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CIRCULAR LETTER 0020/2014

To the Principals and Boards of Management of Second Level Schools and Special Schools and the CEOs of Education and Training Boards

Revised Arrangements for the Implementation of the Junior Cycle Student Award Academic year 2014/15

1. Introduction

This circular sets out the changes to Junior Cycle for incoming first years for the academic year 2014/15. It also gives details of the revised pace of change for the introduction of new elements in future years.

The revised English specification will be introduced, as planned, in September 2014, for first year students. However, in response to concerns expressed by the education partners about the overall pace of change in the roll-out of Junior Cycle reform, the Minister for Education and Skills has decided to slow down other elements of the reform.

2. Name of qualification

The new Junior Cycle qualification which is to be introduced for students entering first year in September 2014 and completing the three year cycle in 2017 will be known as the Junior Cycle Student Award.

3. Phasing of Junior Cycle Reform

The pace of implementation of the new Junior Cycle has been changed. The revised timetable for implementation is set out in the annex to this circular.

4. English Specification

The new specification for Junior Cycle English will be implemented in all schools from September 2014. The specification is available at www.juniorcycle.ie.

5. Rules and Programme

For the academic year 2014/15, the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools, as amended by this and other circulars, will continue to apply.

6. Framework for Junior Cycle

Schools are encouraged, in designing their programmes for students, to consider the principles, statements of learning and key skills in the Framework for Junior Cycle and to evaluate whether they can be incorporated in their school programmes.

7. Short Courses

Short courses, designed by the NCCA, will be available to schools from September 2014. Full details will be available at www.juniorcycle.ie.

For first year students in the academic year 2014/ 2015

- schools may choose to incorporate these short courses into their junior cycle programme either for certification purposes or not for certification

or

- schools may choose not to offer the new short courses and may choose to continue to offer the existing syllabuses in SPHE, CSPE and PE.

Where schools opt to offer short courses, they are strongly advised to offer a small number of short courses only and to introduce such courses gradually.

8. Civic, Social and Political Education

If schools opt to offer their first year students entering post-primary school in September 2014 the existing syllabus in CSPE, then those CSPE students will present for certification in 2017, as per current practice. The terminal components of the CSPE examination for these students will be timetabled, set and marked by the State Examinations Commission in 2017. This will be the final year that the SEC will administer the CSPE examination.

If schools choose to offer the new short course in CSPE, then the work of those students will be assessed by their teachers through school based assessment.

9. Level 2 Learning Programme

Schools wishing to put in place a Level 2 Learning Programme for their students with special educational needs may do so from September 2014 to include the Priority Learning Units available at www.juniorcycle.ie.

This programme will target the learning and accreditation needs of the very small number of specific students with general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories where such needs prevent students from accessing some or all of the subjects or short courses on offer and require focused priority learning outcomes.

10. Number of Subjects and Short Courses

Over time, the reform of Junior Cycle will mean that students will study fewer subjects for certification but will do so in greater depth. Details of the subjects that will be introduced are set out in the Junior Cycle Framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2012) and in the annex to this circular.

However, very limited changes will be made for first year students entering a post-primary school in September 2014.

These changes mean that schools may continue to offer the range of subjects that were offered prior to September 2014 and students may present such subjects for certification in 2017.

However, it is recommended that schools begin to consider limiting the overall number of subjects and short courses that they offer to students for certification. A limit of ten full subjects or their equivalent, for certification purposes, will be in place for first-year students entering post-primary schools in September 2015.

11. Junior Certificate School Programme

Schools which currently offer the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) may continue to do so.

A review of the JCSP will commence in 2014. As previously notified, no new applications will be accepted from schools for entry to the JCSP until the review has been completed.

12. Professional Development

In the context of the implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle, the support service, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), commenced the provision of a comprehensive and long-term national programme of CPD for school leaders and teachers in October 2013.

A variety of CPD delivery methods is being employed including in-school CPD, some of which will be teacher-led, along with off-site workshops delivered by JCT. This provision takes cognisance of the needs identified by the education partners.

It is essential that all teachers have adequate opportunities to avail of this CPD so that they are fully informed about the changes to teaching, learning and assessment required in the implementation of junior cycle reform. For this reason, school management is requested to facilitate the attendance of all teachers at these CPD events. Efforts will be made to minimise disruption to schools; this will involve collaboration and coordination with other support services.

CPD will be offered to school leaders over the course of the phased implementation period.

CPD for subject specialist teachers will be provided on a rolling basis as the various subject specifications are introduced. A minimum of 4.5 days CPD will be available to all teachers of English and a minimum of 4 days CPD will be available to teachers of other subjects.

CPD in a range of other areas (e.g. short courses, Level 2 Learning Programme, particular areas of subject specifications) is being made available over time.

13. Professional development for English

The delivery of a comprehensive programme of CPD for subject specialist teachers to support the implementation of junior cycle reform has commenced with CPD for English teachers in the current academic year. Schools are reminded that this includes in-school CPD for these English teachers. This in-school CPD aims to provide subject departments with an opportunity to further develop the inputs obtained from the JCT workshops in the context of planning and preparing for teaching and learning within their own school's context.

Appropriate levels of substitution cover will be permitted and will be notified to schools and ETBs by JCT. Substitution cover for 3 classes (up to a maximum of two hours) per English teacher is approved in each of the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15. Schools and ETBs may claim the substitution hours in the normal way.

Schools can use this provision flexibly to suit their needs. This time will complement and augment any time set aside by schools or subject departments for design, preparation and planning of their Junior Cycle programme.

14. Whole-school professional development

Approval is granted for schools to close, subject to Board of Management approval, for one day, or its equivalent, each year for whole-school CPD on Junior Cycle reform, as follows:

- One day or equivalent in 2013/2014 (may be carried forward into 2014/15 if required, to be used by end of 2014)
- One day or equivalent in the academic years 2014/2015, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/ 2020, 2020/21 and 2021/22

The purpose of this day will change over time, but in the initial phase it can be used by schools to support the embedding of the underlying framework on a whole-staff basis. JCT will be in further contact with schools in due course on this matter.

15. Additional Information

The website www.juniorcycle.ie is a collaboration between the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and JCT and is an integral part of the support structures for schools. It hosts information and a range of practical materials aimed at supporting schools.

JCT is being hosted by Monaghan Education Centre and can be contacted at info@jct.ie or Tel. 047 74000.

16. General

Please bring this Circular to the attention of all teachers in the school and also provide a copy to members of the school board of management.

This Circular may also be accessed at www.education.ie.

Breda Naughton
Principal Officer
10 March 2014

Annex: Revised Phasing

Phased Implementation of Junior Cycle

Subject Specifications Phases

2014-2015

- **Subject specification** in English will be introduced for students entering first year in 2014.
- Schools may opt for **short courses** but are advised to limit them to a small number and to introduce them **gradually**.
- **Level 2 Learning Programmes** for students with **special educational needs** will be available from September 2014.

2015-2016

- **Subject specification** in Science to be introduced for students entering first year in September 2015.
- Schools may opt for **short courses** but are advised to limit to a small number and to **introduce gradually**.

2016-2017

- **Subject specifications** in Business Studies and Irish introduced for students commencing in September 2016.
- **Standardised testing** in English and Mathematics will take place in spring 2017 for second year students.

2017-2018

- **Subject specifications** in Art, Craft, Design and Modern Languages introduced for students commencing in September 2017.
- **Standardised testing** in scientific literacy and Irish in Irish medium schools to be introduced in spring 2018.

2018-2019

- **Subject specifications** in Home Economics, Music, Geography and Mathematics to be introduced for students entering first year in September 2018.

2019-2020

- **Subject specifications** in History, Technology Subjects, Jewish Studies, Religious Education & Classics to be introduced for students entering first year in September 2019.

PHASE 1

ENGLISH

Introduced to 1st years in 2014-2015
First certification in autumn 2017

PHASE 2

SCIENCE

Introduced to 1st years in 2015-2016
For certification in autumn 2018

PHASE 3

BUSINESS STUDIES & IRISH

Introduced to 1st years in 2016-2017
For certification in autumn 2019

PHASE 4

ART, CRAFT, DESIGN, MODERN LANGUAGES

Introduced to 1st years in 2017-2018
For certification in autumn 2020

PHASE 5

HOME ECONOMICS, MUSIC, GEOGRAPHY, MATHEMATICS

Introduced to 1st years in 2018-2019
First certification in autumn 2021

PHASE 6

HISTORY, TECHNOLOGY SUBJECTS, JEWISH STUDIES, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, CLASSICS

Introduced to 1st years in 2019-2020
First certification in autumn 2022