



A Framework for Junior Cycle

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DES has established a dedicated CPD Service: Junior Cycle for Teachers

A *Framework for Junior Cycle*, published by Minister Ruairí Quinn in October 2012, is widely regarded as one of the most significant reforms of post-primary education since the foundation of the State.

The *Framework* sets out the principles, key skills and statements of learning for the new Junior Cycle. It also highlights the need for fundamental changes in our approach to learning, teaching, assessment and curricular planning if we are to improve the quality of students' learning experiences and outcomes.

The implementation of the *Framework* is set to commence in schools in September 2014. Through a commitment to the implementation of all aspects of the *Framework*, the education system will be able to deliver a Junior Cycle that places the needs of students at the core of learning and teaching.

Necessity of leadership and support

Comprehensive implementation of the *Framework* will improve the quality of the learning experiences and outcomes of all students. This will require leadership and support not only from the Department of Education and Skills (DES), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC), but from school management in particular.

It will also require the commitment of teachers and the support of parents in realising high expectations for all students.

As envisioned throughout the *Framework* document, schools will need to be supported in implementing change:

..... the "new focus on assessment, particularly on 'assessment for learning' as well as on 'assessment of learning' will be a challenge for schools and will require significant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for principals and teachers", (p.3)

..... "supports will include detailed subject and short course specifications, an assessment and moderation toolkit for teachers and schools that will include samples of student work exemplifying a range of standards, a new reporting system for Junior Cycle and also include formative and summative resource material for use by schools. Principals and teachers will have access to CPD", (p. 19)

..... "Principals and Deputy Principals in their leadership role will receive comprehensive professional development in curriculum leadership, educational assessment, including moderation and change management" (p. 26)

Dedicated Professional Development Service

As a response to the scale of the task of implementing the *Framework* in schools, the DES has established a new dedicated continuing professional development (CPD) service – Junior Cycle for Teachers. The aim of this new service is to support schools in their implementation of the *Framework* through the provision of appropriate high quality continuing professional development for school leaders and teachers,

and the development of suitable resources. This support will remain in place for the lifetime of the implementation phase of the Framework. Junior Cycle for Teachers support service (JCT) The Junior Cycle for Teachers (or JCT) support service will commence formally in July 2013, well over one full year in advance of the implementation of the first subject in the new Junior Cycle in schools, namely English. It was announced in January 2013 that I (Pádraig Kirk) would act as the Director of this new support service, having previously served as Chief Executive Officer of Co. Louth VEC and Senior Inspector in the Department.

Secondment to JCT

In May this year a recruitment drive commenced to fill other posts in the service on a secondment basis. Soon, two Deputy Directors will join the team, one with a specialism in school leadership, the other in student assessment. In its first year the service will also recruit a cohort of Advisors (English). The administrative base for JCT is Monaghan Education Centre and the service will work collaboratively on an on-going basis with all of the other twenty Education Centres around the country, with NCCA, SEC and with existing DES support services including the Professional Development Service for Teachers and the Special Education Support Service.

Phased implementation of subjects

The *Framework* outlines a schedule for the phased implementation of subjects. There are four phases in all, commencing with the introduction of English to 1st year students in the 2014/2015 school year, with other subjects introduced in the following years. CPD will be provided for subject teachers a year in advance of the implementation of the subject in schools. So, for example, while science will be introduced to 1st year students in the 2015/16 school year, the provision of CPD for teachers of science will commence in the 2014/15 school year. This principle applies across all of the Junior Cycle subjects.

National database of teachers

In order for the new support service to ensure that all teachers are provided with the opportunity to engage in relevant CPD, it is

important that the service has knowledge of who the teachers are. For this reason JCT will compile a national database of teachers. Work is already underway in the case of teachers of English. In the final term of the 2012/2013 school year all post-primary school principals were requested to register their schools' English teachers online at www.metc.ie. The response was tremendous, and while it is necessary to follow up with a small number of schools, it is clear that schools are keen to ensure that their teachers are involved. The Junior Cycle is also provided in certain non-school settings (e.g., Youthreach) and the same registration process must take place in the case of these settings also. This will ensure a comprehensive register of teachers.

Dedicated CPD for school leaders

The successful implementation of the Framework in schools will require effective leadership. School leaders will be provided with dedicated CPD provision to support them in this role. In the last term of the 2012/2013 school year, all school leaders were invited to an information seminar on the new Framework. These seminars were extremely well attended nationally and provided opportunities for principals and deputies to gain further insights into the Framework itself, including its implementation, and to offer constructive feedback. The views of participants were recorded and will feed into the design and delivery of national CPD provision.

Mix of delivery modes for CPD

Implementing the Framework is not without its challenges. Notwithstanding the fact that many schools already implement most, if not all, of the initiatives espoused in the Framework, the Framework will require schools to implement them on a more formal basis. There are a number of elements that stand out, for example, the new specifications for subjects, short courses and Priority Learning Units, student assessment practices, moderation, standardised testing and reporting of student progress. These necessitate that CPD, in order to be relevant, must focus on these areas, while simultaneously ensuring that other key areas are catered for also. This will be done through a mix of delivery modes provided both during and outside of school time. All teachers will be provided with the opportunity

to engage with no less than three full days of CPD during school time across the roll out of their particular subject area. These days will take the form of facilitated CPD sessions, and for the first time on such a wide scale, some in-school teacher-led sessions for which the DES will provide appropriate substitution cover. A wide range of elective CPD opportunities that will be provided outside of school time, including after school and at weekends, will also be available. On-line support will be a key feature of the supports provided for schools with a new one-stop-shop website currently being planned for all things JCF related – www.juniorycycle.ie.

CPD for school leaders and English teachers

The first CPD sessions for school leaders will commence early in the next school year (September/October 2013). These will be followed by CPD sessions for teachers of English which will commence after the October mid-term break. Subsequent years will see an intensive period of CPD for teachers at post-primary level as all of the new subjects are rolled out across schools.

Many teachers, however, will have a second teaching subject and these teachers will find that many of the new skills and practices picked up during the CPD engaged in within the context of their first teaching subject will automatically transfer across to their other teaching subject(s).

While the provision of CPD is vital, it must then be reflected in the changing approaches adopted by the school through the leadership of school management and the classroom practices of teachers. We all have a role to play in ensuring that the new Framework makes the difference that we want it to make.

Making it work

JCT will discharge its functions with the utmost efficiency. The new service will display high standards of professionalism and will undertake its work in accordance with best national and international practice. As Director of JCT, I look forward to working collaboratively with all the education partners in supporting schools in implementing the JCF and to gaining their trust, cooperation and confidence.

EDUCATION IN THE MEDIA

Dundalk teacher critical of the Junior Certificate reforms plan

October 17, 2012

THE Junior Cert reforms announced last week have been criticised by Dundalk teacher Elaine Devlin, a representative of the Association of Secondary Teachers (ASTI) and a member of the Teaching Council of Ireland.

Ms Devlin, a Maths teacher at De La Salle College, said teachers welcome reform, but the relationships between teachers, pupils and parents will now be drastically changed.

“Effectively, teachers will spend up to four years assessing students.

“The current Junior Cert has public confidence,” she added, pointed out that details of the Minister’s plans were a surprise.

“At meetings we had with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) we were told that the terminal Junior Cert exam would stay. It seems that the Minister has gone behind the backs of the NCCA. “It’s worrying. Essentially, this is a political decision made due to the lack of funds. It costs €20 million to operate the Junior Cert.”

Last week Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn announced the most radical shake-up of the junior cycle programme since the ending of the Intermediate Certificate and Group Certificate examinations in 1991. Minister Quinn has broadly accepted proposals put forward by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to introduce a new junior cycle programme.

Local Oireachtas members were among the first to welcome the initiative.

Senator Mary Moran said such a move is long overdue and will ensure that students, rather than examinations, are at the centre of the three year Junior cycle.

Her Labour Party colleague deputy Gerald Nash said the Junior Cert has been tinkered with for years but it is essentially the same structure today as it was in the past.

www.dundalkdemocrat.ie/news/local/dundalk-teacher-critical-of-the-junior-certificate-reforms-plan-1-4347807