

Advisory Group for Contingency Planning for State Examinations 2020

Completion of Junior Cycle 2020 – Proposed Actions

The Advisory Group for Contingency Planning for State Examinations 2020 have examined proposals for the assessment and reporting upon students' learning at the end of Junior Cycle in 2020 in the context of the Minister's statement of 10 April 2020 regarding state examinations.

This document presents the advice that the Group recommends to the Minister for issue to schools.

AGREED AT MEETING 29 APRIL 2020

**ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING ON STUDENTS' LEARNING AT JUNIOR CYCLE
MAY 2020
DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS**

Context

- Students in Irish schools completing their third year of Junior Cycle in 2020 have experienced a very disrupted period of learning in 2019/20 because of the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 crisis.
- Teachers and schools have used a wide range of approaches to mitigate the effects of this disrupted schooling but the learning experience of students has varied across schools and students for a range of reasons over which these schools and students have had no control.
- In these circumstances, it is not possible for students to undertake the Junior Cycle final examinations normally organised by the State Examinations Commission.
- In addition, while many students have completed most of their classroom-based assessments (CBAs), short courses and/or priority learning units (PLUs), the normal range of assessment activities cannot be concluded consistently for all students.
- In this context, the use of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is not appropriate as a reporting and certification mechanism in 2020.
- These guidelines set out alternative arrangements for the assessment and reporting on the learning achievements of students who are concluding Junior Cycle in May 2020.

Key elements

In 2020, the Junior Cycle learning achievement of students will be recognised through a specific form of certification designed to meet the current, exceptional circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For each student, certification will involve two elements:

- **A State Certificate of completion of Junior Cycle from the Department of Education and Skills.** Students should receive a State Certification that they have completed three years of Junior Cycle education in a number of subjects/priority learning units. This certification will be provided by the Department of Education and Skills.
- **A School Report setting out the learning achievements of students in Junior Cycle.** Students should receive a written report on the broad range of learning that they have achieved in each subject, short course and/or priority learning unit at the end of Junior Cycle. This assessment of their learning will be provided by their teachers. Schools will have autonomy in how this assessment is to be arrived at and the format in which the report is provided.

The school's assessment of students' learning achievements

- The assessment of students' learning achievements in each subject will take place at school level and will be based on the teacher's professional knowledge of each student's learning. Schools will have autonomy to choose the most appropriate form of school-based assessments to put in place for the third-year cohort of 2019/20.
- Schools may opt to use a range of evidence to inform their assessment of students' achievements. These could include:
 - Evidence available from assignments, tests, tasks journals, projects, practical and other work completed over the course of second year and third year
 - Classroom-Based Assessments completed in second year and third year
 - School-designed examinations, tasks, projects, assignments, essay style questions, presentations, or other tasks chosen by the teacher from the range of approaches agreed at school level.
- Each school should adopt a whole-school approach to the assessment and reporting on student achievement following consultation with the teachers of third-year students to determine the most appropriate method of assessment for the third-year group and relevant subjects. The board of the school should communicate with parents/guardians and students in relation to the proposed actions that the school intends to take in relation to the planned end-of-year assessments.
- For each subject, the evidence of learning to be used and any method of assessment chosen should be decided by the relevant subject teachers in the context of the whole-school approach adopted above. Teachers know their students and can balance a variety of factors in arriving at the most suitable form of assessment to put in place for their students.
- Any additional assessment or other form of end-of-year assignment agreed to be completed by students should be limited in scope, cognisant of the disrupted learning that students have experienced in 2020, and recognise that some students may be unable to undertake such additional assessments because of issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- School-based assessments should be devised and marked by the class teacher. The method or format of assessment used (for example, written or electronic format) should take cognisance of students' accessibility to the mode chosen. The assessment format chosen should be accessible to all students in the class.
- To ensure equity, greater weighting should be given to work that was completed by students in advance of the closure of schools on 12 March 2020. Cognisance may be given to work completed after that date but teachers should have regard to the impact that school closure will have had on students' ability to engage with further learning after 12 March 2020 and their ability to complete any additional assessment tasks. For example, some students may be unable to undertake any additional assessment tasks because of issues arising from the Covid-19 crisis. In such circumstances, the assessment of the students' learning, and the report of their achievement issued by the school, may be based solely on work completed prior to 12 March 2020.

- Where relevant the method or format of assessment used should be inclusive of students' with special educational needs (SEN) and provide differentiated approaches to allow students with SEN to access the appropriate assessment mode and be adaptable to their particular context.
- Students should have the opportunity to complete any additional assessments within a clearly defined timeframe. A collaborative approach should be used in schools to devise a suitable timeframe for the completion of assessments and should be reviewed at whole-school level to ensure that the timeframes are balanced and achievable. In all cases, all assessments should be completed and marked before 29 May 2020.

Providing the report to students

- Students and their parents/guardians should receive a written report of the assessment of the student's learning in each subject, short course and/or priority learning unit.
- This report may include the provision of grades or descriptors. It may also detail separately the descriptors awarded to classroom-based assessments (CBAs) and/or priority learning units.
- The report should also provide an opportunity for schools to report on other aspects of achievement including the wellbeing programme completed by students.
- Schools may use a reporting template available from the NCCA but schools are free to devise their own report format.
- The report should be provided to students and their parents/guardians as soon as feasible following the completion of the school year 2019/20.

Providing State Certification

- The Department of Education and Skills will provide each student with a certificate indicating the completion of the Junior Cycle programme of study, including the list of subjects, short courses and/or priority learning units studied and the level at which the subject was studied.
- This data will be drawn from the Department's Post-primary Online Database (PPOD) and will not exceed the 10 subject limit on subjects for certification set out in Circular Letter 0055/2019 (or lower where the student has studied short courses).
- This certificate will be provided early in the school year 2020/21.

Adult learners

- The SEC will put in place specific arrangements for adult learners who have the flexibility to study a subject or subjects at Junior Cycle level within one academic year.
- These arrangements will ensure that these adult learners will be provided with an opportunity to take the final examination in the subject(s) for which they are entered. These examinations will take place in autumn 2020 and the specific timing will be determined as soon as possible.
- These examinations will only be available to students who meet the specific qualifying criteria.