

## Notes for presentation on *A new Framework for Junior Cycle*

### Slide 1 – Introduction slide – Aim of the workshop

### Slide 2 – Overview of slide presentation

### Slide 3 – Why change?

The NCCA has been researching, consulting on and discussing junior cycle development over the last number of years. Consultation findings were based on meetings with all partners in education as well as over 500 written or online submissions.

In addition, in looking at junior cycle, the NCCA used the substantial evidence provided by the ESRI research on the experience of junior cycle. That study shows

- In first year, students are mostly well motivated and positive about their learning. Then in 2<sup>nd</sup> year the dominating effect of the Junior Cycle exam on teaching and learning practice becomes very evident. From 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are being taught to the test and this is having a negative backwash on teaching methodologies. At this point a large minority of students disengage. The research shows that disengagement at any stage in junior cycle is not a phase, or a glitch, but a process that can deepen in senior cycle and have consequences well beyond schooling, and that disengagement tends to be concentrated disproportionately among disadvantaged students and boys.

In addition the ESRI research found a narrow range of assessment activity within post-primary schools and too much teaching to the test.

Finally there was a perception of an inflexible, overcrowded curriculum at JC level.

**Slides 4 – And of course PISA** – While you might contest the scale of the deterioration it seems unavoidable to conclude that across junior cycle, significant numbers of students are not developing the basic skills they need to learn, to live and to work and this provided a further reminder that change is needed

### Slide 5 – The Framework

The ideas for the reform of junior cycle are set out in *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle*. This is available online and for download on the NCCA website at [www.juniorcycle.ie](http://www.juniorcycle.ie)

### Slide 6 What's the difference?

This presentation summarises the main differences between the new junior cycle and the one we're all used to. Then slides that follow will take us through these differences one by one...

### Slide 7 What's the difference 1? A Framework – not rules!

The first big difference is that the introduction of the Framework will mean that junior cycle is no longer based on a series of rules and requirements – it's based on a Framework that a school's junior cycle must work within. Schools can now develop a JC programme that is more flexible and suited to their students' needs and interests.

### Slide 8 – A different kind of core.

The junior cycle statements of learning describe what it is essential for students to **know, understand, value and be able to do** as a result of their time in junior cycle.

Because the main focus of the junior cycle developments is on learning, the Framework states very clearly what that learning is. And that learning is the new CORE of junior cycle. In the current junior cycle we tend to see subjects and examinations as the CORE – now it's the learning.

This represents quite a mind shift – Statements of learning are now core of J C not subjects! There are **24 statements of learning** (we'll take a look at them in a moment)

### Slide 9 – Learning

In addition to the statements of learning being at the core of a new junior cycle, another big feature of junior cycle learning is the emphasis on basic skills such as literacy and numeracy as well as key skills. These will now be embedded across all learning.

### Slide 10 – Slide shows sample statements of learning

Distribute handout of all 24 Statements and ask staff to look at the statements and notice the ones that relate most closely to their subject. This is most effective when staff read the elaborations of the 24 statements at the back of the Framework document (p30-39).

PAUSE to allow time for consideration.

You'll notice that the statements of learning don't necessarily relate to particular subjects – different subjects can contribute in different ways to the learning set out in the statements.

The statements do not set out *everything* the student can learn in junior cycle, but their introduction does reflect the view that it is inadequate to describe what students should learn in terms of **subjects alone**. The statements will provide **the basis for schools planning and for evaluating their junior cycle programmes**

**That process of planning will involve thinking about the combination of curriculum components (subjects and short courses) and other learning experiences that will ensure that all statements of learning, along with key skills and literacy and numeracy skills, are addressed in the programmes of all junior cycle students.**

**Given that schools will be planning their own programmes, these statements provide the basis for consistency between schools and for the monitoring and evaluation of JC programmes within schools.**

### Slide 11– What's the difference 2- Key Skills

Another big feature of junior cycle learning is the emphasis on basic skills of **literacy and numeracy** as well as the **key skills**. These will now be embedded in all subjects and in all learning across the curriculum.

You might rightly say that teachers have always taught their students certain skills but now these skills are being more clearly and explicitly named and embedded in the specifications for all subjects and short courses.

Work with Irish teachers (and international research too) has shown that when key skills are taught students are **more engaged** in their learning, **learning is more effective** and it makes students more responsible and **aware of themselves as learners**. In addition it contributes to better relationships and behaviour in class.

### **Slide 12 –Elements of the 6 key skills**

There's more detail available on each of the key skills in the Framework document and on the NCCA website. Go to [www.juniorcycle.ie](http://www.juniorcycle.ie) and click on key skills

### **Slide 13 – Example of a key skill with the learning outcomes.**

This level of detail is available in the key skills framework and is needed in order to make sure that the key skills are fully developed and understood by both teachers and students.

### **Slide 14 and 15 - Curriculum**

The main curriculum components will continue to be subjects – all of which are being revised. The NCCA will continue to provide the curriculum specifications for subjects and in most cases examined at a common level except for English, Irish and Mathematics

Subjects will be designed for approximately 200 hours of learner engagement. Overall, the reduction in time allocation will give schools more time to ensure deeper learning, to focus on key skills and to track the learning progress of students. To promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills, English, Irish and mathematics will be designed for 240 hours of engagement.

### **Slide 16 Curriculum components**

You'll immediately recognise the subjects on this slide. They're all fairly familiar. But there will also be **short courses!** Some of these will be developed by the NCCA and 'taken off the shelf' by schools choosing to include them in their junior cycle programme. But over time schools can also develop their own short courses locally to a template and guidelines set down by the SEC.

### **What it all adds up to!**

This main job a school has over the coming years is to look at how it wants to use subjects and short courses and other junior cycle learning experiences to underpin the focus on skills at junior cycle and to meet the statements of learning.

**Slide 17 – Subject phases** – this slides shows the timeline for introducing revised JC subjects

**Slide 18** – All assessment should support student learning and in order for this to happen assessment needs to happen closer to the learning.

**Slide 19 and 20– What's different about assessment?**

The biggest area of change in the new junior cycle is in the area of assessment.

From an NCCA perspective, the focus here is on restoring the natural connection between learning and its assessment, on bringing assessment closer to learning

Why? Well there are two reasons. Firstly, because we recognise the importance of assessment as a lever of change. Based on our history of reforming the junior cycle in the past we've learned that if assessment practice doesn't change, learning and teaching won't change either.

Secondly, we know from the research that good assessment and feedback techniques can have a huge positive impact on student motivation and achievement. See Black and Williams' work and John Hattie's effect size<sup>1</sup> research which shows that if a teacher does nothing else differently but simply give his/her students constructive feedback the effect size can be as much as 1.3 which translates as at least a 2 grade improvement – i.e. a move from being a D student to a B student. Geoff Petty suggests that '*Feedback is the single most important thing teachers can do to improve students' achievement*'.

The kind of day-to-day assessment that is envisaged within the new JC classroom is one in which the teacher is providing feedback, helping students to assess their own progress, set targets, reflect on their progress and so improve. Good assessment uses student's day to day work to diagnose strengths and weaknesses, and to set individual targets for improvement. This creates greater student autonomy as **students** will be more involved in, and more responsible for, gathering and presenting evidence of their learning. In general terms, the **teacher's** role lies in judging, giving feedback on, and reporting on evidence of learning.

The Framework, also says that **some** of the results of assessment activity in schools should be used in the context of the national qualification being pursued by the student.

This signals a move from emphasising the examinations as the sole focus of the assessment to prioritising the learning as the focus.

## **Slide 20 – Assessment – supports for teachers**

- Each subject will have clear specification of assessment tasks for the School Work Component
- Teachers and students will be able to look at examples of students' work showing the features of quality and explaining how these relate to the different marks assigned for different tasks.
- Time will be allocated for teachers to meet and discuss examples of students' work and make judgements against the features of quality set down. This process is called 'school-based moderation'.
- The NCCA is working on developing a toolkit of assessment materials and guidance on how school-based moderation will operate and be organised.

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<sup>1</sup> The way effect size is measured in education research is explained succinctly in this clip with Geoff Petty speaking [http://www.teacherstoolbox.co.uk/effect\\_sizes.html](http://www.teacherstoolbox.co.uk/effect_sizes.html)

- Professional development and other practical supports are being put in place.

### Slide 21 –Qualifications

When it comes to qualifications, **assessment** will combine terminal assessment and school-based assessment.

**The school work component for certification will generally be worth 40% of the overall marks for subjects. This will be based on work undertaken by students during second and third year. In most subjects there will continue to be a terminal exam (worth 60% of the marks). The SEC will provide final assessment papers and marking schemes for subjects until the new school-based system of assessment is established. For English, Irish and Mathematics, papers will continue to be set and marked by the SEC and these marks will be returned to the schools to be combined with the 40% weighting for the school work component. This arrangement will continue until standardised testing becomes established in junior cycle.**

The assessment of short courses will be school based and the grade awarded may be included on the JCSA.

In looking afresh at qualifications, the aim was to ensure that **the qualifications should serve the learning** and shouldn't dominate the experience of junior cycle for students (or teachers!) in the way that the Junior Certificate does at present.

### Slide 22 – Subject limit for qualifications

So, the **new qualifications are smaller than at present**. That means that students take assessments and exams in a smaller number of subjects/short courses. (see slide This reduced number of subjects/short courses gives schools **more space and time** to spend on other aspects of their junior cycle and reduces the amount of examination and assessment pressure that the student has to deal with at the end of third year.

There are two qualifications proposed, one a replacement for the current Junior Certificate (like JC at Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications) and the other designed for students with particular special educational needs who currently can't access the Junior Certificate. This qualification will be at Level 2 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

### Slide 23 – Level 2 Learning Programmes and Qualification

So, finally a word about the Level 2 Learning Programmes and qualification. This is targeted at a very specific group of students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. They are small in number (one or two in a typical main-stream school), all have IEPs, and currently cannot access the Junior Certificate even through JCSP because it is pitched at too high a level for them.

It follows that the Learning Programmes for this group of students are built around Priority Learning Units that focus on developing the basic, social and pre-vocational skills of the students involved.

Each of the PLUs – Communicating and literacy, Numeracy, Looking after myself, Living in a community and Preparing for working life is described in detail in elements and learning

outcomes that comprise a 'learning menu' from which the teacher and student select to build their programme. The assessment of the programme is school based.

The L2LPs and the related qualification have been developed with schools already working with this target group of students and the NCCA has drawn on this experience to produce a Toolkit on L2LPs for Teachers – including 'getting started' guidelines, an online planning tool for developing and assessing a programme, and video examples of how the programmes can operate in junior cycle subject classrooms.

The Level 2 Learning Programmes and Qualifications are due to be introduced in 2014 although they are available now for schools to use on a trial basis if they wish.

**NCCA website – This is a really important source of information on all aspects of Junior Cycle development. As a first step you might find the FAQ section of the site particularly useful.**

### **Discussion Qs**

#### **Slide 28 – How might we get started?**

**This slides sets out some starting points – Schools don't have to do it all at once!**

1. Work to your strengths and recognise what you are already doing that you can build upon or link to JC work. For example, if you have already done good work in incorporating active and cooperative learning then you have a good starting point for work in embedding the key skills, or you might have particular strengths in Assessment for Learning (AfL) or in integrating ICT into learning. Conversely, a recent WSE or SSE may have identified an area that needs attention and this can be your starting point for JC planning.
2. Set up teams to take on specific tasks and deadlines. The best approach seems to be multidisciplinary teams with teachers from a variety of subjects working together.
3. Join up the planning. Make sure that the work in planning for JC is linked into your SSE work and your literacy and numeracy strategy.
4. Remember that change is incremental and take it a step at a time.