

PLANNING FOR JUNIOR CYCLE WELLBEING

SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS



PLANNING FOR JUNIOR CYCLE WELLBEING - SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Introduction

This document has been developed in response to commonly asked questions arising from school planning for Wellbeing in junior cycle. It should be considered alongside other planning and guideline materials which relate to junior cycle planning generally and planning for wellbeing specifically.

- Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)
- LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOL 2016 A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools
- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines 2017
- Circular 0055/2019 Department of Education and Skills
- Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 (Revised October 2019)

This document aims to provide a summary of some key information in an accessible question and answer format.

Important considerations when planning for junior cycle wellbeing

The junior cycle wellbeing programme is:

- 400 hours of time-tabled learning for all students
- designed to meet the identified needs of your students
- can be supported by a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities but in general these events will not be counted as part of the 400 hours Wellbeing programme

Key questions to guide the planning process

What are we already doing well in the area of learning about wellbeing? What are our strengths? What are our areas for improvement? How do we know?

Have we evidence to support our planning decisions? Is our planning guided by *our* assumptions about what students need or *their* expressed needs?

What else is influencing our decisions?

What's unique about our school context and our students?

Can we provide a rationale for each element of the 400-hour Wellbeing programme?

What process is in place to make sure that the Wellbeing programme continues to be relevant and meaningful for our students?

The **process** of developing a school's junior cycle wellbeing programme should be:

- Collaborative
- Consultative
- Responsive to students' needs and context
- Adaptable to new and emerging circumstances
- Linked to whole school planning and other planning processes, including the requirement for every school and centre for education to initiate a wellbeing promotion and review development cycle by 2023. (Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, p.5)

See the NCCA, *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* for details on the principles and steps involved in developing Wellbeing programmes (p.52-53)

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: Where to start?

Answer: The starting point in planning for wellbeing needs to be a conversation about student's needs, which students themselves must be a part of. It's also essential to keep in mind a broad vision of wellbeing.

The *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* provides this definition to support school planning:

'Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community.'

Detailed guidance on the steps involved in planning your junior cycle wellbeing programme can be found in the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)* p.53-55

Question: What can be included in a wellbeing programme?

Answer: Once a school has considered the particular needs of its students, the unique context of the school and the resources available, there are a wide range of curriculum options available for consideration.

Schools must include CSPE, PE and SPHE. The minimum for each is set out as follows:

- PE: 135 hours spread across first, second and third year
- SPHE: 70 hours spread across first, second and third year
- CSPE: 70 hours spread across first, second and third year

In addition, schools can include other areas in their Wellbeing programme, such as guidance related learning and can include school-developed short courses or units of learning related to aspects of wellbeing designed to meet the needs of their students.

A number of sample wellbeing programmes are set out in the NCCA Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (p.60-69).

Question: What are the options when it comes to providing for CSPE, SPHE and PE?

Answer: The options available are:

- The specification for the NCCA short courses in CSPE, SPHE, PE (100 hours each)
- School-designed or externally-designed short courses in CSPE, SPHE, PE (100 hours) using the NCCA template and 'Guidelines on developing your own short course'
- Other programmes/modules/units for CSPE, SPHE, PE developed using Appendix I of the NCCA Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines
- The Junior Certificate syllabus for CSPE (1996), SPHE (2000), PE (2003)

(See appendix 1,p. 7 for fuller details on the implications of each)

Question: How can I incorporate the NCCA PE short course which was designed for 100 hours when our students are timetabled for 135 hours PE over 3 years?

Answer: This is a common scenario and in this context it is recommended that schools would develop their own 1st year PE programme, and then teach the PE short course of 100 hours in 2nd and 3rd year. This would allow the school to provide a broad foundation in PE through their 1st year programme, building on their primary school experience and provide progression through to the short course.

Planning for 1st year PE can be informed by a wide variety of resources, such as curriculum documents, students' needs, experiences or interests and individual opportunities or local resources available. It is envisioned that students would be afforded the opportunity to experience a broad and balanced PE experience, as part of their Wellbeing Programme, building on previous knowledge and facilitating future progression and development.

Question: Can I include units of learning within subjects, other than SPHE, CSPE and PE, in our Wellbeing Programme?

Answer: Section 4.4 of the *Wellbeing Guidelines for Junior Cycle* acknowledges that it is possible to include in your wellbeing programme elements of learning or activities taking place in other curriculum subjects. The *Guidelines* give two examples - in Home Economics, aspects of food and health studies could be included in a Wellbeing programme. Similarly, a unit on sustainable living might be provided within Home Economics, Science or Geography and counted as part of the school's Wellbeing programme.

When identifying elements of learning (beyond CSPE, SPHE and PE) that could be incorporated into a JC Wellbeing programme, the following requirements should be borne in mind:

- The rationale for the inclusion of the unit in the school's Wellbeing programme should be clear. In other words, the unit of learning should address a clearly identified need and be supporting students in learning about wellbeing or developing the skills needed to support their wellbeing.
- The learning must be inclusive of all students in junior cycle.
- The learning about wellbeing which the unit within the subject is intended to address should be clearly evident and linked to the six wellbeing indicators.
- The time to be given to the module or unit within the subject should be in addition to the minimum time specified for that subject specification, for example, in the case of Home Economics, it should be in addition to the minimum 200 hours to be allocated to teaching and learning in Home Economics
- Appendix I in the Wellbeing Guidelines for Junior Cycle must be used to plan all school developed units of learning in Wellbeing that contribute to the Wellbeing programme.

Question: How can schools go about developing their own short course? Do these need to be approved?

Answer: Steps to take when developing a short course are set out on the NCCA website at this link <https://www.ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/subjects-and-short-courses/develop-your-own-short-course>

In addition, guidance and planning templates to support teachers in writing up their own short courses are available on the NCCA website.

As part of the development process, the NCCA can offer feedback, if requested, on draft short courses.

Once a school has followed the steps set out in the guidance and finalised their short course then it can be timetabled. There is no formal approval mechanism or system for endorsing or approving school-developed short courses. Schools are expected to review and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of the wellbeing programme as part of ongoing school planning.

Question: How can schools go about developing their own units of learning? Do these need to be approved?

Answer: Many schools are including short units of learning as part of their Wellbeing programme. Sometimes these are derived from existing programmes, such as *Friends for Youth* or the *Webwise Lockers* and *Be in Ctrl* programmes.

Schools are also encouraged to develop units of learning that meet a specific need identified through consultation with students/parents/teachers.

All units need to be planned using Appendix I, a template to support schools in planning shorter units of learning in Wellbeing.

There is no formal approval mechanism or system for endorsing or approving units of learning. Schools are expected to review and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of the wellbeing programme as part of ongoing school planning.

Question: Can tutor time be included in the 400 hours?

Answer: Yes, if within the tutor class there is clear and meaningful learning happening related to wellbeing, linked to the wellbeing indicators, and planned using Appendix I. The time must be sufficient to allow students an opportunity to progress their learning in wellbeing. Meaningful learning in wellbeing is unlikely to be achieved when tutor time is spread over 5 days, such as 8 mins per day, and in such instances would not be included in the 400 hours.

Question: What about including once-off events or guest speakers?

Answer: Visiting speakers and once-off events can be used very effectively to complement learning in the school's wellbeing programme, such as a workshop on study skills that might take place within a *Learning to Learn* module or a guest Human Rights speaker contributing to a citizenship module. Research shows that these inputs are most effective when linked to learning that occurs before and after the event and when incorporated into a wider programme of learning. In selecting programmes or resources developed by external facilitators schools should be aware that 'the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and she/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education' (p.2 Circular 43/2018 - Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice).

A further key condition for inclusion in the 400-hour Wellbeing programme is that the learning must include a whole year group. Events that are invitational or which some students opt out of should not be counted as part of the Wellbeing programme. Some school initiatives such as school retreats, sports days or awareness events, might be included, once they involve all students and that the learning in these events is clear, meaningful and relevant.

Question: How can I make sure that teachers who teach wellbeing are those best suited to it?

Answer: Deploying teachers who are interested and have the skills to teach the different elements of the wellbeing programme is critical to its success. Creating a shared understanding of what wellbeing means and how it supports student learning is an important first step in fostering an appreciation of the importance of learning about wellbeing. (see *Why does wellbeing matter?* Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, p.10-11)

It is important for teachers to understand that learning about wellbeing includes many aspects. Some teachers may be more comfortable talking to students about their emotional wellbeing and others may be capable of teaching a unit of learning related to healthy eating, environmental activism or online safety, all of which could contribute to a school's wellbeing programme.

As far as possible, teachers should be assigned to teach all aspects of the Wellbeing programme with their prior knowledge and agreement. They should also be willing and available to participate in collaborative planning and ongoing reflection and review of the programme with their colleagues.

Question: Where are schools finding the time for 400 hours of wellbeing?

Answer: The introduction of new specifications provides schools with scope to review the curriculum. The new specifications have been designed for a minimum of 200 hours of classroom engagement (except for English, Irish and Mathematics which require a minimum of 240 hours).

Looking at the mathematics of timetabling wellbeing – the following might be helpful.

Schools are required to provide 28 hours per week class tuition time for students.

Therefore, $28\text{hrs} \times 33.4 \text{ weeks} \times 3 \text{ years} = 2,805 \text{ hours}$.

If schools opt for the maximum number of 10 subjects (or equivalent subjects and short courses) this is how it adds up:

3 subjects @ 240 hrs each

7 subjects @ 200 hrs each (or equivalent mix of subjects and short courses)

That comes to 2,120 hrs

Add 400 hours wellbeing programme and you arrive at 2,520 hours

This leaves an additional 285 hours, over 3 years, for whatever is deemed necessary.

Question: How will Wellbeing be reported on?

Answer: Reporting in Wellbeing is important throughout the three years of junior cycle and this takes place in a range of ways.

Reporting on students' learning in Wellbeing aims to provide a picture of what students have learned about Wellbeing and the skills they have developed to support their Wellbeing.

Assessment and reporting in Wellbeing is *not* about teachers assessing or reporting on the student's subjective state of wellbeing. The focus is on gathering evidence and reporting on what the student has learned *about* Wellbeing.

Appendix 1 - Curricular options for CPSE, SPHE and PE

Considerations that need to be taken into account in deciding on the above options

Option 1	Implications
The specifications for the NCCA short courses in CSPE, SPHE, PE (100 hours each)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These specifications are the result of widespread consultation with education partners to ensure that the courses address important, relevant and meaningful learning for young people in these subjects. These short courses are coherent with and aligned to the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)</i> and the wellbeing indicators. The NCCA short courses include assessment advice both for ongoing assessment and summative assessment. They are accompanied by NCCA Assessment Guidelines to support teachers and students in preparation for Classroom-Based Assessments which can be accessed at www.curriculumonline.ie Student achievement in these short courses will be reported on in the JCPA using the same descriptors of achievement as used for all other subjects and short courses
Option 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools may design their own or adapt an existing short course to reflect their local needs and context. The NCCA has Guidelines on developing your own Short Course (here). If planning their own short course, teachers will need to plan for teaching, learning and assessment using the NCCA short course template and guidelines. Consideration will need to be given to how the students will show evidence of their learning, both through ongoing classroom assessment and through a Classroom Based Assessment. While a school can be informed by existing CBAs they will have to develop a CBA and Features of Quality for their students that align with the Learning Outcomes being assessed in their particular short course. Schools are reminded that if developing an SPHE short course, that SPHE (including RSE) must be taught across all 3 years. If developing their own course in PE, PE teachers should ensure that it focuses on a broad and balanced PE experience, including a range of skills and physical activity experiences.
Option 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools undertaking this option may draw upon a wide range of resources such as the NCCA Wellbeing Short Courses, syllabi and relevant resources developed by agencies and organisations. The <i>Wellbeing Guidelines</i> provide examples of how schools might draw upon various resources to develop their own units and modules. This option requires careful planning and collaboration amongst teachers as well as consultation with students to ensure relevance of the learning. Such modules and units must be written up using Appendix I. Reporting on students' learning in Wellbeing is a key feature of the new junior cycle. Therefore teachers will need to consider how they will enable students to show evidence of their learning in Wellbeing units through both ongoing and summative assessment activities.
Option 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will need to consider how these syllabi can be used to inform the planning of learning that is meaningful for their students today. Teachers will also need to consider how they will enable students to show evidence of their learning through both ongoing and summative assessment activities.



Junior Cycle for Teachers Support Service
Monaghan Education Centre
Knockaconny
Armagh Road
Co. Monaghan
Phone 047 74008
Email info@jct.ie



NCCA Headquarters
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
D02 KH36
Ireland
Phone 01 6617177
Email info@ncca.ie