

## A New Junior Cycle:

The text below accompanies the slide presentation that provides information to parents on the new junior cycle being introduced in September 2014.

A *glossary* and a *further reading guide* are provided to explain terms that are used throughout this presentation and point you towards support materials.

SLIDE	TEXT
1.	<b>A New Junior Cycle</b>
2.	<p>Since 2010 the NCCA has consulted extensively on junior cycle education, talking to all the relevant partners, including parents.</p> <p>One of the questions posed was ‘What should be the purpose of education in junior cycle?’ This slide shows some of the responses we received. There is no right or wrong answer to the question of course. junior cycle education can and does serve a number of purposes.</p>
3.	<p>Several factors influenced the change at junior cycle:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The findings of research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) which looked at the experiences of young people over the three years of junior cycle. The research found that young people had too much content to cover in subjects over three years; that while students were making the transition from primary to post-primary in first year and preparing for exams in third year, second year was often less purposeful. Many students</li> </ol>

disengaged from learning in second year and for some, the re-engagement never happened; more than 50% of students at Leaving Certificate regretted making their subject choices based on their junior cycle experience, and finally the modes of assessment used at junior cycle were seen to result in ‘teaching to the test’.

2. The Minister for Education requested that the NCCA:  
Make the move from primary to post-primary education more seamless; create the space for deeper learning and more innovation in schools and get a better balance between the learning of content and the development of key skills
3. There was a concern about young people at 15 years of age having to deal with the pressure and stress of relatively high stakes exams when in fact 90% of them stay in post-primary education until aged 18.

It's worth noting that curriculum flexibility and the issues of progression from primary to post-primary are being addressed in other countries too e.g. in Scotland through its *Curriculum for Excellence*

4. As well as consulting partners in education, the NCCA developed discussion documents and researched international best practice in planning a new junior cycle. All of this led to *A Framework for Junior Cycle*, launched by Minister Ruairi Quinn in October 2012. This document outlines the vision and content of the new junior cycle and is available for download on the NCCA website [here](#).

5.	<p>We will look at parts of the framework in more detail later but it's important to point out that a number of important things will remain the same. The ESRI research highlighted many aspects of the current Junior Certificate that were positive so these are retained, while what needs to be different is addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students will continue to enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum</li><li>• It is important that standards remain high so quality assurance is built in. For instance, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) will monitor both the programmes being offered by schools and the results across all schools to keep an eye on standards</li><li>• Subjects will continue to play an important role in junior cycle</li><li>• While the NCCA will develop subject specifications the State Examinations Commission (SEC) will continue to be involved in assessment (more detail is provided on slide 21)</li></ul>
6.	<p>The changes to junior cycle education are not happening overnight. They'll happen over a period of time. In fact, the last changes won't be in place until 2020.</p> <p>For students entering post-primary school in September 2014, English is the only subject for which there will be a new course. But schools will also begin to use the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> to plan a new junior cycle programme for their students and can begin to explore short courses (see slide 10 for more information on what these are).</p> <p>The request for schools to be able to manage the change gradually was a strong message in the consultation with teachers and school managers as well as teacher unions and the Minister responded to this in circular 0020/2014, issued to schools in March 2014, by extending the period over which changes would be introduced.</p>

## Curriculum Design

7.	<p>The following slides give a brief overview of the curriculum. More detailed information is available at <a href="http://juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum">http://juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum</a></p>
8.	<p>There are four curriculum components that schools will use to build junior cycle programmes– <b>subjects, short courses, Priority Learning Units</b> for Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs – more about those in a moment) and any <b>other learning experiences</b> offered by the school such as guidance, Seachtán na Gaeilge, choir, debating, pastoral care and so on.</p> <p><b>Level 2 Learning Programmes</b></p> <p>In the new junior cycle there will be two qualifications. One, a replacement for the current Junior Certificate, will be aligned to Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The other, designed for students with particular special educational needs who currently can't access the Junior Certificate, will be aligned to Level 2 of the NFQ.</p> <p>The Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) and qualification are targeted at a very specific group of students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. The students are small in number (one or two in a typical school) and all have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The Learning Programmes are built around Priority Learning Units (PLUs) that develop the basic, social and pre-vocational skills of the students involved. Students following L2LPs also undertake 2 short courses which have been aligned to Level 2 of the NFQ.</p> <p>The L2LPs have been developed with schools already working with this group of students.</p>
9.	<p>This slide sets out the sequence in which subjects will be introduced from now until 2020.</p>

10.	<p>Short courses are a new addition to the curriculum. As the title suggests, they are courses which are shorter in duration than subjects. So while 240 hours will be spent on each of English, Irish and Maths over the three years of junior cycle and 200 hours on each other subject, short courses are designed to involve 100 hours of learning.</p> <p>The advantage of short courses are many: they can open up new areas of learning; they can strengthen or deepen existing areas of learning and they can assist in developing important skills for students.</p> <p>To begin with, NCCA have developed the nine short courses on this slide. Most are for certification at Level 3. The short courses in brown have been specifically developed for use in Level 2 Learning Programmes.</p> <p>Schools will also have the option of developing their own short courses following <a href="#">guidelines and a template</a> provided by NCCA.</p> <p>Finally, some short courses will be designed by other organisations and bodies and will be available for schools to use if they wish.</p> <p>Overall, short courses offer potential for a more flexible and diverse junior cycle programme in schools.</p>
11.	<p>The skills of literacy and numeracy and the six key skills named here are at the heart of planning a new junior cycle. The national literacy and numeracy strategy places a strong emphasis on these two fundamental skills.</p> <p>The other <b>key skills</b> are – <i>Managing information and thinking, Working with others, Managing myself, Communicating, Staying well, Being creative.</i></p> <p>These are the kinds of skills that have been identified in most countries as important skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and living – skills that will help students in their learning both now and when they progress to senior cycle and beyond.</p>

## Assessment in Junior Cycle

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 12. | <p>The new junior cycle envisages a stronger than ever emphasis on assessment as part of the learning process.</p> <p><b><i>An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their students, in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.</i></b> (Paul Black, emeritus professor of science education, Kings College, London).</p> <p>At present, we may place too much emphasis on assessing student work AFTER learning. In the new Junior Cycle assessment there's a strong emphasis on teachers working <u>WITH</u> students on assessment BEFORE, DURING and AFTER learning.</p> |
| 13. | <p>In recognising and catering for this stronger emphasis on assessment as a vital part of the teaching and learning process, a changing assessment culture is encouraged. There will be a more varied approach to assessment in ensuring that the assessment method undertaken is fit for purpose, timely, and relevant to the students. Teachers are encouraged to talk about assessment with their colleagues and in this way build capacity, knowledge and confidence in assessment practice in schools.</p>   |
| 14. | <p>Assessment that strongly supports learning might look different for students. They might be correcting their own work before handing it up using a marking plan set by the teacher. They might also be giving feedback to other students about their work and offering suggestions as to how that work might be improved, again following clear criteria. They will be able to look at examples of other students' work to identify differing standards, and use this to assist them in reaching a higher standard in their own work. Through this they will be identifying what they need to learn, what they need to do and what to change in order to improve their own learning.</p>                                |

## Assessment for Certification

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 15. | The next section of the presentation highlights the changes in the area of assessment for certification. Here we're talking about very significant levels of change which is why there has been so much contestation, debate and discussion about it in the media and elsewhere.   |
| 16. | <p>Before looking at the details of assessment for certification, there are three key points to keep in mind.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="405 712 1361 1025">1. A recurring theme that when the framework was being developed and consulted on was that if assessment practices do not change, then nothing else will change. Assessment is a driver of classroom practice and past experience shows that developments that did not address assessment resulted in very little change in teaching and learning.</li><li data-bbox="405 1048 1361 1361">2. The new assessment system being introduced at junior cycle <b>is not the Junior Certificate</b>. The Junior Certificate is the wrong lens through which to view the new assessment arrangements. It's not about REPLACING the Junior Certificate but about enabling and improving the experience of learning and assessment for all junior cycle students.</li><li data-bbox="405 1384 1361 1641">3. The new assessment system is not based on a model of continuous assessment. The proposed system is best described as a combination of exams and school work that is centred around assessment events which take place at particular times during the second and third years of junior cycle.</li></ol> |

17.	<p>The model of assessment for certification is outlined here. In general, 40% of the overall marks <b>for subjects</b> will be allocated to the school work component completed during second and third year. This element of the assessment will take place in the school and will be carried out by the teacher.</p> <p>Generally, 60% is awarded for a final assessment at the end of third year. This will be set by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) but will be administered and marked in the school.</p> <p>Certification for short courses will be based on assessment carried out by the school, using criteria provided.</p>
18.	<p>To ensure that there is consistency in the new model of assessment, there are common yardsticks that will apply to all teachers, students and schools. These features and supports will contribute to the quality assurance of the new assessment system, and reassure everyone that assessment, while different, will be of a high quality.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="405 1133 1350 1335">1. There will continue to be national, externally developed specifications for subjects and short courses. Where schools elect to design their own short courses there are agreed templates and structures to follow.</li><li data-bbox="405 1357 1350 1503">2. The expectations for all students are set out in learning outcomes i.e. statements that detail what a student should be able to do after a period of learning.</li><li data-bbox="405 1525 1350 1727">3. For the first time, examples of students' work are available to demonstrate the standard expected of the students. This will enable students, teachers, and parents to judge whether the student is at the required standard, above it or yet to meet it.</li></ol>



19.	<p>4. The assessment tasks and examinations undertaken by students are developed centrally. There are assessment specifications that detail the arrangements for how and when the assessment tasks will be carried out.</p> <p>5. Each assessment task is accompanied by criteria called <b>features of quality</b> i.e. statements that describe, grade by grade, what to look out for in a piece of work. These provide the basis for marking and making judgements. This slide shows an example of the features of quality used to make judgements on the oral communication task for English.</p> <p>6. Another support for teachers in making these judgements on student work is moderation, which can best be described as <i>conversations about student work among teachers in schools</i>. The purpose of the conversation is for teachers to reach a shared understanding about what represents <b>quality</b> in a piece of student work. Teachers who have been marking and examining as part of the state examination system have been involved in similar conversations and meetings for many years. The moderation process will bring these conversations into <b>every</b> teacher's practice.</p> <p>The next slide shows a group of English teachers who spent time trying out the moderation process. Here is what they had to say afterwards.</p>
20.	Video on the moderation process

21.

The change in assessment practice is significant so the supports for it to happen have to be extensive too. There are four main areas of support:

1. Extensive professional development in the area of assessment will be provided to all teachers and school management. Professional development has already started in the area of English, and this year as part of the first phase of this development, 4,000 English teachers attended the training. This professional development is offered through the Junior Cycle for Teachers [\(JCT\) support service](#)
2. An online [assessment and moderation toolkit](#) will support and guide teachers in their work on assessment. Sample assessment items, examination papers and marking schemes will be developed by the NCCA and the SEC and made available online.
3. Irish, English and Mathematics will continue to be set and marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for the initial years. This is because literacy and numeracy are receiving particular attention as a result of the [national literacy and numeracy strategy](#), however this procedure will be reviewed when standardised testing in these three areas becomes well established. The SEC will also set the final assessment/examination in all other junior cycle subjects.
4. The DES will continue to monitor the assessment results in schools.

## Junior Cycle Student Award

22. On completing their education at primary level, students take with them to post-primary an “[education passport](#)”, which contains relevant information that will support the post-primary school in gaining a full understanding of the student’s learning and their learning profile. This passport contains information about the student submitted by the student, teacher and parent.
- The Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA) will be awarded for the first time in 2017, and will include the results from the new English course, any short courses certificated, as well as the results from other Junior Certificate subjects taken.
23. The NCCA offers many supports to parents and students via our website and other publications.
- We have a twitter account and can be followed at @NCCAieTo receive updates on developments in NCCA and education generally, you can subscribe to [info@ncca.ie](mailto:info@ncca.ie)
- There are 3 websites where all the relevant information you need can be found:
- [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)
- [www.juniorcycle.ie](http://www.juniorcycle.ie)
- [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie)

## Glossary:

<i>Assessment events/tasks</i>	Any performance opportunity that allows students to demonstrate their progress and achievements in relation to learning outcomes
<i>Curriculum flexibility</i>	The capability of courses and programmes of learning to cater for a range of needs and styles of learning
<i>Expectations for students</i>	An umbrella term that links learning outcomes with annotated examples of student work and demonstrates the extent to which the learning outcomes are being realised
<i>High stakes exams</i>	Exams on which important decisions are made. An example of a high stakes exam would be Leaving Certificate because a student's results determine entry to further education
<i>Individual Education Plans (IEPs)</i>	Plans developed in schools which detail the teaching and learning approaches intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations of individual students
<i>Junior Cycle Student Award</i>	The name of the award which will replace the Junior Certificate

<i>National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)</i>	The NFQ provides a way to compare qualifications, and to ensure that they are quality assured and recognised at home and abroad
<i>Progression</i>	Refers to how a student's learning in one stage of education e.g. primary is built on and relates to the next
<i>Standardised tests</i>	Tests that are given in a consistent way to all the test takers and uses uniform procedures for administration and scoring. This term is primarily associated with large-scale tests administered to sizeable populations of students, and allows for comparison of relative performance of individual students or groups of students.
<i>State Examinations Commission (SEC)</i>	The SEC is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the second-level examinations of the Irish state: the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. The State Examinations Commission is a non-departmental public body under the sponsorship of the Department of Education and Skills
<i>Subject specifications</i>	Details what a student should know or be able to do if they study the programme of learning for a subject

## **Further reading:**

[Information leaflet for parents and guardians of 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils](#)

[Some research and background reading that led to the Framework for Junior Cycle](#)

[Keep up-to-date with subject specifications as they are developed](#)

[Read more about key skills in junior cycle](#)

[Learn more about Level 2 Programmes in the new junior cycle](#)

[Look at what moderation meetings in schools look like](#)