**Implementing a New Junior Certificate Framework**

**PDA – NCCA Network of Small Schools**

Following the presentation by Dr. Anne Looney, CEO of the NCCA, to the PDA Annual Conference in Nov. 2012 on the proposed new Junior Cycle Framework, many concerns were expressed by the Principals and Deputy Principals attending the conference. The PDA suggested the establishment of a network of small vocational schools to consider the unique challenges that such schools envisage they will face in the implementation of the framework.

At the invitation of PDA President Brian O Maoilchiarain, Dr. Looney addressed the PDA area representatives at a meeting of the PDA executive and agreed to extend the network model by establishing a PDA NCCA network. PDA discussed this initiative with TUI and a consensus emerged that a deficit of information existed regarding the impact of the proposals for change to the junior cycle in smaller schools/colleges i.e. schools with an enrolment in the current year of less than 250 mainstream students. The PDA agreed to administer the selection process for the network and eleven small vocational schools were invited, following an application process to form the network.

They are: Marino College, Fairview, Dublin 3, (Blake Hodkinson, [blake.hodkinson@marino.cdvec.ie](mailto:blake.hodkinson@marino.cdvec.ie)), Corran College, Ballymote, Co. Sligo, (John McGovern, [corrancollege@sligovec.ie](mailto:corrancollege@sligovec.ie) ), Listowel Community College, Co. Kerry, (Carmel Kelly, [lccadmin@eircom.net](mailto:lccadmin@eircom.net) ), Coláiste Naomh Cormac, Kilcormac , Co Offaly, Eileen Mullaney, [mail@cnckilcormac.ie](mailto:mail@cnckilcormac.ie) ), Carrigallen Vocational School, Co. Leitrim, (Declan Conboy, [principal@carrigallenvs.com](mailto:principal@carrigallenvs.com)) Coláiste Eoin, Finglas, Dublin 11, (Bernie Hand, [bernie.hand@eoin.cdvec.ie](mailto:bernie.hand@eoin.cdvec.ie) )Templemichael College, Lonford, (Sorcha Nic Dhonnacha, [templemc@eircom.net](mailto:templemc@eircom.net) ), Coláiste Daibhéid, Corcaigh, (Tadhg O Laighin, [oifig@colaistedaibheid.ie](mailto:oifig@colaistedaibheid.ie) ), Roscommon Community College, ( Frank Chambers, [roscol@eircom.net](mailto:roscol@eircom.net) ), Ard Scoil Ciaran, Clara, Co. Offaly (Roger Geagan, [claravs.ias@eircom.net](mailto:claravs.ias@eircom.net) ), Arch Bishop McHale College , Tuam, Co. Galway (Eileen Delaney, [principal.amctuam@cogalvec.ie](mailto:principal.amctuam@cogalvec.ie) ). Michael Daly former Priomhoide of Colaiste Eoin Hacketstown and a past President of the PDA was appointed network co-ordinator.

Participation in the network involves exploring the challenges, opportunities and implications for smaller schools in areas such as Curriculum, Short Course Development, Assessment Approach, Timetabling, Planning, Resources, Management/Co-ordination/ Operational Issues etc. The schools involved include in their work an examination of the practicalities associated with the successful introduction of the framework (for students, parents, teachers and school management).

Prior to the start of the initiative school principals of the participating schools engaged in full consultation and discussion with staff concerning their participation.

The eleven participating schools will receive some funding from the NCCA. The NCCA is to cover the cost of substitution and travel and will provide relevant inputs to meetings of the network to support its activity. In addition each school has appointed a link teacher to liaise with the PDA appointed co-ordinator to the network who works closely with the participating schools.

The eleven schools participating in the network have committed themselves to sharing experiences and working together to gather evidence of practice and bring as much clarity as possible to the implementation issues. It is envisaged that the network will help to inform other TUI members and Head Office as to the implications for small schools emanating from the proposed Junior Cycle Framework.

Three meetings of the network participants have taken place with initial contributions being made by PDA President Brain O Maoilchiarain, the officers of the PDA, the Education/Research Officer of the TUI, Bernie Judge, NCCA personnel, ETB Ireland (Formerly IVEA) education and executive personnel as well as the network co-ordinator, the link teachers of the schools and their principals. Discussion has centred around the following thus far:

* Developments in Curriculum, Assessment and Certification.
* Looking at what to do! Planning for the Future in small schools.
* Getting started with programme planning, key skills and short courses.
* What needs to be done for 2014?
* New first year programme in consultation with the core team and staff.
* Assessment and Moderation in the JC Framework. Formative assessment. AfL initiative.
* Template of Key Skills across subject planning for all subjects.
* Schools Sharing the Load
* The challenges, concerns and queries for Small Schools Re: the implementation of the Framework eg time tabling, resources, CPD etc. and the expected appropriate responses required from the DES and the NCCA.