

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Report on the optional nature of History in the Framework for
Junior Cycle

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1. Introduction

In November 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh TD, made the following statement about history in the curriculum:

It is very important that our education system gives our young people the opportunity to learn about, and learn from, key times and events in our history, particularly in the context of our decade of centenaries.

These include the end of the First World War, the delicate path we walk to mark the foundation of the State and the role of women in society.

The study of history also gives pupils the chance to consider and learn from the story of Irish migration, of the journey from conflict to peace on this island, the experience and lessons to be learned from our most recent history and the rich history of our Irish language and its place in our culture and our heritage.

It is for this reason that I have asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to review the optional nature of history under the new Framework for Junior Cycle.

As part of their review I have asked the NCCA to identify how we can best promote the study of history in our schools.

In meeting the Minister's request, this report sets out the NCCA's consideration on the situation of history in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the experience of junior cycle education. The report is presented in the following sections:

- An overview of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*
- The optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course
- The new Junior Cycle History course
- Considerations and conclusions

2. An overview of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) sets out what the educational experience will look like for all young people in the first three years of their post-primary education. Its vision is informed by a sustained period of engagement with stakeholders and by national and international research. A fundamental difference between the old Junior Certificate and the new Junior Cycle is that this Framework is the governing structure within which all curriculum components, including subjects, are placed. This means that changes to any single component or subject, such as history, has implications for the Framework as a whole.

The status of history, and of all other subjects in the Junior Cycle curriculum, must be considered in the context of the Framework. In order to fully appreciate the implications of making changes to the Framework, it is useful to look more closely at the nature of the Framework and how it was developed. The reform envisaged in the Framework is rooted in some key considerations that emerged from the research and consultation process that preceded its development. Two of these key considerations are particularly relevant to how subjects are represented in the Framework:

- *Increased autonomy for schools to design programmes for students' learning*

A key feature of the Framework is that it allows schools and school management enhanced autonomy and flexibility to develop learning programmes and experiences that meet the particular needs of students in their particular school contexts. This feature supports the idea and the principle that school leaders and teachers are well placed to make professional judgements about the kind of learning their students should experience, within certain agreed parameters as laid down in the Framework. Through the Framework, each school develops its Junior Cycle programme which recognises and meets the needs of its students in a manner which was not possible previously. This feature of the Framework was developed in response to research findings and consultation feedback, particularly from schools working with educationally disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs, on the need for greater flexibility in working with what was viewed as an overcrowded and over-regulated curriculum. The greater flexibility and autonomy it encompassed also recognised the wide range of contexts within which schools develop their programmes, not least of which is school size and the related teaching staff and range of subject options available to them.

- *Balancing knowledge and skills in the student's learning experience*

A second key feature of the Framework is that it recognises the changing nature of knowledge and how easily knowledge can be accessed through technology in a manner that might have been

considered impossible just a generation ago. The Framework also acknowledges the impact of these changes on the nature of work and on the world in general. In this regard, the Framework places a strong emphasis on supporting young people to acquire the competences and skills needed to navigate a world where information is presented to them in so many ways and where advances in technology and social media can make it difficult to discern what is real and what is not. These skills include the capacity to think critically, to be creative and innovative, to develop problem-solving skills and to work collaboratively with others. Therefore, the Framework seeks to support schools in developing programmes that represent an appropriate balance between knowledge acquisition and the skills and attitudes needed to critically interrogate the nature of knowledge and how we acquire it.

In relation to the structure of the Framework itself, the principles set out the philosophy on which the Framework is based and inform the kind of learning that students should experience in Junior Cycle.

The Eight Principles underpinning Junior Cycle

The starting point for schools in discussing what kind of programme might best suit its students' needs are the eight principles of Junior Cycle. These principles reflect the twin emphases on increased school autonomy in designing learning programmes and the balance in these learning programmes between knowledge and skills. Some of the principles are of particular relevance to the subject of this review. For instance, on the principle of *Choice and Flexibility*, the Framework states: 'The school's junior cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet the needs of students.' The principle of *Creativity and Innovation* points towards programmes where 'Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative'. For *Engagement and Participation*, the Framework advises that: 'The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school'.

The Key Skills of Junior Cycle

In addition to the principles, the Framework specifies eight key skills in which students demonstrate proficiency. These skills are identified as key to learning not just in Junior Cycle but beyond – as well as being linked to skills at early childhood, primary and senior cycle, the skills are central to students' personal development and wellbeing and their capacity to participate later in adult life and in the world of work or further study. These skills include: *Managing Myself*; *Managing Information and Thinking*; *Being Creative*; and *Working with Others*. While all eight skills are embedded in the learning

outcomes of all subjects and short courses at Junior Cycle and thus across the student's experience of learning, it is noteworthy that the study of history might be considered especially relevant to these skills.

The Statements of Learning

The principles and skills represent the philosophy underpinning the design of school programmes based on the Framework. But what is the essential learning that students should undertake over the course of their three years in Junior Cycle? Previously, through the Junior Certificate, learning was set out in the context of syllabus documents relating to subject areas. These subjects were compulsory or optional depending on the type of school involved and junior cycle programmes comprised of many subjects, sometimes as many as 12-14.

In the Framework, learning is now set out in terms of twenty-four statements of learning. In essence, these statements constitute what is core and required in the new Junior Cycle. These Statements, taken as a whole, and aligned with the eight key skills, represent the learning that must be provided for in the programme of learning experienced by Junior Cycle students in our schools. Any consideration of what is to be taught, what students will learn and what the nature of the learning experience in the new Junior Cycle should be, must focus strongly on the statements of learning. The statements represent the breadth of learning associated with various subject areas and disciplines that students should experience in their Junior Cycle programme.

In this context, it is opportune to note that several Statements of Learning relate directly to history. Three statements are worded as follows: *'the student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which he/ she lives'*; *'the student values local national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change'* and *'the student understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around him/ her'*. Thus, these statements affirm the importance of history in the Framework.

Subjects and short courses

The principles, skills and statements of learning provide a structure for schools to determine what programme best suits their students in their particular context. The Framework also provides for the development of a suite of subject specifications which provide further guidance and clarity in supporting schools to give expression to the principles, skills and statements. Each specification sets

out learning outcomes for that subject, explaining what students should know or be able to do after three years of studying that subject. To further support schools to realise the Statements of Learning, a new curriculum component, the short course, was introduced. The Framework provides for the development of specifications for some short courses, including, for example, philosophy and digital media, but also allows for schools to develop their own short courses where they perceive the need to exist, supported by guidance from the NCCA. In keeping with the ideals of flexibility, autonomy and respect for local contexts and the uniqueness of each school profile, schools have the flexibility and discretion to discuss and decide at local level what combination of subjects and short courses are most suited to their learning and teaching contexts. Furthermore, the learning outcomes in each subject and short course area allow teachers in the classroom the autonomy to select content/contextual knowledge suitable and relevant to the learners while at the same time meeting the requirement of the learning outcome.

Publication of the Framework

The introduction of the Framework in schools since 2014 followed a prolonged and intensive process of deliberation and consultation with education partners and stakeholders, including, among others, representatives of teachers, school management, parents, and other education, social and business interests. The Framework was discussed and considered at length through the various NCCA structures, including the Board for Junior Cycle and Council. The Framework was developed on the basis of evidence provided by national and international research. This included the first, major longitudinal study, conducted by the ESRI, of the experience of students through the years of post-primary schooling and comparative studies looking at developments at lower secondary level internationally. A key recommendation from ESRI research was that schools considered the curriculum 'overcrowded' and wanted greater flexibility and autonomy in programme design and local adaptation.

The Framework for Junior Cycle is more than an updating or revision of separate and discrete syllabus documents. It represents a re-conceptualisation of what the educational experience of 12 to 15-year-old students in post-primary schools should be in a world that has changed significantly since the previous Junior Cycle reforms took place. This conception was, for the first time, presented in the form of an overarching Framework, where each component is designed to align with other features in an integrated and coherent fashion.

3. The optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course

Consideration of the status and nature of any specific subject in Junior Cycle must take place in the context of the Framework as a whole. It may be useful to reflect, in this context, on how the Junior Cycle differs in conception from its predecessor, the Junior Certificate.

Distinctions between Junior Certificate and Junior Cycle

The former was introduced to schools in 1989, replacing the Intermediate Certificate. Learning was articulated through subject syllabuses which were largely developed independently of each other, albeit with reference to certain overarching principles. The Framework sets out a more holistic and integrated student experience, with the principles, skills and statements of learning setting out the essential learning required of all students. While syllabus documents developed for the Junior Certificate were not obliged to conform to a common structure or model, all new subject and short course specifications in Junior Cycle are developed according to a common template, closely informed by the Framework, with learning set out in strands, elements and learning outcomes. Moreover, each specification document elaborates on how the key skills are integrated in the learning outcomes, with the aim of ensuring that all subject experiences in the classroom are designed to enable students to acquire these skills in an integrated way across the full range of their studies. This common template underscores the extent to which the Framework is the key overarching statement within which all other curriculum components, including the subject of history, are placed.

The status of history in the Framework for Junior Cycle

Much of the discourse around history has focused on the point that the subject has been ‘downgraded’ from a previously-held ‘core’ or compulsory status; that in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* the status of history is diminished. For accuracy, however, it should be noted that history was never ‘core’ or compulsory in all schools. Prior to the introduction of the Framework, the status of history in Junior Cycle varied by school type. The relevant provision required that in voluntary secondary schools (52% of all post-primary schools), *the approved course for recognised junior pupils must have included the following subjects: Irish, English, Mathematics, **History** and Geography, Civic, Social and Political*

Studies, Social, Personal and Health Education, and not less than two other subjects from the approved list of examination subjects¹.

However, this provision did not apply to local authority or state schools, that is, vocational or community and comprehensive schools (48% of all post-primary schools). In these schools, there was never an obligation to provide history in the curriculum offered to junior cycle students, though many of those schools took the option of offering history because of the importance they attached to it. It is important to note, therefore, that a decision to make study of the Junior Cycle History course compulsory for all Junior Cycle students would represent a new requirement for the vocational and community and comprehensive schools involved, one that they were not subject to before the introduction of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, and one that for some schools would have implications in areas such as subject choice, provision of other subjects and teaching resources.

Statements of Learning – articulating core or essential learning

Fundamentally, *the statements of learning and the key skills represent what is core learning under the Framework*, with learning outcomes in subjects and short courses providing the learning and teaching experiences through which the statements and skills are realised. Thus, the focus is not on ‘core subjects’ but on ‘core learning’. This point is central to the debate about the optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course. Subjects and short courses provide opportunities for students to give expression to the learning set out in the statements and skills, with schools having some flexibility to design a programme that aligns the learning with the context provided by their local setting and the needs and wishes of their students and parents. The Framework represents an acknowledgement that schools are best placed to make decisions at local level about the learning experiences that are most suitable to their context and that they should be empowered to do so. In the discussions surrounding the development of the Framework, it was argued that making a significant number of subjects core or compulsory would weaken that autonomy, severely limit choice, compromise the integrity of the Framework and the capacity of the people who are most capable of making professional judgements and decisions about student learning – teachers and school leaders.

At the time, in keeping with practice in other countries and jurisdictions, there was an acknowledgement that competence and achievement in the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy were essential and should be accorded particular priority in the Framework, not only as domains of learning in their own right, but as key enablers of achievement in other subjects and areas

¹ Rule 21(1) of the Department of Educations and Skills’ *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*

of learning. This is part of the rationale for the inclusion of *being literate* and *being numerate* as two of the eight key skills at Junior Cycle. The Framework acknowledged the importance of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (2011) which identified Junior Cycle reform as a key action in promoting and consolidating literacy and numeracy as key skills. The Framework also confirms the importance of literacy and numeracy in the articulation of learning outcomes across all subjects and short courses.

This emphasis on literacy and numeracy was also reflected in the central part that Mathematics, English and Irish were assigned in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, with all students required to study these areas. Concern for the social and personal development of young people at the stage of adolescence, a frequently recurring theme in the research, consultations and deliberations that led to the development of the Framework, also resulted in the design of a curricular area called Wellbeing, which incorporates learning traditionally included in PE, SPHE and CSPE and which is also a required area of provision in the new Junior Cycle. Apart from English, Irish, Mathematics and Wellbeing, all other subjects, short courses or curriculum areas have optional status at Junior Cycle.

The requirement to study history in the Statements of Learning

DES Circular letter 0079/2018 sets out in Section 2.1 *The curriculum and assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle* that ‘each school should plan a programme for the three years of Junior Cycle that meets the requirements set out in this circular, is informed by the particular learning needs and interests of students and reflects the characteristic spirit of the school’. This provides for how schools, with a degree of autonomy, can design Junior Cycle programmes that best suit their local contexts but are informed by and faithful to the principles, key skills and statements of learning set out in the Framework.

The statements of learning at Junior Cycle represent what is considered core or essential learning. The statements value the study of history and acknowledge that learning in and about history is a core feature of the Junior Cycle learning experience and programme. There are four statements in particular that are pertinent in this context:

Statement of Learning 6: ‘the student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives’

Statement of Learning 7: ‘the student values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts’

Statement of Learning 8: ‘the student values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change’.

Statement of Learning 9: ‘the student understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him’

In the *Framework for Junior Cycle* each of these statements is further elaborated upon (pp. 53-54) and, in each case, history is identified as a subject that contributes directly to meeting the requirements set out in the statements. All statements encourage and underscore the cultivation in students of an historical sensibility and consciousness of the significance of the past in shaping the world in which they live. If the statements of learning are at the core of learning at Junior Cycle, it follows that learning in history is core also.

The introduction of statements of learning as the basis upon which programmes of learning at Junior Cycle are designed presents a challenge to all working in education to move beyond conceptions of the curriculum as a competitive space within which subjects jostle for time, space and compulsory status, to a consideration of what we can agree should be the totality of what is valued in the education of every young person at Junior Cycle level. The Framework, with the presence of history in the statements of learning, provides the opportunity for the reinvigoration of the subject through the development of a new course, formed in the context of the Framework and drawing upon current thinking in the field of history education to support the highest quality of learning and teaching and assessment. Current figures from the Department of Education and Skills indicate that almost 97% of schools are offering history at Junior Cycle. This means that a small number of schools are not offering the subject as such, but even these must provide for students to acquire the historical knowledge and disciplinary awareness envisaged in the relevant statements of learning.

Recent public commentary on the optional nature of History

In the case of History, it is acknowledged that these curriculum arrangements have recently led to much debate and commentary in the public domain, with concern expressed about the danger of a generation of students losing awareness and knowledge of its historical inheritance and being deprived of the capacity to understand the historical context that has shaped the world in which they live. These concerns have been amplified by recent developments and current issues in national and

international politics. These include the rise of populist ideologies and increased tensions around themes such as globalisation and migration; the debate around Brexit and its political and economic implications for Ireland and Anglo-Irish relations, including the issue of the border; and broader considerations around national and European identity. Concerns around the status of history also coincide with the current focus on key moments in the Decade of Commemoration, where centenary anniversaries of contentious episodes from Ireland's past are the subject of renewed scrutiny and debate, including the War of Independence, Anglo-Irish Treaty and Civil War. Some commentators and academics have voiced disquiet about how students can engage with these issues unless the subject of history is made 'compulsory'.

These concerns have been prominent in public and media discourse in this current academic year, when the continuing implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* in schools featured the introduction of new subject specifications for history, geography, home economics and music. The introduction of the new Junior Cycle History course has generated much debate about the status of the subject in the Junior Cycle, with extensive media coverage of various viewpoints expressed by political and public figures, historians, academics, journalists and others. History teachers have also been vocal in this debate. President Michael D Higgins entered the debate in April 2018, when he expressed his 'deep and profound concern' about changes to the status of history, adding that 'knowledge and understanding of history is intrinsic to our shared citizenship, to be without such knowledge is to be permanently burdened with a lack of perspective, empathy and wisdom'.

These sentiments were echoed by some historians. Diarmuid Ferriter of UCD, who called the arrangements for history in the new Junior Cycle 'a serious mistake', expressed the view that 'there would also be nothing more ridiculous than the Irish State embarking on a series of commemorations to mark the War of Independence and Civil War and encouraging as much public engagement as possible with the past, while simultaneously permitting the downgrading of history in our schools'. Other commentators expressed similar views, with columnist Conor Brady noting in the *Sunday Times* that 'delisting history as a core subject means a great many children – our future citizens – will have no sense of their historic or social hinterland'. Many correspondents to newspapers and social media participants put forward similar views. At school level, some history teachers have expressed concern that the Framework allows for the possibility of the subject being removed from what they regard to be crowded timetables, offering principals an opportunity to allow for increased provision of Wellbeing or including other curriculum components to the detriment of history.

These views represent the dominant perspective in public commentary, although not the only one. Gary Granville, former Professor of Education at NCAD, has been a prominent advocate for the idea

of schools and teachers as best placed to exercise professional discretion and judgement about their students' learning within an agreed and consensual framework, as represented in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. Tom Collins, former NCCA chairperson and current chairperson of Dublin Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, has echoed this view, questioning the experience of compulsion in the curriculum and suggesting that the new reconfiguration of the subject in Junior Cycle, including its emphasis on local history, provides the best possible basis for an increase in students taking the subject to Leaving Certificate.

Some common trends are discernible in the commentary. There is concern that students will not have sufficient historical knowledge and perspective to understand the modern world and issues affecting it. It is feared that ignorance of the past may lead to young people being unaware of historical precedents for current events or issues and condemn them to make similar mistakes to those made in the past. It is thought that important concepts and skills associated with the discipline of history will no longer be evident in young people, such as the capacity to look at events dispassionately and from more than one perspective, to make objective judgements about the past based on respect for evidence, and to develop a sense of historical empathy whereby the actions of people in the past are judged in the context of the time.

At a practical level, some observers have commented on potential difficulties posed in curriculum planning at school level by the requirement to ensure that students meet the needs set out in DES Circular letter 0079/2018 Section 2.4: *Number of subjects and short courses studied by students*, which states that 'typically, students will study a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 10 subjects for final examination, the exact number being dependent on whether the student is also taking short courses.' Some view this requirement as the main potential impediment over time for maintaining areas like history as full subjects in their junior cycle programmes, particularly when, along with this requirement, the new area of Wellbeing also requires a large time allocation. Section 2.5 of the circular states that 'the JC Wellbeing programme began with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017 and will build up to 400 hours by 2020 as the new Junior Cycle is fully implemented in school'.

The strong depth of feeling and passionate commitment to history that is evident in recent public discourse is acknowledged. It is clear from the public debate that much value is accorded to history. These concerns reflect deeply-held convictions in Irish society about how we value an appreciation of the past and its impact on the present and future. That conviction about the importance of the subject is shared by the NCCA and is evident in the designation of statements of learning that relate directly to history and in the design of the new Junior Cycle History course.

4. The new Junior Cycle History course

This new specification/course was introduced to schools for first year students at the start of the 2018/19 academic year. By way of context, this section commences with an overview of ways in which history is provided for at lower secondary level internationally. It then sets out the intensive consultation process and development process that led to Junior Cycle History and looks at the course itself and its potential in detail.

International perspectives on history at lower secondary level

The way history is represented in the curriculum in other jurisdictions varies a great deal. As with Ireland, each country's curriculum model is unique, with certain nuances and variations reflecting various perspectives that informed the development of curriculum in that country. A broad framework model where schools are given various levels of autonomy to develop curriculum in accordance with certain guidelines exists in many countries, particularly those with major regions or provinces or in federalised countries. Consequently, a generalised overview of each country's experience may not convey the complexity of how any given subject is framed. Some trends in the representation of history, however, are evident.

The Ontario model mirrors the *Framework for Junior Cycle* approach. Schools provide a range of choices appropriate to the needs and interests of students but are obliged to ensure that students can access courses in various areas of learning, including history. Sweden also allows a good deal of autonomy, requiring of schools that they devote 885 hours out of 6,785 hours over nine years to the teaching of history, geography, religious education and social science combined, with schools deciding how best to allocate the hours. Another common model sees history closely aligned with geography in subject areas as distinct from subjects. This practice occurs in Spain and France. Thus, while history is compulsory, it is in the context of history and geography as a combined subject area and not as a distinct subject. A further trend along similar lines is the association of history with social studies, explicitly recognising history's links with that domain of study. This is the case for example in Norway.

In other countries, history is framed *within* broad learning areas, where related subjects are grouped together. These groupings are generally characterised as humanities, social sciences or social studies. Related subjects within these groupings may include geography, civics, citizenship and economics. Schools are expected to provide for this broad area of learning as well as other areas or subjects, that tend to include mathematics, the language of that country and a foreign language as well, usually

English. However, there are varying levels of requirement with regard to how history should feature within these broad areas of learning. This arrangement is quite common and often pertains in large countries where different education systems operate on a regional/provincial level, as in Australia. It is also evident in Germany although interestingly, reflecting that country's modern historical context, cross-curricular educational provision is made for education about democracy, about Europe, about National Socialism and the Holocaust and about Jewish history, religion and culture. In New Zealand, history is also provided for in the social sciences area of learning, one of eight such areas that all schools must provide. Scotland provides for a similar model, with social studies one of eight curriculum areas which schools must provide.

It is interesting to note how history is accommodated in countries with new models of lower secondary provision. For instance, Wales is due to introduce a new curriculum in 2022. Learning will be delineated in six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). One of these will be the humanities, which will include history, geography, religious education, business and social studies.

As previously noted, where the subject is listed as compulsory, there are variations and nuances that should be taken into account. In the Netherlands, for example, history appears as a feature of social studies which is in all three of that country's 'tracks' or routes that students take. However, in the lower secondary vocational track, history is not compulsory while it is in the other two more academically-focused tracks. In England, the subject is compulsory in the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3; but more than 70% of secondary schools in England have academy status and are not bound to follow the National Curriculum.

What emerges from such an overview is that provision for history in other jurisdictions does not follow a consistent form or arrangement. However, we can conclude that the subject is highly valued as an integral part of the educational experience of lower secondary education, with the acquisition of knowledge and skills in history a feature of all jurisdictions considered, although varying in the type of representation from distinct and independent subject status, to association with other subjects or subject areas in more general groupings, to being placed in a more general framework.

Provision for history within the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, although distinctive to Ireland, retains some features of these diverse arrangements, in that it provides for a Framework with broad statements of learning but also provides a detailed subject specification/course under the aegis of the Framework. The new specification will now be explored in more detail.

Publication of background paper and brief for development of Junior Cycle History

The NCCA published its *Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle History* in September 2016. The purpose of this paper was to stimulate discussion about how history would be framed in the new Junior Cycle and to initiate the formal consultation process. The background paper provided an overview of the existing Junior Certificate History syllabus, including its structure and content. It reflected on the experiences of students and teachers in the history classroom and presented some outcomes and trends regarding performance and uptake in the Junior Certificate examination. The paper compared the subject internationally, presenting overviews of the subject in other countries around the world. It explored current research and issues in history education, seeking to present some considerations for the development of the new specification. The background paper was made available for national public consultation from October to December 2016.

Development Group for Junior Cycle History

The background paper and the findings from the related consultation informed the work of the NCCA Development Group for Junior Cycle History. This group was charged with developing the new specification. The specification was written by an NCCA Education Officer who facilitated the work of the group and who presented drafts of the specification to the Board for Junior Cycle and the Council of NCCA. Feedback from these two structures was reported back to the group and further revisions were made.

The Development Group was comprised of representatives from the Department of Education and Skills, the State Examinations Commission, the History Teachers' Association of Ireland, the Joint Managerial Body (for voluntary secondary schools), Education and Training Boards Ireland, the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, the Teachers' Union of Ireland, the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland and the third level sector. The development group met on 11 occasions between the spring of 2016 and autumn of 2017. Together, the group members brought much expertise and insight to the development process, with vibrant discussion and debates informing the design and review process.

Publication of the draft specification for public consultation

In March 2017, Council approved the draft specification for public consultation. The consultation mirrored the process undertaken for the background paper but included an additional element – a focus group event held in April 2017, where various interested parties in the wider history education community were consulted. The consultation process took place from March to May 2017.

The consultation findings were considered by the Board for Junior Cycle and Council, as well as the Development Group, which met on numerous occasions after the conclusion of the consultation process and made amendments to reflect the feedback received.

Publication of the new Junior Cycle History course

A revised draft specification was returned to the Board for Junior Cycle and the Council of NCCA for noting and for further comment before Council approved the specification for submission to the Minister for Education and Skills for final approval in the autumn of 2017. The Minister approved the specification in October 2017. A team of advisors to support continuous professional development for teachers was put in place by the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service and this group works with teachers in designing teaching approaches and resources to support effective learning. The new specification was introduced in first year in schools in September 2018.

The detailed, highly consultative process undertaken in developing the new Junior Cycle History course, involving all stakeholders, illustrates the value placed on history as a Junior Cycle subject and underscores its importance to enabling students to attain the essential learning laid down in the statements of learning.

Features of the new course

The following overview of the key features of the specification/course (adapted from an article published in *Stair*, the annual journal of the HTAI in 2018) demonstrates how the subject has been realigned in the context of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and how it allows for learners and teachers to engage with the past in a new and innovative fashion, moving beyond heavily-regulated content to a more flexible model where historical issues, events and personalities can be selected that suit the local context of the learners.

Junior Cycle History sets out a range of learning outcomes relating to three inter-related stands:

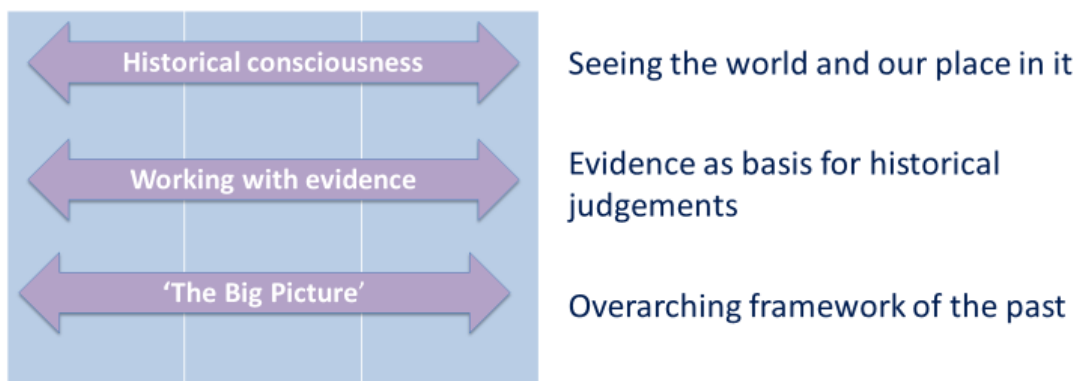
- Strand 1: The nature of history
- Strand 2: The history of Ireland
- Strand 3: The history of Europe and the wider world.

The learning outcomes in Strand 1 relate to the nature of history as a discipline. Students learn about the job of the historian and associated skills, concepts and values, such as:

- *Working with evidence and understanding different types of evidence*
- *Making judgements about the past based on evidence*
- *Being able to consider controversial or contentious issues from more than one perspective*
- *Showing awareness of bias and objectivity, fact and opinion, cause and consequence*
- *Demonstrating empathy for people in the past through seeing them in the context of their time*
- *Appreciating cultural inheritance and understanding how and why events, issues and people are commemorated.*

The learning outcomes in Strand 1 are mostly engaged with as students explore the history of Ireland and of Europe and the wider world in the other two strands. As a result, disciplinary understanding is integrated throughout students' study of the past. In this way, students develop the disciplinary understanding that will allow them to engage critically with any aspect of the past that they encounter throughout their lives. The elements in relation to which learning outcomes are arranged is set out in Figure 1 below:

The Nature of History



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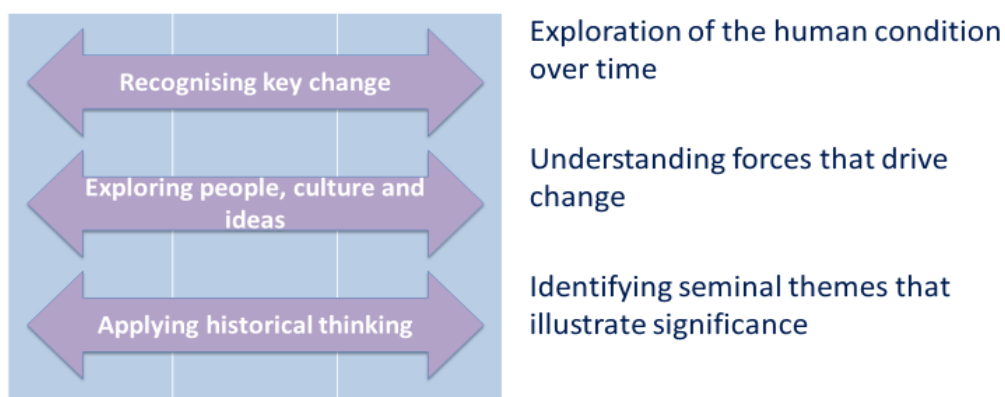
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Figure 1: Elements in Strand 1 of the Junior Cycle History specification – *The nature of history*

The disciplinary or conceptual understanding of history represented here will provide students with the skills, dispositions and values that will enable them to look critically at the past and how it has affected the world around them, in alignment with the statements of learning pertaining to history. Strands 2 and 3 focus on the contextual knowledge that will support students to use these skills to make sense of the past. Strand 2 relates to the history of Ireland and Strand 3 to the history of Europe and the wider world. The elements related to these two strands are common to both and are set out in Figure 2:

History of Ireland/Europe and the wider world



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Fig 2: Elements in Strand 2 *The history of Ireland*, Strand 3 *The history of Europe and the wider world*

Strands 2 and 3 are outlined in a series of learning outcomes. These address what might be considered seminal events, issues and themes that historically literate 12-15-year-old Irish students should know, while also allowing for students and teachers to pursue areas of particular historical interest so that their experience of the subject can be authentic and meaningful. The tables below set out some of the themes and issues considered in the strands.

A further feature of the history specification is the Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) undertaken by students that allow them to explore aspects of the past of particular interest and relevance to them. CBA 1 is entitled *The Past in My Place* and affords students the opportunity to explore a theme relating to their local place or personal/ family history. CBA 2 is entitled *A Life in Time* and allows students to examine a significant person from the past in whom they have a particular interest. A set of assessment guidelines have been published to assist teachers in exploring these CBAs with students.

Some Events, Issues and Themes from Strands 2 and 3

Recognising key change (focus on broad political domain)	
<p>Strand 2: settlement and plantation influencing identity on island of Ireland; physical force and constitutional nationalism; concepts of nationalism and unionism; path to independence and partition; causes, course and impact of the Troubles</p>	<p>Strand 3: exploration of: named civilisation; colonialism/conquest (to include Spanish and Portuguese voyages); warfare (to include WWI or WWII); changing ideas about rights of person and nature of authority: revolution; international relations during Cold War</p>

Exploring people, culture and ideas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding impact of social forces of change: population change, movement of people, religion, feudalism, totalitarianism, war, ideas, thought, innovation, place and status of individual person in state and society 	
<p>Strand 2: significance of religion to include Early Christian Ireland; impact of WWI and WWII on Irish people; impact of the Great Famine and role of</p>	<p>Strand 3: arts and science (Renaissance); life and death in medieval world; significance of religion (to include Reformation); revolution and global war</p>

Diaspora: changing role of women in Irish society during c20th; impact of named movement (sporting, social, cultural)	(WWI or WWII); life under communism and fascism; genocide (to include the Holocaust)
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Applying historical thinking (Applying learning to contexts in Strands 2 and 3)

- Local history and making connections with national/international
- Tracing Ireland's relationship with Europe
- International peace, co-operation and reconciliation
- Seeing the past in the context of the time (empathy)
- Thematic trends or patterns of change
- Looking at change in decade of the 1960s

Through the development and introduction of the new specification in schools, much is happening to reinvigorate the study of history and to position the subject as an ideal vehicle for realising various aspects of the statements of learning and key skills of Junior Cycle. These developments represent a commitment to promoting the importance of historical literacy and consciousness in young people and to providing a strong line of coherence and continuity with history in the Senior Cycle of post-primary education.

The number of students already studying history

It is noteworthy that, as a new history specification is being introduced, over 90% of students across all schools study History, even though in the past it was compulsory only in voluntary secondary schools. This is a clear indication that in respect of subjects like history, schools make mature curricular decisions in the absence of directives. The current non-prescription of specific subject courses at Junior Cycle beyond Irish, English and Mathematics allows schools to shape their curricula in line with their teaching resources, the needs of students and their particular educational philosophies. There is currently no reliable evidence to indicate and no reason to assume that the numbers of students studying history will change significantly with the introduction of the new specification. Indeed, it is intended that the new specification will have the effect of making history more attractive to students and schools and could result in higher numbers taking the subject at Leaving Certificate level.

Specific themes in the Junior Cycle History Specification

In his request to the NCCA to review the optional nature of Junior Cycle History, the Minister also identified a number of themes that should be considered for increased attention and promotion in the course. He stressed the importance of young people having opportunities to study:

- The story of Irish migration
- The story of the journey from 'Conflict to Peace' on the island of Ireland
- The history of the Irish language.

This section sets out ways in which the new specification can be used to provide for learning in these areas.

The story of Irish migration

Several learning outcomes in the new specification allow for the examination of the historical significance of migration. LO 2.1 relates to 'a pattern of settlement' and how it 'influenced identity on the island of Ireland'. LO 2.7 deals with the Great Famine and allows for exploration of the consequences, including emigration, and the significance of the Irish Diaspora.

- Investigate the causes, course and consequences, nationally and internationally, of the Great Famine, and examine the significance of the Irish Diaspora

LO 2.13 analyses Ireland's relationship with Europe, allowing for consideration of how Irish identity was shaped by the relationship with Europe.

- Analyse the evolution and development of Ireland's links with Europe

The theme of migration can also be explored by looking at aspects of the history of the experience of women in the twentieth century (LO 2.9);

- Explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century

by exploring the significance of the 1960s as a decade of change in Ireland (LO 2.12)

- Debate the idea that the 1960s was an important decade on the island of Ireland, referring to relevant personalities, issues and events

and by looking at Christian missionaries (LO 2.6).

- Consider the historical significance of Christianity on the island of Ireland, including its contribution to culture and society in the Early Christian period

The story of the journey from ‘conflict to peace’

Understanding the forces that shaped modern Ireland is a central focus of Junior Cycle History. In this context, students explore a number of learning outcomes related to the emergence of independent Ireland, including the impact of plantation (LO 2.1),

- Recognise how a pattern of settlement and plantation influenced identity on the island of Ireland, referring to one example of a pattern of settlement, such as the growth of towns, and one plantation

the impact of physical force and parliamentary tradition in Irish politics and the rise and impact of nationalism and unionism with particular reference to key events between 1911 and 1923, the decade which is currently the subject of commemoration and remembrance. Students also examine Northern Ireland, looking at the causes and consequences of the Troubles and examining the impact on Anglo-Irish relations. This allows for an assessment of the moves towards peace and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, as well as consideration of the period since the agreement was negotiated.

- Investigate the role and significance of two leaders involved in the parliamentary tradition in Irish politics
- Explore how the physical force tradition impacted on Irish politics, with particular reference to a pre- twentieth century example of a rebellion
- Examine the rise and impact of nationalism and unionism in Ireland, including key events between 1911 and 1923
- Identify the causes, course and consequences of the Northern Ireland Troubles and their impact on North-South and Anglo-Irish relations

The history of the Irish language

The history of the Irish language can be explored as an aspect of numerous learning outcomes.

LO 2.10 allows for the study of a sporting, cultural or social movement:

- Examine how one sporting, cultural or social movement impacted on Irish life

This may include movements associated with the promotion of the language, such as Conradh na Gaeilge. The relationship of the language to Irish identity can be explored as an aspect of LO 2.1:

- Recognise how a pattern of settlement and plantation influenced identity on the island of Ireland, referring to one example of a pattern of settlement, such as the growth of towns, and one plantation

while the impact on Irish of the Famine can be dealt with in LO 2.7:

- Investigate the causes, course and consequences, nationally and internationally, of the Great Famine, and examine the significance of the Irish Diaspora

Classroom-Based Assessments

Students will present two pieces of work for Classroom-Based Assessment over the three years of Junior Cycle.

CBA1, *The Past in my Place*, allows for students to present their findings on a study of an aspect of their home place that they consider of interest. This theme may relate to any of the three areas under consideration here, such as:

- How migration affected the local place of the student, or how a local person who emigrated achieved historical significance abroad
- The impact of conflict on the home place of the student or the contribution of a local person to the move from conflict to peace in Ireland
- The story of the Irish language in the local place of the student or the significance of Irish place names or the contribution of a local person to the Irish language.

CBA 2, *A Life in Time*, allows students to present their findings on a person of particular historical interest to them. The project is designed to allow them to follow their personal interest in a person from the past. This person may be a well-known figure or someone from the student's home place or family but she/he should be a person one whose story can be shown to be of historical significance or interest. This person may again be chosen in the context of any of the three themes being explored here.

Students not born in Ireland but who may themselves have migrated to the country from other parts of the world are free to examine aspects of their countries of origin when exploring CBA 1. For example, it would be a valuable experience for both the student and his/her classmates to learn about aspects of that student's country of birth or family history. This would assist the student in becoming acquainted with his/her adopted home and in helping all students to understand the complex forces that shape the backgrounds and stories of all people, as well as helping all involved to understand and celebrate diversity and difference.

Junior Cycle History sets out a range of events, issues and themes that might be considered important for an historically literate 12-15-year-old student to know in an Irish and European/global context.

The idea of local autonomy to pursue those historical themes and personalities about which they are curious or enthusiastic to learn more is an underpinning feature of the specification. To date, this potential has sparked a renewed interest on the part of local history groups, heritage societies, archives, museums and libraries and other relevant stakeholders in supporting teachers and students as they pursue themes of interest.

5. Considerations and conclusions

This paper has provided an overview of how history is currently provided for at Junior Cycle, through the recently introduced *Framework for Junior Cycle*. The paper is intended to provide an informed basis upon which discussion and consideration of the optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course can take place.

The paper has set out the context and rationale that informed the development of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and has outlined how all subjects and courses at Junior Cycle are provided for by the Framework. Particular attention has been paid to the role of the statements of learning in the Framework; how these now, not subjects, constitute the essential or core learning at Junior Cycle. It has established the central importance given to history through the statements of learning, has shown how strongly history is represented in these statements, and how, viewed through the lens of the statements, learning about history is a requirement and is part of core learning at Junior Cycle. The paper also reflects and acknowledges the public commentary and debate on the optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course and the importance to be attached to this debate during the ongoing decade of commemoration. Lastly, the paper has provided a detailed outline of the new Junior Cycle History course, which has just begun to be introduced in schools since last September and has illustrated how the course allows for treatment of multiple historical interests and themes, local, national and international. In doing so, the paper has also compared provision for history in Ireland with provision at lower secondary level internationally.

In this final section, the paper presents a summary of some key considerations that should inform discussion of the current, optional nature of the Junior Cycle History course in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* including practical considerations. It also looks at some ideas for the promotion of study, teaching and learning related to history.

Key considerations

- The strength of feeling and argument among those who advocate that history should be a compulsory subject for all students at Junior Cycle is acknowledged. This viewpoint values the study of history in helping young people to understand the world and their place in it. It coincides with a time of uncertainty, insecurity and change in culture, society and politics nationally, with neighbouring countries and internationally. Public commentary and media coverage related to

this matter has uncovered and articulated strong and deeply-held views about the positive impact of the subject and its importance.

- Many teachers of history understandably hold strong views about what they perceive as a diminution of the importance of the subject, as indicated in submissions received from representative groups and other public statements. As a submission from the History Teachers' Association of Ireland notes, *'the study of history equips students with multifaceted skills which are central to the vision and learning outcomes as set down in the Framework Document. ...At the heart of the new strategy is the desire for students to learn how to learn; to engage in independent research and to connect with everyday life and current affairs. It is important to note that the language of this document reflects the defining vocabulary for the study of history in our schools over many decades and can be found in every history textbook and syllabus since the reforms of Donagh O'Malley in the 1960s.'*
- Internationally, history at lower secondary level is provided for through a variety of arrangements, including: provision as an area of learning included in broad curriculum frameworks; alignment or merging with related humanities-based subjects such as geography; or grouping in curriculum areas that often encompass history, geography, social studies, environmental education and different forms of education for citizenship. Within the variety of these forms of provision, history is usually a required area of study but the nature of that requirement may relate to the Framework, the broader curriculum area or the actual subject.
- Research that informed the development and introduction of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, including a ground-breaking longitudinal study by the ESRI, pointed to concerns about curriculum overload arising from the extent of requirement existing at the time. It echoed feedback from consultation and developments internationally, suggesting that schools be given greater flexibility and autonomy in programme planning and in making decisions about curriculum that would best suit their students and fit their local context. The development of the Framework recognised the fact that schools are uniquely placed and best placed to make informed, professional judgements about their students in the context of their particular setting, environment and resources.
- The *Framework for Junior Cycle* represents a re-conceptualisation of the entire Junior Cycle educational experience. The Framework constitutes an overarching, integrated learning experience, where schools design programmes based on subjects, short courses and other learning experiences that are most suited to their teaching and learning context. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* was agreed by stakeholders and introduced in 2014 following a long and detailed development, consultation and negotiation process, involving a great deal of careful deliberation

and consideration. A number of DES circulars have issued in the interim to elaborate further on matters relating to the implementation of the Framework. The introduction of the Framework has been, and continues to be, supported by a comprehensive programme of in-service and support for school leaders and for teachers to assist them in introducing various elements of the Framework and to ensure its effective realisation in schools and in the classroom. It is early days in the introduction of the Framework as it becomes embedded in school practice.

- In the Framework, essential or required learning is set out in the form of 24 statements of learning which must form the basis of the school's Junior cCcle programme. Schools must ensure that the programme offered allows students to fulfil these statements. As outlined earlier, these statements explicitly provide for and recognise the importance of historical knowledge, historical consciousness and historical sensibility as important aspects of the curriculum at Junior Cycle.
- The calls for study of the Junior Cycle History course to be restored to compulsory status sometimes ignores the fact that history was never compulsory in all schools, with vocational schools, community colleges and community and comprehensive schools (48% of post-primary schools) never required to provide for it, though many did and continue to prioritise it as a subject in the curriculum they offer. A recent position paper issued by Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), which represents the majority of these schools, has expressed their concern at the implications for their schools in terms of diminishing choice, flexibility, possibilities for customisation, autonomy and teacher resources if a new requirement for Junior Cycle History to become a compulsory subject were introduced in all schools.
- As evidenced in the media in recent weeks and months, the designation of compulsory status to a subject will inevitably lead to cases and requests being made by teachers and advocates of other subjects or curriculum areas for similar status to be applied elsewhere. In recent years there have been calls in this context, at different times, for compulsory subject status to be accorded to science, modern languages, business and enterprise, home economics, and arts subjects. The impact of making more subjects compulsory is to diminish choice, flexibility and autonomy and compromise the value, effectiveness and integrity of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and of curriculum planning and development at local level in schools.
- There are also some practical considerations in making a subject compulsory in the context of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. The courses for the current compulsory subjects, related to the provision of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy (English, Irish and Mathematics), are of 240 hours duration. The duration of courses in all other subjects is 200 hours. The current compulsory subjects are specified at two levels, Higher and Ordinary. All other subjects are specified at

Common level. These differences of increased time allocation and multiple levels for specification and examination would have to be addressed if any subject were to be made compulsory. This would involve further development work on courses recently completed and introduced and would have implications for the Framework as a whole and for resources in areas such as teacher supply and examinations.

- The new Junior Cycle History course was introduced in schools last September, at the start of the academic year 2018/19. Current evidence suggests that, as in previous years, up to 90% of post-primary students will be studying the subject up to its first examination in 2021. There is no published research evidence that the provision of history at Junior Cycle in schools is declining – in fact, the most up-to-date DES evidence indicates that almost 97% of schools are offering the subject. The subject at this level is in a developmental phase. The process of placing online annotated examples of quality-assured student work in history according to different standards has just commenced. Students will be undertaking new Classroom-Based Assessments based on the new course in the next two years. As with all subject specifications being introduced in schools as part of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, an initial NCCA review of the impact of the new specification will take place on completion of the course by the first two cohorts of students in 2021 and 2022. At that point, an evaluation of the impact of the new specification will be made, including any impact on the scale of its provision in schools. Changing the status of a new course specification while it is being taught for the first time to students, mid-cohort, would be unprecedented.
- The timing of any proposed change is a further factor to be considered. As already indicated, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* was initially introduced in 2014, with different aspects and elements of the Framework coming on stream in schools annually since. The new Junior Cycle History course was introduced to schools in September 2018. In *Cumasú: Empowering through learning, Action Plan for Education 2019*, the Department of Education and Skills includes provision for commencing an evaluation of the developments at Junior Cycle, which would encompass evaluation of the effectiveness and implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. As outlined above, NCCA will review the impact of the new Junior Cycle History course in 2021. In the contexts of these evaluations and reviews there will be an opportunity to again consider the situation of history in the curriculum at junior cycle.

Meanwhile, there is much that can be done to build on the level of public, professional and media interest in history and to contribute to the promotion of history in this context.

Promoting History in schools and society

The public debate and commentary is evidence of the strong sense of the importance of history in Irish culture and society. The manner in which the issue has engaged people from different backgrounds and perspectives is indicative of how historical consciousness is such a sensitive and keenly-felt issue for Irish people. This passionate belief in the value and importance of history as an integral aspect of the formation of young people is welcome. This report has outlined how the study of history is valued and affirmed in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and through the development with the education partners and stakeholders of a new course in Junior Cycle History, one with abundant potential in terms of its form and content to allow for the pursuit of particular interests and themes in history whether they are at the personal, local, national or global levels. But there are many other ways in which study and teaching of, and learning about, history can be promoted. This section explores a number of these possibilities, especially relevant given the broader context of renewed interest in history at this time across media and Irish society.

The *Decade of Commemoration* is generating a renewed and welcome interest in the value of history as a discipline and the importance of people acquiring a historical consciousness through which they can better understand the world and their place in it. Recent television documentary and drama series relating to the events of the revolutionary period are testament to the interest that the general public have in this period of the past, while the 1916 commemorations have been widely praised as providing a sensitive and meaningful forum both to commemorate the past and to ask questions of how past events have influenced the present.

This period of commemoration offers an opportunity to consider how schools can imaginatively capitalise on a heightened awareness of the past. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* itself allows for a genuine cross-curricular approach to the promotion of historical consciousness. Schools can design learning experiences focused on aspects of the current commemorations across many statements of learning and related subject areas.

There are many ways in which study, teaching and learning in relation to history can be promoted; many ways in which those concerned about a perceived diminution of the subject might be reassured in this context. The possibilities set out here are framed in terms of how various stakeholders, including policy-makers as well as those who have contributed to the public debate and commentary, might support and advance the situation of history in ways that connect with but extend beyond specific curriculum provision.

The NCCA

The NCCA has a key role to play in supporting and promoting history in the curriculum. It can undertake work and initiatives along the following lines:

- Research and development projects on pedagogical approaches based on best practice internationally at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels in history teaching
- Engage with the small number of schools that, currently, are not offering the subject at Junior Cycle to gain an accurate view of, and describe the ways in which, history is being provided for to meet the requirements of the statements of learning
- Work with initial teacher education providers to support student teachers' understanding of how key features of the specification can be enacted in the classroom; this work to include bi-lateral research projects monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning
- Develop an off-the-shelf Junior Cycle short course on some of the themes identified by the Minister, particularly the history of the Irish language and the experience of women in Irish history.

Other stakeholders, agencies and interests

Likewise, other education stakeholders and agencies have a key role to play in supporting and promoting history. NCCA can collaborate with stakeholders, agencies and interests in this context, including those who have been prominent in the public debate and commentary on the status of history. Work and initiatives that can be undertaken in this context include:

- Decade of Commemorations President's Award/Medal

The contribution of President Higgins to the debate as well as his referencing of the current Decade of Commemorations, could be the catalyst for a national student award project similar in conception to the BT Young Scientist competition. Such an award would acknowledge schools who further students' knowledge and understanding of the current centenary in a meaningful way. The award might focus on local manifestations of aspects of the Decade of Commemorations over the coming years as various centenaries are marked at local and national levels.

- Festival or celebration of history learning (e.g. Féile Staire)

A festival event celebrating learning in and about history could be inaugurated, perhaps in a showcase format similar to the Young Scientist model. This could involve celebratory events at school/local/regional or national level. The event could be aligned with a particular theme each year and serve to increase the profile of student work on Classroom-Based Assessments at Junior Cycle.

Local authorities might also be encouraged to host similar showcase/ celebratory events and local representatives might be associated with such events and with the promotion of history in schools.

- Historians in schools and online project

Third-level history departments could take an active role in supporting post-primary teachers through outreach programmes or school visits, or through seminars/webinars for teachers on relevant aspects of practice and new areas of historical research, understanding and knowledge.

Department of Education and Skills

The Department of Education and Skills might provide for an enhanced profile and promotion of history in the following ways:

- Ensure that the continuous professional development (CPD) needed by history teachers in pedagogy and subject knowledge is available to all schools at Junior Cycle level.
- Ensure that access to the subject is prioritised and available to all schools who wish to provide for history at Junior Cycle level. The necessary supports and provisions for this could be extended to all schools where there is demand from parents and students. The viability of virtual or online platforms, or modes of collaboration between schools at local level, might be examined as a further support.

Conclusion

The final section of this report has summarised its content, outlined some key considerations that should be borne in mind in any discussion and decision making related to the optional nature of history in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, and suggested some important ways in which history in the curriculum can be supported now and in the coming years so that the concerns in relation to the status and situation of history at Junior Cycle do not come to pass.

As conclusions are drawn, there is agreement on the value of history in the curriculum at Junior Cycle. It offers young people important knowledge, skills and values that assist their formation as human beings and citizens. It develops their historical consciousness and sensibility and shapes their view of the world and their place in it. It also allows them to acquire a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the human condition over time and an awareness of how we have come to know and understand change in the human condition.

It is also acknowledged by all involved that serious concerns have been raised about the future of history at Junior Cycle due to its optional nature within the newly introduced *Framework for Junior Cycle*. The scope, strength and scale of the concern, reflected in public and media debate, is welcome and warrants the position and situation of the subject in schools under the Framework being monitored and evaluated closely in the immediate and foreseeable future.

Furthermore, it warrants concerted action on the part of the Department of Education and Skills, the NCCA, and other education agencies and institutions to ensure that supports for the promotion of history in the curriculum, in schools and in society, of the kinds outlined earlier in this section, are put in place to allay and counteract the concerns and effects raised by the public debate.

The positioning of history in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* has come about as part of a recent extensive review and development of junior cycle education in Ireland. The review and development process was based on extensive national and international research and expertise and on extensive processes of engagement, consultation and deliberation with education and other stakeholders in Ireland. The Framework provides a reliable and authoritative basis for the development of Junior Cycle but is in the very early stages of its introduction and embedding in the planning and practice of schools. The final group of subjects involved have yet to be introduced to schools, while most subjects have not yet reached the end of their first three-year cycle.

While concerns are noted about the potential impact of the changes at Junior Cycle on the uptake of history as a subject over time, that impact is not immediately apparent and is likely to be less so given the reach and influence of the public debate around history. A new, well-received Junior Cycle History

specification was introduced in schools last September and there are no indicators to suggest that the figure of almost 97% of schools currently offering the subject is set to diminish, nor that the 90% of students who have consistently studied and taken the Junior Certificate History examination will not continue to do so when the first and subsequent cohorts of students taking the new course in Junior Cycle History present for their final examinations in 2021 and beyond.

It is important to give curriculum and other developments in education time to be planned for, worked with and embedded in the life and programmes of schools. This is not to say that research, evaluation and review of such developments should not be ongoing. The NCCA has already planned, as with all other Junior Cycle subjects, for an evaluation of the initial impact and early insights into the introduction of the new history specification in schools to be undertaken as the first two cohorts of students complete their study in 2021 and 2022. The Department of Education and Skills, along with the NCCA, are also in the process of scoping and designing a similar evaluation of the impact of the introduction of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* which is due to commence from early 2020 and which will encompass the impact of aspects of the junior cycle developments such as the statements of learning, the number and range of subjects taken, the role and uptake of short courses, the time allocation to curriculum components and curriculum areas, among many other aspects. The time to consider fully the question of the current positioning of History in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* is in the context of the evidence presented in the findings of these pieces of research.

Indeed, with the promotion of history in schools and society along the lines envisaged in this report, the findings emerging from such research on uptake at junior cycle could prove very positive for all concerned and could also, over time, have an impact on current low levels in the uptake of history at Leaving Certificate level. With the availability of a new specification for Junior Cycle History, with the value placed on history in the statements of learning, with the additional potential offered to the area of history by thematic, as well as locally-focused short courses and projects, this is a time for a positive approach to be taken to the potential growth of history in the curriculum, in schools and in society.

In line with this thinking, the view of Council at present is that the current, optional nature of Junior Cycle History in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* should be maintained pending the findings of review and evaluation of the new Junior Cycle History course and the Framework itself, and meanwhile supports along the lines set out in this report should be put in place to try to ensure that the concerns expressed in recent public and media debate are not realised.

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