

A flexible programme for students' learning

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* gives schools greater flexibility to design programmes that are suited to the needs of their junior cycle students and to the particular context of the school.

Each school's programme:

- will be guided by the twenty-four statements of learning, eight principles and eight key skills that are at the core of the new Junior Cycle
- will encompass learning in subjects *or* a combination of subjects and short courses
- will include an area of learning entitled Wellbeing
- will provide a range of other learning experiences
- may include priority learning units (PLUs) that will help to provide a junior cycle programme that is appropriate to the needs of particular students with significant special educational needs.

Schools will have the flexibility and discretion to decide what combination of subjects, short courses or other learning experiences will be provided in their three-year junior cycle programme.

Balance between knowledge and skills

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* outlines the curriculum and assessment arrangements that will provide students with learning opportunities that achieve a balance between learning subject knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities. These curriculum and assessment arrangements will promote a focus on active and collaborative learning. In particular, learners will be enabled to use and analyse information in new and creative ways, to investigate issues, to explore, to think for themselves, to be creative in solving problems and to apply their learning to new challenges and situations. Given the changing nature of knowledge, the ease with which students have access to information, and the pace of change in the workplace and the world generally, these competences and skills are critical to the preparation of young people for learning and living.

Subject specifications, heretofore known as syllabuses, and assessment arrangements will be revised on a phased basis to reflect this new balance between subject knowledge and skills. These new subject specifications are being designed to build on current best practices in the system and to support the further development of effective teaching, learning and assessment practice. The inclusion of short courses and other learning experiences in junior cycle programmes also provides a valuable opportunity to broaden students' learning and skill set.

Dual approach to assessment

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* presents a dual approach to assessment that supports student learning over the three years of junior cycle and also measures achievement at the end of those three years. This dual approach reduces the focus on one externally assessed examination as a means of assessing students and increases the prominence given to classroom-based assessment and formative assessment. This change of emphasis arises from an acknowledgement that students learn best when teachers provide feedback that helps students to understand how their learning can be improved.

In the case of each subject, two structured Classroom-Based Assessments will be introduced which will contribute to and build on the use of formative assessment in the classroom. One of these Classroom-Based Assessments will take place in second year, and the other during third year. Each assessment will be drawn from a variety of types of assessment, which might include project tasks, oral language tasks, investigations, practical or designing and making tasks, field studies and artistic performance.

After the second of the Classroom-Based Assessments, students will complete a written Assessment Task on what they have learned and the skills and competences that they have developed in that assessment. The Assessment Task, along with the final examination at the end of third year, will be marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

The dual approach to assessment will recognise and value the different types of learning that take place in schools, and will allow for a more rounded assessment of the education of each young person.

Reporting a broader picture of learning

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* emphasises the importance of valuing, acknowledging and affirming all the students' learning opportunities and experiences during the three years of junior cycle. It also envisages that parents/guardians and students will get a broader picture of students' learning. The approach to reporting will value the different aspects of students' learning and the range of assessment approaches, both formative and summative, that generate evidence of this learning by students. The approach to reporting will facilitate provision of assessment information based on the following elements:

- Ongoing formative assessments, including routine teacher-designed tasks and tests
- Structured Classroom-Based Assessments conducted in second and third year
- Assessment of learning arising from short courses or priority learning units
- The written Assessment Task following the second Classroom-Based Assessment
- The results of the summative state examination.

Schools will be supported to report on these elements by the provision of standard reporting templates, appropriate to the post-primary context, for use in first, second and third year. Before the end of the first term following the completion of the junior cycle, each student will receive a composite Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) from his/her school. The JCPA will capture all of the different assessment elements undertaken over the three years of junior cycle, including the grades which will have been previously and separately issued by the SEC.

Greater professional collaboration between teachers

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* recognises the importance of professional development and collaboration between teachers for informing their understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and their practice in the classroom. All teachers of each subject involved in teaching and assessing the classroom-based components in the school will engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings where they will share and discuss samples of their assessments of students' work and build a common understanding about the quality of students' learning. This

structured support for Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) will help to ensure consistency and fairness within and across schools in the appraisal of student learning.

Teachers' judgements about the work of students will be supported by the publication of standards by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) that describe performance on each type of assessment task at a number of different levels, as well as providing teachers with exemplars of student work at the different levels. To further support teachers, the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service will assist teachers to use the NCCA standards collaboratively with other teachers in the school.

Phased introduction of Junior Cycle

The new curriculum and assessment arrangements for junior cycle will be phased in to accommodate the development of new specifications for subjects, the provision of professional development for teachers and school planning. An overview of the phased introduction of the new Junior Cycle is outlined in Chapter 3. Schools will also have the opportunity to include short courses and other learning experiences in their new junior cycle programmes from the commencement of implementation. It should be noted that short courses are not intended to displace existing subjects.

Supporting continuity and learning

The changes to learning and assessment envisaged in the new Junior Cycle will support continuity and progression in students' learning experiences as they move from primary to post-primary school. In doing so, they will complement existing transition initiatives such as the Education Passport¹. The flexibility that schools have to design their junior cycle programmes, particularly in the first year of the programme, will support students in experiencing a successful transition.

Summary

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* reflects our shared understanding of, and trust in, the many positive features of educational practice currently in our post-primary schools. It also provides a blueprint for guiding the enhancement and development of junior cycle provision in the next number of years. Details on different aspects of the curriculum and assessment changes relating to junior cycle provision are provided in the remainder of this document.

¹ The *Education Passport* materials support the transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary school and have been introduced for use by all primary schools from 2014/2015. For further detail, see www.ncca.ie/transfer and Primary Circular 0027/2015 at www.education.ie