

JUNIOR CYCLE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP

ADVANCING IMPLEMENTATION

17 January 2014



INTRODUCTION

From the outset the Minister has indicated that the reform of the Junior Cycle would be a careful and considered process, phased in such a way as to allow the partners to engage in meaningful dialogue, and developed on a staged basis so as to ensure that the pace of change did not strip the system's ability to build capacity and deliver meaningful change for students. The Minister has also acknowledged that the detail of how the changes in teaching, learning and assessment were to be implemented required close discussion and intensive development.

Some time has been lost in the second half of 2013 in addressing the areas of concern raised in good faith by the various stakeholders but the establishment of the Junior Cycle National Working Group provides an opportunity for all partners to engage in an urgent and meaningful way on those elements of the Junior Cycle reform programme that they find challenging.

This document:

- Summarises some of the key implementation details that have already been worked out since the launch of the Framework, especially the progress in curriculum development and the details that have been worked out about assessment
- Proposes a road map to deal with remaining areas of concern and a time scale for their resolution
- Proposes that, under the guidance of the Working Group, a number of subgroups be convened to deal with the areas of concern raised with the Department.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK

Since the launch of the Framework, curriculum development has continued at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and more details of the range and timing of the assessments to be incorporated in each subject has been worked out.

An update on curriculum development

- The curriculum (now called "the specifications") for English was completed and published in 2013 for implementation in September 2014
- Background papers about the changes needed in Business Studies, Irish and Science were published in 2013 by the NCCA and a public consultation on these will conclude on 17 January for Irish and Science and on 31 January for Business Studies. Like the consultation for English, these consultations are providing teachers and others the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new curriculums

- A consultation is also underway on the Short Courses and the development of curriculums in Art, Craft and Design; Modern Languages; Home Economics; Music; and Geography will begin in the first half of 2014
- Work is continuing on an Assessment and Moderation Toolkit which will be used by teachers.

New details on assessment

A considerable amount of detail has been worked out regarding the types of assessment that will be used during the junior cycle.

- As planned in the Framework, students will be assessed using a school-based component (comprising 40% of the marks for most subjects) and a final assessment (comprising 60% of the marks)
- Assessment will be an integral part of teaching and learning of subjects in the new junior cycle, so the school-based assessment will happen within the minimum school-hours for each of the subjects
- The school-based component will:
 - Be limited to two school-based components
 - Take place at times that will be fixed nationally
 - Generally take place in the summer term of second year and before Christmas in third year
 - Replace existing house examinations and mock examinations
- The final assessment will:
 - Comprise a single paper of two hours or less
 - For English, Irish and Mathematics in the initial years, the final assessment will
 - Have two levels, Higher and Ordinary
 - Take place in early June concurrent with the Leaving Certificate examinations
 - Be administered and marked by the State Examinations Commission
 - For other subjects, the final assessment will:
 - Take place at times that will be fixed nationally, normally around the second week in May
 - Use assessment papers set by the State Examinations Commission and will be marked by teachers
 - Incorporate school-based moderation
 - Will be supported by the NCCA's Assessment and Moderation toolkit

- The new award to be received by students at the end of the junior cycle programme will be called the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA). It will carry a national logo.

DEALING WITH AREAS OF CONCERN

Concerns expressed to date in relation to Junior Cycle Reform can be summarized under four broad headings:

- The pace of change
- The quantum and focus of teacher professional in-service and the need for a whole school approach to Junior Cycle reform
- School and teacher time, and any duties that may arise in schools as a result of changes to assessment practices
- Finally, concerns which have been voiced in relation to a felt need for some external dimension to assessment and quality assurance

The Working Group provides a forum for further issues, not included above, to be raised and examined.

Steps proposed in relation to the pace of change

In order that these areas of concern can be given adequate time for resolution it is now proposed that the pace of the rollout of reform be substantially amended as shown below.

In English, the first subject to be introduced, minimal curriculum changes are envisaged in first year (2014/15) and formal school-based assessment will not be required until students reach the end of second year, i.e. in summer 2016.

By re-phasing the introduction of other subjects but retaining English as the lead subject, (where the content change and impact on first years in schools is minimal), a process for resolving the areas of concern raised can be put in train to conclude in time for the 2015/16 school year.

Following the first three years of implementation, it will be possible to review the pace of change and adjust further the timetable of implementation if this is found to be necessary.

REVISED TIMETABLE FOR CHANGE

2014/15

- Revised English curriculum will be introduced for students entering first year in 2014
- Short Courses will be introduced only for those schools which are happy to do so & Level 2 Priority Learning Units available for schools that wish to implement them

2015/16

- Revised Science curriculum to be introduced for students entering first year in September 2015 (rather than a group of three subjects as previously planned)
- Schools could opt for short courses but advised strongly to limit to a small number and to introduce gradually

2016/17

- Revised curriculums in Business Studies and Irish introduced for students commencing in September 2016 (and not as originally scheduled for September 2015)
- Standardised testing in English and Mathematics will take place in spring 2017 for second year students (rather than in 2015/16 as originally planned)

2017/18

- Revised curriculums in two (rather than four) further subjects – Art, Craft and Design and Modern Languages in September 2017 (originally scheduled for September 2016)
- Standardised testing in Science and Irish (in Irish medium schools) to be introduced in 2018 for second year students (rather than in 2017 as originally planned)

2018/19

- Revised curriculums in Home Economics, Music, Mathematics and Geography

2019/20

- Revised curriculums in History, Technologies, Jewish Studies, Religious Education and Classics

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and school leaders

It has always been the case that continuing professional development (in-service provision) would reflect the views and requirements of all the partners as Junior Cycle reform progressed.

The continuing professional development that is already planned and underway includes:

- A minimum of 3 days of CPD for each subject and a range of optional elective courses
- 3 days for principals over 3 years and a range of optional elective courses
- A specialised team of skilled teachers has been recruited into the Junior Cycle for Teachers team and they have been delivering courses for principals and English teachers
- Funding for CPD is ring-fenced
- www.juniorcycle.ie provides one stop online shop for information
- In the year before the introduction of each new subject, the CPD courses will focus on curricular changes while in the first and second years of implementation they will focus on assessment, so as to prepare teachers for the introduction of the school-based assessment components and teacher-marked final assessments.

Many of the partners have sought additional CPD and in response the following are proposed:

- One day whole-school in-service per year per school will be made available from within the school year until Junior Cycle is fully introduced. The purpose of this day will change over the course of the project, but in the initial phase can be used by schools to support the embedding of the underlying framework within teaching and learning. This will also ensure that all teachers are fully aware of the purpose and nature of the changes in teaching and learning, and enabled to plan for the transitions that will occur in the school's work
- An additional one-and-a-half days of CPD will be provided to English teachers and extra courses will be available to enable English teachers who may have missed the CPD in autumn 2013 and early 2014 to catch up
- An additional day of CPD time will be provided for all other subject teachers over and beyond the 3 days per teacher per subject previously proposed, bring the total to four days per teacher per subject

- It should also be noted that most teachers teach two subjects in post-primary schools and will therefore be eligible to receive eight CPD days during the course of the implementation of the junior cycle reforms.

Resources for schools

The NCCA has provided advice in relation to the resources associated with a changed set of assessment arrangements such as time for meetings, resources for co-ordination and support of school-based assessment and moderation.

The Minister is committed to addressing the issues relating to posts in schools to support assessment and moderation. He is also committed to providing external resources to support assessment moderation in schools.

Similarly, the question of extra duties in schools which may arise over time as a result of proposed changes in the Junior Cycle also fall to be considered under this heading. A mechanism to provide meaningful engagement on this subject is proposed below.

Quality assurance and assessment

The partners in education have acknowledged that current exam practise cannot provide an appropriate holistic assessment of students' work and progress and is detrimental to the sort of learning that we need for young people in junior cycle. However, teachers in particular have also expressed concern at the lack of external support for teachers' school-based assessment of students' work. Some partners have also expressed doubts about maintaining equitable standards and awards across the school system.

It has not proved possible to constructively engage on these issues until now. It is proposed therefore that this matter, including external supports for in-school moderation, be the focus of intensive discussion by the working group, the outcome of which may be presented to the Minister for consideration. The Department will provide documentation on proposed ways forward on this topic, once the relevant sub-group has been convened.

The way forward

In the context of the rescheduling of the rollout of Junior Cycle reform as laid out above, and the areas of concern as delineated earlier, it is proposed that the following model of dialogue be adopted.

- The National Working Group (WG) to convene normally every three weeks

- Three subgroups of the working group to be established to consider the areas identified above: CPD; quality assurance and assessment; resources, including ICT
- Subgroups to begin meeting next week (week beginning 20 January 2014)
- The membership of the subgroups can vary depending on the issue at hand and all partners are free to attend the groups on CPD and Quality Assurance. The group on resources will be confined to representatives of DES, teacher unions and management authorities
- Subgroups will meet on a more immediate basis and provide updates to the WG at each meeting

It is proposed that the intensive process of engagement described here will provide the outcome of its deliberations to the Minister by mid-May 2014.