

10.02.08 NCCA REPORT FOR NPC-pp FROM M LYON

UPDATE ON JR CYCLE DEVELOPMENTS

Syllabus development

During the course of the junior cycle review significant developments have taken place in the subjects that make up the junior cycle. Included in these is the introduction of revised syllabuses in Maths (2000), Religion Ed (2001), Science (2003/4), and a curriculum framework for SPHE (2000), and for PE (2003). All of these syllabuses and frameworks have been implemented and are now considered an integral part of the curriculum at junior cycle. According to information from NCCA support services are still in place to meet the professional development needs of teachers in the relevant subject areas but as I said in my last report to you support services for Science has been axed.

In 2002 a common syllabus template for JC was developed by the NCCA and work began to rebalance subjects to the new template. Essential to the template is the articulation of the content of the syllabus in terms of learning outcomes. A significant proportion of this work has been carried out and a number of **rebalanced** syllabuses are nearing completion. Parallel to this, review and revision work has continued to the point where a number of revised and new syllabuses are at an advanced stage in their development. These include Business Studies and a restructured Classics syllabus, combining Latin, Greek and classical Studies. A new syllabus, Jewish Studies, that may replace the current Hebrew Studies syllabus, has also been developed.

A considerable part of NCCA's work in the area of JC will involve bringing revised and rebalanced syllabuses through NCCA cttee during 2008, engaging in consultation with the system and developing advice on implementation issues and professional development support for teachers regarding the syllabus changes.

Consultation on rebalanced syllabuses

History, Geography, Home Economics, Art Craft Design, Music English

Revised syllabus

Irish, Business Studies, Classics, technical Graphics

New Syllabuses

Classics, Jewish Studies

Complete review of Environmental and Social Studies – advice to DES

Assessment

Work with teachers/schools to expand number of AfL (assessment for learning) exemplars

Post exemplars on new NCCA ACTION website

Investigate new AfL approaches and methodologies

Complete evaluation of CSPE eRAP project (I shall get details at my next JC meeting)

Broader curriculum support and communications

Complete subject factsheets (18) and web publish – combine languages, combine technology subjects, combine Classics

Develop booklet on JC for parents/students

Develop overview of JC – key skills, objectives, etc

Redesign JC section of NCCA website

ACTION website – support for teachers

Inclusion

Complete JCSP programme statement

Develop Curriculum Framework for JC students with SEN – possibility of new award at level 2 for these students. (Junior cert level 3, LC level 4/5)

Complete Curriculum Framework for children in Detention/Care Settings

Rebalancing – consultations

Rebalancing

Key elements

Addressing overlap and overload

Coherence with Primary School Curriculum and with senior cycle

Syllabus template

Learning outcomes

Implications for assessment

Rebalanced syllabuses

History, geography, Home Economics, Music, English, Art Craft Design

Rebalanced syllabuses – consultation

Key considerations

Nature and scale of change across syllabuses has been similar

Large number of rebalanced syllabuses for consultation at one time

What is envisaged

JC Review Cttee (consultation report will come back to this cttee)

Consultation largely web-based

Parents and students would be encouraged to participate in the consultation process. The rebalancing section of the website and consultation instrument would be developed with this in mind.

Schools/teachers/partners notified

Possible use of Education Centre network (April/May bi lateral meetings)

Meetings with key organisation

Combined consultation report

Approval of syllabuses by Council

Implementation support

Challenge: introduction of large number of syllabuses

Opportunity: focus on overall curriculum provision and teaching & learning at JC

Nature of support

Programmes of study

Teaching and learning approaches

Subject-specific information and input

Role of school in decision-making on nature of implementation support

Implementation issues and options

One of the purposes of rebalancing was to provide time and space for teachers to enhance the quality of engagement of all students with the curriculum at JC. It is arguable, however, that this will only be realised if their introduction is accompanied by implementation support that focuses on professional development for teachers in the context of teaching approaches and methodologies, for principals as instructional leaders, and for schools in relation to curriculum organisation and provision at JC.

As the twentieth anniversary of the JC approaches, the introduction of a significant number of rebalanced, revised, and new syllabuses could offer schools an impetus to look again at their curriculum provision for JC students. Current understanding of how young people learn influence how the JC is provided and experience. Schools today have more diverse student populations, presenting challenges of inclusion unforeseen during the development of the programme in the 1980's.

The findings of the recent ERSI research, commissioned by NCCA, into the experiences of JC students are of relevance here. Clear messages have emerged from the research about the positive impact of a supportive school climate, positive teacher-student relationships and effective teaching methods on student engagement with school and with learning. School structures and curriculum organisation and provision were also identified as having a strong influence on student outcomes in JC.

Education partners attending at the recent conference on junior cycle stressed that schools should be encouraged to reflect on the ERSI findings. It is important that schools are supported in this. The implementation would need, therefore, to look beyond the specific syllabuses and seek to facilitate concerted reflection by schools on the way they organise the curriculum and on their approach to student learning.

In presenting these approaches to the question of implementation support it should be held in mind that the school is in the best position to identify its needs, and those of its students and teachers. Given that underlining principle, the school should be the locus of whatever professional support is provided and should play a central role in deciding on the form and nature of that support. Such an approach represents something of a departure from the operating structures of many professional developments initiatives in the past.

Greater detail will be provided later in 2008 on implementation support, three dimensions of support appear to merit attention.

Programme development/organisation

Support provided in this element could be aimed as assisting schools wishing to revisit the design of their JC curriculum. Support provided within this element might focus on approaches to putting in place programmes of study that best respond to students' needs. It could also make expertise and support available to schools in developing and implementing policies in areas such as integration, inclusion, and in the promotion of ICT.

Pedagogical approaches

While the subject expertise of teachers is of central importance to the quality of the learning experience of students, it is clear that many

teaching skills and teacher dispositions are applicable across a range of subject areas. In this context a programme which would provide cross-disciplinary professional development and support to teachers would appear to offer potential for influencing teaching and learning on a wide scale. It would also reduce the potential for overlap, which might arise between subject specific supports and reduce the overall demands made on teachers and schools. The element might provide support in general teaching and learning areas such as assessment, differentiation, and classroom management, promoting a positive classroom climate, integrating ICT, embedding skills, supporting students with special educational needs and those for whom English is not a first language.

Subject-specific support

Some of the changes in new, revised and rebalanced syllabuses will necessitate subject-specific professional development. This will focus on updating the knowledge of subject teachers and familiarising them with new approaches to teaching and learning and assessment change. The extent of the need will depend largely on the scope of the change and the experience or qualifications of the personnel involved. The nature of provision under this element would be identified on a case-by-case basis.

Finally

The introduction of new, revised and rebalanced syllabuses will be a challenge to the system and to schools. However, it will also provide an opportunity for school (parents and students must be included in this reflection) to reflect on and consider the JC experience as a whole – and the findings of the ERSI research will be an important reference point in this regard. Early reports from work with the senior cycle school network have underlined the importance and value of looking at implementation from the point of view of the school and of supporting the school in leading and managing the changes involved. Any advice on implementation support should take this into account.

A look at the syllabuses

Mathematics: some initial rebalancing work has been carried out prior to the NCCA review of maths. Revision of the JC syllabus will now take place on a phased basis as part of Project Maths. Details of Project Maths strand 1 syllabus elements will be completed by the end of this month, and associated teacher resource materials by the end of April.

By that time a common course for first year and a draft-bridging framework (linking primary and post-primary maths) will be prepared. Work on the Strand 2 syllabus will be finalised in May. Phase 2 of Project Maths commences in the 24 participating schools from Sept 2008.

Gaelige: a significant amount of rebalancing work has already taken place. This will be completed and, in addition a series of adjustments will be made to the syllabus to take into account changes arising from an increased emphasis on oral competence in the JC examination.

RE, Science, SPHE, PE: these courses have been introduced relatively recently (since 2000) and were developed in a format broadly consistent with the rebalanced template and, indeed some are outcomes based. Each will be the subject of ongoing monitoring, development and review

Modern languages (French, German, Spanish and Italian): common outcomes based framework for these subject is already in place. The languages will begin a rebalancing process towards the end of the year. The normal rebalancing tasks will be undertaken and the assessment of oral competency is also likely to feature as a substantive issue.

Civic, Social and Political Education: CSPE is a distinctive curriculum component in JC in that it is a short course and is also compulsory. CSPE has now been in the system for more that 10 years and thus it is appropriate to initiate a review of the syllabus. The review will begin in late 2008 and will take into account the proposed introduction of a related senior cycle subject, Politics and Society.

Business Studies was identified during rebalancing as in need of a more substantial revision. As well as a general modernisation, the revision has involved achieving a better balance between the different components of business (business, accounting, economics) and harmonising the syllabus with the new LC Business course. It is envisaged that the draft-revised syllabus will be brought to the JC Review Cttee and to Council before the summer.

The technology subjects: a common syllabus framework for revised JC technology subjects was developed in 2005, and work on the first of these subjects, technical Graphics, will be undertaken in 2008. This will focus in part on ensuring alignment with the new syllabus at senior cycle.

Classical subjects: Following a review of classics, it was decided to develop a new combined classics course to replace the three subjects Latin, Greek and Classical Studies. Work on this new subject is nearing completion and a draft syllabus will be brought to the Board of Studies for classics this month.

Typewriting: the course has been unchanged for some considerable time and is taken by a very small cohort of students (333 candidates in JC 2007) a discussion paper on the viability of this subject will be completed in 2008.

Jewish Studies: a new course has been developed which could replace Hebrew Studies syllabus. The draft syllabus was brought to the JC Review Cttee last week, I will report on it shortly.