



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Junior Cycle Developments

Innovation and Identity: Summary of Consultation Findings

February 2011

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1. Introduction

While the NCCA has an established track record in consulting and engaging with the education sector and the general public, this consultation on junior cycle marked a new departure. It was the first consultation focused primarily on what has come to be known as the *virtual site* of our work. Responding to the evidence of increased use of our own websites and of increased engagement by teachers in the on-line environment, it was decided to focus the consultation on a dedicated website – www.ncca.ie/juniorcycleddevelopments - which featured a number of web 2.0 type activities including blogs and school videos.

The timescale for the consultation was also longer than in previous consultations. It ran from April to December. Given our commitment in *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* to put schools at the heart of any change process, we needed to give schools time to engage with the ideas in the consultation paper.

The report, while it presents the findings from the consultation process, is also an account of the effectiveness of that approach to consultation.

Consultation activity

On 21st April 2010 a symposium on the future of junior cycle marked the launch of the consultation paper *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for the new junior cycle*. The consultation was intended to generate discussion and debate amongst the education partners and the wider public on ideas for developing junior cycle.

As discussed above, the principal forum for the consultation was the website where a questionnaire based on the themes of the paper could be accessed. 445 online questionnaire responses were received. Over 40% of these responses came from post-primary teachers while the next largest group of respondents were parents/guardians (19%) followed by third level students (15%) and second level students (12%). There were 36 postings to the junior cycle blog, the vast majority of which came from junior cycle students.

In addition to the online consultation, meetings were convened around the country in association with the National Parents Council Post-Primary and the Irish Vocational Education Association and a series of focus groups meetings were held with teachers and students in five schools (See appendix 2 for full list of meetings).

A day-long consultation with 86 students drawn from 34 Comhairlí na nÓg took place in Dublin Castle on November 13th organised in collaboration with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Members of the NCCA executive have also taken the opportunity to speak at public events and conferences where the topic of junior cycle was under discussion thus extending the debate into a wider forum.

Finally, 40 written submissions were received from groups and individuals (Appendix 3).

While the website feedback remains to be fully processed (see Appendix 1), this report presents a summary of the main ideas and themes emerging from the entire consultation to date. Of note is that the period of consultation coincided with some of the most challenging times ever faced by the education system and the public sector more generally. It is heartening to see that the responses show a willingness to engage with new ideas, a commitment to improving the system for all who work in it, and imagination and vision in thinking about how schooling might be in the future.

2. Issues arising from the consultation

2.1 Some common threads

This section presents a number of what might be called *common threads* – ideas and themes that appeared in most submissions and responses, albeit in different forms and to differing degrees,

The value of the paper and its ideas

There was a broad welcome for the paper *Innovation and Identity* and a recognition of the significance of the ideas which many regarded as ambitious and imaginative and holding the potential *to re-shape the junior cycle experience for future generations of learners in a way that is both educationally sound and culturally desirable*. (VEC CEEOA)

The process of consultation itself was also welcomed with many comments made long the lines below:

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the NCCA in taking this brave step in seeking to transform the junior cycle and in particular, allowing the consultation process to include views and suggestions from all the stakeholders such as parents like myself (Parent).

The need for reform

The idea that junior cycle is in need of reform was not contested. In fact, just one group suggested that *the system is not broken so why fix it?* (NPCpp meeting, Donegal). Otherwise, all the groups consulted and submissions received agreed on the need for change, albeit displaying different perspectives on the scale of change needed and how to go about it:

There is no choice but to reform the Junior Cycle and the only question is how to go about it (IVEA).

IBEC believes that radical reform of junior cycle teaching methods and curriculum content could have a profound impact on education outcomes including the

development of critical thinking and moving away from the dominance of rote learning (IBEC).

Teachers and schools at the centre for change

There was broad support for the idea of seeing schools and teachers as the centre for change. The following was typical: *we note and welcome the emphasis on the central role which schools will play in shaping the junior cycle of the future* (Teaching Council).

Professional development – a key to success

It was pointed out that the scale of change envisaged will require significant support and resourcing and the most frequently mentioned support concerned teachers' professional development, not just in the approaches and methodologies that might be associated with any new junior cycle, but in how to organise, design and evaluate locally developed curricula. *Significant levels of support are needed for teachers involved in local curriculum planning and development.* (TUI)

The three questions

Three overarching questions appeared in many of the consultation submissions and discussions:

- How can we ensure that reform leads to greater equity and inclusion?
- What is the best balance between locally and centrally devised curricula?
- How can reforms at junior cycle be connected to reforms in senior cycle and in primary education?

These questions are revisited later in this report.

2.2 What to retain?

While *Innovation and Identity* acknowledges that many aspects of the current system are worth retaining, some submissions expressed regret that paper did not explicitly elaborate on what should be retained: *While the document advocates building on what already works well it is a matter of some concern that the question of 'what works well' is not developed further (Home Economics Department, St Angela's College.)*

However, the consultation process did generate some suggestions on what works well and should be maintained within the context of junior cycle developments.

Confidence in the system

While acknowledging many flaws in the current system particular, some submissions were somewhat ambivalent in relation to letting go of what is familiar. This was notable in the responses of parents and students in particular. Some submissions expressed a belief that the current system enjoys both confidence and recognition and there is concern that this might be compromised by change.

The breadth of learning

The consultation has sent a clear message that the breadth of learning which students encounter in junior cycle is a positive feature of the current system that should be maintained. However, groups also pointed out that while retaining a breadth of learning is important, not all learning needs to be studied for the same length of time, nor does it all have to be included in a terminal examination.

Subjects as the main curriculum component

There is an underlying assumption in most submissions that subjects will remain as the main curriculum component in a revised junior cycle curriculum. But this is not to say that everyone is arguing for 'business as usual'. Many also expressed a desire to see subjects taught differently (for example with a more practical and real life focus) and would like to see more cross-curricular and co-curricular work across and between subject areas. It was also suggested that the junior cycle reform offers *an opportunity to communicate across the out-dated division between STEM subjects and those based in the arts, humanities and social sciences (AHSS), or to invent new relationships between them (IBEC).*

Subjects that are practical and relevant

Many advocated that those subjects that have a more practical and ‘real world’ focus should be retained. In this regard, submissions not only pointed to the practical subjects (such as Home Economics and Science) but also to CSPE and SPHE, (which some suggest should not only be maintained but should given more space), as well as development education, ICT, and P.E. *CSPE currently provides the best opportunity to develop global citizenship and awareness of development issues. One class per week is inadequate and should be increased* (Trócaire). Students at a number of meetings also expressed this view, in respect of increased time for CSPE and SPHE.

2.3 What should be included in a new junior cycle?

The consultation offered lots of suggestions about what might be included in a new or reformed junior cycle curriculum.

A core curriculum with choices

Those who contributed to the consultation were generally in agreement that there is a need for a core curriculum that all students should be able to access irrespective of school type. For teachers, and groups that represent them, a core common curriculum is seen as important in avoiding further inequity and differentiation between schools. Some suggested that the core subjects would not necessarily have to be taken throughout the entire junior cycle programme. Students could study some core subjects for just one or two years or for a specified number of hours.

Inevitably however, there was little agreement on what should be in the core. Some submissions did suggest specific subjects or areas of learning that should become part of the core and examples of these are set out below

IVEA

JMB

TUI

-
- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| ▪ English/literacy | ▪ Mother tongue | ▪ General sciences |
| ▪ Irish | ▪ A second language | ▪ Health and PE |
| ▪ Maths | ▪ Humanities | ▪ Creative arts, design, & craft areas |
| ▪ Science | ▪ Technology | ▪ Environmental, historical & cultural studies |
| ▪ Integrated social studies | ▪ Mathematics | ▪ Personal, social, political education |
| ▪ Personal development, health & PE (combined) | ▪ Sciences | ▪ Religious, moral, ethical education |
| ▪ Applied technology | ▪ Physical Education | ▪ Religious, moral, ethical education |
| ▪ European language | ▪ Religious, ethical and moral education | ▪ Communications, languages and literature |
| ▪ Creative arts | ▪ Social, personal and health education | ▪ Mathematical studies |

(Not all areas would be allocated equal time)

(All learning should incorporate an element of technology)

Reduced content

To address curriculum overcrowding and allow time for deepened understanding, active learning and the development of literacy and numeracy and key skills in a new junior cycle, content within subjects should be reduced. It was also suggested that *in some cases a number of subjects might be collapsed into a single, integrated, coherent subject.* (IVEA) However, one group of teachers observed that even if syllabuses were shortened, this may not necessarily result in teachers changing their methodologies or the way they assess their students. Therefore, professional development is needed alongside reduced syllabuses (Athy teachers' focus group meeting).

More emphasis on practical and creative subjects

There was broad agreement that a new junior cycle must incorporate more learning that is practically focused and engages students actively in their learning. This idea

was shared by both groups and individuals who engaged in the consultation and came across very strongly within the student focus groups. Students stressed the importance of learning having a relevance to life and would like to see more practical subjects (including computers, road safety, cooking, budgeting, etc.). They suggested that *all subjects should be taught in a practical way.* (Athy student focus group meeting) In addition, students generally agreed that there should be more emphasis on creative subjects such as music, art, drama, and on sport.

Cross-curricular learning

Some submissions such as those from the UBUNTU Network, Trócaire, Irish Film Institute and Irish Aid) advocated a significant shift in the junior cycle from subject-bound learning to interdisciplinary learning via integrated themes. Of note is that these submissions came from organisations and agencies external to the school system. Others pointed to the potential for cross curricular learning across some subjects or themes as a way of addressing the breadth of subject matter that young people should engage with and experience during this phase of education. The TUI observed that there was also recognition that teachers are not experienced in this way of teaching and would need support and guidance to move in this direction.

Basic and key skills

Respondents welcomed the emphasis on basic and key skills in *Identity and Innovation*. Of note is the awareness across a wide range of submissions and contributions of the need to improve students' literacy levels. A shift towards a more focused development of both basic (literacy and numeracy) and key skills is viewed as one of the most important elements of the reform process.

The current Junior Cycle does not focus sufficiently or effectively on life-values and life-skills (JMB).

A number of students commence post-primary school with insufficient proficiency in literacy, numeracy and other foundational and social skills (TUI).

It is interesting to note that when students were asked to name the most useful thing they ever learned, they tended to list social and life skills such as 'how to communicate', 'how to listen', 'how to stand up for yourself', 'coping skills', 'how to mix

with people – you need it in everyday life’, ‘how to cook – you need to eat’ (Dáil na nÓg consultation).

Some submissions also offered suggestions on how the list of key skills might be extended to include additional skills such as *active citizenship* (UBUNTU Network), *moral reasoning* (Trócaire) and a broader definition of literacy skills that traditionally held, *to include the use, interpretation and production of traditional texts in spoken language, print and multimedia, as well as the use and production of multimedia texts themselves.* (Irish Film Institute).

Recognition of learning both inside and outside the classroom

A range of submissions suggested that a reformed experience of junior cycle education should provide more opportunities for learning outside the classroom and recognition or affirmation of that learning in some way. Among the examples offered were project work, self-directed group work, field trips and engagement in civic and social activities. One group wrote that they *would like to see young people undertaking social innovation projects for the benefit of the community with an emphasis on care, co-operation, communication, and change.* (Young Social Innovators) Parents in Moate agreed that *project-based work gives students confidence and increases their self esteem and this is to be encouraged in any junior cycle developments* (NPCpp meeting).

My subject, new subjects.

Some submissions advocated for specific subjects and areas of learning within a revised junior cycle curriculum. While some argued that their particular subject should become part of the required core, (for example, Home Economics), others wished to see areas of learning not currently available to all students, such as drama, European Studies, media studies, being made more widely available as part of the junior cycle experience. One submission put forward the case for *an integrated language curriculum* with a view to Ireland becoming *a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and through lifelong education.* (IBEC)

2.4 Teaching and Learning

There was a broad recognition that curriculum change must be accompanied by something of a renewal of teaching and learning and hope was expressed that the reforms under discussion might prompt such a renewal. This idea of *renewal* featured in a number of submissions. It was often connected to the idea of student motivation and engagement: *there should be a greater emphasis on strengthening student motivation and creating engaging learning environments and teaching methods* (IBEC). A strong sense emerged that a move away from a 'tired' model, that was neither engaging for teachers nor for students, was needed to re-energise the system and those working in it.

In meetings and written submissions three elements were consistently identified as being at the heart of a more enriching and engaging learning experience - active learning methodologies, cross-curricular learning, and the development of key skills. Other suggestions that were mentioned frequently include greater use of ICT, more practical and 'real life' learning, and the incorporation of Assessment for Learning. Some meetings and submissions also pointed to the need for a changed mind-set on the part of students who needed to develop a *'learning to learn' mind-set supported by energised teaching, assessment for learning and relevant curricular content* (JMB). Another submission suggested that the public needs to be made aware of the educational value of cooperative learning, student directed learning and so on so that these are not seen as a sideshow to the 'real learning' for exams. They pointed out that *promoting a focus on skills in the curriculum or developing collaborative approaches to learning can be seen as distracting from the 'real' work of preparing for examinations. ...In our experience promoting student directed learning can be perceived as 'bad discipline' and involving students more actively in assessment as 'dumbing down'* (Educate Together).

Parents also emphasised the need for teaching and learning that supported students in being more involved in the learning process (Moate NPCpp meeting) and developing a love of learning (Carlow NPCpp meeting). There was a broad consensus among students that they would like to see more active learning, more project work and group work and a greater focus on skills based learning. As one group of students summarised: *The students should be active not the teacher* (Killinarden student focus group meeting). *There should be more of a balance between practical and academic*

work. All students should experience success in school even if they are not 'book smart' (St Louis student focus group meeting).

2.5 Evidence of learning

The weaknesses of the current examination system generated lots of discussion and commentary in the course of the consultation. A majority of students was critical of the Junior Certificate examination for putting too much pressure on students and for testing their memory rather than their understanding of a subject. *The junior certificate exam only proves how much you have learned not what you know. If you have a good memory you will do well* (St Louis focus group student meeting). Teachers too recognised the limitations of the current Junior Certificate exam particularly in regard to meeting the needs of all students. *The J.C. examination restricts the engagement of some students, limiting their opportunities for affirmation and achievement* (TUI). Another submission was even more critical: *We do not need to persist with this externally corrected, academic, largely written, stress-filled, terminal Mini-Leaving Certificate for fifteen year-olds.* (JMB)

Notwithstanding the fact that many view the terminal exam as having its limitations/problems, there was still support for *keeping the exam*. Those who advocated retaining the examination generally connected that position to a perception that the exam acts as a motivation for students and provides them with a practice run for the Leaving Certificate examination. *Many young people and their parents perceive the examination to perform an important motivating role for young people* (ASTI). However, even those who wanted to 'keep the exam' felt it should be reformed, and supported a review of the duration of exams and an exploration of whether a cross curricular approach could enable a number of domains of learning to be tested in one exam. There was also strong support for a reduction in the number of exams.

A significant number of submissions agreed that there was a need for a wide range of approaches to gathering evidence of learning, and suggested a balance between examinations and other evidence of learning. Portfolio assessment was offered as a possible way forward in many meetings and submissions and students favoured this idea. Students feel portfolios have a positive role to play, as they carry *less stress*, provide a *chance to display your creativity*, help students feel *more motivated*, and it

would actually be *'fun'*. They also suggested that portfolios would generate a sense of pride associated with the work. They like the idea of choosing their best pieces of work and having an opportunity to discuss//present their work. This would improve their self-esteem and their communication skills. They would like opportunities to analyse and think about their work

One submission advocated the introduction of a 'Junior Cycle Portfolio' that would allow students build up a *personal achievement portfolio of their work. Each curriculum subject would have built-in provision of the five key skills. Progress and mastery can be measured through the use of ICT, visual, audio or written output and project-based learning. The underlining principle is that students would learn to take responsibility for their learning. Each student would learn to maximise their own potential and measure their progress against themselves rather than an average' student. Although there would be a minimum standard there would be no limit so exceptionally able students could be challenged* (Gifted Student Advocacy Group). The JCSP submission suggested that the JCSP Student Portfolio offers a means by which students can gather evidence of learning and this could be extended. Others suggested that student portfolios might be collect and stored online.

There was also support for the idea that evidence of learning might include out-of-class learning. *In addition to an end of junior cycle examination, a junior cycle qualification should also include evidence of learning including project work, extra curricular activities, civic and social activities* (ASTI). Another submission recommends the use of practically focused and active assessment tools such as action projects and proposes that *an onus should be put on examining skills rather than just subject content* (Trócaire).

While there was general support for wider ways of gathering evidence of learning it was also acknowledged that teachers need more training in using different forms of assessment and in using the outcomes of assessment to inform teaching and learning. In spite of this lacuna, one submission concluded: *It is time we took courageous decisions around assessment for and of learning while trusting in the professionalism and instinctive fairness of our teachers* (JMB).

2.6 Qualifications

What was notable about this theme was its absence from many of the submissions - perhaps signalling a general lack of familiarity with the whole qualifications landscape. Where opinions were offered, a wide range of views was expressed, ranging from those who thought *the possibility of a range of qualifications is welcome* (Institute of Guidance Counsellors) to those who expressed concern that more than one qualification *would introduce a level of complexity and confusion to the learning environment and require a high level of administration and bureaucracy* (TUI). Most submissions that did address this issue, favoured retaining one junior cycle qualification but allowing flexibility within it (for example to accommodate SEN students). *The junior cycle qualification should continue to be available to all who complete the three-year cycle. For some students, such as those with special education needs, an additional qualification would be necessary* (ASTI).

The belief that all students should have their learning affirmed was referred to in a number of discussions. Many would welcome changes to assessment and qualifications in providing an opportunity for this to happen. For some, extending access to a greater variety of qualifications was seen as potentially contributing to greater equity by improving access of all students to a qualification. *Extending access to qualifications at different levels of the Framework is a powerful tool for access and inclusion... The potential gain nationally by opening up access to awards at levels 2, 3, and 4 within junior cycle experience is immense* (FETAC). FETAC also supported the idea of curriculum components that can be used towards a major junior cycle qualification being designated as minor awards. They cautioned that the identity of the awarding body needs to be clear and advocated a fixed maximum credit rating (related to a credit system) being attached to any junior cycle qualifications. Parents too thought that building up credits over the course of junior cycle would benefit students and could result in students having greater confidence in themselves as learners (Carlow, NPCpp meeting).

Finally, it was clear from the discussions that whatever qualification or qualifications are introduced they must be manageable and easy to use and should avoid putting greater pressure on either teachers or students.

2.7 Bringing about and supporting change

The consultation has confirmed the view expressed in *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* that schools are the most important site in the process of educational change. The consultation has also provided evidence that people are open to change provided proper support, guidelines and processes are put in place. The main ideas in this regard can be summed up as follows:

Support for teachers and schools as a priority

A recurrent thread throughout the discussions and consultations is the view that reform of junior cycle will require significant support for schools and teachers. Some expressed a concern that within the current economic climate this support may not be available. *Is it realistic to bring about change in these circumstances of strained finances?* (IVEA) On the other hand another submission suggests that *some of the most significant curriculum changes that have occurred at second level have happened during previous difficult economic times and it could be said that these times necessitate change being implemented* (CEEEOA).

Professional development

The support for and development of teachers is recognised as key to the success of the reform agenda. Submissions and discussions pointed out that many of the changes envisaged *may present challenges to existing teachers who may require a considerable deepening of their professional knowledge, skills and competencies* (Teaching Council). There was also agreement that a different model of CPD would be needed to support change. Many advocated a 'school-based' approach that would combine in-school innovation with external professional support. A more collaborative model was also advocated carried out by teachers in teams or groups and supported by teacher education departments and other outside agencies. Some suggested an *area-based approach* or one based on *local networks*. One submission suggested that such an approach towards junior cycle development should be adopted in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and to help address potential local inequalities that might otherwise arise (TUI).

Change must engage all partners

Some submissions pointed out that all partners in education must be fully engaged in the change process for it to be successful (CEEEOA). Students said they would like to

be more frequently consulted on changes taking place and would like to have a greater involvement in decisions related to what they learn.

Incremental and inclusive of all

Introducing changes to all schools simultaneously was strongly advocated to ensure that some schools were not advantaged or disadvantaged in the process. While acknowledging that the scale of change is ambitious and will take time to implement there is a consensus that 'no school can be left behind'. This is not to say that change might not be incremental and enable schools to set out their own pathway. Clear incremental steps are needed aimed at all schools 'moving further still' over time.

No school should either be left behind or choose to stay behind as the nation's 12 – 15 year olds are liberated from some of the more limiting and stifling characteristics of the current paradigm (JMB).

Clear parameters

There is a plea in many submissions that any move towards greater school flexibility and school autonomy for clear perimeters for curriculum planning, a rigorous system of internal controls (within and between schools) and a system of external monitoring. In this regard, the publication of the Framework for Junior Cycle is eagerly awaited.

3. Overarching concerns

At the outset we mentioned three overarching questions, which have underpinned many of the consultation submissions and discussions. They are revisited below. Finally, the issue of the identity of junior cycle as it emerged from the submissions is also summarised.

How to ensure that reform leads to greater equity and inclusion?

The fact that there are inequities within the system and that it doesn't serve the needs of all students equally is not contested. Competition between schools in the 'market place' was mentioned as a current reality. Many of the submissions were concerned that any change *would not contribute to highly differentiated experiences for junior cycle students and lead to a further 'stratified' system and even greater educational disadvantage* (CEEEOA). On the other hand, some submissions suggested that many of the ideas for change could result in greater inclusion and engagement in learning as well as broader opportunities for recognition of learning. The key to ensuring that reform does not contribute to further inequalities in the system or increase social differentiation between schools, according to some submissions, is in equity of access to resources and support in bringing about change. *It is essential that significant change at junior cycle should be accompanied by the resources necessary to implement that change in such a way that disadvantaged students can benefit from it* (JCSP).

How to get the balance right between locally devised curriculum and central control?

While there is agreement that schools having more flexibility and freedom to develop a programme or programmes to suit their students' needs is a good idea, there are also concerns about the practicalities of such an approach as well as the danger of it leading to highly differentiated learning experiences for students. *Greater flexibility in terms of local school autonomy in areas such as curriculum development could escalate inequalities rather than address them, and result in two-tiered provision* (TUI). Some submissions suggest specific ways of alleviating this danger such as the provision of direction on core areas of learning and learning outcomes which all junior cycle students will experience as well as fixing a limit on the percentage of school developed courses provided within a junior cycle programme of study. For example,

the TUI suggests that *in excess of 70%* of the entire curriculum should be designed centrally.

How to improve the connection between junior cycle education and primary and senior cycle education?

The need for reforms in junior cycle to be accompanied by reforms to both primary education and senior cycle education was a common theme in the discussions and submissions. The negative influence of the Leaving Certificate and points system on teaching and learning was mentioned frequently.

Reform at junior cycle is unlikely to succeed unless the senior cycle (LC) is reformed (IVEA).

The Leaving Certificate and the points system associated with it are a major controlling force on the environment of learning in our post primary schools...and have equally dominated the development of the Junior Certificate. (PPEF)

While the points system may impose a backwards pressure resisting change, the long-term impact of successful renewal at lower secondary, could finally bring about a freeing of post primary education from the matriculation process' (JMB)

In regard to primary education, the concern is not how to lessen its influence but how to capitalise on it and carry forward many of the approaches to learning that students enjoy there. *There is a need to establish and maintain real and grounded linkage with primary school. The bridging framework of Project Maths offers a signpost for what might be achieved in other area. (JMB)*

The transfer from primary to post-primary school was another area of concern and ideas on how to ease this transition were offered by various submissions.

It would be beneficial if 4th, 5th, and 6th classes could be reorganised so that students are introduced to more than one teacher teaching them and in 1st year students could have fewer teachers and increase the number in 2nd and 3rd year (IVEA).

More could be done to link the curriculum in 6th class into the junior cycle e.g. focus on modern languages (IBEC).

One submission suggested that many of the initiatives developed in the JCSP transfer programme might be worth exploring in the context of helping all students in their transfer (JCSP). Students themselves offered lots of ideas on how the transition to secondary could be improved such as starting some secondary subjects in 6th class, a shorter school day for the beginning of secondary school, a buddy or mentoring system, fewer teachers assigned to 1st years, less homework, more visual and practical learning, active learning and taster subjects in first year.

And finally, issues of identity

There was broad agreement on the need for junior cycle to have its own identity and purpose as opposed to being viewed primarily as a preparation for senior cycle. This question yielded some interesting responses via the online survey (see Appendix 3). A large majority of respondents rated the following as most important:

To develop each young person as they make the transition from childhood to young adulthood

and

To help the learner develop a strong relationship with and understanding of learning.

The following are the top four qualities online respondents would like to see developed in students during junior cycle.

- To become independent learner
- To become resourceful learners
- To have confidence in themselves and their abilities
- To become effective communicators - able to interact with others

Some written submissions questioned the continued use of the term 'junior cycle' and suggested we might use *this opportunity to change the name from 'Junior Cycle' to something more challenging and imaginative that will draw in the student and help young teenagers to take ownership of this wonderfully developmental period in their lives - ask them what they would like it to be called (JMB).*

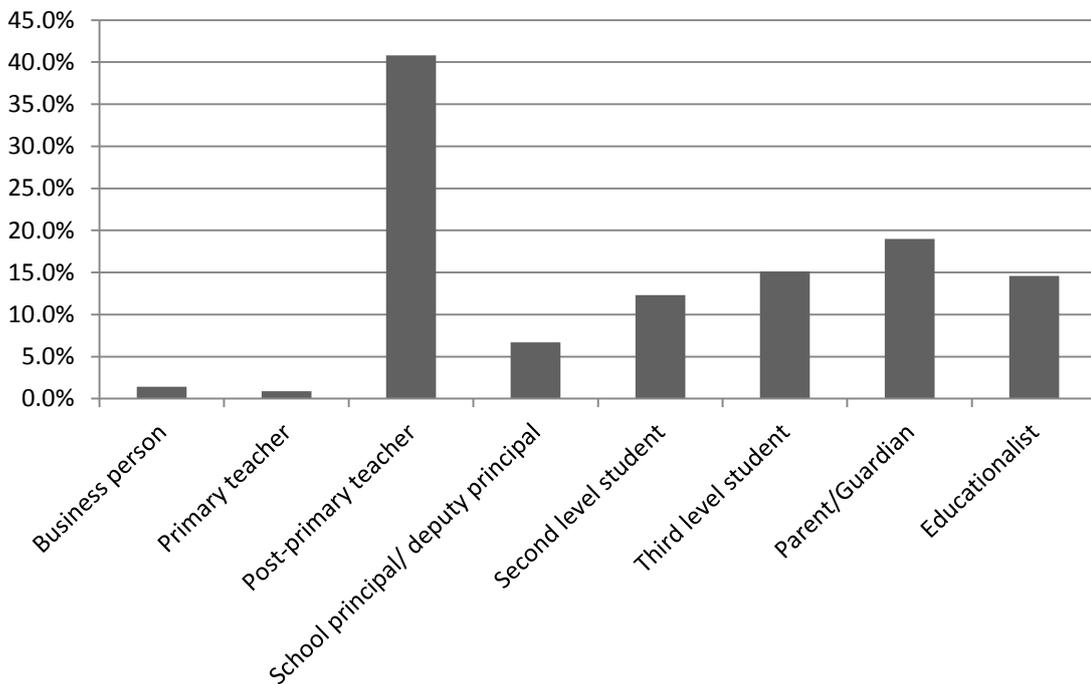
Appendices

Appendix – 1

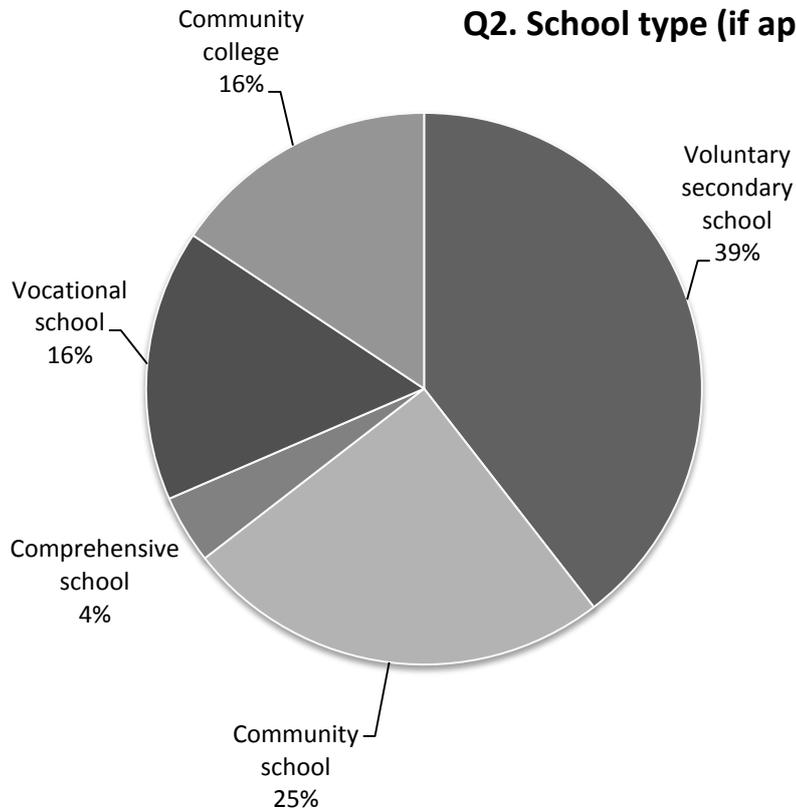
Summary of Online Questionnaire Responses

As part of the consultation on a new junior cycle the NCCA received 445 responses to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire had a total of 18 questions with a combination of closed and open-ended questions. The following is a summary of the responses received from the online questionnaire. The information in the next few pages offers a 'snapshot' into the findings from the questionnaire. The open-ended questions are presented with the top three responses and quotes from the questionnaire are used throughout this summary. In the near future the findings will be further analysed in greater detail and made available.

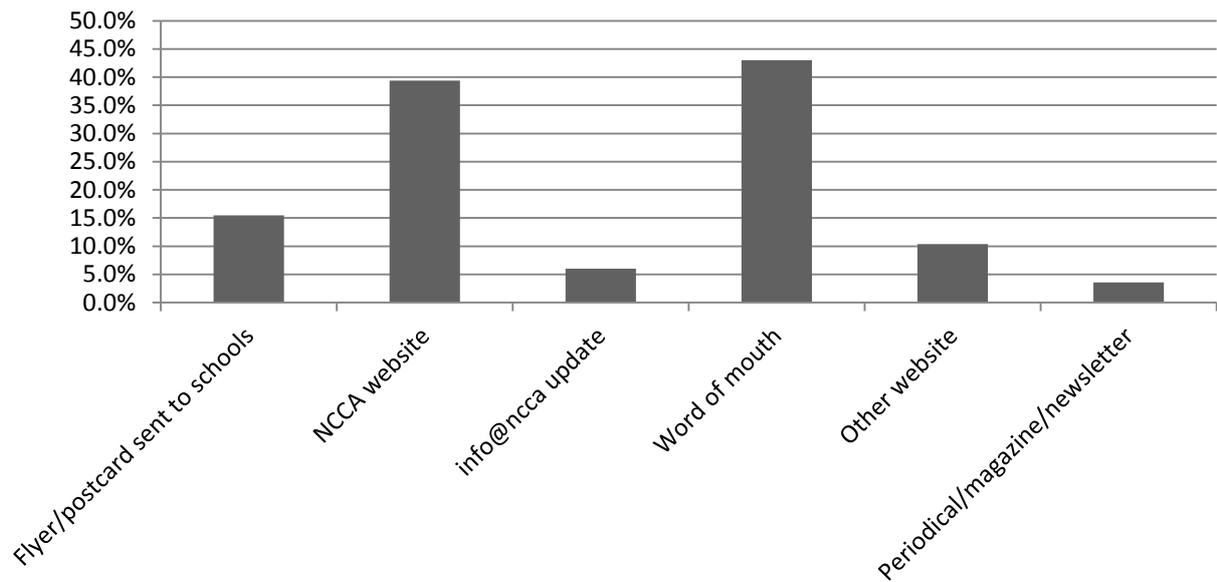
Q1. I am responding as a/n



Q2. School type (if applicable)



Q 3. I heard about the junior cycle developments consultation through:



Q 4. Junior cycle education, in Ireland and beyond, is sometimes said to lack a clear identity. Rate the following purposes of junior cycle education in this context.

Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
To link with and build on the learner's experience of primary education	80	153	22	8
To provide a solid foundation for senior cycle study	130	110	13	11
To help the learner develop a strong relationship with and understanding of learning	170	84	7	3
To prepare learners for life, work, further and higher education	153	85	20	5
To develop each young person as they make the transition from childhood to young adulthood	184	63	16	3
<i>answered question</i>				266

Q5. A recent overview said that future senior cycle learners should be resourceful, confident, engaged and active. What qualities you would like to see learners develop in junior cycle?

The following are the top four qualities respondents would like to see developed in junior cycle.

- To become **independent learner** - *Independence in learning*
- To become **resourceful learners** – *to learn more independently*
- To have **confidence** in themselves - *confidence in themselves and their abilities*
- To become effective **communicators** - *Able to interact with others.*

Q6. What skills would you like to see developed and encouraged in junior cycle learning?

The following are the top four skills respondents would like to see developed and encouraged in junior cycle learning.

- **Literacy and numeracy** (including digital literacy) - *Writing and reading skills. (key to all subjects)*
- **Communication skills** - *Communication-oral, listening, written etc.*
- **Critical and analytic thinking skills** - *Thinking skills - to go beyond memorisation and recall*
- **Research skills** - *Research methods and an ability to cross-check facts*

Q7. In what ways could learning in junior cycle be more relevant and meaningful to the lives of learners and the world in which they are growing up?

The top four suggestions to make the junior cycle more relevant and meaningful to the lives of learners and the world in which they are growing up are as follows:

- By making the curriculum more relevant to students' lives by linking it to their interests, and applying the context for the curriculum in **real life situations** - *The application of what's being learned to real life situations*
- By linking the curriculum to **the wider community** - *Engage classroom activities with local community*
- By using **ICT** technologies in teaching and learning - *Multi media education/ computer access and usage, more use of e-learning, Moodle etc.*

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- By using **cross-curricular and project based** activities - *More emphasis on cross curricular activities*

Q8. What kinds of learning approaches, activities and experiences would you particularly like to see in junior cycle?

The following are the top four learning approaches, activities, and experiences respondents would like to see in junior cycle.

- More **active and discovery learning** - *Active discovery learning*
- More **project and group activities** - *More group projects, joint presentations on PowerPoint etc.*
- More **practical applications** for curriculum activities - *More practical experiences where learners get a first-hand experience of skills.*
- More **continuous assessment and assessment for learning** - *Variety of assessment, with emphasis on assessment for learning*

Q9. When you think about an ideal qualification for junior cycle what evidence of learning and achievement would you like to see it recognise and include on the certificate?

The following are the top four approaches for gathering evidence of learning and achievement respondents would like to recognise and included on the certificate.

- Gathering evidence of learning through **portfolio assessment** – *A portfolio of assignments showing varied project work*
- **Exam results** - *Exam results for a reduced number of subjects*
- **Continuous assessment** over the three years - *Continuous or self assessment based on guidelines and principles established and agreed through DES*
- Acknowledgment of students' **achievements in extra-curricular** or local community activities - *Some recognition for those who contribute positively to their school or to community - some type of recognition of this*

Q10. As well as learning through subjects, how important do you think the various elements below are in developing learning at junior cycle?

Answer Options	An essential development	An important development	A welcome development	A poor development
Use of learning sites outside the classroom	115	96	31	4
Cross-curricular learning on themes and projects	114	86	38	7
Learning through the use of technology and media	138	95	9	5
Learning through events e.g. school musicals	108	100	31	6
Learning through peers	106	113	21	5
Independent and self-directed learning	167	63	13	3
Use of local and other communities as sources of learning	104	98	35	7
Guidance about learning	138	84	16	3
Good relations between all involved in learning	172	64	5	3
Extra-curricular learning activity	124	88	26	4
<i>answered question</i>				248

Q11. In general terms, if there were one thing you'd change about junior cycle, what would it be? Why?

The following are the top four things respondents would change about the junior cycle, with the reasons why.

- The **focus on the terminal examination** the Junior Certificate - *The emphasis on examinations - they are not focussed on how their experiences will help them as they go through life they just want to know what sort of exam question they will get*
- The curriculum is trying to cover too much and there should be **less subjects** - *Fewer subjects. Curriculum is too broad.*
- The **assessment method** should have a greater focus on continuous assessment - *Include continual assessment from the beginning of first year that builds up towards a qualification.*
- Move away from recognising and acknowledging rote learning to a greater focus on **individual responses to their learning** - *Get rid of rote learning and examinations that rely overly on memory work. Testing the ability to respond creatively and individually is a more worthwhile for fruitful living than stores of knowledge already recorded in other media*

Q12. In general terms, what would you not change about the current junior cycle? Why?

The following are the top two things respondents would not like to change about the current junior cycle.

- The presence of a **terminal state examination** - *The objective nature of the assessment. If assessment is to become school-based, there should be an adequate supervisory structure, similar to that in current terminal examinations to ensure standardisation in assessment criteria*
- Keep the **range of subjects** but without the focus of rote learning - *The variety of subjects should not be decreased - The bad thing is that at present the students are expected to remember and to regurgitate everything that they study. Can you just imagine how much they could enjoy it all if they did not have to remember it all!*

Q 13. The first pathway focuses on the curriculum at junior cycle. Should every school offer the same junior cycle curriculum, more or less? Or should each school, while working within a common curriculum framework, have more freedom to include and use elements of the curriculum in different combinations and ways? Rate the elements below in this context.

Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
All students take specific core subjects	132	50	23	14
All students work towards a specific set of learning experiences and outcomes	108	68	25	13
Students take fewer subjects	62	41	56	57
Schools can include courses they have developed themselves	51	46	59	61
Key skills become an important part of the curriculum	144	55	16	5
Literacy and numeracy are prioritised	140	40	25	11
Some parts of the curriculum are based in themes, projects and investigations that are not subject based	77	46	47	49
<i>answered question</i>				222

Q14. The second pathway looks at the junior cycle qualification. Should the junior cycle qualification continue to be the Junior Certificate alone? Is there a need for a qualification that's more than just an examination? Is there a need for more than one qualification at junior cycle to cater for all students? Rate the elements below in this context.				
Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
The Junior Certificate in its current form remains as the junior cycle qualification.	52	40	31	81
Some aspects of the Junior Certificate remain but it is developed into a broader qualification.	54	66	46	36
A new junior cycle qualification that combines examination results with evidence of other learning is designed and introduced.	110	59	31	16
A second qualification is introduced for those students who cannot reach the standard of the current Junior Certificate.	52	54	43	62
Future qualifications can include elements that are related to local courses and learning that is school-specific.	56	70	49	36
Schools can access any qualifications that are available at the appropriate levels of the National Framework of Qualifications.	70	59	45	32
<i>answered question</i>				220

Q15. The third pathway focuses on the organisation of junior cycle in schools and how it relates to primary education and senior cycle education. If schools have more flexibility in relation to

curriculum and qualifications, should junior cycle also be organised differently with a view to assisting students in making successful transitions from primary school and into senior cycle? Rate the ideas below in this context.

Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
A three-year junior cycle continues but with stronger bridging with the later years of primary schooling and more flexibility in junior cycle itself.	63	58	59	32
A 1+2 approach is taken with a one-year transition from primary school followed by a two-year junior cycle.	55	50	50	53
A 2+1 approach is taken where a broad two-year junior cycle curriculum is followed by a year preparing for the junior cycle qualification and making choices for senior cycle.	38	37	41	85
A 5-year model is adopted with the final year of primary school and the fourth year of post-primary school being seen as extensions of junior cycle.	29	20	52	103
<i>answered question</i>				217

Q16. The fourth pathway emphasises the idea of renewing learning and teaching as a major focus for the development of junior cycle. This is in keeping with the idea that strengthening and deepening the student's relationship with learning is the ultimate aim of all junior cycle development. Rate the ideas below in this context

Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
A set of key skills for junior cycle are identified and used as a basis for renewing subject and other learning	114	63	23	11
Greater priority is given to activity based learning and learning outcomes that reflect this	130	59	14	10
Students are given more opportunities to reflect on and discuss their learning	113	59	32	8
Teachers are provided with opportunities to discuss and reflect on teaching and learning with colleagues in and beyond the school	123	49	32	8
Technology and other media are used as tools to develop approaches to learning and teaching	130	52	27	5
The role of co-operative learning and project work in the curriculum is strengthened	103	63	26	17
The use of peer learning, self-assessment and self-directed learning is encouraged	116	56	29	14
There is student input to curriculum and assessment planning in schools	68	45	61	41
<i>Answered question</i>				217

Q17. The fifth pathway looks at the role that an examination like the Junior Certificate should

play in junior cycle and whether evidence of learning can be generated as effectively and as meaningfully in other ways. In a context where schools are given greater choice in how they think about and plan for learning, should they also have more choice and involvement in the ways in which evidence of that learning is generated and used. Rate the ideas below in this context.

Answer Options	an essential development	an important development	a welcome development	a poor development
The Junior Certificate continues but with fewer national, terminal examinations		37	46	75
A combination of national examinations and locally administered examinations are provided	39	46	46	73
Different forms of evidence of learning are gathered and used to guide learning progress and feedback	95	64	32	18
Evidence of learning is gathered, discussed, shared and linked into a record of achievement	95	57	35	20
A combination of examination results and a portfolio of achievements based on evidence of learning are linked into a new junior cycle qualification	119	44	29	18
<i>answered question</i>				214

Q18. If you wish to add any further comments in relation to developments in junior cycle, please add them to the space below.

Below are samples of the type of responses on any other comments respondents have in relation to developments in junior cycle.

- *I strongly believe that all pupils should do practical subjects to Junior Cert because they will see how difficult it is later on in life if they cannot do the basics - cooking, change a plug, hang pictures, do weekly shopping, choose a savings account and many more things!!!*
- *The Junior Certificate should have an attendance element printed on the Certificate or otherwise students should not be allowed sit the exams if they have not being attending school regularly.*
- *I welcome the development of the Junior Certificate curriculum and promote the move to more continuous assessments so as to maximize learners' input. I do think it is important to acknowledge the beneficial structures already in place such as those in the Home Economics classroom where they are already implementing many of the suggested ideas for the new syllabus and therefore should only need to maximize on the already implemented structures*
- *I believe this consultation process is skewed. The hidden agenda is that the Junior Certificate as stands is 'negative' and should be changed. I see no evidence that that is the case nor is there evidence that any other scheme would be more successful. Indeed, I would suggest that the primary examination be brought back.*
- *The junior cycle should have a direct relevancy to the present and future lives of the students. Its purpose should be to equip students with transferable life skills on both an individual basis and as part of the wider society. Through providing the knowledge and practical skills for application in everyday life, we can prepare our future society.*

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- *This is all ok in theory but the senior cycle has to follow on from this and level of education then maybe too difficult or if dropped [the] national standard will be very poor. Lot of kids just don't want to spend time studying in school [it's] not that they aren't able for it. Don't see exams there as important*

Appendix 2 Consultation meetings

Consultation Group/Organisation	Venue	Date
NPCPP regional consultation meetings	Dublin	5 th October
	Carlow	7 th October
	Westmeath	12 th October
	Kerry	12 th October
	Donegal	19 th October
	Cork	19 th October
IVEA regional consultation meetings	Dublin	28 th September
	Galway	5 th October
	Cavan	6 th October
	Limerick	7 th October
	Kilkenny	18 th October
	Cork	21 st October
Dublin CDVEC principals	Dublin	12 th October
ACCS Conference	Athlone	29 th September
Institutes of Technology Ireland	Dublin	18 th May
NAPD	Galway	8 th October
Educate Together Seminar	Dublin	April 17 th
Education and Skills Group (IBEC)	Dublin	December 10 th
NABMSE	Portlaoise	15 th October
Dáil na nÓg	Executive meeting	11 th September
	Consultation day	13 th November

Senior cycle committee	NCCA	11 th October
JMB Curriculum Advisory Group	Dublin	June 23 rd
Early Childhood and Primary Committee	NCCA	23 rd June
School visits	St. Louis, Rathmines	14 th September 22 nd September
	Killinarden Community School	27 th August 28 th September
	Naas CBS	30 th August 14 th October
	Athy Community College	22 nd September 12 th October
Citizenship Education Network	CDU, Crumlin	8 th November

Appendix 3 Submissions received

Organisations
Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE)
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
Bridge2 College Programme, Trinity College
Chief Executive and Education Officer's Association (CCEOA)
Dáil na Óg
Discover Science & Engineering
Educate Together
Engineers Ireland
European Studies Programme
Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)
Gifted Advocacy and Support (Wicklow-South Dublin group)
Health and Safety Authority
Home Economics Department St. Angela's College , Sligo
Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)
ICT Ireland – IBEC (with endorsements from IBM and DANU Technologies)
Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC)
Intel Ireland
International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE)
Irish Aid
Irish Film Institute
Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
JCSP Support Service
Joint Managerial Body JMB/AMCSS
National Association for Youth Drama (NAYD)
National Parents' Council Post-Primary
Post Primary Education Forum
Safefood Commission
Science programme at St. Angela's College

Teaching Council
Trócaire
Teachers Union of Ireland(TUI)
Ubuntu Network Co-ordinator, Department of Education and Professional Studies, UL
Young Social Innovators

Individuals
Dr. Padraic O' Dowd – Principal Gormanston College
Parent
Helen Forde – Principal St. John's Special School, Waterford
Irene Woods - – Home Economics teacher
Orla – Home Economics teacher
PJ Rudden – RPS Consulting Engineers
Roland Tormey, University of Limerick
Secondary school, Northern Ireland