



Circular Number: 0076/2020

To: Addressee: Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff of Post-Primary Schools, Special Schools and Chief Executives of ETBs

Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school year 2020/21

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this circular

This circular supersedes Circular 55/2019 entitled “Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school year 2019/20’ and sets out the arrangements now governing the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, with particular reference to the school year 2020/21.

Boards of Management, Principal teachers of all second-level schools, special schools and the Chief Executives (CE) of all Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are asked to ensure that this circular is brought to the immediate attention of all teachers. In addition, Boards of Management are also requested to ensure that parents/guardians and students are advised of the relevant elements of this circular.

September 2019 marked the final phase of the introduction of new subject specifications to schools. The implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle continues to be reviewed, in partnership with school leaders, teachers and other education partners.

1.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on 2019/20 Junior Cycle Examinations

Owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, a number of decisions were taken in recent months in relation to the Junior Cycle 2020 examinations. These included the cancellation of the June 2020 certificate examinations, with the work and achievement of third year Junior Cycle students in 2020 to be recognised with a state certificate from the Department of Education and Skills, and for schools to provide these students with a written school report on their learning achievements as soon as possible after the end of the 2019/20 school year. It was also announced that specific arrangements would be put in place for adult learners and early school leavers to give them an opportunity to take final Junior Cycle examinations in autumn 2020.

The Department of Education and Skills and the education partners recognise that exceptional measures were required in 2020 for the assessment and certification of students’ learning but that implementation of these measures will not be regarded as a precedent or as agreement to operate such measures in future years.

1.2 Key changes for school year 2020/2021

This section summarises the main changes and updates in Junior Cycle for schools for the school year 2020/21. In July 2020, the Department published curriculum and assessment guidance for post-primary school leaders and teachers in respect of the return to school in 2020/21. In addition, specific guidance on assessment arrangements for the Certificate Examinations 2021 was published in August 2020. These arrangements are designed to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by these students during the 2019/20 school year and include the decision



that the Assessment Task (AT) in subjects with this element will not be examined in 2021. Links to these documents are included in Appendix 1.

Guidance in relation to revised arrangements for 3rd year students following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes (L1LPs and L2LPs) in 2020/21 will also shortly be issued.

1.2.1 Classroom-Based Assessment Arrangements and Assessment Tasks in 2020/21
Schools and non-school settings were advised in May 2020 of revised arrangements for Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in 2020/21 and of further clarifications and key dates for CBAs in this school year. A link to this documentation is included in Appendix 1. These arrangements include the following:

- Extension of the deadline for completion of CBA 1s into the school year 2020/21, while also allowing for the possibility that some teachers and schools may have been able to complete them before the end of 2019/20.

Removal of the requirement for students entering third year of Junior Cycle in 2020/21 to complete two CBAs in each subject, to a requirement to complete just one CBA in each subject.

- The school management and its teachers, in discussion where feasible with students, will choose which CBA to complete for each subject. However, there are some exceptions to this choice:
 - To ensure assessment of oral communications skills, students must complete CBA 2: Communicative Task in Irish, and CBA 1: Oral Communication in Modern Foreign Languages.
 - As they are linked in each case with the final examination in the subject, students studying Visual Art, Home Economics, and Music must complete CBA 2.

The design of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) for 2021 will be adjusted to take account of the revised arrangements for CBAs. Schools and non-school settings were advised in August 2020 that students entering third year in September 2020 would not be required to complete Assessment Tasks for the relevant subjects and that grade descriptors in these subjects will be based on the examination only. In Music and Home Economics students complete a practical examination and do not complete an AT. For Visual Art, the final assessment is based on the completion of students' visual art workbook and artefacts and students do not complete an AT. In these three subjects, CBA2 is linked with the practical examination / Visual Art examination and modified arrangements will be put in place in relation to these linked examination requirements.



1.2.2 Subject Learning and Assessment Review Meetings

Circular Letter 17/2020, Guidance on the Junior Cycle Subject Learning and Assessment Review Process (link at Appendix 1), which was issued on 27 February 2020, required schools to choose from one of four options for the organisation of SLAR meetings. If any school were to choose the fourth option, this would allow for SLAR meetings to be held entirely during normal school tuition hours, with a corresponding reduction in the teacher allocation for professional time. No school chose this option. Further details regarding SLAR meetings are outlined in Section 3.2.4.

1.2.3 Management Resource Hours

The provision of management resource hours will be continued for the 2020/21 academic year in the particular circumstances pertaining for that year. The allocation for the 2020/21 academic year is shown below and contains some adjustments from the provision for 2019/20, with an overall increase in the funding provision.

Enrolment	Weekly Management Resource Hours
700 +	2 hours (was 2 hours 15 mins)
600 – 699	2 hours 40 mins (was 2 hours 27 mins)
400 – 599	2 hours (was 1 hour 57 mins)
< 399	2 hours (was 1 hour 30 mins)

Existing pro-rata arrangements for partial implementation will apply.

This area is dealt with in more detail in section 4.5 of this circular.

1.2.4 Wellbeing

The Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme began with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017, to build up to 400 hours of timetabled engagement for students entering first year in September 2020. In view of the various challenges facing schools on resumption in September 2020, schools are being given the option to defer the increase of wellbeing provision at Junior Cycle from 300 to 400 hours by one year, until the 2021/22 academic year.

In addition, in planning their Wellbeing programmes, schools should note that from September 2021 onwards, the use of the Junior Certificate syllabuses for SPHE and CSPE should be discontinued. The NCCA has also been requested to prepare a 135-hour programme for Physical Education (PE).

In view of the fact that, due to the effect of the of COVID-19 pandemic, the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will not be produced in respect of Junior Cycle 2020, the Wellbeing area of learning will now be reported on in the JCPA for the first time in 2021. See section 2.7 for details.



1.2.5 Junior Cycle History

In October 2019, the Minister for Education announced that History should have special core status within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Further details in this regard are set out in Circular Letter 16/2020 (link in Appendix 1). From September 2020, students will study English, Irish, Mathematics and History (with some exceptions in the case of students with special educational needs), along with a number of other subjects or short courses in their Junior Cycle programme.

2. CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN JUNIOR CYCLE

2.1 The curriculum and assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle

The curriculum and assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle are as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and in the related specifications and syllabuses developed by the NCCA and approved by the Minister. Each school should use the Framework to plan a programme for each of the three years of Junior Cycle that meets the requirements set out in this circular, is informed by the particular learning needs and interests of students, and reflects the characteristic spirit of the school. The programme planned for students entering Junior Cycle should be available for students and parents/guardians as soon as is feasible for students commencing first year in the academic year 2020/21, and should take account of the curriculum and assessment guidance for post-primary school leaders and teachers in respect of the return to school in 2020/21, issued by the Department in July 2020, and the guidance on assessment arrangements for the Certificate Examinations 2021 which was published in August 2020.

2.2 Subjects, short courses, priority learning units and other learning activities

The *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* provides that students in recognised schools will study:

- A range of subjects

OR

- A combination of subjects and short courses

OR

- In the case of some individual students with special educational needs, a combination of priority learning units, and/or short courses and/or subjects, suited to their individual needs

AND

- A Programme in the area of Wellbeing.

Schools will ensure that the 24 statements of learning and the 8 key skills feature in the programmes offered to their Junior Cycle students. The learning outcomes are clearly set out in subject and short course specifications.



2.3 Phasing of Junior Cycle Reform

Since September 2019 students entering first year are studying new specifications in **all** subjects, while students who entered first year in 2018/19 are studying a combination of Junior Cycle and Junior Certificate subjects. A link to the NCCA website where all the specifications are set out is included at Appendix 1.

2.4 Approved Subject Specifications, Syllabuses and Guidelines

The subject specifications and assessment guidelines setting out the curriculum and assessment arrangements for each Junior Cycle subject, short course or area of learning, and approved by the Minister, are as follows:

- The Junior Cycle subject specifications and assessment guidelines published after 2014 consistent with the planned, phased introduction of subjects;
- For students commencing in September 2019 onwards, these comprise all of the new Junior Cycle subject specifications namely: English, Science, Business Studies, Irish, Modern Foreign Languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian), Visual Art, Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music, Geography, Classics, Technologies (Engineering, Wood Technology, Applied Technology and Graphics) Religious Education and Jewish Studies;
- The relevant NCCA Junior Cycle short course specifications selected by the school (if applicable) for inclusion in its Junior Cycle programme;
- School and/or externally developed short course specifications selected by the school (if applicable) for inclusion in its Junior Cycle programme;
- The NCCA Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle, including the NCCA publication 'Considerations in planning for Junior Cycle Wellbeing 2020-21';
- The NCCA Level 2 Learning Programme Guidelines for Teachers;
- The NCCA Level 1 Learning Programme Guidelines for Teachers.

2.5 Number of Subjects and Short Courses studied by Students

Students will study a minimum of 8* and a maximum of 10 subjects for final examination, the exact number being dependent on whether the student is also taking short courses. A maximum of four short courses may be studied in the Junior Cycle programme, except in cases where a student is studying Wellbeing short courses in SPHE, CSPE or PE. It is not the aim or intention that short courses would replace existing subjects.

Exceptions to the minimum number of 8 subjects should only be made in the cases of students with special educational needs who may take a lower number of subjects, combined in some cases with Level 2 or Level 1 learning programmes.

In October 2019, the Minister for Education announced that History should have special core status within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Further details in this regard are set out in Circular Letter 16/2020. From September 2020, students will study English, Irish, Mathematics and History (some exceptions for History apply in the case



of students with special educational needs), along with a number of other subjects and/or short courses in their Junior Cycle programme.

It is the responsibility of the school authority to ensure that the Department's Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD) reflects accurately the subjects each student is studying – both examination and non-examination subjects, including subjects undertaken outside of a school setting. PPOD is used to provide the State Examinations Commission (SEC) with details of students and their subjects for examination purposes. Having accurate and complete data on PPOD is essential so that students are provided with the materials they require for their Assessment Tasks¹ where relevant, practical and performance tests and final examinations.

To help Junior Cycle students manage the demands of Junior Cycle and to ensure that the requirements in relation to the assessment process are not excessive, the following arrangements will apply:

In all types of recognised second-level schools, for students who commenced Junior Cycle in September 2018, 2019 and 2020, the following requirements apply:

Subjects and short courses	
	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• study a maximum of 10² subjects for Final Examination and reporting through the JCPA. OR• study up to 9 subjects for Final Examination and up to 2 short courses for reporting through the JCPA OR• study up to 8 subjects for Final Examination and up to 4³ short courses for reporting through the JCPA
Wellbeing	
	This area of learning will incorporate learning traditionally included in CSPE, PE, and SPHE. Schools are reminded that there is a minimum threshold of 300 hours across the three years of

¹ It should be noted that, as a result of specific arrangements put in place for students entering third year in 2020/21 due to COVID-19 school closures, there are no Assessment Tasks for students in the third year of Junior Cycle in 2020/21.

² The maximum of 10 subjects includes subjects studied outside of a recognised school setting. It should be noted that students who choose to study a subject outside of their school cannot complete the requirements for the Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) and Assessment Task for that subject.

³ A student may study more than four short courses if studying one or more Wellbeing short courses in SPHE, CSPE and PE.



	<p>Junior Cycle which should be provided for PE, SPHE and CSPE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PE: 135 hours spread across first, second and third year (and must be provided in each of the three years.). • SPHE: 70 hours spread across first, second and third year (and must be provided in each of the three years). • CSPE: 70 hours spread across first, second and third year <p>The options available are *:</p> <p>Option 1: The specifications for the NCCA short courses in CSPE, SPHE, PE (100 hours each);</p> <p>Option 2: School-designed or externally-designed short courses in CSPE, SPHE, PE (100 hours) using the NCCA template and ‘Guidelines on developing your own Short Course’, which can be found in Appendix 1;</p> <p>Option 3: Other programmes/modules/units for CSPE, SPHE, PE developed using Appendix I of the NCCA Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines;</p> <p>Option 4: The Junior Certificate syllabus for CSPE (1996), the SPHE Junior Certificate syllabus (2000), the PE syllabus (2003).⁴</p> <p>Note that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools can include other areas in their provision for wellbeing, as detailed in section 2.7 <p>* Or a combination of these options provided the minimum threshold time across the three years for PE, SPHE and CSPE is met.</p>
<p>Other areas of learning</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may engage in other learning activities set out in a school’s programme for

⁴ In planning their Wellbeing programme, schools should note that from September 2021 onwards, the use of the Junior Certificate syllabuses for SPHE and CSPE should be discontinued. The NCCA has also been requested to prepare a 135 hour programme for Physical Education (PE).



	<p>Junior Cycle. These can include social, cultural, pastoral, scientific, entrepreneurial and other activities that can support the 24 statements of learning and the 8 key skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Junior Cycle programme must include guidance education. The 2017 Whole School Guidance Framework developed by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is a useful resource to schools for planning for Guidance in Education. A link to the Framework document can be found at Appendix 1.• Some schools will also provide students with a course in religious instruction reflective of their own characteristic spirit as part of a Junior Cycle programme.
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Please also note that:

- Schools may continue to offer more than 10 subjects to their First-Year students to facilitate subject selection for study for Final Examination. However, when students enter second year, the maximum of 10 subjects must be adhered to.
- The list of possible subjects can be found in Appendix 1.
- Students will study between 8 and 10 subjects⁵.
- Each student must include Irish, English, Mathematics and History among the subjects that he/she studies.⁶

Students studying the programme, as set out in the requirements above, will be recognised by the Department of Education and Skills for the purposes of teacher allocations and other payments to the school.

2.6 Subjects taken outside of a school setting

The Junior Cycle Framework is designed to be delivered in a school setting and all subjects and areas of learning can only be undertaken in their entirety within a school setting. The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is a school-based award, which draws upon and reports on achievement across all elements of assessment

⁵ *Exceptions to the minimum number of 8 subjects should only be made in the cases of students with special educational needs, who may take a lower number of subjects.*

⁶ *Certain students may be exempted from the study of Irish in accordance with Circular 52/2019. Some exceptions to the study of the subject History will apply in the case of students with special educational needs. Circular 16/2020 refers.*



including ongoing assessment, Classroom-Based Assessments and State Examination grades and descriptors.

The three-year Junior Cycle programme is underpinned by the integration of assessment and reporting as a normal part of teaching and learning in classrooms. The Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in each subject area are assessed by the teacher, based on the learning that has taken place within the context of a classroom. Due to COVID-19, students in the school year 2020/21 may, in exceptional circumstances, need to complete some or all of their work on CBAs in school or remotely, with guidance from their teachers..

Teachers in a school involved in teaching the subject will engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings (SLARs). The holding of the SLAR meeting is an important part of the assessment process and teachers have received training on best practice in this area. .

In some cases, students may study a subject(s) outside of a recognised school setting. In such situations (even where the student is sitting less than ten subjects in school) the requirements regarding Classroom-Based Assessments by recognised schools cannot be satisfied and CBAs cannot, therefore, be reported on as part of the JCPA. Where students cannot complete the CBAs within a recognised school setting (or recognised centre for further education), the CBAs will display as “not reported” on the JCPA.

Students who have elected to be home schooled will have access to the final examination at Junior Cycle. A JCPA will not be provided to such students, as the JCPA is designed as a school-based award. The State Examinations Commission (SEC) can provide these students with a statement of the results of their final examinations.

It is important to note that the maximum number of 10 subjects allowed for examination and certification by the SEC may not be exceeded, regardless of whether subjects are being studied as extra subjects outside of a school setting.

The full suite of learning and assessment components at Junior Cycle is only available when studying in a school setting. Where a student wishes to undertake a subject outside of the recognised school setting, the school should inform parents/guardians and students at the earliest opportunity that:

- Students who choose to study a subject outside of their school cannot complete the requirements for the Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) and⁷ (AT);

⁷ Please note that new, alternative arrangements are in place for students in third year in 2020/21 due to COVID-19 school closures. As a result of these new arrangements, there are no Assessment Tasks for students in the third year of Junior Cycle in 2020/21. The grade descriptor awarded for these subjects will be based on the examination paper.



- In relevant subjects, not being able to complete the requirements for CBAs and will result in students only being able to attain the marks available in the final examination
- In the case of Music, as an exceptional measure and in light of the changes introduced regarding CBAs for 2020/21, students entering third year in 2020/21 will be permitted to continue studying outside of a school setting for reporting on their JCPA.

2.7 Wellbeing Programme

All students commencing Junior Cycle from September 2017 onwards undertake an area of learning called Wellbeing. Wellbeing crosses the three years of Junior Cycle and builds on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' wellbeing. It is envisioned that the school's commitment to this area of learning will increasingly have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the students. It will include learning opportunities to further enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students.

The Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme began with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017, to build up to 400 hours of timetabled engagement for students entering first year in September 2020. However, in view of the various challenges facing schools on resumption in September 2020, schools are being given the option to defer the increase of wellbeing provision at Junior Cycle from 300 to 400 hours by one year, until the 2021/22 academic year.

The NCCA Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle aim to support schools in planning and developing a coherent Wellbeing programme that builds on the understandings, practices and curricula for Wellbeing already existing in schools. When planning a Wellbeing Programme schools should consider the NCCA developed short courses in PE, SPHE, and CSPE. These are the result of widespread consultation with education partners to ensure that the courses address important, relevant and meaningful learning for young people in these subjects. NCCA developed short courses also include assessment advice.

The NCCA has also published 'Considerations in planning for Junior Cycle Wellbeing 2020-21', which can be found in Appendix 1. This document was developed to support planning for the 2020/21 school year in response to the unique circumstances that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and which will influence Junior Cycle Wellbeing planning.

In addition to programmes of study in PE, SPHE and CSPE schools may also choose to include other areas in their provision for Wellbeing. Examples are set out in the NCCA guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle and include areas such as guidance,



school-provided courses/units that address aspects of wellbeing, elements of other subjects that are clearly linked to wellbeing, school initiatives and relevant courses and units developed by outside agencies and organisations. In selecting programmes or resources developed by external facilitators schools should refer to Circular 43/2018 – *Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education’s Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*, link to the latter of which can be found in Appendix 1. It is acknowledged that owing to COVID-19, using external facilitators to promote wellbeing may not always be possible in a physical setting.

Once a school has considered the particular needs of its students in Junior Cycle, unique context and available resources, there are a wide range of curriculum options available for consideration. Schools may introduce units of learning to cover part of a Wellbeing programme. However, the rationale for the inclusion of these units in the school’s Wellbeing programme must be clear. It is important that they are linked to the six wellbeing indicators, that the learning about wellbeing they address is clearly outlined and that they are inclusive of all students in Junior Cycle. The planning template to support schools in planning units of learning in Wellbeing can be found at Appendix I of the NCCA Wellbeing Guidelines.

Optional wellbeing-related initiatives which engage a small number of students, rather than a whole class group, can be effective for those involved. However, these learning experiences should not be counted as part of the Wellbeing programme as they do not include all students in the class. Staff, parents and students should be consulted when a school’s Wellbeing programme is being developed. There is a series of appendices in the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines to support schools in this process.

The Department’s Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023, together with the resources developed for schools can be used to support planning for up to 400 hours of engagement. The programme of CPD provided to support the wellbeing promotion process will be aligned with the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme.

2.7.1 Reporting on Wellbeing through the JCPA

Reporting on students’ learning in Wellbeing aims to provide a picture of what students have learned about wellbeing and the skills they have developed to support their wellbeing. It is expected that schools will report on student learning about wellbeing as part of ongoing assessment and reporting throughout Junior Cycle.

In view of the fact that, due to the effect of the of COVID-19 pandemic, the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will not be produced in respect of Junior Cycle 2020, Wellbeing will now be reported on through the JCPA for the first time in 2021. Wellbeing will show in a separate area of the JCPA. It is in this area that



schools will report on student achievement in CSPE, SPHE and PE. This will be facilitated by the use of the descriptors which have already been developed and reflect the appropriate language of learning⁸.

The Wellbeing area of the JCPA will also include a free text space where schools can report on achievement in Wellbeing in other areas as set out in section 2.7. Further information on this may be found in the JCPA Handbook.

2.8 Diversity and Accessibility

Subject specifications, short courses and Priority Learning Units (PLUs) developed by the NCCA have been designed to be as universal and inclusive as feasible, providing meaningful and valuable learning opportunities for students from all cultural and social backgrounds, and from a wide variety of individual circumstances. This includes ensuring that the learning opportunities are as accessible as possible to all students, including students with special educational needs, and that statements about the skills to be developed are articulated in a way that reflects this.

When planning its Junior Cycle programme, each school is required to take account of the school's local context and the backgrounds, interests, and abilities of its students and to ensure that, within the school's Junior Cycle programme, there is sufficient flexibility to cater for the individual learning needs of all students, including those with special educational needs.

Notwithstanding the above, there will inevitably remain learning outcomes within subjects and short course specifications that cannot be achieved by some students by virtue of a particular special educational need.

Schools should be conscious of this when planning their Junior Cycle programmes in order to ensure that, as far as possible, the particular range of subjects, short courses and Priority Learning Units available is appropriate to the needs and aptitudes of each student. The individual student and his/her parents/guardians should be made aware of the feasibility and appropriateness of the curricular options available in light of the student's ability.

2.9 Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs)

Level 1 Learning Programmes (the term 'Level' refers to broad alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications) and their main curriculum component - Priority Learning Units (PLUs) have been approved by the Minister and have been available to schools since September 2018. L1LPs are designed for students with learning difficulties/needs in the low moderate and severe and profound range of ability and as

⁸ Where students are not following the short course, the descriptor awarded by the teacher should reflect the student's learning and achievement during the course of study.



such are prevented from accessing all or some of the L2LPs. L1LPs will be reported on for the first time in the JCPA in 2021.

L1LPs consist of six Priority Learning Units (PLUs) and two Level 1 short courses. Some students participating in a Level 1 Learning Programme may also take a small number of Level 2 PLUs (or elements of a PLU) and short courses. L1LP guidelines are available at Appendix 1.

Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs)

Level 2 Learning Programmes are available for certain categories of students with general learning difficulties/needs in the low mild to high moderate range of ability who commenced their Junior Cycle from September 2014. These programmes were reported on for the first time in the JCPA in 2017.

L2LPs are designed for a small number of Junior Cycle students where the difficulties/needs of those students prevent them from taking some or all of the subjects or short courses on offer at Level 3 as a result of being identified as requiring additional learning supports. L2LPs are not suitable for students who are learning English as an additional language, and should not be undertaken by these students.

Some students with general learning difficulties/needs in the low mild to high moderate range of ability may also be capable of undertaking a Level 3 state examination and a CBA or only the CBA in that subject or a Level 3 short course.

Students' learning achievements will be reported to students/parents/guardians through the JCPA. L2LP guidelines are available at Appendix 1.

2.10 Junior Certificate School Programme

Schools that currently offer the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) may continue to do so. A review of JCSP is underway, but it has not been possible to conclude this work due to other pressures arising in managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on curriculum and assessment planning. No new applications are currently being accepted from schools for entry to the JCSP.

2.11 Timetabling

The teaching, learning, assessment and reporting activities that take place in the revised Junior Cycle programmes encompass a wider range of activities, a new balance between the development of skills and competences and the development of students' knowledge. To facilitate this learning and the implementation of good formative assessment practices, a minimum class period of 40 minutes is required. Certain subjects require double class periods (2 x 40 minutes) during the school week. Schools must ensure that class periods of less than 40 minutes are no longer timetabled. Some schools may find the use of longer class periods of up to 60 minutes (rather than 40 minutes) more suited to the learning needs of their students and the



subjects they study, or alternatively a combination of class periods of 40 minutes and longer class periods of up to 60 minutes.

English, Irish and Mathematics will each require a **minimum** of 240 hours of timetabled student engagement. Apart from English, Irish and Mathematics, each subject, including History, will require a **minimum** of 200 hours of timetabled student engagement that includes teaching, learning and assessment activity.

Priority Learning Units are designed for **up to** 250 hours of student engagement and are set out in terms of elements and learning outcomes. Short courses **require** 100 hours of student engagement over the three years of the Junior Cycle.

In schools where a sampling programme is in place for first years, school management should ensure that such programmes do not impact on the overall time available for the subject options chosen as students progress in subsequent years of the Junior Cycle.

3. ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING IN JUNIOR CYCLE

3.1 Assessment arrangements for subjects

The Framework for Junior Cycle has introduced a dual approach to assessment that supports student learning over the three years of Junior Cycle. 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.

All assessment for Final Examination purposes remains externally devised and assessed by the SEC.

More information on assessment is available on the NCCA website at:

<https://www.ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/assessment-and-reporting>

In light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic specific guidance on assessment arrangements for students taking the Certificate Examinations in 2021 was published in August 2020. These arrangements, referenced in Section 1.2 above, are designed to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by these students during the 2019/20 school year.

For students who entered 1st year in September 2019 or entering 1st year in September 2020, the arrangements as outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 currently remain unchanged. These include:

- The assessment of the subject specifications through ongoing in-class feedback, two Classroom-Based Assessments (generally one in second year and one in third year), reported on to parents/guardians and students by the school,



- an Assessment Task (devised by the NCCA and marked by the SEC) in most subjects, and
- a Final Examination set, administered and marked by the SEC at the end of third year.

The combination of the Assessment Task and the Final Examination, marked and awarded by the SEC, will generate a grade. Slightly modified assessment arrangements will apply in Visual Art, Music, Home Economics, and the Technology subjects.

3.2 Classroom-Based Assessments

Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) allow students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and skills and their ability to apply them in ways that may not be possible in an externally assessed examination. They are used in the assessment of learning in subjects and in short courses. CBAs are assessed by the students' teachers and the descriptors awarded are reported to students and parents/guardians during Junior Cycle using the normal school reporting procedures and in the JCPA.

Students who entered 1st year in September 2019 were the first cohort of students undertaking a full programme under the new Framework for Junior Cycle. As all new subject specifications include ongoing feedback, formative assessment, CBAs, assessment tasks (where relevant) as well as final examinations, there is a need to avoid 'over-assessment' and to minimise the cumulative burden on students and teachers of multiple assessments across the full range of subjects. In this context, the Classroom-Based Assessments will substitute for other assessments currently undertaken in the school such as in-house examinations. Schools should examine their own assessment policies and must plan for the replacement of in-house examinations with Classroom-Based Assessments for students, where relevant.

3.2.1 Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in Subjects

Students who commenced first year in 2018 have a revised schedule for their CBAs as outlined in section 1.2.1 above. Students entering first year in 2019 and 2020 will undertake two Classroom-Based Assessments facilitated by their class teacher, generally⁹ one in second year and one in third year.

Classroom-Based Assessments in all subjects are specified at a common level. The assessments associated with CBAs cover a broad range of activities, including oral tasks, written work of different types, practical or designing and making tasks, artistic performances, scientific experiments, projects, portfolios or other suitable tasks,

⁹ For Irish both CBAs will take place in 3rd year.



depending on the subject in question. It is acknowledged that during COVID-19, these activities must be held within the prevailing COVID-19 precautions.

A small number of subjects, (Visual Art, Music, Home Economics and the Technology subjects) involve practical work, a performance, or the creation of an artefact which is currently marked by the SEC. These subjects will continue to have an external SEC assessment of the practical work, performance or artefact, together with the related accompanying written evidence, as appropriate. In these subjects the second CBA will be linked to the forthcoming practical work, performance or artefact. The formative assessment related to the production of these artefacts and performances will be reported upon to the student and parent/guardian by the school as for all other second Classroom-Based Assessments. The above should be read in the context of section 2.6 of this Circular – Subjects taken outside of a school setting

CBAs will be undertaken by students within class time to a national timetable. Students who are certified absent owing to COVID-19 can be facilitated to research, create and complete their CBA remotely, with support and guidance from their teacher. Details of the timetable are available at www.ncca.ie along with assessment guidelines for each subject are available on www.curriculumonline.ie.

3.2.2 Key dates for Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in the school year 2020-2021

The window within which schools can complete Classroom-Based Assessments and SLAR meetings is provided below. Classroom-Based Assessments must be completed within the time period allocated as specified in the Assessment Guidelines for each subject. The SLAR meeting should take place no more than a month after completion of the CBA, with the exception of SLARs of student work from CBAs completed during school closures which may not yet have taken place. Where necessary, key dates for classroom-based assessments may be amended in light of particular circumstances schools may encounter due to COVID-19.

Student cohort 2018 – 2021 (3rd years)

CBA 2 in Visual Art (required)

Latest date for completion	Friday 20th November 2020
Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Friday 27th November 2020
Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher	Friday 4th December 2020

CBA 1 in Modern Foreign Languages (required)

Latest date for completion	Friday 4th December 2020
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Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Friday 11th December 2020
Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher	Friday 18th December 2020

Either Classroom-Based Assessment 1 **or** 2 in English, Science, Business Studies, Mathematics, History, Geography

Latest date for completion	Friday 12th March 2021
Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Friday 19th March 2021
Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher	Friday 26th March 2021

Classroom-Based Assessment 2 in Gaeilge, Home Economics, Music (required)

Latest date for completion	Friday 12th March 2021
Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Friday 19th March 2021
Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher	Friday 26th March 2021

Student cohort 2019 – 2022 (2nd years)

Classroom-Based Assessment 1 in English, Science, Business Studies, Modern Foreign Languages, Visual Art, Maths, History, Geography, Music, Home Economics

Window for completion	Monday 2nd November 2020 – Friday 14th May 2021
Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Wednesday 19th May 2021
Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher	Wednesday 26th May 2021

Classroom-Based Assessment 1 in Applied Technology, Engineering, Graphics, Wood Technology, Religious Education, Jewish Studies, Classics

Window for completion	Wednesday 6th January – Friday 14th May 2021
Latest date for award of provisional descriptors by the teacher	Wednesday 19th May 2021



Latest date for completion of Subject Learning and Assessment Review and for award of final descriptors by the teacher

Wednesday 26th May 2021

The broad time-bands in which CBAs and SLARs may be completed allow schools greater flexibility to organise the timing of the CBA in a way that suits the learning needs of students and the organisational needs of the school. This also allows for greater flexibility for schools to integrate other relevant learning experiences such as co-curricular or extra-curricular activities into their yearly timetable.

The scheduling of CBAs and associated SLAR meetings within the wider time-bands is a matter for the management of the school, in liaison with subject departments.

In order to ensure effective SLAR meetings, it is recommended that the timing of the completion of CBAs and SLAR meetings remain as close together as the situation in specific school contexts allows.

In some instances, students' work, developed as part of the CBA process, may need to be recorded and/or stored online. For example, teachers will record samples of presentations made by students which will be used for discussion at the Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings.

In all instances, when recording and storing students' work, teachers and schools are required to act in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in force since 25 May 2018, and child protection requirements.

When assessing the level of student achievement in a Classroom-Based Assessment teachers will use 'on-balance' judgement in relation to the Features of Quality, which are set out in four level descriptors:

Classroom Based Assessment Descriptors
Exceptional
Above Expectations
In Line with Expectations
Yet to Meet Expectations

3.2 3 Classroom-Based Assessments in Short Courses

Arrangements for CBAs in short courses remain unchanged. Most of the assessment activities during the teaching of short courses will be formative in nature. The evidence of learning will be generated according to the short course specification and will relate directly to the aims and learning outcomes of the short course. Junior Cycle short courses will have one Classroom-Based Assessment. This includes PE where students in third year in 2020/21 will be required to complete one CBA rather than the usual two. Short courses are reported on by the school to students and parents/guardians during Junior Cycle and in the JCPA.



Guidelines for the Classroom-Based Assessment of each NCCA-developed short course are available at Appendix 1.

3.2.4 Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLARs) meetings to support implementation of CBAs

When students have completed CBAs, the CBAs are assessed by the students' teachers, and the outcomes will be reported to the students and parents/guardians. To support teachers in assessing students' Classroom-Based Assessments, teachers engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings. At these meetings, teachers share and discuss representative samples of students' work and build a common understanding about the quality of their students' learning.

Where there is a single teacher of a subject in the school, that teacher can be facilitated to participate in a SLAR meeting with another school. In the case of an Irish medium school, the teacher can be facilitated to participate in a SLAR meeting with another Irish-medium school. The potential of digital technologies to support such meetings may be explored.

It may be necessary, in the case of short courses, for schools to consider SLAR meetings electronically with teachers of short courses from other schools.

SLARs should take place, save in exceptional circumstances, for the assessment of CBAs that are completed in short courses and the achievement of students will be described using the same descriptors as for subjects above.

SLAR meetings play a key role in developing a collegial professional culture and building up expertise about the judgements that teachers make about student achievement.

Matters relating to the holding of SLAR meetings in schools were the subject of further discussions between the Department, the teacher unions, and management bodies. Following these discussions the Department presented schools with four options for the holding of SLAR meetings, detailed in circular letter 17/2020, the fourth of which allowed for SLAR meetings to be held entirely during normal school tuition hours, but with a corresponding reduction in the teacher allocation for professional time. No school chose that option. Schools should use only one of the following options to organise SLAR meetings:

Option A

- Schools may choose to maintain or implement a timetable having four long days and one shorter day.
- This timetable will facilitate SLAR and other meetings relating to Junior Cycle to be held in the period following the conclusion of tuition on the shorter day, or at another time that does not impinge on student tuition time.



- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student tuition time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Substitution and Supervision must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.
- A SLAR meeting will be a single meeting of approximately 2 hours duration.

Option B

- An agreement is reached at school level between teachers and management that SLAR meetings will be held at a time suitable to the teachers in the subject groups without impinging on tuition time.
- Should circumstances allow, a meeting, or portion thereof, may take place within normal school tuition hours.
- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student tuition time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Substitution and Supervision must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.
- A SLAR meeting will be a single meeting of approximately 2 hours duration.

Option C

- The SLAR process will constitute 40 minutes of preparation time from within a teacher's professional time, and a collaborative portion of a minimum of 80 minutes' duration, the latter to be held as a single meeting.
- Once students have completed their CBA, their subject class teacher will carry out a provisional assessment of the students' learning as developed and evidenced by the CBA process, based on the Features of Quality. These provisional assessments may be modified in light of the discussions that take place at the SLAR meeting.
- In preparation for the collaborative portion of the SLAR process, each teacher will identify one sample of students' work for each descriptor, where feasible, for discussion at the meeting. Each teacher will submit his/her samples to the Facilitator, together with a brief note on each sample of students' work showing their reasons for their provisional assessment of the students' work. This will support all relevant teachers in reviewing the samples of students' work in the preparatory phase.
- The Facilitator will assemble and make available the appropriate examples of student work and attached notes supplied by the subject teachers some days prior to the commencement of the collaborative portion of the SLAR process.
- Teachers will use 40 minutes of their professional time to access this material, examine the samples and attached notes, and familiarise themselves with their content.
- The balance of the SLAR process (a meeting of a minimum 80 minutes' duration) will be held at a time suitable to the teachers in the subject group,



without impinging on student tuition time and without the use of any substitution.

- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student contact time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Supervision and Substitution must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.

3.3 Assessment Task arrangements for 2020/21

This year revised arrangements for 3rd year Junior Cycle students in the 2020/21 academic year, announced in August 2020, and arising from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, removed the requirement to complete Assessment Tasks (AT).

Assessment Tasks have previously accounted for 10% of the final mark in the relevant subjects. For 3rd year students in the 2020/21 academic year, this 10% will be subsumed into the final examination, which will account for 100% of the final marks in the relevant subjects.

3.4 Final Examination for third-year 2020/21 students

For most¹⁰ Junior Cycle subjects there will be a written examination which is set, administered and marked by the SEC. The written examinations will be no longer than two hours duration once the new specification has been introduced for the subject.

The final written examinations are scheduled to take place in June 2021. The final written examination will be at a common level, apart from English, Irish (T1 and T2) and Mathematics, where there will be two levels (higher and ordinary) available.

Student achievement in the Final Examinations will incorporate, in the case of the practical subjects, student achievement in the externally assessed practical component (artefact, practical work, or performance).

Achievement will be recorded using a set of grades. These state-certified grades will first be reported by the SEC in provisional form in September/early October following the end of third year. They will subsequently be confirmed and included in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) which is to be issued from the school. The grades will appear as follows:

Grading of the Final Examination

GRADE	RANGE (%)
Distinction	≥90 to 100
Higher Merit	≥75 and <90
Merit	≥55 and <75

¹⁰ Visual Art is the only Junior Cycle subject that does not have a Final SEC Examination in June



Achieved	≥40 and <55
Partially Achieved	≥20 and <40
Not Graded	≥0 and <20

The existing SEC supports for reasonable accommodation in the Junior Certificate examination (RACE Scheme) continue to be provided for candidates sitting the Final Examinations in the Junior Cycle subjects.

3.5 Assessment arrangements for students with special educational needs

Assessment is an intrinsic part of any learning programme as it promotes learning and supports teaching. There is an expectation that all students should, as far as possible, have the opportunity to present evidence of their learning in Classroom-Based Assessments. To ensure this, schools are expected to remove any barriers students may encounter arising from a spectrum of social, gender, ethnic, cultural, environmental factors, or from specific physical or learning challenges. Any arrangements should be in line with those the school has put in place to support the student's learning throughout the school year and are designed to ensure that students can demonstrate what they have learned rather than compensate for lack of learning/achievement.

Notwithstanding the above, there will inevitably remain learning outcomes within subjects and short course specifications that cannot be achieved by some students by virtue of a particular special educational need.

Students with special educational needs that are categorised as falling in the range of higher functioning moderate and lower functioning mild general learning disabilities may be studying, as appropriate, a combination of priority learning units (PLUs) and short courses in a Level 2 Learning Programme. Those students in the low moderate, and severe and profound range of general learning difficulties may be studying, as appropriate, a combination of priority learning units (PLUs) and short courses in a Level 1 Learning Programme.

Students undertaking a Level 2 Learning Programme may also undertake subjects and/or short courses at Level 3. Assessment arrangements for the Level 3 subjects and short courses that may be involved for these students will be as set out in sections 2.13.1 and 2.13.3.

It is not anticipated that students undertaking a Level 1 programme will be sitting Level 3 Learning Programme examinations.

Student learning in the PLUs and in short courses included in L1LPs and L2LPs, will be assessed by the students' teachers and reported on to students and parents/guardians



during Junior Cycle and in the JCPA using appropriate descriptors – Achieved (L2LPs) and Successfully Completed or Progress Achieved (L1LPs).

- PLUs: the evidence of learning will be generated with reference to the NCCA specifications for the PLUs as outlined in the NCCA publication Level 2 Learning Programmes: Guidelines for Teachers and will be directly related to the learning outcomes of those PLUs
- Level 2 short courses: there will be one Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) for each short course. Any arrangements to ensure the accessibility of these CBAs for students should be in line with those the school has put in place to support the student's learning throughout the school year. These should be designed to ensure that students can demonstrate what they have learned, rather than to compensate for lack of learning/achievement.

Over the three years in Junior Cycle, students assemble evidence of their learning in a Level 1 and/or Level 2 Learning Programme in a portfolio. Students submit this portfolio to their teachers and the students' work is assessed and reported on.

The JCPA can document a student's achievements in Level 1 and/or Level 2 Learning Programmes, as reported by the school. When the student has submitted evidence of achievement in the majority of learning outcomes for each element in a particular PLU (up to the maximum of six PLUs for L1LPs and five PLUs for L2LPs), the title of the PLU will appear in the relevant section of the JCPA. Where a student does not submit evidence of achievement in a particular PLU that PLU will not appear on the JCPA. Apart from the requirements related to PLUs, students will also include evidence of learning in Level 1 and Level 2 short courses. When the student has successfully completed a CBA for a Level 2 short course, the descriptor 'Achieved' will be recorded in the relevant section of the JCPA with the title of the relevant short course. Where a student has not successfully completed a CBA for a Level 2 short course, the title of the short course will not appear on the JCPA. Achievement in both PLUs and Short Courses (Level 1) is on the basis of one of the following descriptors: Successfully Completed or Progress Achieved.

Guidance in relation to revised arrangements for 3rd year students in 2020/21 following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes (L1LPs and L2LPs), in view of the impact of COVID-19, will also shortly be issued.

3.6 Reporting on Student Achievement

3.6.1 Reporting

Formal reporting on the progress and achievements of students will take place in first year and second year, and the school will issue the composite Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement following final examination. This will complement reporting on progress



to parents/guardians during parent-teacher meetings and through normal student feedback sessions, including feedback after the completion of each CBA.

The NCCA has developed reporting templates in line with the style and format of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. Schools are encouraged to develop their own reporting formats along similar lines. The draft templates prepared by the NCCA provide some examples of how student progress might be reported at the end of second year in Junior Cycle. The templates illustrate how a school might adopt a phased approach to the inclusion of the new terminology of Junior Cycle within their reports. This formal report will be supplemented by a range of other forms of reporting throughout the school year, including parent teacher meetings and a range of informal written and oral feedback on student progress.

Guidelines on Reporting, including examples of templates for use by schools, are available at <https://www.ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/assessment-and-reporting>

3.6.2 Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)

Due to the cancellation of the 2020 Junior Cycle examinations as a result of COVID-19, no JCPA will be awarded to students in third year in 2019/20. Instead, alternative arrangements have been put in place on foot of the ministerial announcement of April 29, 2020. A link to this announcement is provided in Appendix 1.

The JCPA for 2020/21 will report student achievement across a range of areas of learning in Junior Cycle, including in:

- SEC Final Examinations;
- Short Courses;
- Classroom-Based Assessments¹¹;
- Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) (where appropriate);
- Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) (where appropriate) (will first appear on JCPAs in 2021);
- The area of Wellbeing (will first appear on JCPAs from 2021);
- Other areas of learning.

In the transitional period, the JCPA will reflect results provided by the SEC for both new and existing Junior Cycle subjects, with new subjects increasing in number year on year until all new subject specifications are examined in summer 2022. Further information on this may be found in the JCPA Handbook.

¹¹ *The design of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) for 2021 will be adjusted to take account of the revised arrangements for CBAs.*



3.6.3 Recording and reporting arrangements

The following paragraphs provide a broad outline of the technical arrangements currently in place for the production of JCPAs in respect of the various schools and centres where students undertake the Junior Cycle.

Recognised post-primary schools will record the outcome of Classroom Based Assessments (in subjects and short courses), as well as achievements in PLUs (where appropriate), for their students and these details will be uploaded onto the Department's Post Primary Online Database System (PPOD). This data, along with the outcome from the SEC Final Examinations (following the appeals process and incorporating the Assessment Task¹²) will be recorded on a JCPA for each student. The part-completed JCPA template will then be made available electronically to schools who will record relevant details of achievements in the 'Other Areas of Learning' and 'Wellbeing' sections in respect of each student. The completed JCPAs will be issued by schools to their students and parents/guardians.

In the case of **Special Schools, Youthreach Centres, Detention Centres and Adult Learners in other non-standard school centres** where students undertake the Junior Cycle, a part-completed JCPA template will be provided to these schools and centres through an automated system developed by the Department. The system is the Junior Cycle Assessment Database (JCAD). The template will include the outcomes of any SEC Final Examinations (incorporating the Assessment Task¹³) taken by students where applicable. Schools will record locally on the JCPA, the outcome of students' Classroom-Based Assessments (in subjects and short courses as appropriate), students' achievements in PLUs, as well as achievements under 'Other Areas of Learning' and Wellbeing. The completed JCPA will be supplied by these schools to their students and parents/guardians.

3.6.4 JCPA Retention and Records Management

Schools will be required to save the JCPA of each student – either electronically or in hard copy. Schools should retain copies of the JCPA for 7 years after the age of majority (18). The retained records should be used to meet requests by students for their JCPA, including after the students have left the school. Schools should have regard in this context to the GDPR requirements introduced in May 2018.

3.7 Adult learners in adult education settings

Adult learners in the school year 2020/21 will continue to have the flexibility to study a subject or subjects at Junior Cycle level within one academic year. These adult learners will undertake one Classroom-Based Assessment (that completed in third year

¹² Students entering third year in September 2020 will not be required to complete Assessment Tasks for the relevant subjects.

¹³ Students entering third year in September 2020 will not be required to complete Assessment Tasks for the relevant subjects.



by students in mainstream schools) and the Final Examination.¹⁴ Adult learners may also study short courses and Priority Learning Units as suited to their learning needs.

Adult learners are not required to undertake study in any specific subject and they are not required to study Physical Education, CSPE or SPHE or other elements in the area of learning known as Wellbeing.

Because the Framework for Junior Cycle is designed as a three-year school-based programme it is not suited to be undertaken within a shorter timeframe. For this reason more appropriate alternative learning programmes for adult learners in the future will be identified.

4. RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

To ensure that the necessary time and resources are available to implement the Framework for Junior Cycle, the following resources will continue to be made available to schools:

- a) An extensive programme of CPD for school leaders and teachers (details available from the Junior Cycle for Teachers support service www.ict.ie)
- b) Professional time for teachers (i.e. non-student contact time in which teachers will participate in a range of professional and collaborative activities to support the implementation of Junior Cycle)
- c) Additional paid hours for the coordination of Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings
- d) Management resources (i.e. additional paid hours that schools will devote for the sole purpose of the management of activities associated with the implementation of Junior Cycle).

Extensive Programme of CPD for School Leaders and Teachers

CPD will continue to be delivered by Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the Department's dedicated CPD support service supporting schools in their implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle.

4.1 Whole-School Planning and School Self-Evaluation

Requirements in respect of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) are set out in Circular 41/2020. This circular supersedes circular 0040/2016 *Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016-2020* and recognises the challenges presented by school closures due to Covid-19. The third cycle of SSE was due to commence in September 2020, however, this circular (41/2020) notes that there will be no new SSE requirements for schools and centres of education in the school year 2020/21. Schools will have the flexibility to use the SSE process to address challenges that arise during

¹⁴ For the school year 2020/21, there will be no Assessment Tasks for all learners, including adult learners.



the re-opening of schools and centres and/or to complete aspects of teaching and learning selected as the school's SSE focus in the period 2016/2020.

Advice on how school self-evaluation may be used in this way, together with *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-primary Schools*, *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020: Post-primary*, copies of SSE Updates referring to Junior Cycle implementation and other resources are available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie

Approval continues for schools to close, with board of management or ETB approval, as appropriate, for a day of whole-school planning and self-evaluation for Junior Cycle implementation for each year of implementation up to the school year 2021/22. Owing to COVID-19, this may take place remotely.

The purpose of this day will change over time, but in 2020/21 it may be used by schools to support the embedding and/or continued development of the underlying Junior Cycle Framework on a whole-school basis. This may involve schools reviewing their current policies and practices, as well as planning and monitoring for the changes being introduced under the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

JCT will continue to be available to assist schools in planning for and implementing this whole-school day and will liaise with schools directly on this matter.

4.2 Continuing professional development (CPD) for school leaders and teachers

(a) Models of CPD delivery

Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) continues to provide a comprehensive programme of CPD for school leaders and teachers. In line with *Returning to School: Guidance on Learning and School Programmes for Post-primary School Leaders and Teachers* (published in July 2020) JCT professional learning events in the 2020/2021 school year will reflect the pedagogical environments in which teachers will be working, the restrictions that may need to be applied, for health reasons, regarding attendance at CPD events, and the need to minimise, insofar as possible, any disruption to class contact time over the school year. Online provision of CPD and relevant supports will feature strongly in the programme of CPD planned by JCT in 2020/2021. There will be no face-to-face CPD provided before January 2021 at which stage the situation will be reviewed in light of relevant advice available from the health authorities.

(b) CPD for school leaders

Online supports will be provided for school leaders regularly throughout the 2020/2021 school year and will address the expressed needs of school leaders. One focus of these online supports, particularly at the commencement of the new school year, will



be on junior cycle in the context of students returning to school following school closure due to COVID-19. Face-to-face events will recommence for school leaders in the second half of the 2020/2021 year should the health situation deem it appropriate. School leaders will receive notification of these events, which will issue well in advance of their delivery. School leaders are encouraged to engage with JCT events in order to keep abreast of developments at junior cycle.

(c) Whole-school CPD

A number of whole-school CPD days have been developed by JCT and may be facilitated in schools later in the 2020/2021 school year subject to advice from the health authorities. The JCT whole-school CPD team will also provide ongoing online supports for teachers throughout 2020/2021. The online supports will address, but will not be limited to, wellbeing, subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings and supports for teachers with junior cycle management resource hours. Live online support meetings may also be facilitated for schools at which a small group of teachers, with the approval of school management, may attend. All events will be notified to schools and teachers well in advance.

(d) Subject-Specific CPD

The impact of COVID-19 has resulted in the need to move subject-specific CPD into the online space for 2020/2021 school year. In this context it is planned, subject to advice from the health authorities, to provide subject CPD for teachers online in the period from January to April 2021. This will require a one-day school closure to students for clusters of schools, and teachers will attend their relevant subject CPD online. Schools may close, with board of management/ETB approval, as appropriate, to enable teachers' engagement. Where a school closes, all teachers must attend the school cluster online event and engage in the CPD activity. JCT will liaise directly with schools regarding these cluster events, including scheduling the events and assigning each school in good time to these events. This will occur well in advance of the CPD day.

(e) Second Teaching Subject Supports

Teachers who teach a second subject in junior cycle are provided with the opportunity to engage in CPD supports in that subject at the start of successive school years (generally September and October each year). This year, because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not possible to provide second teaching subject CPD in a face-to-face setting. As a result, the JCT has repurposed all of its 2019/2020 subject CPD workshops for the online space and these are available at www.jct.ie for all teachers who teach a second subject from the commencement of the 2020/2021 school year.



(f) Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

Support for Level 1 and Level 2 learning programmes will continue for both mainstream post-primary and special schools. These supports will be facilitated online, in the main, for the 2020/2021 school year with face-to-face events being re-introduced subject to advice from the health authorities. Bespoke supports for schools can be arranged in collaboration with relevant JCT L1/L2 Advisors.

(g) Miscellaneous

Management in each school is required to register all teachers with JCT, including their school-based email addresses, and facilitate their attendance at CPD events, where applicable.

To complement the core online events being provided during the 2020/2021 school year, JCT will organise two concentrated elective online CPD events during the 2020/2021 school year, one in October/November 2020 and another in March/April 2021. These events will comprise, but will not be limited to, webinars, podcasts and live CPD events covering a wide range of areas and topics applicable to junior cycle.

JCT collaborates with the Inspectorate and other Department of Education and Skills agencies and school support services in the context of design, facilitation and review of its work.

4.3 Professional Time

The Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 recognises that teachers need professional time to engage in a range of professional collaborative activities, a proportion of which will involve collaboration with teaching colleagues, to support teaching, learning, assessment and reporting.

This time will facilitate teachers engaging, as necessary, with a range of professional and collaborative activities, namely:

1. Whole-school professional activities to support the junior cycle
2. Individual teacher and subject department professional activities, including activities related to formative assessment, feedback, reporting and inputs being compiled for the JCPA
3. Attendance at Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings
4. Preparation for, and overseeing the outcomes of Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings
5. Administration of the Assessment Tasks in classrooms. This will not be required for academic year 2020/21.



In relation to Youthreach settings, those delivering Junior Cycle are entitled to professional time. This time should come from within existing time for administrative duties and does not therefore lead to a reduction in teaching time.

The provision of individual professional time for teachers reflects the commitment under the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 to provide such support to allow teachers engage in professional collaborative activities to support teaching, learning and assessment. From September 2017, in all subject areas, full-time teachers involved in the delivery of Junior Cycle are entitled to 22 hours of professional time, with a pro-rata entitlement for part-time teachers as set out in Appendix 2. As set out above, this is subject to the full co-operation of a teacher with all elements of the Framework. The provision of professional time is supported by the allocation of an additional 698 whole-time equivalent posts to schools. This allocation is designed to avoid reducing overall class contact time for students. The allocation is shown separately on the staffing schedule as set out in the Approved Allocations of Teaching Posts Circulars for individual schools and equates to the additional allocation which would be provided by a reduction in the Pupil Teacher Ratio of 0.53.

The provision of 22 hours maximum professional time for full-time teachers involved in the delivery of junior cycle (and pro-rata provision for part-time teachers) will mean that each full-time teacher's class contact time (including teaching time and time allocated for other assigned management and coordination duties), in a school with a timetable laid out in 40 minute periods, will be reduced from 33 teaching periods in the timetable to 32 teaching periods.

The 40 minute professional time period provided within timetable is available to teachers on the basis that they will use this time flexibly including bundling time periods and carrying forward time to facilitate professional collaboration. Teachers may also use the time periods for individual planning, feedback or reporting activities relating to Junior Cycle. In particular, time periods will need to be bundled to facilitate Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings. Since professional collaboration meetings can only be held when the relevant subject teachers can be present, a limited number of meetings may need to draw on teachers' bundled time to run beyond normal school tuition hours for some of the duration of the meeting. Each meeting will take approximately two hours. This flexibility will be required for and will generally be restricted to the organisation of SLAR meetings.

The deployment of all professional time is a matter for the management of the school acting in accordance with the terms of this Circular Letter. All time periods provided to support implementation of the Junior Cycle must be used for this purpose under the overall direction of the school's management and the use of professional time may be subject to inspection in whole-school evaluation and other inspections.



The allocation model for professional time (including the discrete allocation relating to SEN teachers) that was agreed for the 2017/18 school year is being maintained and, where necessary, will increase to reflect any additional whole-time equivalent teaching positions that arise because of increased student numbers.

Circular Letter 17/2020, Guidance on the Junior Cycle Subject Learning and Assessment Review Process, which was issued on 27 February 2020, required schools to choose from one of four options for the organisation of SLAR meetings. If any school were to choose the fourth option, this would allow for SLAR meetings to be held entirely during normal school tuition hours, but with a corresponding reduction in the teacher allocation for professional time. No school chose this option and therefore no reduction in the allocation is necessary. The remaining options for the organisation of SLAR meetings are outlined in Section 3.2.4.

4.4 Resources for the coordination of Subject Learning and Assessment Review Meetings

An additional two hours will be allocated by school management to a teacher on a rotational basis for the preparation and co-ordination of each Subject Learning and Assessment Review meeting for an individual subject or short course, including providing confirmation to school management that the meeting has taken place and descriptors awarded and reported. The two hour allocation may be facilitated through the provision of additional paid substitution hours to the school – not within the Supervision and Substitution scheme. This is in addition to the 22 hours of professional time allocated within the timetable for each full-time teacher from 2017/18 onwards.

4.5 Management Resources

The board of management of each school or the ETB, as appropriate, along with the in-school management team, will be accountable for the overall implementation of the Junior Cycle in the school, as it is for all other aspects of the school's work.

In recognition of the fact that the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 has implications for school leaders, extra hours were allocated to schools (via substitution) with effect from 2016 on an interim basis pending the restoration of leadership posts in schools, to help with the facilitation of this additional work. Circular letter 3/2018 - 'Leadership and Management In Post-Primary Schools' provided details regarding the restoration of leadership and management posts in those schools, including some 1,300 leadership posts being restored to post-primary schools. As shown in Section 1.2.4 above, the provision of management resource hours will be continued for the 2020/21 academic year in the particular circumstances pertaining for that year. The allocation for the academic year 2020/21 is shown below and contains some adjustments from the provision for 2019/20, with an overall increase in the funding provision.



Enrolment	Weekly Management Resource Hours
700 +	2 hours (was 2 hours 15 mins)
600 – 699	2 hours 40 mins (was 2 hours 27 mins)
400 – 599	2 hours (was 1 hour 57 mins)
< 399	2 hours (was 1 hour 30 mins)

Existing pro-rata arrangements for partial implementation will apply.

The provision of these additional resources is contingent on schools confirming that their Junior Cycle students have access to teaching, learning and assessment practices in line with the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and the associated specifications designed by the NCCA and approved by the Minister, including all assessment arrangements set out in this circular.

The Principal will, with the approval of the Board of Management, following an open invitation for expressions of interest from the teachers in the school, allocate the additional teaching hours granted to the school to support him/her in implementing the new Junior Cycle. This additional time allocation is in the form of weekly coordination hours and can be drawn down over the school year.

The hours can be bundled to reflect the fact that the work associated with Junior Cycle coordination in a school year may vary in quantity from week to week.

Some or all of the following activities may be included:

- Supporting the Principal/Deputy Principal with planning, communication and organising substitution for teachers attending in-service;
- Scheduling of in-school or online CPD events and liaison with JCT;
- Overseeing the scheduling of SLAR meetings;
- Liaising with the coordinators of SLAR meetings;
- Overseeing the new Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) reporting procedures for subjects and for L2LPs, L1LPs and short courses to parents/guardians.
- Organising administration of the Assessment Tasks and making the necessary arrangements for returning the Assessment Task to the SEC. This will not be required for academic year 2020/21.

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

5.1 Rules and Programme

All references to Junior Cycle and Junior Certificate examinations in Rules 20, 21, 32, 33 and 34 of the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools 2004/2005 are superseded by the provisions within this circular.



5.2 Access to Information

Further information can be accessed on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website www.ncca.ie and the Junior Cycle for Teachers website www.jct.ie and www.curriculumonline.ie

These websites host information and a range of practical materials aimed at supporting school leaders, teachers and parents.

This Circular may also be accessed at www.education.ie

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APPENDIX 1 – Related Documentation

This circular refers to the following documentation:

- The Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, is available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015.pdf>
- Arrangements for Inspection and School Self-Evaluation for the 2020/2021 School Year Circular Number: 0041/2020 at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0041_2020.pdf
- *Framework for Junior Cycle – History in Schools from September 2020 onwards* Circular number 16/2020 at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0016_2020.pdf
- *Guidance on the Junior Cycle Subject Learning and Assessment Review Process* Circular Number 00017/2020 at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0017_2020.pdf
- The Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation (22 May 2015) and its appendix published 5 July 2015 available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Junior-Cycle-Reform-Joint-Statement-on-Principles-and-Implementation.pdf>
- Subject specifications for each of the subjects to be taught at Junior Cycle; these specifications have been developed by the NCCA and approved by the Minister. Each of the subject specifications is available at: <https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle>
- Level 2 Learning Programmes Guidelines for Teachers. The Level 2 Learning Programmes are designed for students with general learning difficulties/needs in the low mild to high moderate range of ability and are available at: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/f03b2786-2e04-454e-b0b8-56e313ff62b2/11729-NCCA-Level-2-Guidelines-V5August-2014.pdf>
- Level 1 Learning Programmes Guidelines for Teachers. These are designed for students with general learning difficulties/needs in the range of lower functioning moderate to severe and profound categories and are available at: <https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/13b94835-df1b-4b4d-9b02-8c01f0f66dab/L1LPs-Guidelinesforteachers.pdf>
- More information on Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes can be found at: <https://www.ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/level-one-and-level-two-programmes>
- Key dates for the classroom based assessments for the 2020/2021 school year are available at: <https://ncca.ie/en/resources/revised-arrangements-for-the-completion-of-classroom-based-assessments-for-the-cohort-of-students-2018-2021>
- Specifications for Junior Cycle short courses designed by the NCCA for use by schools; available at <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses>
- Guidelines for schools on the development of short courses at Junior Cycle; available at <https://www.ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/subjects-and-short-courses/develop-your-own-short-course>



- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, and other wellbeing planning material, developed by the NCCA,; available at <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/wellbeing>
- The Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023, July 2018. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-2018%E2%80%932023.pdf>
- The NCCA's guidance developed to support planning for the 2020/21 school year in response to the unique circumstances that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic can be found at <https://ncca.ie/media/4648/considerations-in-planning-for-wellbeing-2020-2021.pdf>
- 2017 Whole School Guidance Framework; available at <https://www.ncge.ie/wsg/resources>
- Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice; available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0043_2018.pdf
- 'Returning to school - Guidance on learning and school programmes for post-primary school leaders and teachers' (July 2020), and 'Curriculum and assessment guidance for post-primary school leaders and teachers in respect of the return to school in 2020/21' (August 2020). Both documents available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7acad-reopening-our-post-primary-schools/>
- DES announcement of 29 April 2020 regarding revised assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle 2020, <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-04-29.html>



APPENDIX 2 – Pro-Rata Allocation Of Professional Time To Part-Time Teachers

The annual pro-rata application of the Professional Time to teachers on less than full hours is set out below.

Hours in teacher's contract	Professional time p.a. - Class periods (x 40 min)	Professional Time: Total p.a.
11 hours or less	17	= 11 hours, 20 mins
11h 1 min - 11h 29 min	17	= 11 hours, 20 mins
11h 30 min - 11h 59 min	18	= 12 hours
12 hours - 12h 29 min	18	= 12 hours
12h 30 min - 12h 59 min	19	= 12 hours, 40 mins
13 hours - 13h 29 min	20	= 13 hours, 20 mins
13h 30 min - 13h 59 min	21	= 14 hours
14 hours - 14h 29 min	21	= 14 hours
14h 30 min - 14h 59 min	22	= 14 hours, 40 min
15 hours - 15h 29 min	23	= 15 hours, 20 min
15h 30 min - 15h 59 min	24	= 16 hours
16 hours - 16h 29 min	24	= 16 hours
16h 30 min - 16h 59 min	25	= 16 hours, 40 min
17 hours - 17h 59 min	26	= 17 hours, 20 min
18 hours or more	33	= 22 hours

The total number of hours assigned to a teacher - which encompasses teaching time and other assigned management and co-ordination duties - is the quantum of hours upon which application of the above schedule in respect of professional time is based.