

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A FRAMEWORK FOR JUNIOR CYCLE

BRIEFING NOTE

4 OCTOBER 2012

HIGHLIGHTS

- Phased replacement of the Junior Certificate examination with a new school-based approach to assessment starting with English for students entering post-primary education in 2014
- Most students will study 8 subjects, with a maximum of 10 subjects to be studied by any student for certification. Students can substitute 2 short courses for one full subject, allowing options such as computer coding, or Chinese, to be studied in short courses. (Students will present a maximum of 4 short courses for certification.)
- Some short courses will be available to all schools, but schools will also be encouraged to develop short courses of their own which are particularly relevant to students and their local communities. Subjects and short courses will relate to Level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ)
- Priority learning units (PLU's) will provide for the learning and accreditation needs of students with learning disabilities. These will relate to Level 2 on the NFQ
- The school's junior cycle programme will also include other learning experiences including guidance, pastoral care, elements of religious education and other learning initiatives, pursuits and activities
- Towards the end of second year, all students will sit standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics (from 2014) and Science (from 2016), as well as Irish in Irish-medium schools (from 2014). This underpins the new priority being awarded to literacy, numeracy and scientific literacy
- At the end of junior cycle, assessment will include a school-based component and a final assessment component in all the subjects chosen by the student
- Generally 40% of the marks for each subject will generally be awarded for school based components, such as oral exams in language studies, or work completed during second and third years, which could be presented in e-portfolios or in other forms as decided by the school
- For English, Irish and Mathematics, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) will retain responsibility for setting and marking the final assessments which account for the remaining 60%. This will be the case until the new standardised testing system has been established.
- For all other subjects, the SEC will provide final assessment papers to schools, but these examinations will be supervised and corrected by the teachers during the normal school year. Generally, this final assessment will be worth 60%
- For all short courses and priority learning units, there will be school-based assessment for certification
- A junior cycle achievement profile which will include a new school certificate will issue to all students, in the autumn after the end of junior cycle. This profile will detail the results of the standardised tests from second year, the grades awarded at the end of junior cycle, as well as information on areas such as attendance, teamwork and

behaviour. This will present parents with a much more rounded view of how their children are performing and will provide opportunity for student comment

- Significant In-service will be provided by the PDST in relation to subject specific curricular changes. and assessment
 - The NCCA will provide supports to schools in the form of the assessment and moderation tool-kit, syllabus specifications and exemplars of the standards expected
 - The new assessment system will provide more detailed information to both students and parents in relation to learning progress, areas of strengths and weaknesses
 - A range of initiatives and mechanisms to underpin the quality of the junior cycle experience is built into these new arrangements
 - A consultative group has been formed to advise on some aspects of the implementation of reform, consisting of relevant stake holders
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Minister for Education and Skills published *A Framework for Junior Cycle* on 4 October 2012. This document contains the Minister's plan to reform the junior cycle in post-primary schools.

A Framework for Junior Cycle builds upon proposals developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and published in November 2011 under the title, *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle- Innovation and Identity*. The Minister's plan adopts many of the curricular changes proposed by the NCCA but it also contains more radical changes to how students' progress and learning are assessed at junior cycle.

2. WHY IS CHANGE NECESSARY?

The NCCA document, *Towards a Framework* highlighted the need for fundamental changes in the approach to curriculum and assessment if the learning experiences of students at junior cycle are to be improved. The weaknesses in the current model highlighted by the NCCA included:

- A significant number of first-year students do not make progress, particularly in English and Mathematics
- A significant number of students in second year become disengaged from the learning process and find it almost impossible to re-connect to learning subsequently
- Choices made as early as first year of Junior Cycle (for example to take Ordinary level rather than Higher Level) are almost impossible to reverse and may limit the options open to young people for the Leaving Certificate and after leaving school. This is a particularly important issue for students in lower stream classes and those in schools serving areas of disadvantage
- In third year, the Junior Certificate examination dominates the experiences of students; the focus of learning narrows, the emphasis is on rote learning and for many students, the examination does not lead to positive learning experiences and outcomes.

It is also the case that assessment practice at the end of junior cycle (or lower secondary education) in Ireland is out of line with best practice in many countries with high-performing educational systems.

- In Ireland, we have a State examination which has all the arrangements and attributes of a high-stakes examination; however, as long ago as 1975, an official report commented that "for a large and increasing number of candidates, the [State Examination at the end of Junior Cycle] is not necessary or useful as a qualification for jobs." [ICE Report, 1975] The examination referred to was the Intermediate Certificate which was replaced by the Junior Certificate examination but the relevance of the quotation remains. The vast majority of students completing junior cycle go on to study at senior cycle or in other forms of education and training.
- 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' needs.

- Increasingly, educationalists are noting the high educational standards that are being achieved in many countries where, at the end of lower secondary education, assessment is school-based and in the hands of well-supported teachers. Finland, New Zealand and Queensland in Australia are just some of these countries or territories.

3. PRINCIPLES

- The Junior Cycle Framework is underpinned by eight principles. These inform the planning for the development and implementation of junior cycle programmes in schools.

PRINCIPLES FOR JUNIOR CYCLE EDUCATION

<p>Quality All students experience a high quality education, characterised by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Creativity and innovation Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Engagement and participation The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.</p>	<p>Inclusive education The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.</p>
<p>Continuity and development Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enables students to build on their learning to date, recognises their progress in learning and supports their future learning</p>	<p>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.</p>

4. WHAT SHOULD A STUDENT LEARN?

4.1 Twenty-four statements of learning

- The learning at the core of the junior cycle programme is described in 24 statements of learning.
- These statements describe what students should know, understand, value and be able to do at the end of junior cycle.
- The statements provide the basis for schools to plan for, design and evaluate their own junior cycle programme. The statements will help to ensure that schools provide a broad and balanced programme for junior cycle students.
- The statements provide a reference point for schools reporting to students and parents on the progress and achievements of students.

4.2 Key skills

- The Framework makes clear that throughout the junior cycle, students will acquire a range of key skills, including literacy, numeracy and other skills. These skills are:
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Managing myself
 - Staying well
 - Communicating
 - Being creative
 - Working with others
 - Managing information and thinking.
- The specifications for new syllabuses for subjects and courses will ensure that these skills are appropriately incorporated into the learning for each subject or course, so that all teachers will be teachers of these skills.

4.3 Range of subjects and courses

- During their junior cycle, students will follow a programme which will be made up from a combination of subjects, short courses and for some students with special educational needs, Priority Learning Units (PLUs) plus other educational experiences such as guidance, pastoral care and other activities
- English, Mathematics and Irish will feature in the junior cycle programmes for all students in recognition of the key role played by English and Mathematics in supporting literacy and numeracy and the particular status of Irish in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools
- To ensure that the programme provided to students is not overloaded and that students can engage in quality learning experiences, there will be a limit to the number of subjects and short courses that will be included for certification purposes.
- Most students will include from eight to ten full subjects or their equivalent. A maximum of four short courses (each one equivalent to half a subject) can be

included. This means that most students will take one or other of the following combinations:

- 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

4.4 Subjects

- Subjects will continue to play an important role in the Framework for Junior Cycle
- A total of 21 subjects will be available
 - Art, Craft and Design
 - Business studies
 - Classics (replacing Latin, Greek and Classical Studies)
 - English
 - Modern Language subjects (French; German; Italian; Spanish)
 - Geography
 - History
 - Home Economics
 - Irish
 - Jewish Studies
 - Mathematics
 - Music
 - Religious Education
 - Science
 - Technology Subjects (Materials Technology/Wood; Metalwork; Technical Graphics; Technology)
- The new curriculum specifications for each subject will be outcomes based and will incorporate examples of students' learning to illustrate to teachers and parents what standards of learning are to be expected
- The courses in Irish, English and Mathematics will be designed for at least 240 hours of engagement across the three years. In line with current Department policy, schools will be expected to provide a class per day in the main language of the school (English or Irish) and Mathematics
- The courses in other subjects will be designed for 200 hours of learner engagement over three years.

4.5 Short courses

- These courses are designed for 100 hours of student engagement over three years
- Short courses will be developed by the NCCA in SPHE and CSPE building on existing junior cycle syllabuses. Other short courses will be developed by the NCCA including PE, Digital Media Literacy, Artistic Performance, Chinese and Computer Programming/Coding

- Schools will have the freedom to develop their own short courses in accordance with specifications designed by the NCCA
- Both subjects and courses are related to Level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) as is the case for the Junior Certificate currently.

4.6 Priority Learning Units

- The PLUs will form part of the 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.
- It should be noted that most students with general learning disabilities in the mild category will be able to continue to access most, if not all, subjects and short courses (Level 3) through differentiated teaching, learning and assessment.
- 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

4.7 Specifications for subjects, short courses and PLUs

- The specifications for subjects, PLUs and some short courses will be developed by the NCCA and published online.
- These online curriculum specifications will include the learning outcomes, expectations for learners and examples of student work in a subject along with a bank of assessment items for school and classroom use.
- This online facility will also include customised links that will give parents and students the opportunity to access these new specifications.
- The specifications will be a vital planning tool for teachers of subjects and short courses.

While some specifications may have distinct characteristics, arising from the area of learning involved, all junior cycle specifications, for subjects and short courses, will have a number of features in common. They will:

- be outcomes based
- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression
- set out clear expectations for learners

- provide examples of those expectations
- include a focus on literacy and numeracy and on the other key skills
- be clear, consistent and as accessible as possible.

4.8 Other educational experiences

The school's junior cycle programme can include all three curriculum components – subjects, short courses and PLUs. It can also include other learning experiences such as guidance, aspects of pastoral care, religious education which may be prioritised within their junior cycle programme.

5. ASSESSMENT

5.1 What do we want to achieve?

- The most significant change in introducing the *Framework for Junior Cycle* is in the area of assessment.
- **The current Junior Certificate examination will be phased out and replaced by a school-based approach to assessment.**
- School-based assessment emphasises both the process and the product of learning in school through the combination of students' work and final assessment.
- This approach will ensure that assessment takes place as close as possible to the point of learning. Final assessment at the end of a period of study has a role to play, but it will be just one element of a broader school-based approach to assessment.

The new approach to assessment will:

- place a new emphasis on the assessment that happens in classrooms and schools
- use a wide variety of methods, tasks and strategies so that high-quality feedback can be provided to students across the three years of junior cycle. (Such feedback will be based on sources of evidence such as questioning, tests, project work, presentations, experiments and other kinds of classroom-based activities)
- allow students to review their own progress and discuss their progress with their teachers and other students with a view to identifying next steps to be taken. (This will help to build students' capacity to manage their own learning and their motivation to stick with a complex task or problem. It will also form the basis of more informed conversations between parents and schools on the learning of their students)
- be aligned to the learning outcomes of each subject, short course and PLU

- help students to demonstrate their learning achievements over time and in a range of learning contexts which the current examination regime cannot capture
- be in line with best international assessment practice in lower secondary education.

5.2 What will the assessment arrangements look like?

The assessment will:

- include **on-going classroom assessment for learning** where feedback will be provided to students
- include **standardised testing in English reading and Mathematics from 2014 and Science for all** students (from 2016) towards the end of second year in all schools. Standardised testing in Irish reading will be completed in Irish-medium schools from 2014
- include a **school work component for all subjects** reflective of students' work over the course of the final two years for the purposes of certification
- include a **final assessment component for all subjects** at the end of the three years of junior cycle initially set by the SEC¹ but administered and marked by schools. In the initial years of implementation, final assessments in English, Irish and Mathematics will be set, administered and marked by the SEC to ease the transition from a central to a school-based system of assessment for schools and the educational system.
- have two levels available for English, Irish and Mathematics and one level for other subjects
- include an **assessment of short courses and PLUs** that is administered and marked by schools
- include **new arrangements for reporting** to parents on their children's progress
- provide assessment results for school certification of students in the autumn after the end of junior cycle that is related to Level 3 or in some cases related to Level 2 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

5.3 The school work component for certification

The **school work component of subjects for certification** will:

- generally be worth 40% of the overall marks for subjects
- be generated in line with the specification for the subject
- be based on work undertaken by students during second and third year

¹ It is intended that schools will develop their own assessment papers once the SEC discontinues provision of same for the final assessment at the end of junior cycle.

- 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, practical activities, written pieces and tests/tasks of different kinds. For example, in languages, oral assessments are likely to be central to the school work component. In the technology subjects, Science, Home Economics and Art Craft Design, for instance, practical tasks and assignments will be an important part of the school work component.

5.3 The final assessment component for certification

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 only in English, Irish and Mathematics only
- last no more than two hours and be conducted in school in May during regular school time (except in the case of English, Irish and Mathematics in the initial years). The final assessment for English, Irish and Mathematics will take place early in June so as to run concurrently with the initial days of the Leaving Certificate. The final assessments for English, Irish and Mathematics will be of two hours duration
- 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 until the standardised tests in reading and Mathematics become established in post-primary education
- The marks for English, Irish and Mathematics will be sent to the school by the SEC and will be combined with the results for school work components to generate a grade in each subject on the School Certificate.

5.4 The reporting system

- The learning achieved by students will be reported by the school in a new **junior cycle student achievement profile**
- The profile will include a **school certificate** which will state the grades achieved by the student in between eight and ten subjects (or equivalent). The grades will be awarded by the school using the grades from the school work components and the final assessment components (including the marks for provided by the SEC for the final assessment components in Irish, English and Mathematics)

- The achievement profile will also contain reporting from the school on the **other learning experiences and achievements** of the student.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 Quality assurance measures

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 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 ensure that there is a shared and common understanding of the standards of work expected

6.2 Additional quality assurance of assessment at end of junior cycle

For assessment towards the end of junior cycle, in addition to the above supports and quality assurance measures:

- The SEC will provide final assessment papers and marking schemes for subjects until the new school-based system of assessment is fully established
- For English, Irish and Mathematics, the SEC will initially mark these papers, and return the marks to the school to be combined with the 40% weighting to the school work component. This arrangement will continue until standardised testing becomes established in junior cycle
- For the school work component, schools will undertake internal moderation in accordance with the guidelines on moderation for Junior Cycle assessment which will be formally confirmed by the principal

- 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 arising from its statistical analysis which will advise the school of patterns in their data relative to national norms of achievement in the school certificate and in standardised tests of English reading, Mathematics and Science (and Irish reading for Irish-medium schools) towards the end of second year. The Data Profile will also provide schools with information on their patterns of achievement relative to schools with a similar school context. These data will help schools to refine their assessment and moderation practice. They will also be a valuable source of information for schools' self-evaluation² processes.

In the event of an unusual pattern of achievement, the Inspectorate of the DES will be advised, and support and evaluation measures will be provided for the school.

These support and evaluation measures can include:

- advice on making better use of assessment data from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- additional professional development in assessment and moderation from PDST
- guidance on organising moderation meetings from PDST
- external support at moderation meetings (from other schools, for example)
- evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment in the school by the Inspectorate

6.3 Further national and international benchmarking of standards

National monitoring of standards will be complemented by continued participation in national and international assessments. These assessments will facilitate national and international comparisons and provide indicative evidence of standards. These assessments will include:

- National assessments in Mathematics and English reading for a scientifically constructed representative sample of junior cycle students on a four year cycle
- Continuing participation in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA).

² School self-evaluation is a process where schools and teachers make judgements about the quality of education in the school based on evidence that they have gathered. This enables them to affirm good practice and make decisions about what they would like to develop or further improve.

7. PHASING-IN OF NEW ARRANGEMENTS

7.1 Subjects

The new subjects for Junior Cycle will be introduced on a phased basis as follows:

SCHEDULE FOR THE PHASED IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBJECTS

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

7.2 Timeframe for the introduction of the junior cycle developments

Features	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/2020
New Framework in schools	Planning		1 st year students	1 st and 2 nd year students			All junior cycle students	
Introduction of subjects			English	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4		
Introduction of short courses			Introduction of NCCA short courses	Short courses included in school programme as required including course designed by schools				
Introduction of other learning experiences not for certification (e.g. guidance, pastoral care or other areas prioritised by schools)	Continue to provide in accordance with school ethos and priorities							
School Reporting System								
Certification	Junior Certificate as usual				School report (Junior Cycle Achievement Profile) issued by school to include School Certificate and report on other learning experiences. School Certificate to include results for subjects and short courses presented for certification including results from SEC for some subjects until SEC involvement ceases			
Other learning experiences	Using existing in-school arrangements							
Support	Professional Development and Programme Support							
	Review/Evaluation							