

Media Statement for the second interim research report on the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle

25 April 2023

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) welcomes the publication of *Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study – Interim report no. 2*. This is the second in a series of research reports on the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle and, as such, provides further insights into schools' experiences of working with the Framework since its introduction in 2015.

The research for this second report draws from in-depth case studies of a representative sample of 12 schools. As well as a continuing focus on the perspectives of teachers, this second report includes the views of students and parents for the first time, with input from 1,830 students in Junior Cycle. This data is complemented by the data set from the first phase of the teacher surveys from across 100 schools.

The insights published today include:

- The rationale for change as set out in the Framework is supported by teachers, students and parents.
- This broad level of support for change extends to new pedagogy and assessment practices. Teachers reported that they now implement more student-centred and student-led pedagogical approaches and a wider range of assessments methods.
- Teachers reported that student learning was positively impacted by the changes with students having greater voice, responsibility, and ownership of their learning, and more collaborative and engaging classrooms.
- A significant number of students believed that their learning needs and interests were met during the Junior Cycle, particularly during its early years.
- Teacher professional collaboration and dialogue has increased significantly, and this was evident across all data sources.
- Parents were supportive of the introduction of the Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) and cited many benefits for their children.
- The introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes* was welcomed, with teachers and schools noting how the programmes support a more inclusive school.

The research also points to areas requiring further consideration in realising the Framework's vision, including:

- The importance afforded to CBAs in the context of the overall assessment of Junior Cycle. Teachers, students, and parents believed CBAs supported student engagement, enjoyment, motivation, and skills development but perceived that the efforts put into the CBAs were not fully valued.
- The wider assessment culture being the lens through which Junior Cycle changes are perceived, and the final examinations remain a central concern for teachers, students and parents.

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the level of engagement and progress with the changes at school level.
- The need for greater parental understanding of the vision of the Framework and the curriculum changes, particularly in relation to assessment.

The four-year longitudinal research, initiated in late 2020 and based on a nationally representative sample, is an exciting study capturing the views and experiences of teachers, principals, students, parents and wider educational stakeholders on the Framework for Junior Cycle. The study is being carried out by an experienced research team in the University of Limerick on behalf of the NCCA, and draws on significant expertise, nationally and internationally, in longitudinal research.

Welcoming the report, Minister Norma Foley said: *'From this second report, we can clearly see the positive changes that are emerging from the reform of Junior Cycle, particularly the shift towards teaching and learning that is more student-centred and student-led, and greater professional collaboration. The voices of students, teachers and parents are all captured here to provide an understanding of the lived experience to date within schools of this major reform. Such research plays a hugely valuable role in supporting the ongoing implementation of this major reform, by evaluating the progress and the impacts as well as capturing the challenging and the learnings, and I look forward to the future phases of this important study.'*

Speaking about the significance of the study for NCCA's work, Arlene Forster, NCCA Chief Executive, noted: *'Through rich case studies, this second report brings us inside schools and classrooms as teachers share examples of their commitment to curriculum and assessment change and reflect on the progress they're making towards realising the vision of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Another key strength of the report is that we hear directly from students and their parents with their reflections reminding us of the importance of the changes introduced by the Framework and that worthwhile change takes time. This robust and rigorous longitudinal study is a major commitment by the Council to research evidence which will help the NCCA continue to support schools' work in the junior cycle of post-primary education while also feeding into the redevelopment of senior cycle. In addition, the study's findings will assist the Council in revisiting the Framework and advising on updating it, if and where needed, to support high quality teaching, learning and assessment.'*

It is hoped that this second report will continue to raise awareness of the study and signal its value to all involved in shaping the experience of Junior Cycle education for the benefit of students. The research team will continue to work closely with schools and stakeholders until 2024. Ongoing work in the study involves a second teacher survey, which builds on the findings from the first phase of the teacher survey, a second round of case-study school visits and interviews with up to 100 school principals.

The next report will build on and expand the themes and findings emerging from this report and the first Introductory Report. It is expected to be published in the second quarter of 2024.

The NCCA expresses sincere thanks to students, parents, teachers and school leaders in the participating schools nationwide for agreeing to share their stories for the duration of the study. The NCCA also thanks and commends the work of the UL Research Team and looks forward to future reports from the study.

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Note to editors:

The Report and more information about the research is available online at: [Junior Cycle National Project | University of Limerick \(ul.ie\)](#)

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Background Information

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body of the Department of Education. The 26 members of the Council are appointed by the Minister for a four-year term. The members represent the partners in education, industry and trade union interests, students, parents' organisations and other educational interests. The Council also includes one nominee each of the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Minister for Education appoints the Chairperson. The Council is supported in its work by three boards and a number of development groups. Members of these represent similar stakeholders to Council. The day-to-day work of the Council is led by the Chief Executive Officer supported by a full-time executive staff.

*** L1 and L2 Learning Programmes**

Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes: Guidelines for Teachers were introduced as part of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) target the very specific group of students with general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LP) target the very specific group of students with general learning disabilities in the range of lower functioning moderate to severe and profound categories.

Publications and Reports

Framework for Junior Cycle 2015

First Introductory Report (Initial perspectives on implementation, outcomes and impact)
Exploring the introduction for the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study (UL, 2022)