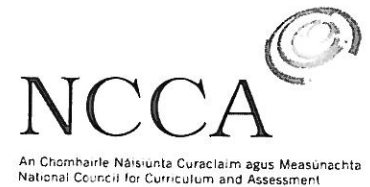


7th October 2011

Margaret Kelly
Principal Officer
QCAP Section
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1



Dear Margaret

Following the Council meeting of 22nd September, I am pleased to enclose *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle: Proposals for junior cycle development*. It is accompanied by a note on *Implementing change at junior cycle* which was also presented at Council and which can form a basis for the next stage of work on implementation.

The advice on junior cycle development was discussed extensively at Council. In the discussions, concern was expressed at the junior cycle developments being introduced at a time when the education system is experiencing cutbacks, the view being that the progress of the developments would hinge on an explicit commitment of resources for their implementation. The decision taken by Council was to approve the substantive ideas in the proposals on the understanding that in the next phase of discussion specific evidence is provided of the commitments to resource the developments. It was noted at Council that the TUI's endorsement is conditional on adequate resources being made available for the implementation of the changes. It was also noted that the proposals on school-based assessment as set out could cause problems for the teacher unions, and the ASTI in particular.

A further, related area of concern was discussed at the meeting. Page 40 of the NCCA document refers to the DES's proposed introduction for first years in September 2012 of a limit on the number of subjects they would sit in their subsequent Junior Certificate examination. This proposal has given rise to considerable concern and unease in schools. The specific concerns relate to the lack of information at this late stage on how the limit is to be managed by schools, the uncertain dynamics in schools that may result in the area of subject and examination provision and choice, and the effect the limit may have in demotivating students in their 'non-examination' subjects. Council members were particularly concerned that the uncertainty surrounding this measure is already affecting the reception and perception of the broader junior cycle developments and was seen as having a negative impact on the latter. While it is recognised that the intention in introducing the limit was to signal a move away from the focus on examinations, the unintended consequence so far has been the opposite – a preoccupation with examination arrangements and choices over the period in question. Council expressed the fear that the introduction of the limit had the potential to undermine the progress of the junior cycle developments

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The advice enclosed is the culmination of considerable debate and consultation on junior cycle education over the last number of years. Its proposals are based on that dialogue but also draw on a strong evidential base in research and international practice. It is presented as the considered view of the Council on the path to be taken towards junior cycle development in the coming years. I look forward to discussing the proposals and the requirements for their implementation with you in due course.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Anne Looney
Chief Executive