



Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Physical Education

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1. Introduction

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) provides for a new area of learning called Wellbeing. Physical education (PE), along with Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and guidance-related learning provide the main pillars for building a school's Wellbeing programme.

From 2021 students should experience 400 hours of wellbeing-related learning over the three years of junior cycle. Physical education is allocated a minimum threshold of 135 hours to be experienced over the three years of junior cycle (DES, 2019). Currently, there are four options available to inform the provision of physical education. Schools may choose a combination of these options:

- the specification for the NCCA short course in PE (100 hours)
- a school-designed or externally-designed short course in PE (100 hours) using the NCCA template and guidelines for developing and writing a short course
- other programmes/modules/units of PE developed using Appendix I of the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA, 2017)
- the Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus (2003).

This paper provides a background and a context for the proposed development of a minimum 135-hour course for junior cycle physical education. The early insights review of the enactment of the Junior Cycle Physical Education short course is encompassed in this paper. It begins by presenting an overview of the experience of physical education in junior cycle and looks at progression from primary school to senior cycle. Some international perspectives on the nature of physical education in other jurisdictions are considered. The paper concludes with a proposed brief for the development of the junior cycle physical education specification.

2. Physical education in junior cycle

This section sets out the curricular context for physical education in junior cycle. It includes a brief overview of the history and evolution of the subject as part of the curriculum in Ireland. It describes the two most recent curriculum developments in junior cycle PE: the junior cycle PE syllabus (2003) and the PE short course (2016). Additionally, it summarises the curricular options for timetabling PE in the current context.

2.1 Introduction

The 1960s and 1970s were a time when significant changes occurred in the Irish education system. The introduction of free second-level education enabled a greater number of students to attend post-primary schools. The primary and post-primary school curricula were broadened, and this included an increased emphasis on physical education. Physical education (PE) was formally recognised as a subject in secondary schools in 1973 and appeared in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools* (1973).

Prior to 1973 there was no detailed syllabus or guidelines for physical education in post-primary schools. The Department of Education advised that schools should provide for the teaching of physical education and/or organised games and athletics. Two contributing factors to the development of the physical education curriculum were the establishment of the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) in 1968 and the National College of Physical Education (NCPE) in 1973. The NCPE was renamed as Thomond College of Education in 1975 and was later integrated into the University of Limerick in 1991.

The 1973 syllabus set out a more formalised approach to physical education and it included statements about the value of physical education. However, it did not go into detail as to what should be covered as part of the school programme.

In contrast, the syllabus that followed in 1987 provided a clear structure for the development of students' knowledge and skills at post primary. It showed a significant evolution in thinking as far as the delivery of physical education was concerned and the importance of kicking and striking games as part of the national culture was recognised. The 1987 syllabus included more detailed guidelines and a structure for the development of knowledge and skills relating to physical education:

The 1973 syllabus spelt out the need for physical education to contribute to the moral, emotional, aesthetic and social development of the student. The 1987 document placed less accent on these issues, with a much stronger emphasis on the physical elements of education. This included the appreciation of all forms of physical activity and the development of a mature body image. This shift may be reflective of an increasing sense of confidence within the profession about the merits of the subject in its own right and in the context of a broadening view of the education process. (Duffy, 1997, p. 195)

Another key development of the 1987 syllabus was specifying that the programme should be delivered by a specialist PE teacher (DES rules and programme, 1987).

The ensuing years saw robust debate from physical education stakeholders on the position and implementation of physical education in post-primary education. The focus of the debate was on the extent to which the syllabus was fully realised in schools. According to Duffy (1997), 'the non-compulsory nature of the subject; inadequate time allocation, teacher employment patterns and variable facilities all combined to ensure that the impact of the syllabi tended to be thin and patchy for the most part'. In 1994 an NCCA course committee was established to advise on the structure and content of a revised syllabus, which ultimately led to the development of the 2003 junior cycle syllabus.

The 2003 syllabus signalled a significant departure from previous practice. It described an approach to teaching, learning and assessment, which included a focus beyond skills-based learning. The 2003 syllabus retained the 1987 activity structure with one minor change: 'Fitness' and 'Health Education' appear as 'Health-Related Activity'. A broad holistic approach to physical education was promoted:

Physical education applies a holistic approach to the concept of physical activity for young people. It recognises the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of human movement, and emphasises the contribution of physical activity to the promotion of individual and group wellbeing. (DES, JCPE, 2003, p. 2)

The syllabus was piloted with 100 schools prior to national rollout and was supported by a physical education professional development team.

2.2 Overview of the Junior Cycle Physical Education

(JCPE) Syllabus 2003

The 2003 syllabus is a well-regarded reference document to plan a broad and balanced physical education programme and it is still widely used to inform junior cycle physical education in schools

today. The syllabus was structured around seven practical activity areas, referred to as ‘Topics’ in the document. The Topics were broken down into specific skills with an accompanying set of underpinning principles to promote holistic development for each Topic.

The Topics were outlined in the syllabus as set out below:

Adventure activities	Aquatics	Athletics	Dance	Games	Gymnastics	Health-related activity
Orienteering	Entry	Jumping	Basic actions	Games making	Themes	Activity and the body
Team challenge	Movement in water	Running	Movement quality	Attacking play	Movement vocabulary	Fitness
Campcraft	Aqua fitness	Throwing	Relationships	Defensive play	Qualitative focus	Training
	Water safety		Dance creation		Relationships	Lifelong activity

Figure 1. Topics from the junior cycle PE syllabus (2003)

Assessment in the 2003 Junior Cycle Physical Education syllabus

The 2003 JCPE syllabus stated that the modes and methods of assessment used in physical education contribute directly to the formative development of the learner and the assessment modes and methods employed should be consistent with the practical nature of physical education at this level. The syllabus recommended as follows:

In recording student achievement over the duration of junior cycle, it is recommended that all assessment material be compiled and stored in the form of a Student Portfolio. The portfolio will contain assessment evidence obtained from a variety of assessment approaches. The contents should also reflect achievements and attainments in other forms, to be agreed between the student and the teacher.

The portfolio will provide useful information to the teacher, school and parents, but will ultimately be of most value to the student as a record of personal achievement. It should be used very much as a vehicle for the formative assessment of student progress. (DES JCPE, 2003, p. 54)

There was autonomy for schools to decide how best to report at a local level. Whilst teachers used a variety of methods to assess student learning such as observation, formal assessment, and peer assessment, the practice of compiling portfolios in PE was inconsistent across schools.

2.3 Overview of the Junior Cycle Physical Education

short course (2016)

Arising from the Framework for Junior Cycle, the NCCA developed a 100-hour physical education short course, which was published in 2016. The learning outcomes-based specification reflected changes more broadly in junior cycle in relation to the nature of curriculum specification. It was less content focused, featured key skills and was flexible in terms of planning for teaching and learning. The short course embedded the content structure of the 2003 syllabus into the learning outcomes-based specification and aligned to the Framework. It was also intended to be an example for teachers who chose to develop their own school-designed short course.

The short course supports continuity from the primary PE curriculum to junior cycle while also enabling progression to senior cycle PE. The short course subsumes the seven activity areas from the 2003 syllabus into four strands and includes formal assessment in the form of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs). It provides opportunities for students to realise some of the statements of learning, and to acquire and enhance their proficiency in the eight key skills. The learning outcomes are statements of the knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should acquire having studied the short course and therefore it promotes the holistic development of the students as

knowledgeable, skilful, and creative participants who are confident and competent to perform in a range of activities safely. (NCCA, 2016, p. 5).

The specification is structured around four strands and are outlined in the short course specification as follows:

- Strand 1: Physical activity for health and wellbeing
- Strand 2: Games

- Strand 3: Individual and team challenges¹
- Strand 4: Dance and gymnastics.

In terms of planning, each school decides the order in which the strands are taught. Where appropriate, equal time weighting for each strand is encouraged to ensure the provision of a broad, balanced and developmentally appropriate programme.

Classroom-Based Assessments in the JCPE short course

This is the first introduction of formal assessment and reporting in physical education at junior cycle. There are four individual Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) specifically designed to capture evidence of students' learning in each of the strands. Students undertake two of the four CBAs and select their best performance to be reported on in their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). Each assessment includes a student reflection that is assessed as part of the Features of Quality used to decide the level of achievement in the CBA. In each of these assessments, students are required to reflect on their learning in the strand. Detailed expectations and the features of quality are provided in the accompanying Assessment Guidelines.

2.4 Physical education within the Framework for Junior Cycle

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), describes how teaching, learning and assessment practices should evolve to support the delivery of a quality, inclusive and relevant education that will meet the needs of junior cycle students. It outlines where physical education contributes to this phase of a student's education. The learning at the core of junior cycle is described in 24 Statements of learning (SOL). Schools ensure that all statements of learning and eight key skills, feature in the programmes for all junior cycle students. The following statements are best realised through the study of physical education:

- SOL 11: The student takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others

¹ This strand focuses on building students' competence and confidence in two of the following physical activity areas: orienteering and team challenges, aquatics and athletics.

- SOL 12: The student is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active
- SOL 13: The student understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices.

When the Framework was published in 2015, PE was classified as a short course and not as a subject, and it also stated that ‘schools may also offer students the opportunity to take a small number of short courses’ (DES, 2015, p. 21). Consequently, this classification may have contributed to a perception that PE was an optional component. However, the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines that were published in 2017 clarified that PE is a main area of learning in the junior cycle programme.

Nevertheless, how schools’ plan their PE programme in junior cycle differs from other subjects and short courses due to its time allocation. Subjects are timetabled for 200 hours (or 240 hours for English, Irish and mathematics) and short courses are timetabled for 100 hours. The Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 0055/2019 stated that ‘schools are reminded that there is a minimum threshold of time across the three years of Junior Cycle which should be provided for PE... 135 hours spread across first, second and third year’ (DES, 2019).

The 2019 circular proceeded to outline the four curricular options for physical education at junior cycle. The options available demonstrate a high level of flexibility and autonomy for schools to plan at a local level. Planning for PE must also be completed in the context of a school’s Wellbeing programme. In the case of two of the options (the short course in PE and a school-designed or externally-designed short course in PE) schools must still develop a programme for the remaining 35 hours.

The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA, 2017) recommended that schools develop their own first-year PE programme, and then teach the PE short course of 100 hours in second and third year. This would allow the school to provide a broad foundation in PE through their first-year programme, building on their primary school experience, and provide progression through to the short course:

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. (NCCA, Planning for Wellbeing p. 3)

PE is reported on in the Wellbeing area of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This is significant as it is the first time learning in PE is included on a formally accepted national assessment template.

In order to further support schools in planning their junior cycle programme within the minimum threshold of 135 hours, in 2020, the NCCA was requested by the Department of Education to prepare a minimum 135-hour programme of learning for physical education.

2.4.1 Physical Education teachers' experience of junior cycle reform

A report prepared by researchers in the University of Limerick and presented to Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) examined PE teachers' views of junior cycle change with a particular focus on revision to the physical education curriculum and the Wellbeing programme. The researchers engaged with the JCT and PE teachers from 2018 to 2020. The report, *A Three-Legged Stool: Teachers' Views of Junior Cycle Physical Education Curriculum Change*, published in 2020, provides a timely and relevant insight into teachers' experience and perception of physical education reform. It explores teachers' understanding of the Framework for Junior Cycle as well as gathering specific views on the short course for physical education and their perceptions of implementing change. 107 teachers responded to the survey, which provided qualitative and quantitative data for the report.

The researchers constructed three themes to reflect physical education teachers' views on junior cycle change and these themes included: Learning Focus, Embracing Change, and Curriculum Implementation.

The report noted that the development of the short course as a learning outcome-based specification required the teachers to shift from a focus on content to a focus on learning (O'Sullivan et al. 2020):

A key shift for teachers with this new curriculum framework was away from a focus on content to a focus on planning for key learnings in Physical Education. This move "from content to learning" reflects teachers' acknowledgement that learning is now the most important goal for teachers. More than 80% of the teachers also agreed that these changes to a learning outcomes approach allowed the Physical Education curriculum to better support the Wellbeing focus of the new curriculum. Teachers noted that reform was needed, as junior cycle sought "to move away from rote learning to active learning". (O'Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 13)

The changed assessment and reporting approaches at junior cycle reflected this shift to a focus on student learning and coherence between learning outcomes, learning intentions and assessment. The report explores some of the challenges for teachers related to these approaches.

Most teachers were very supportive of student learning achievements being formally reported on the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. Yet, there were some dissenting views about this focus on learning. A key concern was that too much attention to assessment of learning would take away from physical activity engagements of students and thus negatively impact on their experiences in Physical Education. In addition, teachers were concerned about their own capacity to assess student learning fairly and accurately. (O'Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 14)

Although teachers were confident that CBAs represented a better approach to assessment in PE than a final examination, they were much less confident about implementing CBAs. This was expanded on in the report:

There was some evidence suggesting teachers did not have the pedagogical knowledge or understanding to effectively plan and deliver on the new approaches to Physical Education. 60% of the respondents said they would “not be” or were “unsure” how they would change their teaching approach. Thirty-seven percent of teachers answered ‘no’ they would not change their teaching approaches as a result of the positioning of Physical Education with the Wellbeing Area of Learning. It was unclear however if this meant teachers thought they were already aligning their teaching approaches to the new curriculum or not. Fifty-five percent suggested that they had not yet developed their assessment and reporting practices for Physical Education and 30% admitted not having considered their practice through the lens of the principles of new reforms. (O'Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 18)

What was noteworthy about the findings in this report is that most of the teachers accepted the new approach to teaching Physical Education as part of junior cycle reforms:

The good news is that teachers were supportive of the changes in the curriculum and they recognised the number of resources already provided in support of the new curriculum but believe more were still needed. (O'Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 22)

It is worth noting that some of the findings of the research report are echoed in the review of the PE short course (section 5 of this paper). Similar themes emerged including challenges around the learning outcomes approach for planning teaching and learning, assessment, and CPD.

3. Supporting and progressing learning in physical education

This section provides an overview of the main developments to the PE curriculum in primary and senior cycle education. At primary level, the 1999 Primary School Curriculum is currently being reviewed and re-developed. A *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was developed in 2020 and consultation is ongoing and physical education is part of that work. At senior cycle, Leaving Certificate Physical Education was introduced as an examinable subject in 2018 and a framework for physical education for all students in senior cycle was published in 2018.

3.1 Physical education in primary school

The focus of physical education in the primary curriculum (1999) is on the child's holistic development, stressing personal and social development, physical growth, and motor development. The curriculum is structured around the six activity areas:

- Athletics
- Dance
- Gymnastics
- Games
- Outdoor and adventure activities
- Aquatics.

The curriculum also emphasises developing the child's understanding and appreciation of physical activities. Schools are afforded a high level of autonomy and flexibility to plan appropriate and relevant learning experiences for children. The recommended programme of study should be broad and balanced, and the assessment of the programme should reflect this. It is advocated that the assessment should include social and personal qualities, physical skills and competence, knowledge and understanding, creative and aesthetic development, development of health-related fitness and development of safe practices. The classroom teacher is responsible for teaching this curriculum.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020) proposes five broad curriculum areas including Arts Education and Wellbeing (Physical and Health Education). These integrated curriculum areas are intended to allow for greater flexibility and agency for schools as they provide a broad and integrated Arts Education and Physical and Health Education. It is envisaged that Arts Education would provide children with broad-ranging experiences that encompass many different disciplines including dance, which was traditionally included in the PE curriculum. It is also proposed that Wellbeing would include Physical and Health Education. The precise learning outcomes in the proposed curriculum area of Physical and Health Education have yet to be decided and this will happen during the specifications' development phase, which will involve further consultation.

3.2 Physical education in senior cycle

There are two distinct physical education curricular areas at senior cycle: The Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE) Framework and Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE). The SCPE Framework (2018) provides a planning tool for schools to design a programme that aims to encourage learners' confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives. LCPE, on the other hand, is a subject that students study and are assessed in, as part of their Leaving Certificate examinations. Both curricular areas focus on the holistic development of students' physical education experience with a focus on movement skills as well as contemporary issues.

As of September 2020, all students in senior cycle must experience PE either as part of SCPE and/or LCPE.

3.2.1 Senior Cycle Physical Education Framework

The SCPE Framework was implemented as part of a phased approach in 2018 and was available for national rollout from September 2020. This Framework was a significant development as it was specifically for senior cycle and contained guidance in relation to teaching, learning and assessment of PE at this stage of education. Before this Framework, the 1987 syllabus provided a structure for the development of students' knowledge and skills in senior cycle PE, where the syllabus 'sought to recognise that the student should be at a stage where a degree of independent choice is important to them' (Duffy, 1997, p. 201). When the 1987 syllabus was replaced by the 2003 junior cycle syllabus, a syllabus was not put in place for senior cycle physical education.

The SCPE Framework is structured around six curriculum models, which are theme-based and reflect a specific philosophy about what is most important in physical education. (see Figure 2).

Senior cycle physical education is designed to be taught over the two or three years of senior cycle education. It is recommended that a double period per week is made available as the minimum requirement for teaching senior cycle physical education.

Health-related physical activity —developing learners’ understanding of health-related physical activity for now and in the future.
Sport education —providing learners with an enjoyable and authentic experience of organised physical activity as they learn to perform playing and non-playing roles.
Contemporary issues in physical activity —encouraging learners to critically reflect on their own and others’ experiences in physical activity and sport.
Adventure education —encouraging learners to challenge themselves and co-operate with others as they learn to solve physical activity challenges.
Personal and social responsibility —encouraging learners to take responsibility for themselves and their learning in physical education class including respecting the rights and feelings of others.
Teaching games for understanding —developing learners’ tactical awareness and decision making skills in a variety of games.

Figure 2. Curriculum models of the SCPE Framework (2018)

The framework suggests the use of portfolios to support assessment for learning. Flexibility in terms of the presentation, method of construction and management of portfolios is provided.

3.2.2 Leaving Certificate Physical Education Specification

The Leaving Certificate Physical Education Specification (LCPE) was implemented on a phased basis from 2018 and was available for national roll out from September 2020. The aim of Leaving Certificate Physical Education is to develop the learner’s capacity to become an informed, skilled, self-directed and reflective performer in physical education and physical activity in senior cycle and in their future life. There was a high demand for the subject in 2018 with more than 300 schools competing for 60 places in phase one of the LCPE rollout.

The LCPE specification is presented in two strands. In strand 1, students learn about different theoretical perspectives that impact on optimum performance and how to apply this understanding to a range of different activities. In strand 2, students learn about contemporary issues in physical activity and how different people experience physical activity and sport. Leaving Certificate Physical Education is designed to be taught in approximately 180 hours.

Strand 1	Strand 2
Toward optimum performance	Contemporary issues in physical activity
Topics	Topics
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning and improving skill and technique 2. Physical and psychological demands of performance 3. Structures, strategies, roles and conventions 4. Planning for optimum performance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Promoting physical activity 6. Ethics and fair play <p><i>In addition, two of the following topics will be prescribed each year.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Physical activity and inclusion 8. Technology, media and sport 9. Gender and physical activity 10. Business and enterprise in physical activity and sport

Assessment

Assessment for certification in physical education is based on the aim, objectives and learning outcomes outlined in the specification. There are three assessment components in Leaving Certificate Physical Education:

- Physical Activity Project—20%
- Performance Assessment—30%
- Written examination—50%

In both the Physical Activity Project and the Performance Assessment, students capture their evidence of learning in a digital format. There is a strong emphasis on practical demonstration and reflective practice throughout the specification and this is reflected in the assessment components.

3.3 Supports and initiatives for physical education

In Ireland there are many stakeholders involved in the development of resources and initiatives designed to support aspects of physical education capability in post-primary schools.

Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 (Department of Health, 2013) is the national framework for whole of Government and whole of society action to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Ireland. As part of this framework, the *Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland* (Department of Health, 2016) was launched. It aims to increase physical activity levels across the whole population. It aims to create a society which facilitates people, whether at home, at work or at play to lead an active way of life. It places physical education as an essential factor for developing enthusiastic, physically literate and skilled young people who can participate in lifelong sport and physical recreation. It states:

In schools, learning in physical education helps children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and positive attitudes that support and enable them to lead physically active lifestyles. Quality physical education also assists children and young people in mastering fundamental skills that enable them to engage more enjoyably in a wide variety of physical activities and sports. (Department of Health, 2016, p. 17)

The *Get Ireland Active!* plan sets out to create a coordinated approach to physical education, physical activity and sport in school and community settings for children and young people. *Get Ireland Active!* recognises the need for a co-ordinated approach to the development and provision of high-quality physical education and the effective delivery of physical literacy programmes, which are essential for children to have in order to develop the skills and confidence for lifelong participation in sport and physical recreation.

The *Active School Flag* (ASF) is a Department of Education initiative supported by Healthy Ireland and is part of the *National Physical Activity Plan*. The ASF aims to promote healthy living and physical activity by supporting schools to achieve a physically educated and physically active school community.

Schools for Health in Ireland: Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School, Post-Primary published in 2013 by the Health Service Executive (HSE), offers a framework to schools against which they can look at their school, assess health needs and begin a process of working towards better health for all members of the school community. A *Health Promoting School* aims to: foster the healthy development of the whole school community; provide a framework for developing health promotion initiatives in a way that supports and enhances the implementation of the curriculum; support the planning, implementation and evaluation of health-related activities under school self-evaluation and school development planning processes; and enhance the links between schools and their communities.

Initiatives such as the *Active School Flag (ASF)* and *Health Promoting Schools* are designed to recognise schools and communities that strive towards achieving a physically educated and physically active school community. Schools that are involved in these initiatives are recognised for their efforts in providing a quality programme for all students and for promoting physical activity across the whole school community.

PE XPO is an initiative that was founded by PE teachers to support physical education as a subject and to encourage students to undertake research in physical education and related topics. PE XPO is a competition that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and application of the sciences underpinning sports-related topics. It culminates in an annual national exhibition which sees large numbers of students travel from across the country to represent their schools and present their projects.

The Physical Education Association of Ireland, founded in 1968, aims to improve standards and performance within physical education by providing members with opportunities and materials for professional growth. It provides a number of teaching resources to teachers online, supports the professional development of its members via teachers' communities of practice as well as hosting an annual conference, which includes interactive workshops and lectures. It also supports and disseminates relevant research and encourages teachers' engagement with research.

The Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA) was founded in 2002. The IPPEA is dedicated to heightening awareness of PE issues in primary schools and it aims to promote physical activity in an education context.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) provide continuing professional development opportunities to teachers and support teachers through workshops, events and online materials.

Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport (PEPAYS) is a research centre whose aim is advancing health and well-being through research in the areas of physical education, sport, physical activity and health. Their vision is:

To develop a critical mass of researchers actively contributing to multi-disciplinary and multi-entity research that impacts policy and practice related to health and well-being of populations in the areas of physical education, sport, physical activity and health. (PEPAYS)

Physical Education Teacher Education Ireland (PETE Ireland) is a national group that represents the collective views of physical education initial teacher education providers across Ireland, for both Primary and Post-Primary. It includes representation from Dublin City University, Institute of

Technology Tralee, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, University of Cork, and University of Limerick. It advocates research-based practice to support high quality preparation of prospective teachers for PE and members work with other organisations such as NCCA, PDST, JCT, Teaching Council, XPO, IPPEA and PEAI to provide CPD and research opportunities for teachers of PE across all levels (Early Childhood, Primary and Post Primary).

4. International curriculum for physical education

There is an increased focus on the benefits of physical education as an area of learning internationally. This section offers a brief insight into the curricular provision of physical education in three jurisdictions: Ontario, Australia and Scotland. Each jurisdiction places PE as an essential component of their Health and Wellbeing programme, although the exact categorisation varies. The programmes offered are broad curricular areas which promote significant autonomy for PE teachers both in teaching and learning, and assessment.

Given the place of physical education in the Wellbeing programme and the assessment approaches promoted in junior cycle, the three examples outlined below offer some interesting insights into the approach in different jurisdictions.

4.1 Curriculum in Australia

Health and Physical Education is one of the eight areas of study for secondary-level students in the Australian Curriculum from year 7 to year 10 (from 12–15 years of age). This curriculum is a national curriculum and implementation may be adapted from state to state.

In Health and Physical Education, learning experiences encourage lifelong involvement in physical activity. Skills are developed for critical and creative appraisal, analysis of sport and health in society, and refinement of students' own and others' movement performance. Social, cultural and political factors that influence health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity participation are questioned and critically analysed to make informed judgements and ethical decisions. Strategies to positively manage change and respectful relationships, leadership and collaboration skills are developed and critically evaluated.

Health and Physical Education is organised into two content strands:

1. Personal, social and community health
2. Movement and physical activity

The table below provides an overview of the strand content and sub-strands within the curriculum. The curriculum suggests an integrated approach to teaching and learning.

	Strands	
Sub-strands and threads	Personal, social and community health	Movement and physical activity
	Being healthy, safe and active <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identities • Changes and transitions • Help-seeking • Making healthy and safe choices 	Moving our body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refining movement skills • Developing movement concepts and strategies
	Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with others • Understanding emotions • Health literacy 	Understanding movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness and physical activity • Elements of movement • Cultural significance of physical activity
	Contributing to healthy and active communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health promotion • Connecting to the environment • Valuing diversity 	Learning through movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork and leadership • Critical and creative thinking in movement • Ethical behaviour in movement settings

Figure 3. Strand content and sub-strands within the Australian Health and Physical Education curriculum

In addition to the strands and sub-strands, there are 12 compulsory focus areas that provide the breadth of learning across years 7 to 10. The 12 focus areas are outlined below:

1. Alcohol and other drugs
2. Food and nutrition
3. Health benefits of physical activity
4. Mental health and wellbeing
5. Relationships and sexuality
6. Safety
7. Active play and minor games
8. Challenge and adventure activities
9. Fundamental movement skills
10. Games and sports
11. Lifelong physical activities
12. Rhythmic and expressive movement activities.

Assessment and reporting

Assessment is undertaken by the class teacher, supported by Achievement Standards. The Achievement Standards, provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), apply to each band or stage of learning e.g. year 7 and outline what students understand and can do at the end of each band. These descriptors are used to report student achievement.

4.2 Curriculum in Ontario

Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum in Canada strives to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to lead physically active and healthy lives. Canada's PHE curriculum is a shared responsibility with each province and territory taking leadership to develop its own in response to local and contextual differences.

In the province of Ontario in Canada, a main focus of secondary education is fostering a learning environment that facilitates an individual approach while supporting high-quality learning. There is an emphasis on student wellbeing and the impact this has on overall learning and achievement. The vision of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum is as follows:

The revised health and physical education curriculum is based on the vision that the knowledge and skills students acquire in the programme will benefit them throughout their lives and enable them to thrive in an ever-changing world by helping them develop physical and health literacy as well as the comprehension, capacity, and commitment they will need to lead healthy, active lives and promote healthy, active living. (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 6)

The curriculum comprises four Healthy Active Living Education courses (HALE), one in each of grades 9 through to 12.² It is compulsory for students to earn one credit in Health and Physical Education (one full credit course is allotted 110 instructional hours) in their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and students may also take a Health and Physical Education course to meet the additional compulsory credit requirement.

The curriculum structure is based on underpinning principles that inform planning. The activity areas are strictly seen as the medium through which students will achieve the course expectations.

Living Skills is seen as an overarching area of learning and is developed throughout the experience of Health and Physical Education. The other strands of learning are Active Living; Movement

² Second level or high school in Ontario starts at grade 9, at approximately 14 years old.

Competence: Skills, Concepts, Strategies; and Healthy Living. The curriculum promotes an integrated approach. The graphic below outlines the curriculum structure for grades 9–12:

Living Skills Personal Skills [PS] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness and self-monitoring skills • Adaptive, management, and coping skills Interpersonal Skills [IS] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Relationship and social skills Critical and Creative Thinking [CT] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Processing • Drawing conclusions/presenting results • Reflecting/ evaluating 	Strand A: Active Living		
	A1. Active Participation Regular participation, variety, lifelong activity Enjoyment, motivation	A2. Physical Fitness Fitness development through daily physical activity, personal fitness plans	A3. Safety Personal safety and safety of others during physical activity
	Strand B: Movement Competence: Skills, Concepts, Strategies		
	B1. Movement Skills and Concepts Movement skills – stability, locomotion, manipulation Movement concepts – body awareness, effort, spatial awareness, relationships Movement principles	B2. Movement Strategies Components of physical activities Strategies and tactics in all physical activities	
	Strand C: Healthy Living		
	C1. Understanding Health Concepts Understanding the factors that contribute to healthy growth and development	C2. Making Healthy Choices Applying health knowledge, making decisions about personal health and wellbeing	C3. Making connections for Healthy Living Making connections to link personal health and wellbeing to others and the world around them
	Expectations in the Healthy Living strand focus on the following four health topics. Learning about mental health and emotional well-being can be a part of learning related to all of these health topics, just as it is part of learning across the curriculum.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Eating • Personal Safety and Injury Prevention • Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours • Human Development and Sexual Health 		Mental Health and Emotional Well-being	

Figure 4. Curriculum structure for grades 9–12

Assessment and reporting

Teachers are supported in assessing their students using achievement charts outlining the various levels achieved as well as the categories to be evaluated. These charts are provided by the Ministry of Education. Students’ achievement is reported on the Provincial Report Card at specific times in the year. This report is the record of curriculum credits for the OSSD.

4.3 Curriculum in Scotland

In the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, physical education appears in the area of learning of Health and Wellbeing. The recommended time allocation to PE is the provision of at least two hours of quality physical education for every child, every week. The curriculum is structured around key competencies, experiences and outcomes and accompanying benchmarks to support practitioners' professional judgements. The key competencies for PE are:

- Movement skills, competencies and concepts
- Cooperation and competition
- Evaluating and appreciating.

Providing a broad range of physical activities is encouraged in order to develop the key competencies. Students have the option of studying physical education for their National Qualification (NQ) as they enter S4 (age 14–15) onwards. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) provides detailed course specifications and assessment guidelines for PE.

The National 3 course specification, usually undertaken by students aged 14–15, is outlined below:

Units of learning	• Performance Skills	1. Demonstrate a range of basic movement and performance skills during physical activities in familiar contexts.
	• Factors Impacting on Performance	1. Demonstrate knowledge of factors that impact on personal performance in physical activities 2. Develop performance in physical activities 3. Review the process of performance development

Figure 5. National 3 course specification for Health and Wellbeing

The units of learning are designed to be largely experiential in nature and provide learners with the opportunity to develop basic movement and performance skills, improve aspects of fitness and develop personal and interpersonal skills in familiar contexts.

Assessment and reporting

Assessment as part of the National 3 qualification is internally assessed by class teachers and externally moderated to ensure judgements are consistent and meet national standards.

The assessment of the units in the course are as follows:

- Performance Skills (National 3): The learner will be required to demonstrate basic movement and performance skills during physical activities in familiar contexts, using safe practices. The Unit

offers opportunities for personalisation and choice in the selection of physical activities used for assessment purposes.

- Factors Impacting on Performance (National 3): The learner will be required to demonstrate an awareness of factors that impact on performance. The learner will (with support) monitor, record and reflect on performance in physical activities.

The examples outlined in this section demonstrate how three jurisdictions promote a flexible and autonomous approach to physical education while ensuring consistency. Given the nature of physical education, the access to resources and facilities, this flexibility is necessary. Learning in physical education can be developed through a variety of physical activities, affording schools autonomy for developing their individual programme and can support the most relevant, accessible experience for students. The position of physical education in the area of wellbeing is also of significant relevance. While other jurisdictions approach the area of wellbeing in a combined 'health and physical education' curricular area, the Framework for Junior Cycle enables some of the related learning to be achieved through the other pillars of Wellbeing such as SPHE, guidance and school-based programmes. The various approaches offer insight into the development of learning activities in this area while also supporting assessment and reporting.

5. Review of the Junior Cycle Physical

Education short course

This section outlines the key messages which have emerged from the review of the junior cycle physical education short course process and concludes with suggestions for how these could be addressed.

5.1 Introduction

The review of the PE short course took place between April and September 2020. This review was designed to explore and evaluate:

- the experience of teachers and students in working with the specification and the extent to which the specification enables the achievement of its aims
- the experience of assessment in PE
- the experience of physical education more generally in junior cycle.

NCCA wishes to thank the schools who facilitated the interviews as part of the review, as well as sharing and raising awareness for the student voice in this challenging time. NCCA would also like to thank the Department of Education, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI), for taking the time to engage with the interviews.

5.2 Consultation process

The unique circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated rethinking how it might be possible to engage in consultation with teachers, students across 10 schools³ and other stakeholders in a manner that was sensitive to public health advice while still enabling the collection of helpful and meaningful data.

³ 11% of the total schools offering the short course.

Feedback was gathered in the following ways:

- One-to-one telephone interviews were conducted with 10 PE teachers. The teachers were selected to represent different school types, contexts and geographic areas. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour.
- An online survey was shared with a random selection of second and third year PE students from the above 10 schools, and 343 students responded to this.
- One-to-one phone calls and video conference calls were conducted with the DE Inspectorate, members of the JCT PE team and the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI).

5.3 Review findings

This section outlines the findings in relation to the enactment of the short course specification for PE. In doing so it explores the perceptions of teachers, students and stakeholders in relation to the learning as set out in the physical education short course. It addresses feedback regarding the aim of the specification, the experience of planning with learning outcomes, as well as other aspects of the specification.

5.3.1 Aim of the specification

Overall, there was a sense that the specification is viewed positively by teachers, students and stakeholders. There was general consensus that where the short course is being implemented the aim of the specification was being achieved. Teachers and stakeholders welcomed the focus on the confidence and competency of students, the objective to build their appreciation of physical activity and the focus on lifelong learning. Teachers and stakeholders welcomed the aim of developing the students' experience in a more holistic manner than that of a previously more skill-based approach. One teacher commented in relation to the experience of the short course:

It allows young people to see their journey in PE across junior cycle, it has broadened out their understanding of what PE is about – PE teacher

The short course is planned to be experienced in second and third year and teachers and stakeholders noted that, as a result of this, it is imperative that the aim aligns to the practice and experience of first year also.

There were concerns raised about whether the experience of PE as envisaged in the short course is being fully realised on a larger scale. The specification promotes the use of new approaches to

teaching, learning and assessment. It was reported that the short course has introduced some changes to classroom practice, but some teachers and stakeholders questioned the extent to which real change was evident.

Some teachers and stakeholders queried the extent to which change was enacted in PE during the reform of junior cycle and the place of PE in the Framework for Junior Cycle. One participant commented:

Many schools didn't move to the short course. It was context-based, it came down to personnel and support. The options didn't encourage a move.– PEAI

Teachers and stakeholders cited a number of reasons for this feedback. The extent to which change was enacted varied depending on the individual school context and factors included: personnel, PE teachers' motivations for change, facilities and resources available and perceptions of the junior cycle reform in relation to PE. There was a sense that the status of PE was under threat and classifying PE as a short course resulted in the perceived downgrade of the subject. It was reported by teachers and some stakeholders that the range of options available at junior cycle for the timetabling of PE was perceived as unclear. Therefore, maintaining traditional practice in planning was easier.

A lack of a full-time dedicated junior cycle PE CPD team and the lack of exemplification in the short course were viewed as further barriers to introducing the short course. The industrial relations difficulties during the junior cycle reform were also cited as a challenge.

Some of the barriers to engagement [were] a lack of clarity in the system, lack of consistent messages from stakeholders, the IR situation and the perception of PE being downgraded. – PE teacher

Some people in a department are slow to engage with change and if they feel they don't have to and what they are doing is working fine then why would they. – PE teacher

During the process of the short course review students were asked the extent to which they felt they achieved various elements of the aim of the short course. The highest consensus was for 'I understand the importance of health enhancing physical activity' with 78.3% stating they feel that 'a lot'; 19.3% stating they feel it 'somewhat' and 2.4% stating they feel it 'not at all'. Second to this was the area of feeling more committed to being physically active in the future, followed by feeling more confident and feeling more skilful.⁴

⁴ NCCA student survey question 1. See Appendix C for the full survey.

Whilst the short course was available to schools in 2016, schools were slow to engage with it due to the range of options available to schools in PE. It is only in recent years that elements such as Classroom-Based Assessment (CBAs) and Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLARs) meetings are taking place in PE.

When teachers in the review were asked about their motivation for implementing the short course, the findings indicate the following: that the specification is aligned to their vision for PE; the opportunity it presents to link students' experience of and engagement in physical activity in their communities; more formal assessment and reporting opportunities; and the opportunity to improve the provision of PE for a diverse range of learners. These points are expanded in the sections that follow.

Some specific comments included:

I really like the emphasis on physical activity for life, building confidence across a wide range of physical activities. – PE teacher

More accessible than JCPE [JCPE Syllabus 2003]...less strands but with opportunities to adapt, select from options, differentiate the learning. – PE teacher

Emphasis on reflection allows the students to plan to improve so every student can have a sense of their own improvement. – PE teacher

5.3.2 Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach was welcomed by teachers during the review, but it was also noted it was not without its challenges. Teachers spoke positively about maintaining their autonomy and enjoying the flexibility the learning outcomes offered. The flexibility of the specification allowed the PE curriculum to better support the Wellbeing focus of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). When questioned on the extent their planning was influenced by the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme one teacher stated:

You have the flexibility to cocreate units of learning, I use student voice and we develop success criteria together as well as how they would like to be assessed. – PE teacher

One teacher commented that it encouraged collaboration stating:

We could really 'spread our wings' to collaborate with other subjects as part of the Wellbeing Programme'. – PE teacher

Teachers cited a wish for more support in planning learning experiences and developing assessment practices that are aligned to the student-centred approach set out in the specification. This was also

evident in teachers reporting that the short course was ‘user friendly’ but they found planning using learning outcomes to be time consuming and challenging compared to their familiar practice rooted in a more skill-based approach. However, teachers also noted that planning was becoming easier as they familiarised themselves with the learning outcomes.

In the initial stages, planning with the learning outcomes was very time consuming but with each new cohort of students, it was easier and more a matter of tweaking for the particular class. The LOs that were more aligned with more traditional JCPE [JCPE Syllabus 2003], e.g. skills and technique were easier to engage with in the early days. The others required more thought and work. – PE teacher

Engaging with the learning outcomes was seen to facilitate a more student-centred experience where students were empowered to take ownership over their learning and students reported an increase in their engagement with PE:

I found the 4 week programme of dance, Zumba, cheerleading and CrossFit very interesting. It was a great opportunity to learn about each activity. I even joined a local dance class because this programme was very helpful – Student

I found learning about eating healthy and all about exercising really interesting because I wanted to know about the fitness world and I found it useful for my wellbeing – Student

The PE short course has helped me gain new skills from different sports I would have never done before and it has helped me learn how important it is to stay active and healthy which has led me to want to be more active in my daily life – Student

I feel as though I am more in tune with my fitness and I have a greater understanding when it comes to developing and improving my fitness skills – Student

In this course I have seen many changes to my fitness capabilities and that I have gotten stronger and more confident in things I didn’t want to do. Now I feel like I would do anything that involves fitness – Student

However, the emerging theme relating to the experience of the short course was that planning using learning outcomes and assessment design was at an early stage. It was felt that the variety of options available for providing PE at junior cycle did not encourage change and that teachers were reluctant to deviate from previous practice where they were confident in their planning. This resulted in disparate practices emerging depending on a teacher’s individual context:

...there is a lack of motivation to move towards the short course because of lack of knowledge and confidence. – DE Inspectorate

However, based on the nature of PE at junior cycle, teachers were able to explore elements of the short course. Teachers spoke of experimenting with a couple of learning outcomes or elements of a CBA without committing to undertaking the full course. Teachers and stakeholders indicated that previous practice and culture impacted planning to a great degree but also acknowledged that the learning outcomes can facilitate a more holistic understanding of physical education.

The structure of the short course, organised in four strands, caused some perception issues for teachers, which was cited as a disincentive for undertaking the course. Previously, the JCPE syllabus (2003) was structured around seven activity areas and although all activity areas are present in the short course, the optics of a shortening or downgrading from seven to four was discussed.

Teachers and stakeholders engaging with the short course expressed opinions on areas for improvement within the specification. Discussion centred on the domains of learning represented and the concern over a dominance of the affective domain over the psycho-motor and cognitive. The question was raised about the benefit of making the scientific underpinning of the learning more explicit.

Strand 1 was seen to be very 'wordy' and quite large compared to the other strands. There was robust discussion on the suggestion of strand 1 becoming an over-arching strand.

Specific areas were identified as needing some clarity. The repetition of 'reflection' in the learning outcomes divided participants' views: some welcomed the repetition and felt it provided a necessary emphasis but in contrast some felt it caused confusion. Teachers specifically spoke about the challenge of developing the skills of reflection in students, and students cited negative feelings towards the 'written element' of PE. One teacher commented:

Covid lockdown meant I included the use of different strategies for the students to reflect and I think this really helped... I think they need to be given other options than just pen and paper. - PE teacher.

5.3.3 Classroom teaching, learning and ongoing assessment

One of the main findings in relation to classroom teaching, learning and assessment was the logistical challenge for incorporating a 100-hour short course within the minimum threshold of 135 hours of junior cycle physical education. Teachers understood the need to develop a first-year programme before progressing to the short course in second and third year but felt that there were no clear expectations or support for the development of their PE programme.

There is a lack of experience and confidence in curriculum design, a lack of assessment literacy. Although the autonomy is excellent it was asking the system to do something that it did not have the skills to do. – JCT

There was deliberation on the shift in focus on teaching, learning and assessment that the short course, and on a greater level the Framework for Junior Cycle, brought about.

Teachers and stakeholders reported the challenges that a shift of this nature presents. There was a general consensus that a key limitation for teachers fully realising the learning in the short course was the practice of superimposing the short course onto previous practice of the JCPE (2003).

...teachers who were using the JCPE [JCPE Syllabus 2003] it was very clear on what the intended learning was. Learning outcomes gave a huge amount of autonomy and teachers struggled to explore the deep learning by not drilling down deep enough. – JCT

Realising the potential of the short course in the classroom requires an understanding of the Framework for Junior Cycle and the position of the short course within the Framework. Emerging from conversations with teachers and stakeholders, there was concern that the reforms in relation to PE are being experienced in theory but the potential for PE within the Framework for Junior Cycle was yet to be fully realised:

The potential has not been realised in PE, up until this time people have just been proceeding with business as usual but with more clarity on reporting etc. people are starting to adapt their practice. – DE Inspectorate

The flexibility offered in junior cycle physical education was valued by participants and they felt it offered the opportunity to develop individualised programmes to best suit the needs of their students. This flexibility was retained and could be seen as gaining even more prominence as part of the short course. Participants commented on PE teachers' greater autonomy in their classes, noting that they have always demonstrated a comfort level in planning using a broad curriculum to meet the needs of their students depending on individual contexts, infrastructure and equipment available. This was something that was valued within the system.

PE teachers can 'cut the cloth to measure' for their students' interests and abilities. It's relevant, adaptable, lots of scope to pick and choose' – PE teacher

Practical nature of the learning and the range of choice allows all students to participate – PE teacher

However, it was noted that to evolve teaching, learning and assessment practices to support a quality, inclusive and relevant education, as described in the Framework for Junior Cycle, more support and clarity is needed. Clear expectations of a junior cycle physical education programme and support on assessing the curriculum is necessary.

Teachers discussed how access to resources and facilities influences the design of their PE programme and it was noted that access to resources differs from school to school, and ultimately the students' experience differs greatly. One teacher commented:

Planning for the short course was significantly impacted by the lack of facilities in our school. Often two or more classes were timetabled together so any planning was often amended at the moment depending on the weather and access. This is now rectified with a new sports hall and fitness suite. – PE teacher

5.3.4 Classroom-Based Assessments

As outlined previously, there are four individualised CBAs for each strand in the short course. Participants welcomed the formalised approach to assessment and reporting in the short course specification.

Similar to other findings, the lack of clarity or ‘shifting ground’ was cited as a disincentive to engaging with a more formalised approach to assessment. However, teachers who engaged with the CBAs welcomed the opportunity to formally recognise students’ learning and achievement in PE. They felt it contributed to the status of PE as a subject and overall, they agreed that the quality of student learning and engagement in PE was enhanced by their engagement with the CBA. Teachers spoke positively about how the CBAs were providing a clear goal for learning in PE.

Teachers and stakeholders reported that it was not without challenges, some areas appeared to offer more accessibility to teachers’ expertise. The culminating performance is traditionally undertaken in gymnastics or dance. However, evaluation of achievement in areas such as games challenged teachers’ norms in relation to assessing students’ ability.

Teachers who had carried out CBAs with their students spoke positively about the experience and the opportunities afforded:

Formal assessment brought a robustness and a welcome increased profile for PE. – PE teacher

It’ll take time for the cultural shift to happen from where assessment was not a feature on learning in PE to where students can now have their learning feature on JCPA. – PE teacher

Teachers’ confidence with CBAs grows as they repeat the experience. It takes time. Collaborating with a colleague(s) within and/or beyond the schools was seen as being really helpful. – JCT

Over time, teachers felt they would develop more confidence and familiarity with the practices conducive to supporting learning in CBAs. One teacher commented:

...my traditional approach to assessment would have been much different, with the formalised approach of the short course I brought in the language associated with the CBAs and had ongoing conversations with students... I was able to communicate the learning of the CBA to parents. – PE teacher

The shift in approach to physical education required of stakeholders, school leaders, teachers, parents and students was discussed. There are deep-rooted perceptions of what PE is and deviating from this is not without its challenges. Teachers reported that engaging in professional conversations and collaboration helped them to develop the practice of formative assessment throughout learning. Teachers in the consultation discussed the move from 'doing' to 'learning' in PE and it was noted that this shift in practice was not to be underestimated. Supporting teachers to assess desired teaching and learning required adequate support.

I found the SLAR [Subject Learning and Assessment Review meeting] very rewarding and informative. It was great to get the insight into other professional workings or other approaches and it was also reaffirming of some of my practices. – PE teacher

Building students' capacity to reflect thoughtfully was frequently mentioned as a challenge. Students would complete the CBA well, but their poor reflection would result in a lower descriptor being awarded. Further support is required to help students to build this skill, such as professional development in the area of the eight key skills and the use of the wellbeing indicators. It was also noted that reflection as reflection is a transversal skill of the Framework for Junior Cycle, this may get easier with time as the framework beds down. The clarity provided in the Wellbeing Guidelines on reporting on PE was welcomed.

6. Conclusion

The position of PE as a curricular subject has evolved since the 1960s, and today PE is a fundamental area of learning in the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), which supports many positive developments in teaching, learning and assessment. The emphasis on physical education in the framework is significant: it appears as a main pillar in the area of Wellbeing; it is a compulsory area of study; and it appears in formal assessment and reporting as part of the JCPA for the first time. This has laid a solid foundation for further developments, from which lessons have been learned to support next steps. It is clear that teachers need to be supported, to develop their confidence in planning with learning outcomes, and their capacity to support learning through formative and summative assessment practices.

The time allocation of 135 hours within a school's junior cycle programme is unique to PE and further clarity is necessary in terms of curricular provision to support a more cohesive approach to planning for PE in the junior cycle programme.

The NCCA has been requested by the Department of Education to develop a specification for a minimum 135-hour course that is aligned to the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*, is based on the current short course and draws from the *Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus (2003)*. The review of the early enactment has highlighted areas for consideration, such as but not limited to, exploring the potential of an overarching strand, how reflection is approached within the specification and exploring the cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning outcomes.

It will be important to ensure that this development supports teachers' expertise in developing broad and balanced physical education programmes tailored to individual needs and particular contexts. A significant level of autonomy and flexibility can still be retained while offering a curriculum that celebrates good practice and provides the general and transverse knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a solid foundation in physical education.

7. Specifications in junior cycle

While some may have distinct characteristics, arising from the area of learning involved, all junior cycle specifications, for subjects and short courses, will have a number of features in common. They will

- be outcomes based
- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression
- set out clear expectations for learning
- provide examples of those expectations
- include a focus on all eight key skills
- strive for clarity in language and for consistency in terminology
- set out an approach to assessment and reporting.

To improve the connection with learning and teaching in primary school, these features are shared with the Primary School Curriculum. The specification will include:

1	Introduction to junior cycle	This will be common to all specifications and will summarise the main features of the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> .
2	Rationale	This will describe the nature and purpose of the subject as well as the general demands and capacities that it will place on, and require of, students. The text will, as appropriate, aim to draw attention to challenges and any access issues associated with study of the subject for students with specific needs or disabilities.
3	Aim	A concise aim for the subject will be presented.
4	Links with: Statements of learning Key skills	How the subject is linked to central features of learning, teaching and assessment at junior cycle will be highlighted and explained.

5	Overview Strands Learning outcomes	An overview of the subject will illustrate how it is organised and will set out the learning involved in strands and learning outcomes.
6	Links to Wellbeing Guidelines and the wellbeing indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active ▪ Responsible ▪ Connected ▪ Resilient ▪ Respected ▪ Aware
7	Expectations for students	These will be linked with groups of learning outcomes and will relate to examples of student work. The examples will be annotated, explaining whether the work is in line with, ahead of, or behind expectations for students.
8	Assessment and reporting	<p>This section refers to both formative and summative assessment. It outlines the assessment component/s through which students will present evidence of learning on an ongoing basis, and for the purposes of recording achievement for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).</p> <p>This description of assessment is supplemented by separate assessment guidelines for use in second and third years.</p>

8. Brief for the review and redevelopment of junior cycle physical education

The review of junior cycle physical education will involve the development of a revised Junior Cycle Physical Education Specification, designed for a minimum of 135 hours of class contact time and will be at a common level. The template used will be in line with the template for junior cycle specifications as set out above.

The principles for junior cycle education as they appear in the Framework for Junior Cycle will inform key decisions made in the development of the specification for physical education. In its work, the development group will be conscious of the extent to which the specification relates to various statements of learning in the Framework for Junior Cycle; the wellbeing indicators; and how it might assist a school in planning and evaluating their junior cycle programme.

The key skills of junior cycle will be embedded in the learning outcomes of the specification, which will also be designed to ensure appropriate progression and continuity from primary education and consistency with the most recent curriculum developments in senior cycle.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will address the following:

- how to expand the curricular provision, as set out in the physical education short course, to accommodate a minimum of an additional 35 hours
- the findings of the early enactment review set out in Section 5 of the paper
- how to ensure physical education is aligned with the updated Wellbeing Guidelines
- how to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in the design of the specification to enable teachers to plan for a comprehensive range of activities for students
- how to encourage student agency and an associated capacity for lifelong learning, enjoyment, and engagement in physical activity
- how to embrace technology in the learning, teaching and assessment associated with the specification, in such a way that students are digital consumers and creators
- the identification of supports necessary for successful enactment.

The work of the junior cycle physical education subject development group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of its work and discussions, refinements of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

The specification will be completed for Council in Q2, 2021.

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Appendix A

Questions for teachers – one-to-one telephone interviews

- Q 1 a) **Why** did your school choose to move toward offering the PE short course?
- b) What does learning in first year PE look like?
- c) Does the flexibility in first year offer both the opportunity to build on prior learning experiences and ease of transition into the SC in 2nd and 3rd year?
- Q 2 Does **the SC specification in PE** capture and facilitate learning in what's really important for JC physical education? In other words, through engaging in this course, do the students come to understand, value learning that are relevant and important? Does it achieve the aim? Explain please.
- Are there **any omissions that need to be given more emphasis to achieve the valued learning**?
- Q 3 a) How about **planning using the learning outcomes**? Is that working? Why/why not? What opportunities and challenges have you and your subject department experienced in using learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting?
- b) Are there any **particular LOs that are unclear or problematic**? Are there any particular LOs that have really worked well in terms of teaching, learning, assessment and reporting? Explain please.
- Q 4 To what extent does student learning in the PE Short Course help students to develop the **key skills** outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle? (this may already be answered via Q 3)
- Q 5 What feedback would you like to give us on your experience of doing **the CBAs**?
- a) From the students' perspective, what was their experience like?
- b) how can the experience of the CBAs be improved?
- c) Features of Quality question?
- Q 6 What feedback do you have on the experience of participating in **Learning and Assessment Review meeting for PE**.
- Q 7 Has the new Junior Cycle changed **the way you communicate and report** on learning and achievement in PE to students and parents?

Q 8 Coming to the question of inclusion do you find this course is accessible and relevant to students of all backgrounds and abilities/disabilities? What about students with special needs?

Q 9 Overall, what have been the **main successes and challenges** so far in teaching this course?

Q 10 Any other observations or suggestions?

Appendix B

Questions for education stakeholders– one-to-one telephone interviews

NAME: Organisation:

1. Have you observed an appetite among schools to move towards offering the PE short course? Why/why not?

2. What's your observations about PE teachers' experience of **planning using the learning outcomes**? Is that working? Why/why not? What opportunities and challenges have individual teachers or PE departments experienced in using learning outcomes to plan for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting?

3. Are there **any particular learning outcomes that are unclear or problematic**?

4. **Are there any omissions or topics that should be given more emphasis?** In other words, if we were writing the specification now is there learning we would want to include or give greater emphasis to?

5. What feedback have teachers given you in relation to students **undertaking the CBAs**?

6 What feedback (if any) do you have on their experience of participating in a **Learning and Assessment Review meeting for PE** (these may not have taken place before Covid-19).

7. From your interactions with teachers, do you think the new short course has changed **the way teachers assess and report** on learning and achievement in PE to students and parents?

8. In relation to **inclusion**, do you find this course is accessible and relevant to students of all backgrounds and abilities/disabilities? What about students with special needs?

9. Do you get a sense that the PE short course **specification is achieving its aim**?

'The short course in physical education aims to develop students as knowledgeable, skilful, and creative participants who are confident and competent to perform in a range of activities safely. The course aims to build students' appreciation of the importance of health-enhancing and inclusive physical activity and a commitment to it now, and in the future.'

10. Any other comments or observations regarding **the main successes and challenges** so far in teaching this PE short course?

Appendix C



Short Course
Physical Education

Specification for Junior Cycle

PE student survey

The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on the curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools.

We are currently reviewing the PE Short Course and an important part of this review is feedback from students. We would really appreciate if you could take five minutes to fill in this survey and let us know your thoughts and experiences of studying the PE short course. Your feedback will be used in our review to inform if and how this short course might be improved.

This survey has four sections. These are related to

- the aims of the PE short course
- the strands of the PE short course
- the Classroom-Based Assessment for PE
- your overall experience of the PE short course

All questions in this survey are optional. You do not have to share any personal information with us.

The information you give us will be removed from the survey once the report on the consultation has been finalised and published. This is estimated to be by the end of December 2020. Should you require a copy of the information you have supplied to us, you will be given the opportunity to download a copy of your answers at the end of the survey after you have clicked on 'Finish'.

Should you have any questions in relation to the collection or use of data in this survey, please contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer through info@ncca.ie (<mailto:info@ncca.ie>).

Thanks so much for your feedback.

* Required

1

What year are you in? *

Second Year

Third Year

Section 1 - the aims of the PE short course

2

Question 1

The short course in physical education aims to develop students as knowledgeable, skilful and creative participants who are confident and competent to perform in a range of activities safely. The course aims to build students' appreciation of the importance of health-enhancing and inclusive physical activity and a commitment to it now, and in the future.

Having studied this short course, to what extent do you feel this aim has been achieved? Please consider the following statements:

In Physical Education class

	Not at all	Somewhat	A lot
I feel more confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more skilful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand what I am learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more creative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand the importance of health enhancing physical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand what inclusive physical activity is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more committed to being physically active in the future?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3

Please use this comment box to explain your answer

Section 2 - the strands of the PE short course

4

The short course consists of 4 strands:

Strand 1: Physical activity for health and wellbeing.

Strand 2: Games.

Strand 3: Individual and team challenges.

Strand 4: Dance and gymnastics.

	Very uninterested	Uninterested	Neither interested or uninterested	Interested	Very interested
Strand 1: Physical activity for health and wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strand 2: Games. (court, invasion, striking & fielding games)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strand 3: Individual and team challenges. (orienteering, team challenges, aquatics or athletics)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strand 4: Dance and gymnastics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5

Use this comment box to tell us what learning experiences on the course you found most interesting

6

Are there any other learning experiences you would have liked to have had in the PE short course?

- Yes
- No

7

Please suggest the learning experiences below

Section 3 - Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA)

8

Did you complete a PE CBA?

Yes

No

9

If yes, please rate your experience of completing the CBA

Very worthwhile

Worthwhile

Unsure

The following questions are aimed at finding out about your experience of doing the CBA. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Doing the CBA gave me the chance to....

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
... be more interested in learning in PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... develop a deeper understanding of the areas of learning in PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... be recognised for my learning in PE - reports etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...develop skills of communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...decide how I wanted to show my learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...work with others to achieve a goal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... reflect on my learning and what it means for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... show creativity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... show what I have learned in PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... be more motivated in PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11

What did you enjoy most about your CBA experience?

12

What did you enjoy least about your CBA experience?

Section 4 - your overall experience

13

Finally - please sum up your overall experience of the PE short course and let us know how you think it could be improved.

Thank you!



Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

Please click 'submit' below