



# Teachers' Union of Ireland

## Junior Cycle Reform A Time for Change ?

**Make your views known to the TUI now.**

### *What has happened so far?*

- In June 2009 the Minister for Education and Science requested the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to look at the entire Junior Cycle experience
- To kick start the discussion and debate the NCCA set out a number of ideas for a new Junior Cycle
- The next step is to develop a framework that will shape any future changes that may come about.

- *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a new Junior Cycle*, a summary document and other consultation materials such as videos, a questionnaire are available on the NCCA website ([www.ncca.ie/juniorcycleddevelopments](http://www.ncca.ie/juniorcycleddevelopments))
- TUI has prepared this material to assist you in identifying your views on what should or could happen to the current Junior Cycle Programme and Junior Certificate Examination - see TUI website ([www.tui.ie](http://www.tui.ie)) for more details.

### *Where can we get more information?*

### *Why should we comment?*

- It is vital that teachers on the ground express their views and influence the nature of change that may take place
- TUI will be finalising its response to the initial ideas by the end of November - it must reflect the views and concerns of its members.

- Examine the ideas for change set out by the NCCA
- Access some commentary on the ideas on the TUI website
- Consider the questions set out in this document
- Have a discussion in your workplace or at a branch meeting
- Report your observations to TUI Head Office so that they inform the TUI response to the NCCA and its participation in further discussions.

### *What should we do with our views?*

***Forward comments to Head Office  
by Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2010.***

**Postal Address 73 Orwell Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6**

**Fax Number: 01 492 2953**

**Email address: [showard@tui.ie](mailto:showard@tui.ie)**



# Junior Cycle Reform

## What are the main ideas for change?

The NCCA has set out five interrelated and complementary ideas for discussion?

### 1. From curriculum conformity to schools having freedom to be different

TUI understands that this means.....

- A move away from a centrally determined curriculum to an emphasis on locally designed programmes
- Less emphasis on subjects and more emphasis on integrated and cross curricular activity
- Each school undertaking change to varying degrees, depending on capacity and resources
- All schools will be guided by a framework that sets out the overarching key skills, knowledge and competences young people should have on completing Junior Cycle.

### 2. From the Junior Certificate to qualification(s) designed for all

TUI understands that this could mean.....

- A move away from the focus on state examinations at end of the Junior Cycle as the sole manner in which we accredit learning
- Emphasis on accrediting a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences
- More than one qualification being offered.

### 3. From the three years in Junior Cycle to three years of Junior Cycle

TUI understands that this suggests.....

- A different approach to the Junior Cycle experience
- A stronger emphasis on transition from primary school
- More opportunities for students to experiment and explore before selecting final areas for study.

### 4. Towards a renewal of teaching and learning

TUI understands that this could lead to.....

- Greater attention to key skills such as information processing, communication, being personally effective, working with others, critical and creative thinking
- Greater use of active methodologies and experiential learning
- Students being more involved (with teachers) in making decisions about what they would like to learn and how they would like to learn
- More student engagement in assessment, including self assessment with their peers, through project work and co-operative activity.

### 5. From generating an examination grade to generating evidence of learning

TUI understands that this could.....

- See a move away from the terminal examination
- Include the wider use of assessment approaches and instruments such as project work, portfolio evidence, and practical tasks
- Involve on-going assessment of learning
- Engage teachers more in the assessment process.

***If implemented these ideas would bring about a radical change to the Junior Cycle and therefore to the daily work of TUI members.***

***What do you think of the ideas for change set out by the NCCA?***

You may find it helpful look at the ideas presented by the NCCA under a number of areas such as:

- Educational validity, potential, risks etc
- Operational and organisational issues associated with implementation
- Supports and resources required for effective implementation
- Impact on staff working conditions.

Yes, commentators have highlighted merits and risks:

**Merits:**

- the possibility to make the school experience more relevant, more interesting, more accessible and more enjoyable for students (and teachers!)
- the need to change the curriculum to reflect the changes that have come about in how we access, use, process and create information and knowledge in a modern society.

**Risks:**

- concerns about standards, quality, inequity, inequality and competition between schools
- issues about capacity to implement at school/centre and system level at a time when resources are contracting.

***Are there merits and risks associated with the ideas set out by the NCCA?***

***Does the TUI support curriculum change?***

Yes, TUI:

- is a strong advocate of curriculum change when adequate resources are available
- considers change undertaken in current times may need to be more conservative and realistic than the current suite of ideas put forward by the NCCA imply.

Yes, TUI is concerned that:

- the system and schools/centres have limited resources and may lack capacity to embrace the kind of change implied
- implementation of the ideas could lead to significant more demands being placed on school/centre managers and teachers
- without substantial new investment in education, implementation could have a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and learning and the working conditions of TUI members.

***Has the TUI particular concerns about the ideas set out by the NCCA?***

TUI will make a strong case that any changes eventually agreed for implementation

can only proceed in line with capacity and availability of resources to implement across all school/centres - simultaneously.

***Go to the TUI website for more on merits, risks and particular TUI concerns - [www.tui.ie](http://www.tui.ie)***





## Junior Cycle Reform

### Do you think the Junior Cycle and the Junior Certificate Examination should change? .....why, what, how and when?

*Have a discussion with your colleagues or at a branch meeting about the need for change. Use the following questions to help you develop your views and critique the ideas set out by the NCCA.*

1. Is the current Junior Cycle still fit for purpose - is it relevant enough for the 21st Century and beyond?
2. What is it young people need to know when they finish Junior Cycle -what basic skills, knowledge and competences are essential at this stage of life and why?
3. Is there currently too much emphasis on subject specific content and not enough on more general skills, knowledge and competences?
4. What is good about the current system that should be retained and why?
5. What aspects of the current system are not working well and why?
6. What changes are possible within current resources that would make the Junior Cycle curriculum and experience better e.g. more relevant and accessible?
7. What do you think should or could change in your specific subject?
8. To what degree do you think locally devised programmes could be used instead of nationally devised syllabuses e.g. for all or some of the curriculum?
9. What are the opportunities and risks involved in using locally devised programmes?
10. What is the main function of the current Junior Certificate?
11. Is the Junior Certificate Examination having too much influence on what is taught and how it is taught – is it crowding out other ‘more important’ things?
12. Is there too much emphasis on the number of subjects students take in the Junior Certificate Examination?
13. Should the Junior Certificate Examination, taken at the end of the cycle remain the sole determinant of student progress and achievement?
14. How could students be assessed differently to enable a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences to be acknowledged and rewarded?
15. Would a different approach to, and model of, assessment be more appropriate, better, fairer? (see questions 16 and 17 below)
16. Should the Junior Certificate Examination be replaced entirely with a mix of other assessment modes - projects, field studies, practical tasks, oral tests, portfolios, written tests taken at a different time etc?
17. Should other modes of assessments be combined with a terminal examination?
18. If the ideas set out by the NCCA are progressed what will happen to the current suite of subjects; will an unhealthy hierarchy emerge or is that already with us?
19. If the ideas set out by the NCCA are progressed could they benefit some more than others, accentuating inequalities and inequities?
20. If the ideas set out by the NCCA are progressed are quality and standards at risk and why?
21. What are the risks and opportunities involved in a radical overhaul of the Junior Cycle?
22. How can these risks and opportunities be managed?
23. When might changes be best agreed and implemented?
24. Are you willing to engage in change ...and to what extent?
25. How should schools be supported to implement any changes agreed?

*Log on to [www.tui.ie](http://www.tui.ie) for more details* 