	7	18	74	0	0
Leaving Certificate year 2	11	21	68	0	0

3.3.3 *Promotion of Physical Activity Outside of School Time and External Support*

The vast majority of post-primary schools (97%) reported that their students participate in physical activities outside of school time. The five main activities

that schools are involved with after school time are Gaelic games, basketball, soccer, athletics and rugby.

With regard to physical activity initiatives and programmes, 63% of schools take part in Sport for All Day, 54% take part in Active School Week.

89% of schools indicated that they encourage physical activity during breaks. This is a slight increase since 2012 (86%).

Over one-third of schools reported using external agencies to support the delivery of physical activity or sport. Of these agencies, the GAA is cited as the main source of external support.

3.3.4 Challenges to Promoting Physical Activity

More than half of the respondent schools reported that there are challenges to promoting physical activity in schools. These include lack of space or poor facilities (64%), availability of staff or inadequate supervision (23%), and time pressure/focus on curriculum (21%). See Table 3.2.

Table. 3.2: Challenges in Promoting Physical Activity in Schools

Main challenges to physical activity in school (schools could select more than one)	
Lack of space/ poor facilities	64%
Availability of staff/ inadequate supervision	23%
Time pressure/ focus on curriculum	21%
Budget	7%
Transport	4%
Lack of interest from students	2%

3.4 Substance Misuse

Schools were asked about their approaches to teaching about substance misuse. Questions included whether a substance misuse policy was in place; whether parents contributed to the development of the substance misuse policy; and about the type of approaches and challenges faced in teaching about substance misuse.

3.4.1 Substance Misuse Policy

In total, 95% of schools reported undertaking some work on developing substance misuse policy, which compares with 93% in 2012.

87% of schools indicated that they had consulted parents in the development of their substance use policy while 13% had not.

3.4.2 Teaching about Substance Misuse

All of the respondent schools reported that their lessons on substance abuse covered *awareness of and combating* drug abuse, alcohol abuse and the health risks of smoking.

Three quarters of schools reported using *On My Own Two Feet* as a key resource to address this topic. This resource was first launched in 1994. It is an educational programme for use in post-primary schools, which is aimed at the prevention of substance misuse.

In terms of the level of difficulty experienced by schools in teaching about substance abuse, 56% of post-primary schools reported that substance misuse is a challenging topic to teach; 49% reported it as somewhat challenging and 7% as very challenging. 44% of schools reported that substance abuse was not challenging to teach.

Almost half of all respondent schools (48%), reported bringing in external agencies to support them in teaching about substance misuse. The main agencies that are involved with providing external facilitation on this topic are An Garda Síochána and the HSE.

3.5 Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Schools were asked a number of questions about the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and also about Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Schools were asked about having an RSE policy and who contributed to the development of the policy; the number of RSE classes provided and the topics addressed in Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.

3.5.1 RSE Policy Development

87% of respondent schools reported that they have a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy in place. 11% of schools reported that they are in the process of developing a policy; and 2% reported having no RSE policy in place. In

total, 98% of schools have undertaken some work on an RSE policy, which has not changed since 2012.

3.5.2 Contributors to RSE Policy

SPHE/RSE teachers were the main contributors to the RSE policy, with 96% of schools that answered the question reporting that SPHE/RSE teachers had made a major contribution to the development of the school's RSE policy. Principals were reported to have made a major contribution in 50% of schools. Parents, students and boards of management were reported to have made a major contribution to RSE policy development in 21% of schools. See Fig. 3.1.

Fig. 3.1: Contribution to RSE policy
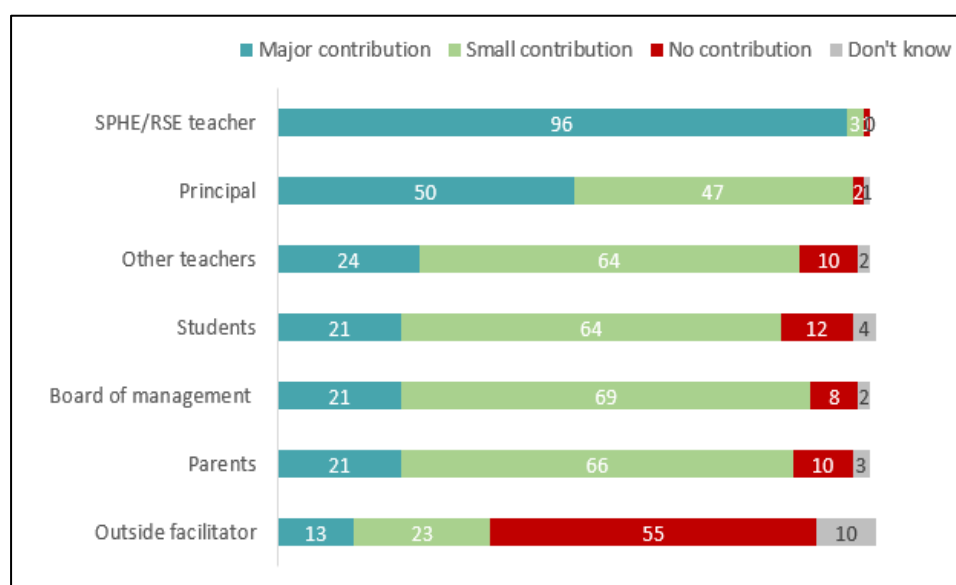
3.5.3 Overview of Implementation of RSE at Junior Cycle

Overall, schools reported high levels of implementation of the RSE programme at Junior Cycle, similar to the figures for 2012. 94% of schools reported that they teach RSE as part of SPHE at Junior Cycle, 4% teach it as part of another subject, 1% as a stand-alone programme, while 1% do not teach it at all at Junior Cycle.

3.5.4 Overview of RSE Implementation at Senior Cycle

There is more variation in the provision of the RSE programme at Senior Cycle. This is primarily due to the fact that while schools are not *required* to provide SPHE at Senior Cycle, they are required to provide an RSE programme.

3.5.5 Number of RSE Classes Provided

Schools are required to timetable one period per week for SPHE in Junior Cycle. Out of the SPHE programme, six timetabled periods in the year should be assigned to RSE. While a small percentage of post-primary schools provide for SPHE from 1st year to 6th year, in the vast majority of schools, the RSE requirement at senior cycle is fulfilled outside of SPHE.

Just over a quarter of respondent schools reported meeting this requirement. 16% provide three to five classes per year, 41% provide one to two classes per year, while 5% provide none.

3.5.6 Topics Addressed at Junior Cycle RSE

The six RSE topics given most emphasis at Junior Cycle are: (1) communications and respect, (2) taking responsibility, (3) sharing feelings, (4) negotiating relationships, (5) changes at puberty, and (6) human reproduction. An average of 75% of schools placed considerable emphasis on these topics and an average of 24% give these topics some emphasis. Schools reported that they give less emphasis to the following four topics at Junior Cycle: teenage pregnancy, sexual orientation, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and contraception. Forty per cent of schools give these topics considerable emphasis and 50% of schools give these topics some emphasis. This is summarised in Fig 3.2.

Fig. 3.2: Topics Addressed at Junior Cycle RSE in Schools with an RSE Programme
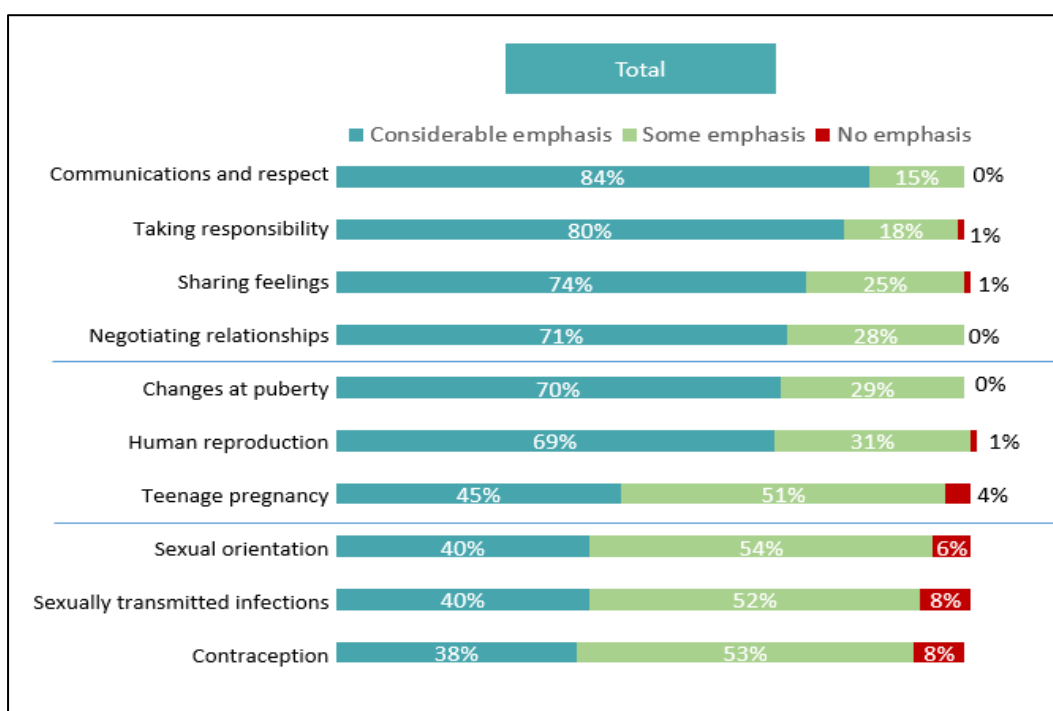
3.5.7 Topics Addressed at Senior Cycle RSE

Senior cycle students are more likely to be taught about STIs, contraception and teenage pregnancy compared to Junior Cycle students. See Figure 3.3. 77% of schools reported placing considerable emphasis on teaching about STIs at Senior Cycle, compared to 40% of schools at Junior Cycle. Schools reported giving considerable emphasis to teaching about contraception: 74% of schools at Senior Cycle, compared with 38% at Junior Cycle. Similarly, 72% of schools reported that teaching about teenage pregnancy was given considerable emphasis at Senior Cycle, compared with 45% at Junior Cycle.

Fig. 3.3: Topics Addressed as Part of RSE at Senior Cycle in Schools with a Planned RSE Programme
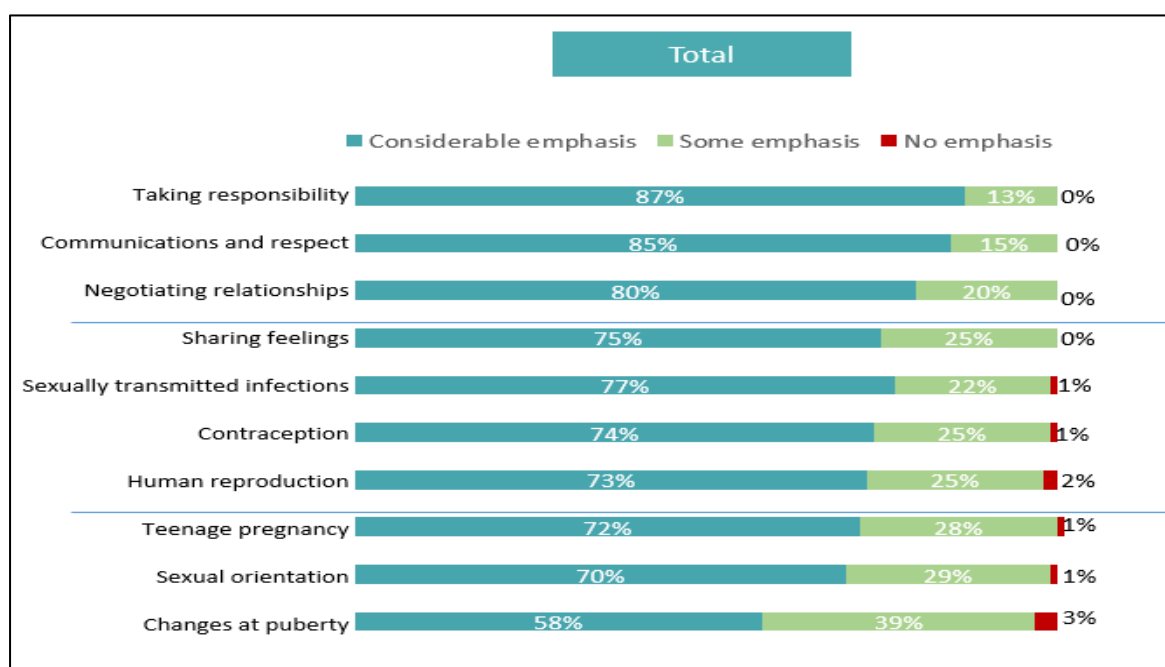
3.5.8 External Visitors/Facilitators

Of the schools that responded, 55% of schools reported that the RSE programme is delivered by teachers but with assistance from external facilitators. In the remainder of schools, RSE is almost exclusively delivered by teachers. The HSE, Aids West, Accord, Cura and the Rape Crisis Centre were amongst the most widely used external agencies reported in that respect.

3.5.9 Level of Challenge Experienced by Schools in Teaching the RSE Programme

16% of schools that answered the question reported that they find RSE very challenging to teach and 62% reported that they find it somewhat challenging.

3.5.10 Use of RSE Resource Materials

66% of schools that responded reported using the *B4uDecide.ie Resource*[3]. 71% of schools use the *Talking Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching (TRUST) Resource*[4].

3.6 Child Protection

98% of schools reported helping their students with identifying risks and giving guidelines on how to maintain personal safety. 99% of schools reported equipping their students with the knowledge to understand when and how to ask for help. These figures are unchanged since 2012.

3.7 Anti-Bullying and Mental Health

Schools were asked if they have an anti-bullying policy in place and whether students would know how to respond if they were being bullied. They were also asked about providing mental health lessons and their use of mental health resources.

3.7.1 Anti-Bullying Policies and Topics

Circular 45/2013 requires all post-primary schools to have an anti-bullying policy in place and the survey finding indicating that 99% of post-primary schools reported having an anti-bullying policy in place is welcome.

All of the schools that responded to the question reported that their students would know what to do if they were being bullied. 95% of schools reported covering topics such as: influences on decision making, resisting inappropriate peer pressure, resolving conflict, and understanding and expressing emotions.

86% of schools use *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*. These guidelines were developed by the National Educational Psychological Service in consultation with the HSE and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

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[3] *Developed by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme in partnership with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the National Youth Council of Ireland.*

[4] *TRUST was developed by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme and the PDST. It was published in 2009 and is supplied to teachers who attend the RSE Senior Cycle Teacher Training provided by the PDST.*

Almost one-quarter of schools (24%) reported finding mental health very challenging to teach with a further 57% reporting finding it challenging to teach.

3.8 Road Safety

The vast majority of schools that responded (93%) reported teaching road safety, compared to 84% in 2012 and 82% in 2009.

55% of schools reported using the *Streetwise* programme[5] compared to 27% in 2012. There was also an increase in the number of schools reporting using *Your Road to Safety*, the RSA transition year programme, up from 44% in 2012 to 78% in 2015.

70% of schools reported using external agencies for support in teaching road safety. The most frequently used agencies are An Garda Síochána and the Road Safety Authority.

3.9 Health Promoting Schools

Of the schools that responded to the question, 63% reported being part of or in the process of becoming part of the *Health Promoting Schools* (HPS) initiative. The main barrier to schools becoming involved in the initiative is the significant amount of effort and resources involved. Thirty-six per cent of schools indicated that while they are not part of the official initiative, they are involved in other health-promoting activities. This is a very significant improvement on the position in 2009 and 2012 when 36% and 37% of schools, respectively, reported themselves as participating or in the process of joining the initiative.

3.10 Enterprise in Schools

For the first time, the 2015 survey included questions about links between post-primary schools and local enterprise.

Analysis found that schools which answered the question reported high levels of engagement between schools and enterprise/industry or social entrepreneurs at a local level (95%) and at a regional level (73%). 11% of schools reported engagement at an international level with enterprise. 40% of schools reported engaging with 1–3 companies, 23% with 4–7 companies and 34% with more than seven companies. Talks and presentations, including career talks and guest speakers, are the most common interactions cited (95%), followed by

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[5] Devised by the Road Safety Authority (RSA)

participation in awards/competitions (e.g. Get Up and Go Mini-company, Young Social Innovators Award, BT Young Scientist, STEPS (90%), followed by work experience for students (89%).

Post-primary schools were asked to select, from a list, the action that would be helpful in encouraging their school to engage with enterprise and/or industry. Schools ranked an online register of local enterprise as something that would be particularly beneficial, followed by less pressure on school timetables to allow time for the engagement.
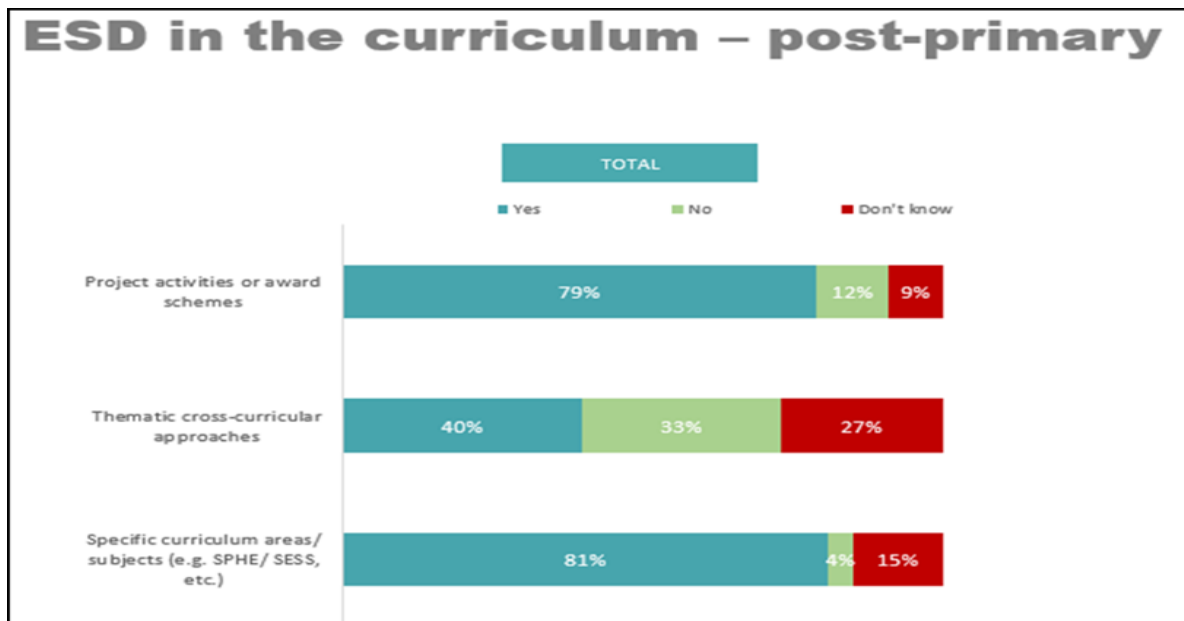
3.11 Education for Sustainable Development

The *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014 - 2020* was developed by the DES, in consultation with key stakeholders. It provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a more sustainable future at a number of levels: individual, community, local, national and international.

ESD aims to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge, the key dispositions and skills and the values that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future. 2015 was the first year that ESD questions were included on the Lifeskills questionnaire. Just over half of schools (52%) are familiar with the *National Strategy on ESD, 2014-2020*.

76% of schools report that their students are given the relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions required to make sustainable choices. 16% state that they do not know and 8% state that their students are not given such knowledge and skills. 55% of schools report that their teachers are adequately prepared to support students in the development of the knowledge and skills required to make sustainable choices. As shown in Fig 3.4 below, the most common way for ESD to be taught is through specific curriculum areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social Political Education (CSPE). This is followed by project activities or awards schemes.

Fig 3.4: Teaching of ESD through Key Areas in the Curriculum

ESD in the curriculum – post-primary

TOTAL

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know

Project activities or award schemes	79%	12%	9%
Thematic cross-curricular approaches	40%	33%	27%
Specific curriculum areas/ subjects (e.g. SPHE/ SESS, etc.)	81%	4%	15%

71% of schools state that their students engage with issues relating to sustainable development during Transition Year.

While 45% of schools state that they reflect sustainable development in their school plan, when it comes to different initiatives around the school, performance is stronger. 88% of schools report that energy usage is monitored in their school and 96% state that students and teachers are encouraged to reduce energy usage. 90% report that their school works to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and 86% state that they encourage students and teachers to avoid wasting water with 80% of schools reporting that they monitor their water usage.

Just 16% of schools report having a travel plan. The main challenges reported by schools to the promotion of sustainable development are time pressures, lack of funding or budgetary pressures and an overloaded curriculum.

3.12 Student Voice

Almost all schools reported having a student council (99%). 98% of schools reported that they actively involve students in decisions that affect them. 83% of schools state that they encourage students to get involved in actions for change in relation to local and global issues.

4. Main Findings from Centres Delivering the Youthreach Programme

4.1 About the Youthreach Programme

The 2015 Lifeskills survey included Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres (CTCs) for the first time in view of the important role they play in providing a different educational and training experience for many of our early school leavers and young unemployed.

Youthreach Centres and CTCs are part of the Further Education and Training sector, within the overall remit of the Department of Education and Skills, with funding and strategic co-ordination provided through SOLAS. Youthreach and CTC learners are predominantly aged 16 to 21. Table 4.1 provides the age profile of the learners.

Table 4.1

Age Profile of Youthreach & Community Training Centre Learners	Percentage at Age*					
	2013		2014		2015	
	YR	CTC	YR	CTC	YR	CTC
Number Under 18 years	48.6%	45.3%	51.4%	43.4%	49.1%	48.2%
Number 18 years	26.4%	21.4%	23.7%	21.3%	25.4%	23.9%
Number 19 years or older	25.0%	33.3%	24.9%	35.4%	25.5%	27.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Source: YR Statistical Returns, CTC SOLAS MIU						
*Note: YR Age captured for learners enrolled at 31 December each year. CTC age captured at course entry only.						

The centres aim to provide a different and more flexible model of education and training for young people that have left school compared to that provided in post-primary schools. Caution should be exercised in making comparisons with post-primary schools, who operate under a very different set of curricular and governance arrangements.

The purpose of surveying centres providing the Youthreach programme was to investigate practice in these centres in relation to the teaching of important areas

of learning that enhance the Lifeskills of young people. These areas comprise personal and social development, physical and mental health, personal safety and enterprise education. This survey provides an opportunity to gather baseline data so as to inform SOLAS as it carries out an evaluation of its Youthreach programmes and thereby inform policy formation, support training and have an evidence base for resource provision into the future.

4.2 Sample Characteristics

In 2015, a specific version of the Lifeskills survey was issued by the DES to centres delivering the Youthreach programme that reflects the programme run in their centres. These centres include two distinct groups, Community Training Centres (CTCs) and Youthreach Centres. 143 centres were invited to take part in the research (108 are Youthreach Centres and 35 CTCs). In total, 77 of these 143 centres responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 54%. As 2015 was the first year in which the Lifeskills survey was administered to these centres, there is no comparison data with previous years.

A Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI) is being piloted in 20 of the 108 Youthreach Centres nationally. The purpose of the SENI is to introduce specific measures that address the special educational needs of learners. These measures focus primarily on learning and wellbeing. Centres that are included in this initiative receive additional funding from DES.

Of the 52 Youthreach Centres that responded to the survey, 13 centres are included in SENI.

This represents an overall response rate for Youthreach Centres of 48% and for centres included in the SENI of 65%. In total, 25 CTCs responded to the survey, which represents an overall response rate of 71%.

The limitations of the data collected from centres are acknowledged. The survey used was an adaptation of the one devised for use with schools, which means that its categories and terminology in general derive from how practice is described and organised in primary and post-primary schools. As a result, the survey may not have succeeded in capturing all the work being done by centres in the teaching of Lifeskills, particularly in the CTCs where the operating practices differ most widely from those of schools.

4.3 Healthy Eating

45% of centres offering the Youthreach Programme reported having a healthy eating policy, 16% are in the process of developing one, while 39% have none. Many centres provide meals to their learners. Centres are given an allowance for this purpose. Some 26% of all centres reported that parents had an input into the healthy eating policy. See Fig 4.1 & 4.2
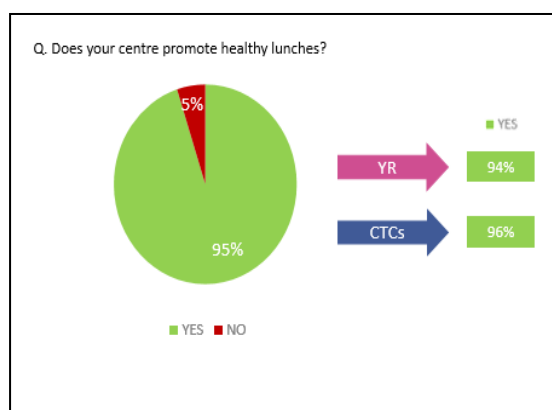
Fig. 4.1: Total Healthy Eating Policy
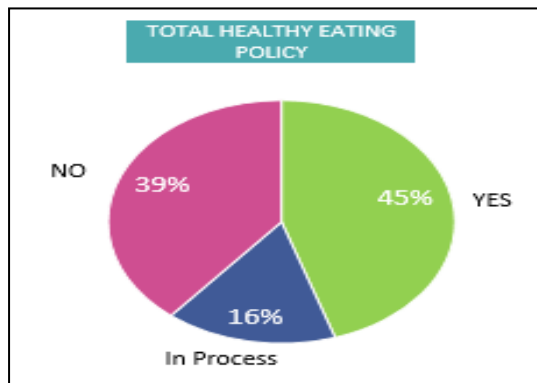
Ninety-one per cent stated that they have a facility for making fresh fruit available.

22% of centres provide a vending machine or shop selling 'junk' food.

Fig. 4.2: Promotion of healthy lunches

Healthy eating is covered under the topic '*the importance of a balanced diet and exercise'* in centres. Youthreach Centres are somewhat stronger on covering this topic than CTCs (96% and 88% respectively). In terms of level of difficulty, *physical health and nutrition* is ranked as the least challenging topic to teach, by centres that completed the survey, when compared with teaching about mental health, RSE and substance misuse.

4.4 Physical Activity

41% of centres have a physical activity policy/plan in place and 24% are in the process of developing one. Youthreach Centres included in the SENI are more likely to have a policy than those that are not. With regard to parental input, only 16% involved parental contribution to their policy. The low input by parents is not surprising due to the age profile of learners.

In over 50% of centres a typical group of learners would receive one to two hours a week of Physical Education. 15% of centres reported that they offer less than one hour of PE a week per group.

With regard to physical activity initiatives and programmes, 51% participate in the Sport For All Day initiative and 25% take part in Active Centre Week. The centres encourage physical activity during breaks, with Youthreach Centres at (60%), and CTCs at (24%). Some 54% of centres reported providing physical activities outside of centre hours. Soccer (85%), gym work (61%) and indoor games (44%) are cited as the most popular activities.

65% of centres stated that there are challenges to the promotion of physical activity in their centre. The main challenges identified are a lack of physical space/facilities, budget constraints, lack of available trained staff, time pressures and transport issues.

4.5 Substance Misuse

97% of centres reported having a substance misuse policy and 3% are in the process of developing one. There is more parental involvement in this area than in the formation of healthy eating or physical activity policies, with 36% of parents having some input.

Over 90% of centres reported addressing awareness of and combating alcohol misuse and drug misuse and awareness of the health risks of smoking. All of the centres included in the SENI covered these topics. Overall, some centres stated that they use *On My Own Two Feet*. Usage of this resource was highest in the Youthreach Centres included in the SENI, followed by the other Youthreach Centres and lower in the CTCs (83%, 50% and 42%) respectively.

When asked how challenging a topic substance misuse is to teach, most centres rated it as somewhat challenging, though not as challenging as mental health and RSE. Thirty-seven centres reported that they use external agencies to help address substance misuse, where the local drugs taskforce is the main source of external support.

4.6 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) / Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

It is important to understand how the centres responded to the questions in the survey relating to SPHE and RSE. While Youthreach Centres are expected by the DES to teach SPHE and RSE and have traditionally been supported to do so by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), CTCs are not currently given any specific direction in this area of curricular provision. The terms SPHE and RSE are generally not used in CTCs, although there is considerable overlap between the content of the post-primary SPHE and RSE curricula and the subject matter contained in Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Levels 3 and 4 modules, such as *Personal and Interpersonal Skills* and *Personal Effectiveness*. These modules are included in most of the major awards that form the principal accreditation vehicle and curriculum provided in practically all CTCs as well as in many Youthreach Centres.

4.6.1 SPHE

59% of centres reported that they have an SPHE coordinator. There is considerable difference between Youthreach Centres (81%) and CTCs (13%) in this respect. Youthreach Centres included in the SENI have a higher level of SPHE coordinators (92%) than those not included (77%).

73% of Youthreach Centres and 17% of CTCs reported having a planned SPHE programme delivered to all learner groups at Junior Cycle or QQI Levels 1–3.

74% of Youthreach Centres (100% of centres in SENI; 66% of centres outside SENI) reporting that they have a planned RSE programme in place. 24% of CTCs had a comparable programme. Those that have an SPHE coordinator are significantly more likely to have a planned SPHE or RSE programme in place.

4.6.2 RSE Policy Development

63% of centres indicated that they have an RSE policy in place or are in the process of developing one. Of these, 47% have a documented policy and 16% are in the process of developing one, whereas over one-third (36%) have no policy. See Fig. 4.3 which shows 66% of Youthreach Centres having a policy in place compared with 8% of CTCs. Similarly, centres that have a RSE policy in place or in process are significantly more likely to also have a planned SPHE programme as well as an SPHE coordinator.

Fig. 4.3: RSE Policy Implementation in Youthreach Programme Centres
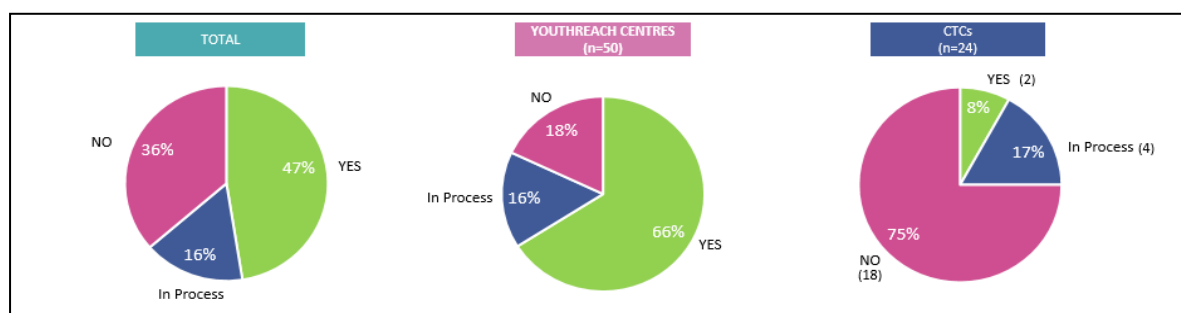
SPHE/RSE teachers were the main contributors to RSE policy, with 86% of centres reporting that they make a major contribution. The second most influential group are centre coordinators or managers, with 82% of centres reporting that they made a major contribution. It is noteworthy that 22% of centres reported that learners made a major contribution. Indeed centres that involved learners in the development of an RSE policy were significantly more likely to have a planned SPHE programme than those where they made no contribution at all.

Fig. 4.4: Contribution to RSE Policy
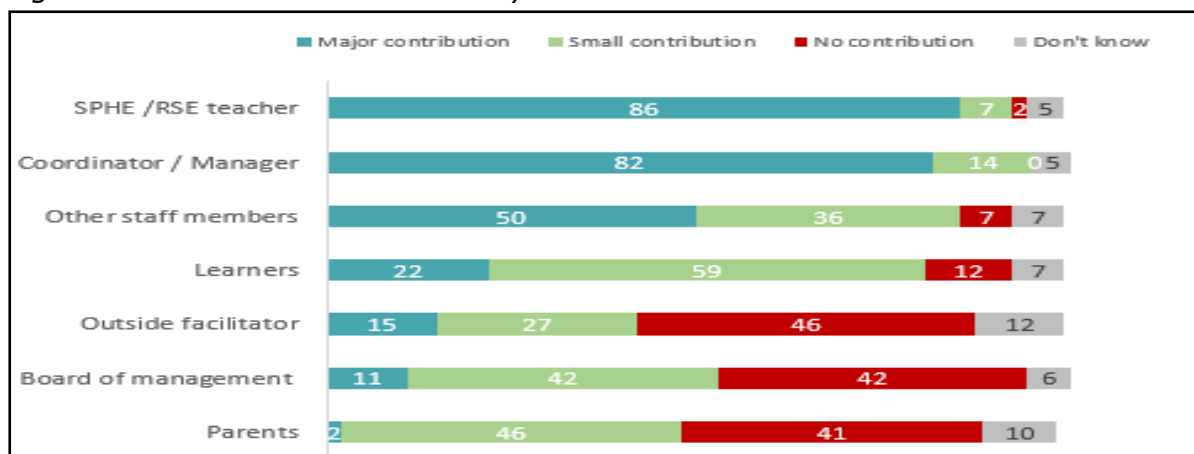
4.6.3 RSE Tutors

Some 68% of centres have at least one RSE teacher. Due to the different overarching programme requirements that apply, there are considerable differences between Youthreach Centres and CTCs. Only six out of 25 CTCs reported having a RSE tutor, whereas Youthreach Centres have on average just over 1.5 members of staff teaching RSE, with over two on average in centres included in the SENI. Sixty-four per cent of centres reported attendance at in-service training provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), 33% attended training provided by the National Youth Council of Ireland, while 52% of centres attended other RSE training.

4.6.4 Overview of RSE in CTCs

The majority of Youthreach Centres teach RSE in some form. In CTCs, some 57% teach RSE related material and usually provide it as part of a *Personal Effectiveness* programme or as a stand-alone programme.

4.6.5 Implementation of RSE in Youthreach Centres/CTCs (Junior Cycle/QQI Levels 1–3)

54% of centres reported that they have a planned SPHE/RSE programme at Junior Cycle/QQI Levels 1–3. There are several ways that RSE can be delivered at the centres: as part of SPHE, as part of *Personal Effectiveness*, as a stand-alone programme, as part of another subject or a combination of all four. Just over 50% of centres teach RSE as part of their SPHE programme and a further 35% teach it as part of *Personal Effectiveness*. These figures indicate that centres use various curricula to support their RSE programme; some centres use both the SPHE and *Personal Effectiveness* curriculum to teach RSE. Seventeen per cent of centres do not teach RSE at all at Junior Cycle/QQI Levels 1–3.

4.6.6 Implementation of RSE in Youthreach Centres/CTCs (Senior Cycle/QQI Levels 4–6)

Some 57% of centres stated that they have a planned SPHE/RSE programme at Senior Cycle/QQI Levels 4–6. Of those that have a planned programme, almost 40% of centres deliver RSE as part of SPHE and 33% deliver it as part of *Personal Effectiveness*. 25% of centres reported that they do not teach RSE at all, following programmes equivalent to Senior Cycle/QQ1 Levels 4–6. These figures indicate that centres use various curricula to support their RSE programme; some centres use both the SPHE and *Personal Effectiveness* curricula to teach the subject.

4.6.7 Number of RSE classes provided

In terms of RSE class provision, 43% of centres reported that they would typically provide one to three classes per year per group, 16% would provide four to six classes, 21% would provide more than seven classes, while 19% would provide no RSE classes at all.

There are significant differences between the centres: 47% of CTCs reported that they provide RSE classes, compared to 93% of Youthreach Centres. Centres that have a planned RSE programme are more likely to deliver more timetabled classes.

4.6.8 Topics addressed in Youthreach Centres/CTCs /QQI Levels 1–3 RSE

The top four RSE topics listed as receiving considerable emphasis were: healthy relationships (76%), body image (68%), assertive communication (64%) and contraception (64%). See Fig 4.5. Consent and sexual violence, pornography, and gender and gender stereotypes are given the least focus: 24% of centres do not cover pornography, 18% of centres do not cover consent and sexual violence, and 14% of centres do not cover gender and gender stereotypes. Ten per cent of centres do not cover contraception and STIs.

Fig. 4.5: Emphasis on Topics in RSE at Junior Cycle/QQI Levels 1–3 in Centres with a Planned SPHE Programme
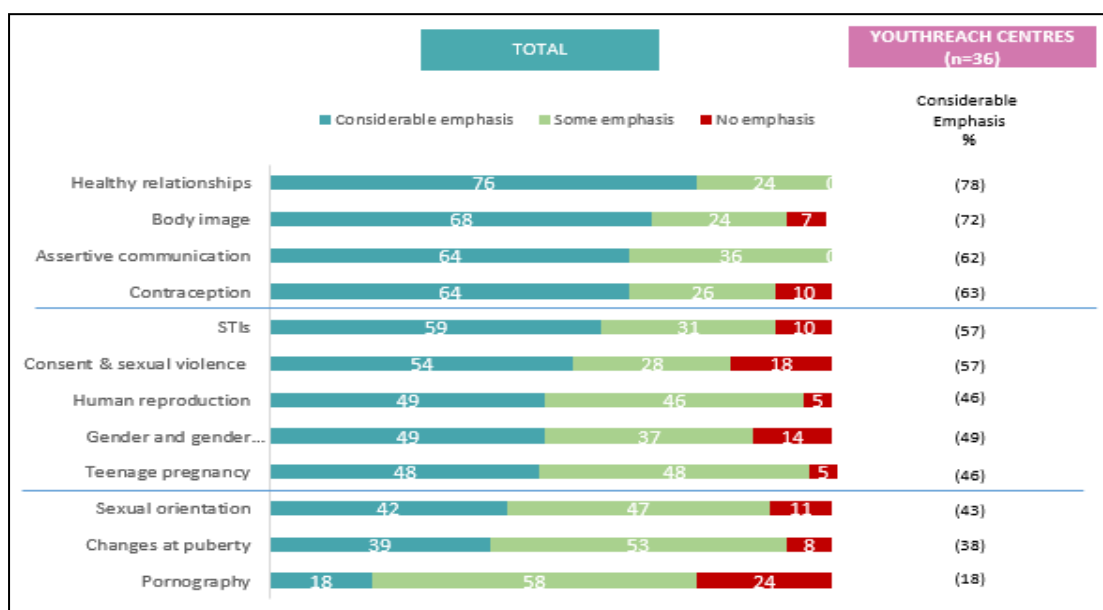
4.6.9 Topics addressed at Senior Cycle /QQI Levels 4–5 RSE

Among those with a planned RSE programme, all centres covered contraception, teenage pregnancy, healthy relationships, STIs, consent and sexual violence, and sexual orientation. See Fig 4.6. There are also very high levels of coverage of assertive communication, body image, gender and gender stereotyping, and human reproduction. 23% reported that they do not address pornography.

Fig. 4.6: Emphasis on Topics in RSE at Senior Cycle in centres with a Planned RSE Programme
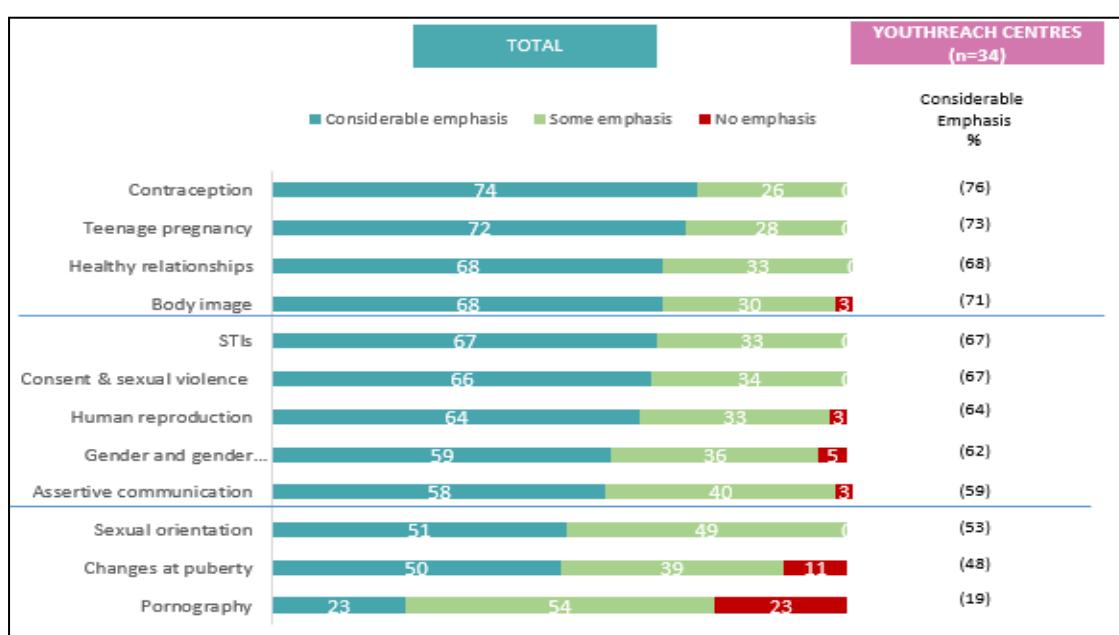
4.6.10 External Facilitators

In 57% of centres, RSE was delivered by staff members with occasional assistance from external facilitators, 22% delivered it exclusively by external facilitators, 14% delivered it exclusively by staff members and 8% shared the RSE teaching between staff members and external facilitators. Some 67% of Youthreach Centres stated that RSE is usually delivered by the teacher with occasional assistance from external facilitators. In CTCs, RSE is more commonly delivered by external facilitators (53%). The top three external agencies used to help with sexuality education in centres are the HSE, the local drugs taskforce and the local health service. Table 4.2 summarises the findings.

Table 4.2: Involvement of External Facilitators in RSE

	Total	Youthreach	CTCs
Delivered mainly by staff members	57%	67%	32%
By outside facilitators	22%	9%	53%
RSE is delivered exclusively by staff	14%	13%	16%
Shared between staff members and	8%	11%	0%

4.6.11 Level of Challenge Experienced by Centres in Teaching an RSE Programme

RSE is ranked as the second most challenging subject to teach, when compared with mental health, substance misuse and physical health/nutrition. Only mental health is considered a more challenging subject than RSE.

4.6.12 Use of Good-Quality RSE Resource Materials

Forty-five per cent of centres are using the *B4uDecide.ie* class resource. It was published in 2012 and is supplied to teachers that attend the RSE Junior Cycle Teacher Training provided by the PDST. The resource materials are also available online.

Thirty-nine per cent of centres indicated that they use the TRUST Resource, which, as stated earlier, was developed by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme and the PDST. It was published in 2009 and is supplied to teachers that attend RSE Senior Cycle Teacher Training provided by the PDST. Some use the Delay Early Sex Training provided by the National Youth Council of Ireland. Given that the TRUST Resource is not available online, this finding would suggest that 39% of centres facilitated teachers' attendance at the TRUST training.

4.7 Personal Safety

Eighty-eight per cent of centres reported that they inform learners on how to maintain personal safety. More specifically, 81% of centres help their learners with identifying risks and 89% of centres give guidelines on how to seek help.

4.8 Anti-Bullying and Mental Health

96% of Youthreach Centres and 92% of CTCs stated that they have an anti-bullying policy in place. All centres reported that their learners would know what to do if they were being bullied. Some 33% of Youthreach Centres and 29% of CTCs have had parental input into their anti-bullying policies.

With regard to curricular provision for anti-bullying, 79% of centres reported that they cover 'skills for resisting inappropriate peer pressure' and 86% of centres reported that they cover 'skills for resolving conflict'. However, Youthreach Centres put more focus on these topics than CTCs.

In terms of resources, 64% of centres use *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*. These guidelines were developed by the Department of Education and Skills, the HSE and the Department of Health, and published in 2013.

Centres indicated that mental health is the most challenging topic to teach when compared with RSE, substance misuse and physical health/nutrition.

4.9 Road Safety

56% of Youthreach Centres reported that they teach road safety. Road safety was taught in 36% of CTCs . 13% reported using the *Streetwise* programme devised by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), while 14% use *Your Road to Safety*, the RSA Transition Year programme. Forty-eight centres use external agencies for support in teaching road safety, where the most frequently used agency is the RSA.

4.10 Enterprise in Centres

The 2015 survey included questions on the links between the centres and local enterprise. Results in fig 4.7 show that there is strong engagement between centres and enterprise/industry or social entrepreneurs at a local level (97%) but none at an international level. Work experience is the most common interaction cited (97%), followed by talks and presentations (62%). This is not surprising as work experience is a core element of the Youthreach programme.

Fig. 4.7: How the Centres Engage with Enterprise
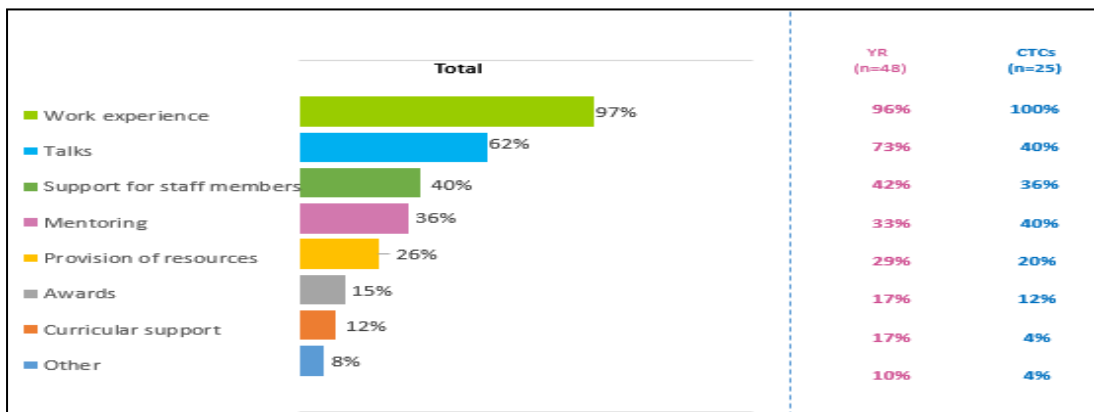
The centres were specifically asked to rank what initiative would be most helpful in encouraging their centre to engage with enterprise and/or industry. See Fig 4.8. The online register of industry was considered to be the most helpful initiative with 82% of centres rating it 1 or 2 in terms of helpfulness.

Fig. 4.8: Ranking of Initiatives that would be most helpful to Encourage Engagement
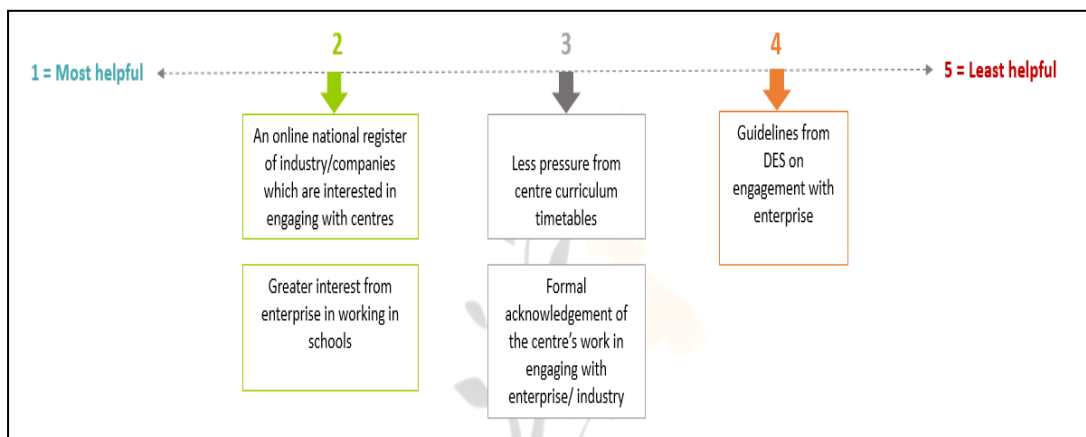
4.11 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The Lifeskills Survey administered to centres also included questions about ESD, focusing specifically on awareness of the National Strategy on ESD, 2014-2020 and the transfer of skills and knowledge around sustainability to learners. Just under half of the centres (48%) are familiar with the National Strategy on ESD, 2014-2020. Youthreach Centres (especially SENI centres) are more familiar with the strategy compared to CTCs (54% vs. 36% respectively).

54% of Youthreach Centres and 50% of CTC's report that their staff members are adequately prepared to support learners to make sustainable choices (e.g. in terms of energy and water consumption, environmental awareness, globalization, sustainable travel, active citizenship). In line with this, 57% in Youthreach Centres state that their learners are given the relevant knowledge, skills and values to make sustainable choices. One in five of all centres stated that they don't know if learners are given the relevant knowledge (20%).

When asked about the promotion of ESD, 40% of centres report that it is promoted though specific curriculum areas such as SPHE or CSPE, and 40% report it is delivered through thematic cross-curricular approaches. Promotion of ESD is much stronger in Youthreach Centres than in CTC's. (See Fig 4.9) The main obstacles reported were that staff members were not adequately aware of ESD; that there was a lack of resources to deliver or promote ESD, and centres reporting that it is not on the curriculum or that it is hard to link subjects.

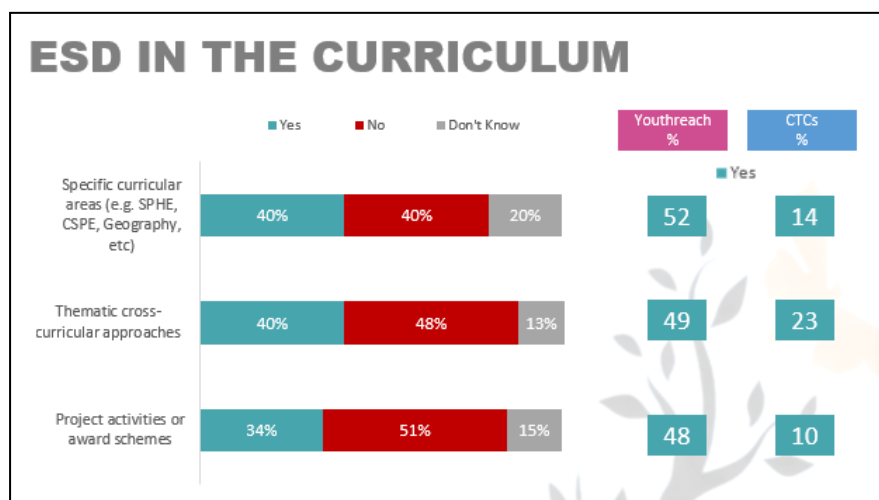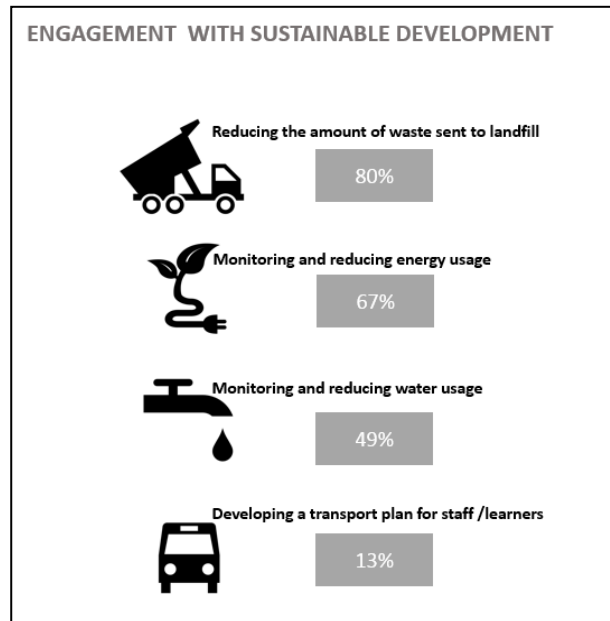*Fig. 4.9: Teaching of ESD through Key Areas in the Curriculum*

Fig 4.10

Looking specifically at how centres engage with sustainable development, the most common initiative across the centres is the reduction of waste sent to landfill; 80% report that their centre works to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. 67% state that energy usage is monitored in their centre, and 49% of centres reporting that they monitor and reduce their water usage. Only 13% report that they have developed a transport plan for staff and/or learners.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill — 80%

Monitoring and reducing energy usage — 67%

Monitoring and reducing water usage — 49%

Developing a transport plan for staff /learners — 13%

Analysis found that CTCs are more likely to monitor and reduce energy and water usage, when compared to the Youthreach Centres.

4.12 Voice of Learner

Centres were asked how they encourage learners to become active citizens. Analysis found that learners in the centres are encouraged in a number of ways to become active citizens. 92% Youthreach Centres and 83% CTCs reported that they do this through involving learners actively in decisions that affect them, 80% of Youthreach Centres and 70% of CTCs through encouraging learners to get involved in actions for change in relation to local and/or global issues and 70% Youthreach Centres and 50% CTCs reported that they do this through a student council.

5. Conclusions – Primary and Post-Primary Schools

The findings from the Lifeskills survey 2015 identify the very good work that is being done by many schools in equipping students with a range of essential Lifeskills and in many instances shows improvement since the 2012 survey was carried out.

The limitations of the data are acknowledged. It is recognised that the data represent the perspective of the school community only, and the views expressed must be balanced with information provided through other sources, such as school and subject inspection reports prepared by the DES inspectorate, as well as the views of students themselves. Finally, in drawing conclusions from the data provided through the survey, it has to be remembered that not all schools responded to the survey. Having said that, the data, provided by the respondent schools give important indicative information to the DES that will assist in informing future policy making.

There are a number of positive findings to emerge from the data.

5.1 Positive findings

Healthy Eating

In the first instance, both primary and post-primary schools that responded to the survey are contributing in a significant way to healthy eating initiatives. The findings indicate that most schools promote healthy eating in some way, even in the absence of a formal policy. The work by schools in this area complements work undertaken by the Department of Health and other stakeholders in promoting the Government's overall *Healthy Ireland* agenda (2013 – 2025).

In relation to the responses from primary schools, there is a high level of involvement from primary parents in the development of Healthy Eating Policies, which may indicate that this is an area of concern/interest for many parents. The majority of primary schools reported that teaching about physical health and nutrition was not challenging.

In relation to accessing healthy food on site, almost 3 in 4 post-primary schools reported having a facility for selling fresh fruit.

Physical Activity

Schools at both primary and post-primary levels continue to be active in supporting pupils in physical activity both inside and outside of school hours. This

complements work undertaken by the Department of Health and other stakeholders in promoting the overall *Healthy Ireland* agenda including the publication in 2016 of the National Physical Activity Plan.

While the preparation of a Physical Activity Plan is not a specific requirement for schools, the majority of primary schools have a physical activity policy/plan in place (65%) and at post-primary level approximately 59% of schools have a physical activity policy in place or are working on it.

Substance Misuse

The data indicate that schools, both primary and post-primary, are very active in equipping their pupils with the key skills they require to make informed choices about substance use. The majority of primary and post-primary schools reported that they have a substance misuse policy in place.

Most schools reported that parents were consulted on the development of the policy. 94% of primary schools reported using the *Walk Tall Programme*. While three quarters of post-primary schools reported that they use *On My Own Two Feet,* a resource about responsible substance use.

Health Promoting Schools

62% of primary schools and 63% of post-primary schools reported that they are part of, or are in the process of becoming part of the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative* (HPS). At both primary and post-primary level, the schools that reported not being part of the HPS say that they run an alternative health promotion scheme in their school.

Relationship and Sexuality Education

The data provide evidence of strong implementation of Relationship and Sexuality Education at both primary and post-primary levels. The delivery of the RSE programme is in line with recommendations contained in the *National Sexual Health Strategy*. This Strategy was published by the Department of Health in 2015 to raise awareness of sexual health and stem the rising incidence of sexually transmitted infections.

The vast majority of primary and post-primary schools have or are in the process of developing an RSE policy. Over two-thirds of post-primary schools are using *B4uDecide* Resource Materials for Junior Cycle and 71% are using the *TRUST* Resource for Senior Cycle.

Child Protection

Both primary and post-primary schools continue to display a very high compliance in relation to child protection requirements. The vast majority of schools reported that they addressed topics such as identifying risks and giving guidelines on how to maintain personal safety. All primary schools reported using the *Stay Safe* programme, the primary school based approach to the prevention of child abuse. At post-primary level the vast majority of schools reported that they addressed topics such as identifying risks and giving guidelines on how to maintain personal safety.

Anti-Bullying/Mental Health

The vast majority of primary and post-primary schools reported having an anti-bullying policy in place (99%).

Schools cover key mental health topics such as understanding and expressing emotion and resolving conflict. 86% of post-primary schools use *"Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention"*.

Road Safety

The findings relating to addressing road safety in the classroom are very welcome. All primary schools that responded to the survey indicated that they cover road safety as part of the curriculum. 93% of post-primary schools reported teaching road safety, which is an increase of almost 10% since 2012. Some 55% of post-primary schools use the *Streetwise* programme devised by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), which compares with just 27% of schools in 2012.

Education for Sustainable Development

This is the first survey in which questions were posed about ESD. The high level of schools reporting that their students are given the relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions required to make environmentally sustainable choices is very welcome.

71% of schools state that their students engage with issues relating to sustainable development during Transition Year.

Student Councils

The fact that almost all reporting post-primary schools have a student council (99%) is very positive.

Enterprise

For the first time, the 2015 survey included questions about links between schools and local enterprise. Schools were asked how much interaction they have with enterprise at various levels.

The high level of engagement with enterprise through talks and presentations at both primary (73%) and post-primary levels is very welcome (95%).

5.2 Challenges

While the findings show the positive contribution that schools continue to make to the many policy areas outlined above, the evidence also suggests that a number of challenges have been identified.

Engagement between Primary schools and Early Years' Education Settings

41% of primary schools indicated that they have little contact with early years' education settings, while 15% indicated they have no contact.

Frequent use (i.e. very frequent or frequent) of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, is low with 73% of schools reporting that they never use it. However, the requirements on Primary schools is to implement the School Self-Evaluation process in order to evaluate quality provision. Working with *Síolta* complements this work.

Healthy Eating

While at primary level 92% of primary schools reported that they had a healthy eating policy in place, the position is very different at post-primary level where almost 38% post-primary schools reported that they have not commenced work on developing a healthy eating policy. There is no requirement by the Department of Education and Skills for schools to have a policy in place but it has become good practice in the majority of schools. 27% reported that they have a vending machine on site that sells unhealthy food and drinks, such as confectionary and fizzy drinks.

There is a need to promote a wider variety of healthier alternatives to 'junk' food in schools. This is an issue relevant to post-primary schools in particular. Schools should proactively address this important area, particularly in light of the growing obesity phenomenon. The DES included advice to primary schools in 2016 and post-primary schools in 2015 on this issue in Circulars on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles. The DES acknowledges that the sale of food and beverage products often represents a revenue stream for schools and it is not the intention to end this practice. Rather the intention is to ensure that there is a greater proportion of healthier alternatives to some of the less healthy products that are currently for sale in schools.

Physical Education

Just over half of primary schools reported facing impediments to successfully delivering physical education in their school. Lack of physical space (especially indoor) and poor facilities were the main impediments, with 44% of primary schools reporting these issues. The same impediments were also highlighted at post- primary level along with inadequate supervision and time pressure or curriculum pressure.

40% of post-primary schools do not have a physical activity policy, though there is no requirement from the DES to have such a plan in place. Also of concern is the fact that a significant number of post-primary schools do not meet the recommendation of two hours of Physical Education per week but they do provide between one and two hours per week.

Substance abuse

While the majority of primary and post-primary schools reported that they have a substance misuse policy in place, over half of both primary and post-primary schools reported that substance misuse was challenging or very challenging to teach.

RSE

While the vast majority of primary schools are meeting the requirements in relation to their RSE Programme, the majority of those schools that responded reported that teaching RSE is either challenging (62%) or very challenging (12%). The most common arrangement is for RSE to be taught by teachers with assistance from outside facilitators.

At post-primary level the number of schools teaching RSE as part of an SPHE Senior Cycle Programme is low at only 24%. Just over a quarter of schools reported meeting the requirement of 6 RSE classes per year, 16% provide three to five classes per year, 41% provide one to two classes per year, while 5% provide none.

62% of the post-primary schools reported that they find RSE challenging to teach with a further 16% reporting that they found it very challenging to teach.

Anti-Bullying/Mental Health

The majority of primary and post-primary schools that responded reported that mental health is the most challenging topic to teach.

Enterprise

73% of primary schools engage with enterprise through talks and presentations.

Compared with primary schools the levels of engagement between post-primary schools and enterprise/industry at a local level are very high at 95%.

Both primary and post-primary schools were asked to select from a list the actions that would be helpful in encouraging their school to engage with enterprise and/or industry. The majority of schools stated that 'less pressure from school timetable' would be the most helpful initiative, followed by an online national register of industry/companies available to work with schools.

ESD

71% of primary respondents indicated that teachers were adequately prepared to support students in the development of the knowledge and skills required to make sustainable choices. This level fell to 55% for post-primary school teachers.

Student Councils

The proportion of primary school respondents that have established student councils is reported as 21% and while this is a seven percentage point increase since 2012, it is still relatively low. Primary pupils can provide very constructive ideas in relation to the running of school and their voices should be heard and represented.

5.3 Opportunities Available

Engagement between Primary Schools and Early Years' Education Settings

There is scope to encourage more primary schools to engage with early years' education settings as 41% of primary schools indicted that they have little contact with early years' education settings while 15% indicated they have no contact whatsoever.

Physical Education

There are a number of important developments relating to improvements in the quality of physical education in schools. *The National Physical Activity Plan* (NPAP) which was published in January 2016 sets out a number of actions for DES and other relevant stakeholders which will encourage schools to promote physical activity and to provide the recommended amount of Physical Education.   The NPAP includes a commitment to extend the Active School Flag programme to 500 further schools and to fully implement the physical education curriculum by 2020.

Wellbeing in Junior Cycle

Other important developments include the introduction, from September 2017, of an area of learning entitled "Wellbeing" as part of each school's Junior Cycle programme. Wellbeing will address the content, skills and learning outcomes traditionally included within CSPE, SPHE and Physical Education along with guidance and other areas. Wellbeing will cross the three years of junior cycle and build on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' wellbeing. This area of learning will make the school's commitment to wellbeing visible to students. It will include learning opportunities to enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students. It will enable students to build life skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and to their community.

The Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme will begin with 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017 and build up to 400 hours by 2020 as the new Junior Cycle is implemented fully in schools.

Senior Cycle Physical Education

A Senior Cycle Physical Education Framework has been designed by the NCCA to provide schools with a framework within which they can design a P.E. programme

for those students who will not choose to take Physical Education as part of their Leaving Certificate when it becomes an option in the near future. Schools will be given the flexibility to select which activities their students will study.

A new Leaving Certificate Physical Education syllabus has been finalised by the NCCA as a full subject which will be available for certification as a Leaving Certificate subject in a manner similar to other subjects.

Health Promoting Schools Initiative

It is clear that while many schools have applied to participate in the *Health Promoting Schools Initiative*, some schools are reluctant to take part due to the perceived administrative burden required. The HSE will review the *Health Promoting Schools* model, in consultation with the DES and the Department of Health, and develop a model for health promotion that is more user-friendly for schools.

RSE

The survey indicates high levels of implementation of the RSE programme. It is important that the DES continues to offer RSE Training to teachers through the PDST. The *HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme* and the PDST will re-develop the *B4uDecide* resource materials to support the new Junior Cycle wellbeing programme.

DES and DOH partnership

The partnership between the Department of Health/HSE and DES will continue. One of the issues to emerge from the findings is the need to streamline the resources available to schools on a range of Wellbeing topics. The Department of Health and HSE will audit/evaluate school resources used in primary schools and post-primary schools. This is with a view to developing a joint plan with the DES for the development and maintenance of suitable teaching resources and CPD on Wellbeing topics, ensuring schools can easily access resources.

Enterprise

56% of primary schools that responded indicated that they engage with enterprise at a local level, 24% at a regional level, 14% at national level and just 4% at international level. Since these levels of engagement are relatively low there is potential to promote partnership between industry and schools.

Availability of an online national register of industry/companies was selected by 50% of schools as being beneficial to facilitating their engagement with enterprise. The possibility of creating such a register will be explored.

Education at Post-Primary for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Less than half of schools state that they reflect sustainable development in their school plan. The DES, through implementation of the actions in the Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014 – 2020, can promote and encourage schools to reflect sustainable development in their school plans. There are opportunities to support teachers through high quality CPD and supports.

More could be done to ensure that teachers at both primary and post-primary levels are adequately prepared to support students in the development of the knowledge and skills required to make sustainable choices.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment plans to audit, from a sustainable development perspective, the primary and post primary curriculum in 2017. This audit is scheduled to be carried out in autumn 2017.

Student Councils

The finding in relation to the high number of student councils in place at post-primary level is very positive and the DES will continue to encourage the involvement of student councils in decisions affecting the school and its student population. More primary schools need to be encouraged to establish student councils.

Substance Misuse

The role of parents/guardians should be encouraged in the development of a substance misuse policy.

6. Overall Conclusions

The DES is very aware of the many pressures that schools and Youthreach Centres are facing and therefore taking the time to complete the Lifeskills survey is very much appreciated. It is hoped that the numbers completing the survey in 2018 will grow. The DES is committed to ensuring that the next Lifeskills survey will be more streamlined and user friendly.

Early Years

Universal provision by the Government of two years early years' education for all children from September 2016 provides many opportunities. The transition from preschool to primary school is recognised nationally and internationally as a very important time in children's lives. This transition is a priority area of work in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Strategic Plan, 2015-2018. A coordinated information-sharing process between the preschool and primary school is an important way of supporting children making this transition.

As part of the implementation of Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, the NCCA has undertaken research to prepare draft templates for consultation and the preparation of reporting templates based on research and trialling is ongoing in 2017. Online reporting templates will be available for use by practitioners in 2018.

Schools

It would be important to:

- Increase the involvement of parents in primary and post-primary schools in the development of policies that impact on the quality of their children's experiences not only in schools but also in their lives outside of school. Implementation of such policies should become the normal way of living not only in the school but also in both the home and community as well.

- Involve students at all levels, particularly at primary, in decision making that impacts on their way of doing things. Primary schools should be encouraged to establish student councils, like those in the majority of post-primary schools, so that the young people have their say through a formal structure that has recognised status.

- Reflect on the number of areas that have been identified through the survey as challenging for schools and their teachers to teach such as substance misuse, RSE and mental health. CPD should be provided to enhance confidence and competence in these areas identified as difficult.

- Welcome and encourage further collaboration at the different levels which exists e.g. between

  o DES, DCYA, the DOH and the HSE;
  o school principals, teachers, students and parents
  o schools and local / national enterprises
  o DES, IBEC , Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in relation to their input into Enterprise and Sustainable Development aspects of our learners' experiences in Schools and Youthreach Centres

- Continue to work with the DOH and HSE to make the Health Promoting School initiative less complex and more school friendly so that participation in the initiative will increase.

- Consider the challenges raised in the survey relating to curriculum overload and lack of time as reasons for not having more focus on Physical Education when the NCCA is reviewing the Primary Curriculum.

- Gather data on the implementation of policies in schools and Youthreach Centres in relation to student wellbeing and mental health.

In summary the title 'Lifeskills' suggests, Lifeskills are for life. They are not confined to life in the school but are important at home and in the community throughout the life of the learner. But at schools our young learners need to gain good habits, become informed in relation to decision making and have the resilience needed to live a healthy, confident and happy life.

Youthreach/CTCs

This was the first time Youthreach Centres and CTCs were included in the Lifeskills survey and therefore an analysis of trends is not available. The data produced by the 2015 Lifeskills survey provide indicative information to the DES and its Further Education and Training Section in particular and SOLAS. The data obtained from

this survey will assist SOLAS in their pending evaluation of Youthreach and CTCs and in informing future policy making.

The limitations of the data collected from centres are acknowledged. The survey used was an adaptation of the one devised for use with schools, which means that its categories and terminology in general derive from how practice is described and organised in primary and post-primary schools. As a result, the survey may not have succeeded in capturing all the work being done by centres in the teaching of Lifeskills, particularly in the CTCs where the operating practices differ most widely from those of schools.

Recommendation:

As Youthreach and CTCs are different in their ethos and approaches to learning, it is suggested that in future a separate Lifeskills survey is carried out. This would, however, be a decision for SOLAS.

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Appendix

Primary School Survey

Post-Primary School Survey

Youthreach and Community Training Centres Survey

Copies of each survey are available at www.education.ie.