

Junior Cycle Developments – Minister departs from earlier proposals on assessment (TUI Quick Guide, November 2012)

On 4th October 2012 the Minister for Education and Skills set out his decisions in respect of changes to the Junior Cycle. While he embraced many of the principles and proposals set out by the NCCA Council (2011) he departed significantly with regard to others. **Table 1** sets out the **Key elements of a new junior cycle and main differences between the Minister’s decision and the NCCA Proposals. Table 2** sets out **Other Key features of the new Junior Cycle** as envisaged from 2014.

Table 1	
NCCA Proposals (2011)	Ministerial Decision (2012)
<p><u>Curriculum components</u> Subjects retained and developed by NCCA (Core-English, Irish, Maths; schools to select others)</p> <p>Optional short courses selected by school; NCCA develop some, schools develop others</p> <p>Priority Learning Units (5) developed by NCCA (focus on special needs)</p> <p><u>Assessment and Certification</u> Terminal assessment of all subjects (60%) - externally set and externally marked</p> <p>School based work in second and third year in all subjects (40%) to be marked at school level by teachers but subject to external moderation on random basis</p> <p>School based work in second and third years in short courses (100%) to be marked at school level by teachers without external moderation</p> <p>Maximum of 8 subjects or combination of subjects and short courses for qualification purposes</p> <p>Assessment of Priority Learning Units, like short courses, will be based on school work (100%) marked at school level by teachers (100%) with external moderation</p>	<p><u>Curriculum components</u> Subjects retained and developed by NCCA (Core-English, Irish, Maths; schools to select others)</p> <p>Optional short courses selected by school; NCCA develop some, schools develop others</p> <p>Priority Learning Units (5) developed by NCCA (focus on special needs)</p> <p><u>Assessment and Certification</u> Terminal assessment of all subjects (60%) – externally set by SEC for an initial period only and marked at school level by teachers (May). English, Irish, maths marked externally until standardised tests are implemented from 2014/2015</p> <p>School based work in second and third year in all subjects (40%) to be marked at school level by teachers but without external moderation</p> <p>School based work (over second and third years) in short courses (100%) to be marked at school level by teachers without external moderation</p> <p>Maximum of 10 subjects or combination of subjects and short courses (up to 4) for qualification purposes</p> <p>Assessment of Priority Learning Units, like short courses, will be based on school work (100%) marked at school level by teachers with no external moderation</p>

<p>National Certificate to issue to students - Qualifications at Level 2 and 3 on national qualifications framework.</p> <p>SEC to be involved in the design of exam papers, specifications and administration of the assessment process including external marking, collation of results and grades and issuing certification (Level 3 Qualification).</p>	<p>School Certificate to issue to students- Qualifications at Level 2 and 3 on the national qualifications framework.</p> <p>School to be responsible for the design and administration of assessments, including marking of students' work and exams, collation of results and grades, preparing reports to parents and issuing certification to students. In time the SEC will have no involvement.</p>
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Table 2 - Other key features of a new Junior Cycle

- 24 statements of learning to underpin the Junior Cycle.
- A strong focus on key skills, literacy and numeracy.
- CSPE, SPHE, and PE are designated as short courses and, along with other courses (Digital Media and Literacy, Artistic Performance, Chinese Culture and Programme and Coding) will be developed by the NCCA. Schools can also develop short courses.
- The new approach to junior cycle will be phased in as follows :
 - English and, if schools choose, short courses -2014/2015
 - Irish, Science and Business Studies- 2015/2016
 - Languages, Home Economics, Music, Geography, Art, Craft, Design -2016/2017
 - Mathematics, Technical Subjects, Religious Education, Jewish Studies, Classics, History- from 2017/2018.
- From 2014 onwards incoming students will take a maximum of 10 subjects, or a combination of subjects and short courses (maximum 4), for certification and qualification purposes (e.g. eight subjects and 4 short courses; two short courses can replace one subject).
- The terminal assessment will be of two hours duration.
- There will be two levels of assessment in Irish, English and Maths and one in other subjects and short courses.
- Grading will be based on a five point system – Not achieved (0-39%), Achieved (40-54%), Achieved with Merit (55-74%), Achieved with Higher Merit (75-89%), Achieved with Distinction (90-100%).
- After 2017 the involvement of the SEC in designing, administering and overseeing the assessment process, organising external assessment, collating results and grades and issuing certification will diminish - eventually it will have no involvement.
- From 2017 schools will have responsibility for a new reporting system to parents and students consisting of two key elements - the School Certificate and other learning experiences. The details will be generated by the school (and partly by the SEC in the early years) and reports will be made in the autumn each year.
- There will be no external moderation of the assessment process but the Department will monitor results.

Full details of the new framework for junior cycle are available at www.ncca.ie.