



Information on The Framework for Junior Cycle

Spring 2013



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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The Framework for Junior Cycle

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (The Framework)* was published in October 2012. It is based on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's advice to the Department as set out in *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle* (November 2011) and on research into education for our young people aged 12 to 15 / 16 years. The *Framework* document can be downloaded from www.education.ie and www.ncca.ie.

Why must we change Junior Cycle?

We need to change the educational experience of students at junior cycle because the current arrangements don't allow teachers to develop their students' skills and abilities in the ways we would want but more importantly in a way that reflects the interests and needs of our students.

Despite the best efforts of teachers, we know that a number of aspects of the system discourage the delivery of a broad, balanced and relevant learning experience that we want our students to enjoy.

- We have concerns about the literacy and numeracy standards achieved by students. *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 – 2020* (2011) (*The Strategy*) sets out the Minister's *Strategy* for literacy and numeracy and the key tenets of the *Strategy* are integrated within and complement the *Framework*. A significant number of first year students don't make progress in English and mathematics, for example.
- Research by the ESRI tells us that many second-year students become disengaged from the learning process.
- We know that the current examination arrangements can dominate the experience of students, especially in third year, and narrow their learning experiences.
- Current assessment practice at the end of Junior Cycle in Ireland is out of line with best practice in many countries which have high-performing educational systems. There is increasing international evidence to show that the learning experience is narrowed if an assessment system is restricted to assessing students through external examinations and testing, because both teachers and students focus on learning what is necessary to do well in final examinations, rather than on pursuing an educational programme that is designed to meet students' interests and needs.
- Our State examination at the end of third year has its origins in a time when many students used it as a school leaving qualification, yet now the vast

majority of students completing Junior Cycle go on to Senior Cycle or to other forms of education and training

- Giving teachers who are professionals in this area and their schools more control over and involvement in assessment ties in with efforts to encourage schools to engage in self-evaluation and reflection. The *Framework* and the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines* (November 2012) are designed to empower schools to provide them with flexibility rather than restrict them as they develop a junior cycle programme that reflects the educational and personal needs of their students. Implementing the *Framework* and *School Self Evaluation* will link in directly to whole school evaluation requirements.

What are the principles underpinning the change?

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* is underpinned by eight principles. These principles will inform planning for the development and implementation of the Junior Cycle programme in our schools.

PRINCIPLES FOR JUNIOR CYCLE EDUCATION

Quality All students experience a high quality education, characterised by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.	Wellbeing The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective well being of school, community and society.
Creativity and innovation Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.	Choice and flexibility The school's Junior Cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet the needs of students.
Engagement and participation The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.	Inclusive education The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.
Continuity and development Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enable students to build on their learning to date, recognise their progress in learning and support their future learning	Learning to learn High quality curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning support students in developing greater independence in learning and in meeting the challenges of life beyond school, of further education, and of working life.

What should students learn?

The learning at the core of junior cycle is described in the 24 statements of learning which are set out below. The statements describe what students should know,

understand, value and be able to do at the end of junior cycle. They should also acquire key skills through their learning. The statements and skills complement the principles.

STATEMENTS OF LEARNING

The student:

1. communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1¹
2. listens, speaks, reads and writes in L2 and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to her or his ability
3. creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts
4. creates and presents artistic works and appreciates the process and skills involved
5. has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making
6. appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives
7. values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts
8. values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change
9. understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him
10. has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably
11. takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others
12. is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active
13. understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices
14. makes informed financial decisions and develops good consumer skills
15. recognises the potential uses of mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning
16. describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships
17. devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills
18. observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions
19. values the role and contribution of science and technology to society, and their personal, social and global importance
20. uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge
21. applies practical skills as she/he develop models and products using a variety of materials and technologies
22. takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills
23. brings an idea from conception to realisation
24. uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner

¹ L1 is the language medium of the school i.e., English in English-medium schools and Irish in Irish-medium schools. L2 is the second language of the school i.e., Irish in English-medium schools and English in Irish-medium schools.

KEY SKILLS

The Framework makes clear that throughout the Junior Cycle, students will acquire a range of key skills. These are:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Managing myself
- Staying well
- Communicating
- Being creative
- Working with others
- Managing information and thinking

Implementation of the *Framework* and, in particular, the acquisition of the identified skills will complement the implementation of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*.

Planning a Junior Cycle Programme in a school

The principles, statements of learning and key skills provide an important guide not only for schools as they design their junior cycle programme but also inform students and parents in relation to what they should expect from junior cycle. They also provide the catalyst around which schools, parents and students can discuss the kind of programme that will best serve the needs of the students.

Does this mean that traditional subjects will disappear?

No. Students will continue to study discrete subjects and teachers will continue to teach in their specialist areas.

In addition, schools will be able to offer a range of short courses (roughly equivalent to half a subject) and there will be special courses (priority learning units) available for students with mild and moderate learning needs.

A school will have the flexibility to offer a mixture of subjects, short courses and priority learning units (PLUs). Individual students will be able to select from the range of subjects, short courses or priority learning units that are offered by their school. This flexibility will enable schools to offer the best learning opportunities to their students.

What subjects will be available?

Twenty one subjects will be available. Almost all syllabuses (to be known as “specifications” in the future) will be designed for a minimum of 200 hours of student engagement over three years. The exceptions will be English, Irish and mathematics which will be designed for a minimum of 240 hours of engagement.

The subjects are:

Art, Craft and Design	Business Studies	Classics (replacing Latin, Greek and Classical Studies)
English	French	Geography
German	History	Home Economics
Irish	Italian	Jewish Studies
Materials Technology/Wood	Mathematics	Metalwork
Music	Religious Education	Science
Spanish	Technical Graphics	Technology

Is there a schedule for the subject changes required?

The revised specifications for subjects for junior cycle will be introduced on a phased basis. The phasing allows time for the development of specifications and the provision of necessary professional development for teachers. A summary of the schedule for the phased implementation for subjects is set out below.

Phase 1 Introduced to 1 st years in school year 2014-15 First certification in autumn 2017	Phase 2 Introduced to 1 st years in school year 2015-16 First certification in autumn 2018
English	Irish Science Business Studies
Phase 3 Introduced to 1 st years in school year 2016-2017 First certification in autumn 2019	Phase 4 Introduced to 1 st years in school year 2017-2018 First certification in autumn 2020
Art, Craft, Design Modern Languages Home Economics Music Geography	Mathematics Technology subjects Religious Education Jewish Studies Classics History

What about short courses and priority learning units?

SHORT COURSES

Short courses are being developed by the NCCA. They are designed for 100 hours of student engagement over three years. Short courses in SPHE and CSPE (formerly for 60 – 70 hours) and PE are being developed and these will build on the existing Junior Cycle syllabuses. Other short courses are being developed in Digital Media Literacy, Artistic Performance, Chinese, Programming/Coding. They will be available for schools to offer to their students from 2014, if they so wish.

Schools, along with other organisations, will have the freedom to develop their own short courses in accordance a template set out by the NCCA.

PRIORITY LEARNING UNITS (PLUs)

The PLUs will form part of a Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP). This programme will target the learning and accreditation needs of the specific students with general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories where such needs prevent students from accessing some or all of the subjects and short courses on offer and require focused priority learning outcomes.

The PLUs focus on developing the social, pre-vocational and life skills of the students involved. There are five PLUs:

Communicating and literacy		Numeracy
Personal Care	Living in a community	Preparing for work

The NCCA is also preparing a short course on “Caring for Animals: A personal Project” which is intended to be aligned to Level 2 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

So what subjects and short courses will students study?

Students will be able to choose subjects and short courses from those provided by their schools for their junior cycle. Most students will study from eight to ten full subjects or their equivalent for certification. A maximum of four short courses (each one equivalent to half a subject) can be included. Such a limit is set so as not to overload the students but to provide them with the opportunity to engage in quality learning experiences. This means that most students will take one or other of the following combinations for certification:

- Eight subjects *or* 7 subjects + 2 short courses *or* 6 subjects + 4 short courses
- Nine subjects *or* 8 subjects + 2 short courses *or* 7 subjects + 4 short courses
- Ten subjects *or* 9 subjects + 2 short courses *or* 8 subjects + 4 short courses

The student's achievements will be certified on the School Certificate of Learning, which will be part of the school's Junior Cycle Achievement Profile. It will be presented to each student in the autumn after they complete their junior cycle.

Are there core subjects?

English, Mathematics and Irish will feature in the junior cycle programmes for all students in recognition of the key role English and Mathematics play in supporting literacy and numeracy and the particular status of Irish in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools.

In planning for a school programme consideration will need to be given to the Framework's Principles, statements of learning and key skills, to the needs of the students and to the team of teachers available to the school.

What about CSPE, SPHE and PE?

Short Courses, designed by the NCCA, will be available to schools from September 2014 in CSPE, SPHE and PE. Schools may choose to incorporate these short courses into their junior cycle programme either for certification purposes or not for certification. They may choose not to opt for the new courses and may choose to continue to use existing courses or other approaches to meet the Framework's principles and Statements of Learning relevant to these areas. Schools may determine how best to meet the range of Statements of Learning, Key Skills and Principles that relate to the areas currently covered in SPHE, CSPE and PE.

Note that from 2017, papers in CSPE will no longer be set or examined by the SEC.

But there are other very important areas of learning, what will happen to them?

As well as the subjects, short courses and PLUs for certification, students will be able to participate in other learning activities as part of a broad and balanced educational programme prioritised by their school. These non certification activities could include traditional subjects but also learning activities such as guidance which are already prioritised parts of the curriculum offered in most schools and offer valuable opportunities for learning, personal and skills development, along with team work.

For example, many schools teach religious education as a non-examination subject, some schools offer opportunities to learn traditional or classical musical instruments, to take part in artistic performance (e.g. staging a drama or show), and many schools also engage their students in social action programmes. All of these learning activities will continue. The added bonus will be that students' achievements in these areas will be documented on the school's Junior Cycle Achievement Profile.

Will teaching and learning practices change?

By placing the students at the centre of their junior cycle programme schools will be able to improve their students' learning experiences and outcomes. Schools, aided by their school self-evaluation programme, will provide a quality, inclusive and relevant education for all their students, including those students with special educational needs.

The key change ensuing from the implementation of the *Framework* will be the new intertwined relationship between teaching, learning, assessment and outcomes. To this end, on-going assessment for and of learning accompanied by on-going reporting to students must become a key support for the teaching and learning experience across the three years of junior cycle. It will also feed into the teaching and learning requirements of school self-evaluation where the links between learner outcomes and the teaching and learning processes are enablers of the evaluation of a quality experience. (See section 3.3. of School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary schools)

What will assessment look like in the new Junior Cycle?

Assessment in schools is about gathering, interpreting and using information to understand *how* students are learning and *what* they are learning.

Until now, assessment at junior cycle has been associated almost totally with the State Junior Certificate examination. This over-emphasis on a single, written examination at the end of third year has had a detrimental effect on the quality of many students' learning experiences. It has frustrated teachers' efforts to provide a challenging programme that develops students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in a balanced and enjoyable way. The reality for many students is that their third year is dominated by the examination.

Recent advances in our knowledge of how learning takes place and how learners make their way through classroom activities have led to new understandings of the importance of assessment in the promotion of learning. These new perspectives are having an impact across the curriculum as the focus on assessment activity begins to move from an emphasis on the *assessment of learning* to include *assessment for learning* – or put simply - on enabling students and teachers to improve the quality of students' individual learning experiences and outcomes.

One of the key aims in reforming the Junior Cycle is to achieve a better balance between *Assessment for Learning* and *Assessment of Learning*.

How will *Assessment for Learning* be incorporated within the Junior Cycle?

Teachers already use a variety of assessment approaches to gather information about their students' learning. Asking questions, giving written tests at the end

of units of study, setting and correcting homework assignments, and setting and marking end-of-year examinations are all forms of assessment with which teachers are familiar. Teachers will continue to use these approaches in the new Junior Cycle. In addition, all students will complete standardised tests in English reading and mathematics (from 2014) and science (from 2016) during the second half of second year. Students in Irish-medium schools will also complete standardised tests in Irish reading (from 2014) at this time.

The new junior cycle will place a much greater emphasis on how assessment data can be used to inform students of their progress and to help them to improve their learning. This *Assessment for Learning* approach will involve:

- sharing learning goals with students
- helping students to recognise the standards they are aiming for
- students in assessing their own learning
- providing feedback, which helps students to recognise what they must do to close any gaps in their knowledge or understanding
- communicating confidence that every student can improve
- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment

The revised specifications for junior cycle will facilitate much greater use of this *Assessment for Learning* approach. The specifications will contain clear statements of the knowledge and skills that students will develop as they study each subject. In addition, the specifications will be accompanied by examples of students' work showing what students can be expected to be able to do when they have mastered the learning outcomes in the specification. The clear statements in the specification and the examples of students' work will help to guide teachers as they assess the work of their own students.

The availability of assessment information from standardised tests of reading, mathematics and science towards the end of second year will complement the other assessment data that teachers have. Standardised tests in reading and mathematics are already in place in primary schools and this information now transfers automatically from the student's primary school to the second-level school. The inclusion of science in second year tests will provide additional evidence based data. This continuity of assessment data will also help teachers to monitor and report on each student's progress and identify their next steps.

How will *Assessment of Learning* take place at the end of Junior Cycle?

The current Junior Certificate examination will be phased out and replaced by a school-based approach to assessment over the next 8 years. Subjects will be assessed using a combination of school work components and a final assessment.

SCHOOL WORK COMPONENTS

The school work component of subjects for certification will:

- generally be worth 40% of the overall marks
- be generated in line with the specification for the subject
- involve the completion of specific tasks undertaken by students during second and third year
- relate directly to the aims and learning outcomes of the subject involved and therefore may differ from subject to subject
- be marked by teachers in the school using a marking guide included in the specification for the subject

The kinds of school work likely to be involved include assignments, projects, case studies, performances, spoken word/oral work, oral assessments (in languages, for example) practical activities, written pieces and tests/tasks of different kinds.

FINAL ASSESSMENT FOR SUBJECTS

The final assessment of subjects for certification at the end of third year will

- generally be worth 60% of the overall marks
- comprise a single paper or assignment (depending on the subject) provided by the SEC initially
- be available at more than one level in English, Irish and Mathematics only
- last no more than two hours
- be marked by teachers in the school using marking schemes provided by the SEC, except for English, Irish and Mathematics that will, in the initial years, continue to be marked by the SEC.

Short Courses and PLUs will be assessed using only school work components.

How will schools report about the achievements of students?

Schools will report on the learning achieved by students through a new **Junior Cycle Student Achievement Profile**.

The profile will include

- A **School Certificate of Learning** which will state the grades achieved by the student in the subjects and short courses that they complete. There will be five grade points – Not achieved (0 – 39%), Achieved (40 – 54%), Achieved with Merit (55 – 74%), Achieved with Higher Merit (75 – 89%) and Achieved with Distinction (90 – 100%). Students will receive grades in between eight and ten subjects (or equivalent combinations of subjects and short courses). The grades will be awarded by the school using the combined grades from the school work components and the final assessment components (including

the marks provided by the SEC for the final assessment components in Irish, English and Mathematics).

The first School Certificate of Learning will be issued in autumn 2017.

- Reporting on the other learning experiences and achievements of the student
- The results of standardised tests in reading, mathematics and science completed by the student before the end of second year.

How will quality and standards be assured?

To support and quality assure assessment across the three years of junior cycle:

- Each subject specification will contain clear learning outcomes, expectations for learners, and examples of student work showing the standards expected. Students and parents will have access to this material
- Teachers will receive comprehensive professional development in educational assessment, including processes of moderation, and in providing feedback to students
- Principals and deputy principals in their leadership role will receive comprehensive professional development in curriculum leadership, educational assessment including moderation and change management
- The new reporting system will encourage the generation and reporting of evidence of learning across the subjects, short courses and other learning experiences offered by a school
- The new standardised tests for all schools and students in English reading, Mathematics and Science and in Irish reading for Irish-medium schools will give teachers information about how well students are achieving in these areas relative to the rest of the age cohort. Results of these tests will be reported to parents and will be submitted to the DES
- The NCCA assessment and moderation toolkit will provide teachers with assessment materials for classroom use, and will support the design of class and school assessment. It will also offer guidelines on in-school moderation, and show how professional dialogue between teachers in a school (and, where a teacher is the only teacher of a subject, between schools) can create a shared and common understanding of the standards of work expected
- The results awarded on every school certificate will be sent to the DES. The DES will monitor the national and school patterns along with the results in the

standardised testing of reading, Mathematics and Science. This monitoring will provide further quality assurance and identify any local or national anomalies. A report on overall trends will be published regularly

- The DES will provide each school with a Data Profile based on the information provided. This Data Profile will highlight their patterns of achievement relative to schools with a similar school context. The profiles will be a valuable source of information for schools as they work through their school self evaluation process. These data will be a valuable source of information for schools' self-evaluation processes.

In addition, Ireland will continue to participate in PISA and there will be a new sample National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics carried out on a regular basis as part of the implementation of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*.

What is the role of the Board of Management, the Principal and Senior Management team in these changes?

The professionalism of Irish school leadership will require that management along with teachers interact with parents and students to create a programme for junior cycle that best reflects the needs of students. The students have to be placed at the core of what is done. It is high quality teaching and learning experiences that will engage our students and improve their enjoyment and learning outcomes.

As leaders of teaching and learning, your support and commitment to the successful implementation of the *Framework* is central to its success. There are criteria within the *Framework* that must be followed but there is flexibility built in so that management and staff can, in collaboration with their students and parents, determine the most appropriate programme of subjects, short courses, PLUs (where appropriate) and other learning experiences. All of us have to have high expectations and aspirations for our students so that they can achieve to their full potential.

Do students have a say in the design of a school's programme?

The emphasis throughout the *Framework* is that "students will be at the core of the junior cycle programmes provided by schools". The *Framework* will allow for flexibility in considering what combination of subjects, short courses, PLU and other learning experiences can be provided within their three year programme. Such programmes should be devised in collaboration with students formally through their Student Council. The new emphasis on assessment for learning will provide continuous opportunities for teachers to understand what their students enjoy, what aspects can lead to disengagement, and where students, for example, need to be motivated. Through dialogue between management, teachers, parents

and students an informed opinion can be made of a programme that would most appropriately suit the students' interests. Such an approach will assist schools in their Self-Evaluation processes as they strive to bring about school improvements.

Do parents have an opportunity to provide their opinions?

Parents should also have an opportunity to input into the junior cycle programme as it is being designed and reviewed. Parents should also have a say into how their school reports to them on their children's progress in learning. Schools should ensure that parents are an integral partner in the School Self-Evaluation process.

But how can principals and teachers be prepared to implement the changes required?

The implementation of the *Framework* is not a cost saving exercise. It is about providing a better learning experience for our students. Change to be successful requires support. Materials for the delivery of the new programme will be prepared by the NCCA and SEC. In addition, resources will be ring-fenced to provide principals, deputy principals and teachers with comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD). A new dedicated junior cycle CPD team is being established. The team will concentrate on the implementation of the *Framework* and there will be special emphasis on assessment. CPD should commence in autumn 2013.

Is there somewhere I can go to get more information on junior cycle?

A dedicated website for the new junior cycle will be established. In addition, the NCCA website www.ncca.ie will provide data on the curriculum as it is being developed as will the SEC website at www.examinations.ie which will concentrate on assessment aspects. Links to other appropriate sites will be available from www.education.ie

How do the changes at junior cycle link with other initiatives?

All of the major reforms that are being introduced into schools at present have been designed as part of an integrated package and are intend to complement each other. They are not separate policies, requiring separate actions. Instead, the actions to improve teaching and learning need to be seen as complementing and supporting one another.

- One of the key actions in the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* is to reform the junior cycle curriculum. The *Strategy* identified the need for a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy and it prioritised the reform of English and Irish as well as the continued roll-out of Project Maths. That's why English (and Irish for Irish medium schools) are being prioritised in the revision of the subjects within ***A Framework for Junior Cycle***. In addition, specifications

for all other subjects will show how a greater emphasis will be placed on the teaching and consolidation of literacy and numeracy skills across all aspects of the junior cycle curriculum.

- The introduction of standardised tests for literacy and numeracy during second-year in second-level schools is an integral part of both the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* and *A Framework for Junior Cycle*. It also builds on the introduction of these tests at primary level and the requirement on primary schools to pass on assessment information about students to second-level schools
- The introduction of *School Self-Evaluation* was also signalled in the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* and will be an essential support for the implementation of *A Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The *Guidelines for School Self-Evaluation* (2012) ask schools to focus on how they can improve teaching and learning, initially in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Implementing the revised specifications and assessment arrangements for junior cycle will mean that teachers will have to look at their current practice in relation to the desired student outcomes. The evidence needed about students' progress will come from the different forms of assessment used in the junior cycle including standardised tests in reading, maths and science. Schools will have to identify what is good within their current practice and what needs to be improved or changed. That's exactly what school self-evaluation is all about. Indeed, the School Improvement Plan required as part of School Self-Evaluation will be one and the same with the school's literacy and numeracy plan and its plan for the roll-out of Junior Cycle reforms.