

Tánaiste launches consultation process on reform of junior cycle

The Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms. Mary Coughlan, T.D., today (Wednesday, 21 April 2010) launched a consultation process on reform of the junior cycle in second level schools. The consultation is being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (“NCCA”). The public consultation was launched at conference hosted by the Tánaiste, organised by the Council, and attended by teaching, school management, parent, higher education, media and industry representatives.

At the conference, the NCCA is presenting a discussion paper, *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a new Junior Cycle*, which is available on the website www.ncca.ie. The paper sets out a range of possible directions for reform ranging from small to medium to significant levels of change. The objective of the consultation is to generate a debate in the coming months on the future shape of junior cycle education.

As part of the consultation process, the NCCA will also gather feedback from its close collaboration with a network of schools. Continuing analysis of international practice, together with a report of research into the use of standardised testing at this level of the system in other countries, will also inform developments. No specific proposals will be made until the feedback from the consultation phase has been considered.

The feedback from the consultation, and reviews of international practice, will inform the proposals which the NCCA will make to the Tánaiste. It is anticipated that these proposals will then be presented at a symposium in the autumn.

The NCCA had been asked to review the junior cycle in the light of best international practice, to examine what should be prioritised within the totality of the junior cycle experience, and advise on the nature and form of assessment which would be most appropriate in the context of what is no longer a high-stakes environment.

Launching the consultation, the Tánaiste said, “*The period of the junior cycle is such an important one in the formative years of our young people. The skills they learn and the outlook they develop during these key adolescent years will impact greatly on their individual futures. Their experiences will shape their life chances and leave them with the values which will underpin their role as future citizens, future parents and future leaders.*”

She said that, as a result, there is a huge onus, not only on parents, but on society to put the best possible supports in place at such a critical time for our young adults. “*That includes equipping them with the very best education that the State with its resources can provide; and it includes delivering that education through the framework of a best practice contemporary curriculum.*”

Commenting on the impact she envisaged for learners as a result of the reform, the Tánaiste said, “*Our learners need to be flexible, adaptable, resilient and competent if*

they are to participate successfully in society and be enabled as independent learners throughout the whole of their lives. They need to develop critical thinking skills and move away from the trend towards rote learning. Curriculum reform must result in a more active learning experience for the individual, promote a real understanding within learning, and aim to embed a seed of creativity and innovation in the learner.”

The Tánaiste stressed the need to ensure change is appropriately planned and supported, and that there is an orderly lead in time for students and schools. She indicated that while a changed model is needed, what is envisaged is a qualification, designed for all, built on evidence of learning, mechanisms for ensuring national standards, and a means of ensuring that students are well equipped for the demands of senior cycle.

ENDS

Photographs for this launch are available from Maxwell Photography - **macspics@eircom.net**