

Junior cycle short course

Guidelines for developing and writing a short course

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Introduction

Short courses are one of the curriculum components of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Schools may opt to include in their curriculum short courses developed by the NCCA. Alternatively, schools may develop their own short courses in accordance with these guidelines and related templates.

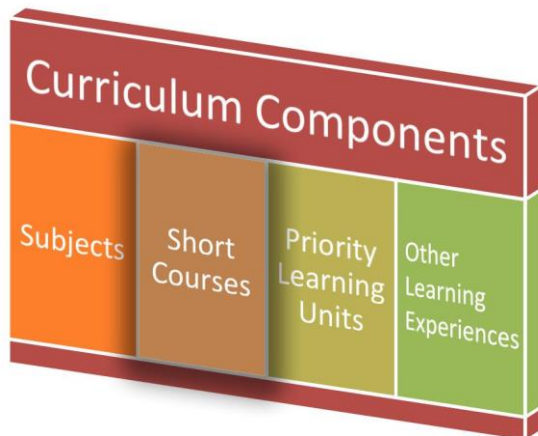
Short courses provide opportunities for schools to:

- broaden the range of educational experiences they offer in Junior Cycle
- recognise and certify different types and smaller units of learning
- engage in curriculum development and planning at local level.

These guidelines will explain the five phases involved in developing and designing a short course for your school. The main focus of these guidelines is how to write and structure the specification for your short course.

A brief description of a short course

The short course is designed for approximately 100 hours of student engagement. Most subjects are designed for 200 hours with the exception of Irish, English and Mathematics which are 240 hours.



The [Framework for Junior Cycle](#) comprises several curriculum components. As can be seen in the graphic, short courses form one of those components.

Short courses may be related to an existing subject but offer a particular learning focus. Or they may be devised to open up an entirely new area of learning. Short courses are flexible enough to encompass specific events or initiatives such as school musicals, Young Scientist or Green Flag initiatives. In some cases, short courses may be made up of two or more separate but complementary parts which might be taught by more than one teacher, for example a Home Economics teacher and an English teacher working on a cookbook. The key points around short courses can be found in this Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) [leaflet](#).

Quality assurance

The quality of short courses is assured by the following measures:

- Short course developers are required to use the NCCA [support materials and planning templates](#) and these guidelines
- The NCCA has published short courses at levels two and three. These courses range from Coding, Philosophy, Artistic Performance, CSI: Exploring Forensic Science to the short courses for Wellbeing

- Professional development is being made available by the [Junior Cycle for Teachers Support Service](#)
- Schools are encouraged to publish their short courses
- Schools are encouraged to look at the short courses that have been developed by other schools.

Short courses developed in accordance with these guidelines are aligned with level indicators for Level 1 - 3 of the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#). An appendix is included in the short course template stating that the short course has been developed in alignment with the appropriate level indicators of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Planning

Based on our experience of working with NCCA short course developers, we know that the process takes time and is best done collaboratively. It is also recommended that developers work through the five-phase process for developing their own short course.

Five phases for developing a short course

There are five phases involved in developing a short course. Three of these phases are completed **before** the work begins on the NCCA short course template.

The five phases are:

- Pre-development
- Scoping
- Consultation
- Completing the short course template.
- Review and evaluation



By working through each of the phases, developers of short courses can be more confident that they have explored fully the different ideas for the course, consulted widely and refined their thinking before finalising the short course.

Phase 1 – pre-development

We recommend that you set up a small working group (teachers, students and parents) to look at the following questions about your school.

- What is working well in Junior Cycle?
- What are the gaps in students' learning experiences?
- What areas of learning might be of interest to and worthwhile for your students?
- Could you use a short course to deepen or extend students' learning in a junior cycle subject?
- What expertise do you have available in your school community to contribute to the development of short courses?
- Who might be interested in getting involved in the development of short courses?
- How do these considerations link to your overall plan for Junior Cycle?
- What is a good title for the course that will appeal to students and convey to parents what their children will be learning?

Phase 2 – scoping document

The [scoping document](#) for developing a short course is a template for clarifying important ideas and assisting in the development of your short course. Once completed, the document is emailed to NCCA for some feedback and suggestions. The email address is in the scoping document.

Some short courses may be closely related to an existing junior cycle subject(s). If this is the case, areas of potential overlap should be carefully considered. The student should always be the central consideration. It is informative and helpful to ask students in what way they will see the topic and the learning as being:

- interesting and challenging
- enjoyable
- connected to prior learning, both at primary and post-primary
- relevant to future learning
- useful now and in the future.

How will students learn in this short course?

Key skills help learners develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to face the many challenges in today's world. They also support students in learning how to learn and to take responsibility for their own learning. It is important to describe how students will be learning in this short course, e.g. researching, creating, presenting, performing, discussing, designing. The [Framework for Junior Cycle](#) provides the context in which your short course is situated.



How will students be assessed in this short course?

What might students be asked to say, do, write and/or make to show evidence of their learning?

What opportunities are there for formative assessment?

Formative assessment can be used to provide feedback to students about their learning and to adapt teaching to meet students' learning needs. Our [Focus on Learning](#) support series provides further information on formative assessment including booklets on formative feedback and effective questioning.

Phase 3 - consultation

The short course scoping document can now be used as a basis for discussion about the proposed short course, its relevance for students and how the school might accommodate it in its junior cycle programme.

It is important to consult with teaching colleagues, students and parents. Each of these groups will provide relevant and focused feedback to inform the development of the short course.

Phase 4 - completing the short course template

The [short course specification template](#) can now be completed following the consultation phase. This will be the first draft of the specification for your short course. Once completed it is emailed to NCCA for feedback.

The language used in the template should be clear and accessible. Each section should be concise and address the questions in the template. The [NCCA short course specifications](#) follow the same structure as the template and provide good examples of how to write each section of the template.

Title of short course

The title should clearly identify the content and focus of the short course. It should be interesting and attractive for junior cycle students and their teachers.

1. Introduction to junior cycle

This section is common to all specifications and summarises the main features of the Framework. NCCA provides this text.

2. Rationale

The rationale should answer questions such as why learning in this short course would be interesting and challenging for students in junior cycle, and how it is relevant inside and outside school.

Check out the ideas you have identified in the **scoping document** to inform the development of the rationale.

3. Aim

The aim should be a brief statement that outlines the expected impact of the course on students' learning. The aim is aspirational in nature and should describe the 'big picture' thinking behind the short course.

4. Overview: Course

This section provides an overview of the course including how it is organised into strands and learning outcomes. Each strand outlines what the student will learn in that section of the course. The strand

title is brief and identifies the 'significant content'. There should be a maximum of three or four strands and these may be further subdivided into not more than four topics.

5. Learning Outcomes: Some guidelines

Learning outcomes are clear statements about what is expected each student will achieve as a result of the learning associated with each strand. It is not necessary to write a learning outcome for everything you want the student to learn. But it is necessary to write learning outcomes **that draw a clear picture of the kinds of learning that is envisaged in the short course**. Writing learning outcomes takes time and careful consideration. Remember not to have too many learning outcomes. Refer to the [Focus on Learning section](#) of the NCCA website and [subject specifications](#) for guidance on learning outcomes and their function within a course.

6. Links

In this section, the ways in which the short course links to the [statement of learning and the range of key skills](#) are outlined.

6. a) Junior Cycle 24 Statements of Learning

In this section, you are asked to identify the 3/4 statements of learning to which this course relates significantly, including a brief description of some relevant learning provided in the short course.

6. b) Key skills of junior cycle section

In this section choose one or two main elements for each of the Key Skills of Junior Cycle. Give one or two examples of how this short course contributes to the development of the key skills.

7. Assessment and reporting

Assessment in education involves gathering, interpreting and using information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and can be used in a variety of ways. While different techniques may be employed for formative, diagnostic and summative purposes, the focus of the assessment and reporting is on the improvement of student learning. To do this it must fully reflect the aim of the curriculum.

The purpose of assessment in the short course is to support learning. Assessment is both **formative** and **summative**.

Classroom-Based Assessments are the occasions when the teacher assesses the students in the specific assessment(s) that are set out in the subject or short course specification. Junior cycle short courses will have one Classroom-Based Assessment. The features of quality for this Classroom-Based Assessment are outlined in the assessment and reporting section of the short course planning template.

Features Of Quality are developed to support teacher judgment of the students' work for Classroom-Based Assessments. For ideas on how to write Features Of Quality, consult some of the [NCCA-developed short courses](#). For the purposes of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), the assessment of short courses will:

- be carried out in the school by the teacher
- be based on work undertaken by students in second and/or third year.

Read more about [assessment and reporting](#) in junior cycle.

8. Assessment arrangements

This section is common to all specifications and NCCA provides the text in the [short course specification template](#).

Phase 5 - review and evaluation

Once the first draft of the specification has been reviewed by NCCA, a final draft should incorporate feedback and suggestions. The final draft can then be sent back to NCCA for a final review.

Over the course of the implementation of the short course, the school should evaluate the effectiveness of the course. Evidence should be gathered that students are achieving the learning outcomes. Examples of student work should be reviewed, preferably through a Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meeting, where feasible. A period of reflection on the effectiveness of the



course will help both teachers and students to come to a better understanding of the features of quality.

Table summary of the five-phase process

PHASE	ACTIONS
Pre-development	Brainstorm with a working group of school community partners.
Scoping	Distil the work into a scoping document for a short course. Obtain feedback from NCCA.
Consultation	Consult with the wider school community and incorporate feedback and suggestions from the whole school community.
Completing the short course template	Develop a first draft using the scoping document, feedback, existing NCCA short course specifications and the template itself.
Review and evaluation	Implement the final draft after feedback from NCCA.

