

National Working Group on Junior Cycle Reform

January – May 2014

Report

Introduction

The National Working Group on Junior Cycle was established in January 2014 to formalise the continuing open dialogue with the education partners on the implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework.

At the opening meeting of the Working Group, a presentation was made to the partners which highlighted a number of changes related to the implementation of Junior Cycle. They included:

- Phasing In
 - A slowing down of the phasing in of the new Junior Cycle subjects.
 - Standardised testing to begin later than planned (i.e. in spring 2017)
- CPD
 - Additional CPD for all teachers (1.5 additional days for English and one additional day for all other subjects)
 - A full day of facilitated whole school CPD for each year of implementation
- Workload/Assessment
 - A commitment to consider duties and posts in schools to support assessment and moderation
 - Agreement to discuss external supports for teacher assessment and moderation.

These changes reflected the Minister's response to concerns which had been highlighted to him.

At the initial meeting, officials also told the education partners that the Minister wished to intensify the level of dialogue and build on existing structures which had been in place since the launch of the Framework for Junior Cycle in October 2012.

Teacher Union Position

Both the TUI and ASTI stressed at all meetings that they are opposed to school based assessment but not educational reform or Junior Cycle reform. They objected to the nature of the meetings which, in their view, were to an agenda "defined and constrained by the Minister".

In the course of ongoing discussions, the unions balloted for industrial action.

There was a 64% turnout for the TUI ballot with 88% voting in favour of industrial action over proposed Junior Cycle changes.

The TUI executive issued the following directive to TUI members:

From the 7th of April, all TUI members in schools and centres - including Junior Cycle Network Schools - are directed to withdraw co-operation with the introduction or implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework proposals as follows:

1. Not to attend CPD organised in connection with the Junior Cycle Framework proposals.
2. Not to attend meetings associated with the Junior Cycle Framework proposals.
3. Not to attend any planning meeting or participate in any planning activities organised in connection with the Junior Cycle Framework proposals.
4. Not to engage in any aspect of school-based assessment for the purpose of the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA).
5. Not to engage in any development of or delivery of Junior Cycle Framework Short Courses.
6. Not to engage in any event, activity or function related to points 1 to 5 above.

TUI members also gave a reserve mandate for strike action.

ASTI has issued the same directives to its members. 88% of ASTI members voted in favour of industrial action over proposed Junior Cycle changes. ASTI Central Executive Council decided on May 24 to ballot members on industrial action up to and including strike action if Junior Cycle subject specifications, including assessment by students' own teachers, are introduced.

The Working Group and Sub-Groups

To assist the work of the National Working Group, it was decided to establish three sub-groups.

The three sub-groups are addressing the following themes.

- Workload and Implementation Issues for Schools and Teachers
- Quality Assurance and Support for Teacher Assessment
- CPD

The Teachers Union of Ireland, the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, Education and Training Boards Ireland, the Joint Managerial Boards, Educate Together, the National Parents Council (primary¹ and post-primary), the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, the State Examinations Commission and officials from a number of sections of the Department of Education and Skills were all represented at these meetings.

The National Working Group on Junior Cycle Reform held its first meeting on January 17th 2014. It went on to hold three further meetings on 7th February, 7th March and 29th May.

Meetings of the sub-groups were held as follows:

- Workload and Implementation Issues for Schools and Teachers – This group met on 24th January, 3rd March and 14th April

¹ The National Parents' Council (Primary) was only represented on the National Working Group and not on the sub-groups.

- Quality Assurance and Support for Teacher Assessment – This group met on 30th January, 3rd March and 14th April
- CPD – This group met on 30th January, 21st February and 21st March.

Sub-Group: Workload and Implementation Issues for Schools and Teachers

This sub-group had the benefit of a comprehensive joint submission from management bodies and NAPD along with a further written submission from Educate Together which outlined the necessary supports from their perspectives. Department officials signalled the Minister’s willingness to respond to these submissions.

The National Parents Council (Post Primary) also made a short submission to this group.

The NCCA executive also presented to this group on the question of resources for assessment and moderation.

The Group considered views on the possibility of whether a post of responsibility will be available in each school.

Clarification was sought in relation to the scope of assessment and moderation, particularly when all new specifications for 21 subjects and short courses are in place.

The question relating to time for the implementation of all aspects of the JCSA was highlighted. This included:

- Moderation, including co-ordinators, facilitators, teachers, especially part-time teachers
- Marking
- Re-marking
- Implementation of the full framework
- IT capacity
- Substitution, particularly if a large group of teachers are involved
- Timetabling

Circulars

Circular 20/2014

The Group discussed in detail the provisions of Circular 20/2014 which dealt with revised arrangements for the Implementation of the Junior Cycle Student Award in the academic year 2014/15. This issued to schools on March 10, 2014

Prescribed material (English) - Circular for 2014, 2015 and 2016 cohorts

This circular was brought to the group for comment. The proposed circular is to issue shortly.

PPOD - Circular for 2014/15

A DES representative from the Parents, Learners and Database (PLDS) section outlined how the Post Primary Online Database (PPOD) would impact on the new Junior Cycle.

Sub-Group: Quality Assurance and Support for Teacher Assessment

This group was informed by the NCCA of its work on School-Focused Moderation for the JCSA and also by the submissions from the management bodies and the NAPD, Educate Together and parents that included proposals on external support for moderation. The sub-group engaged in discussions on the proposals put forward. There was also detailed discussion on timing issues relating to school based assessment and moderation.

Assessment and moderation - the Scottish experience

Norman Emerson, Education Scotland made a presentation on Assessment and Qualifications in Scotland to the sub-group. This allowed the partners an opportunity to tease out the issues in a system which is ahead of the Irish system in relation to implementation of its reform. The opportunity for discussion in relation to an international example was welcomed by all stakeholders, notwithstanding the reservations of teacher unions in relation to assessment.

Sub-Group: Continuing Professional Development

This group considered implementation and planning issues related to CPD. Set out below is information on implementation to date and planned as discussed in detail with the sub-group.

Introduction

Since its inception in July 2013, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) has progressed in a number of significant directions, so as to provide teachers and schools with timely relevant support for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework. Significant developments include:

- Design and delivery of CPD Programme for teachers and school leaders
- Development of materials and resources for teachers and schools
- Planning for the next implementation phases of CPD for Junior Cycle.

Design and Delivery of CPD

Since September 2013 the JCT service has designed and delivered a programme of CPD for teachers and school leaders as listed below.

English Day One: Focus on Junior Cycle Framework, Teaching new Specification, Subject Planning

English Elective: Series of workshops on teaching drama and film in conjunction with the Arts Council

Leadership Workshop 1: Rationale and overview of new Junior Cycle Framework, Change Management

Leadership Workshop 2: Supporting the new English specification, Key Skills, Ongoing Assessment and Curriculum Planning.

The Programme experienced a certain degree of interruption prior to Christmas due to industrial action. This had a direct impact on the numbers attending seminars for teachers and school leaders at this time. JCT took steps in second term to ensure that all teachers and school leaders were offered an opportunity to avail of seminars they were unable to attend before Christmas.

In total, attendance at these workshops and seminars to date include:

English: 4814 teachers of English (90%)

English Electives: 172 teachers

School Leadership: 1231 school leaders (approx. 70%)

In addition to attendance at workshops telephone and email support has been provided consistently throughout the school year to school leaders and to teachers of English.

Feedback:

Feedback has been recorded and collated for all JCT activities. Among the main points arising are:

English	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong appreciation of methodologies and strategies presented.• Strong appreciation of facilitators• Wholesome praise of elective seminars• Desire for more information on assessment
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Warm welcome to content and methodologies of Junior Cycle• Strong appreciation of materials and facilitation• Desire for more information on timetabling and assessment

Development of materials and resources

As CPD Programmes have rolled out JCT has accompanied these with a suite of materials and resources for the benefit of participants and others. These are hosted on the JCT tab on www.juniorecycle.ie and include:

- 5 minute film on Junior Cycle Framework
- Video footage from schools and centres highlighting good practice in relation to various aspects of Junior Cycle
- Links to resources and materials that are of benefit to teachers and schools
- Full video presentation of initial workshop for school leaders. This is presented in short clips.
- Resources for whole-school discussion around, and analysis of Junior Cycle provision

In addition to these JCT has progressed significant suites of resources for CPD in the areas of:

- Short Courses
- Level 2 Learning Programmes
- Whole-School CPD

Plans for Next School Year

Plans are currently being finalised for JCT's roll out of a CPD Programme for the school year 2014-2015

These include:

Whole School CPD	Working with schools to facilitate one day's support for all schools requesting this service
School Leadership	Provision of two national workshops and two elective workshops for school leaders. First elective workshop will focus on Planning the Curriculum Programme and Timetabling.
English	CPD Day 2 – Focus on Assessment Elective workshops for Teachers of English
Science	CPD Day 1 for all teachers of Science Elective workshops for Teachers of Science [Registration currently at 819 teachers from 199 schools]
Short Courses	Workshops for teachers wishing to lead/engage in Short Courses
Level 2 Learning Programme	Workshop for teachers wishing to lead/engage in Level 2 Learning Programmes
Online Materials	Ongoing development of website and electronic resources to support implementation of Junior Cycle Framework. Available at www.juniorcycle.ie

JCT has forged relationships with a wide range of stakeholders including management bodies, teachers associations and other professional groups. Since January, collaboration has been formalised with the establishment of the CPD sub-group of the national working group. JCT has found this forum a useful platform for briefing all partners on progress and plans and for receiving feedback on same, as well as for providing clarification on partners' queries. Views and concerns raised by partners will be considered by JCT with a view to resolution if possible, for example in relation to CPD content and focus, ensuring quality in the calibre of personnel delivering CPD, or regarding logistical difficulties in releasing multiple teachers from schools simultaneously to name but some issues.

Current Recruitment

JCT is currently recruiting additional seconded staff for next school year including:

- Deputy Director (Assessment)
- Science Team Leader
- Science Advisors
- English Advisors
- Regional Team Leaders (Whole School)
- Team Leader (Level 2 Learning Programmes)
- Team Leader (Short Courses)

JCT is also about to recruit additional associates to support its CPD programme.

Parents

There has been continued engagement with parent representatives in relation to Junior Cycle.

Just in the last few weeks officials have met with representatives of both the National Parents Councils – Primary and Post- Primary to discuss the needs of parents. It has been agreed that both National Parent Councils for Primary and Post-Primary will, in partnership with the NCCA, organise a series of meetings around the country between now and the end of the school year to explain the new approach to learning and assessment.

Summary

Progress in CPD has been steady and continues to engage our teachers and school leaders. Schools and teachers continue to seek this professional development opportunity.

Progress in relation to the provision of resources and external supports for student assessment by teachers has been slow due, in particular, to difficulties arising from the concerns of teacher unions.

Future

The Department is very open to working with the partners to ensure that the implementation of Junior Cycle reform happens in a comprehensive manner that is acceptable to all. This will require continued dialogue that is constructive and includes all partners, including Teacher Unions.

While some progress has been achieved since the first meeting of the Working Group in January, and many constructive proposals have been made by some of the education partners, there is clearly further work to be done to achieve all necessary elements of the reform. We believe that continued engagement with all of the partners together with an openness to change on the part of all parties will be needed to achieve this outcome.