

info@ncca

supporting teaching and learning

Ready for ACTION?

Assessment, Curriculum
and Teaching Innovation
On the Net

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Junior Cycle **and much more...**

NCCA 

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

welcome...

to the summer issue of info@ncca.

There's a phrase that's thrown around in the lifestyle and arts media that always intrigues me. A handbag, a jacket, a painting, even a recipe – can all be described by those who eulogise them as being 'out there'. Whatever that might mean!

I would like to think that this issue of info@ncca can fall into the 'out there' category... because it's about how the NCCA is 'out there' in different ways. You can read about how we are 'out there' online in the new ACTION website, or how we have been 'out there' working with primary schools on reporting to parents. We have been 'out there' in education centres – and will be coming to one near you this year! We have been 'out there' over the past few months with our junior cycle consultations, and will be 'out there' this autumn on senior cycle. Mathematics has taken us 'out there' in a new way, and you can read how we will be even more 'out there' with *Project Maths* in the autumn.

In the course of the last few months of getting 'out there' we have had lots of chances to meet you at conferences and events. Thanks for all the positive feedback on info@ncca. It's greatly appreciated, and your comments and suggestions regarding future issues are important. Keep them coming.

A quick visit to our website will bring you up to date on how we are 'out there' with a number of primary and post-primary schools across the country. These schools have worked with us on a wide range of projects from assessment for learning in primary classrooms, to the guidance framework, to Key Skills in senior cycle. As the school year draws to its conclusion, I want to thank all of those teachers, principals, students and parents who have worked with us this year. It's vital that they do. They make sure that while we are 'out there', we are always, as they also say in the lifestyle columns, 'real'. That's the essence of curriculum and assessment change. That always looking to the possible takes account of the realities of classrooms and schools. 'Out there', but 'real'.

As the longest third term you will probably ever have draws to a close, enjoy the well-earned summer break.



Anne Looney
Chief Executive

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment



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Supporting teaching and learning...

info@ncca is published three times over the school year, in September, January and April.

Copies are distributed to teachers in every primary and post-primary school in the country. Electronic versions of the newsletter, in both Irish and English, are available to download from our website, at www.ncca.ie. If your school requires extra copies of **info@ncca**, please send your request by email or post.

We welcome articles from teachers as well as comments and queries about content.

Contact details:

Email: newsletter@ncca.ie

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Website: www.ncca.ie



Post: **Editor, info@ncca,
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24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.**



Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2

A big thank you to the many teachers who took part in the second phase of the Primary Curriculum Review (PCR). Almost 1,400 teachers from 200 schools completed our questionnaires, and teachers in eight schools took part in the school case study. We greatly appreciate your input. The final report of the PCR, Phase 2 will be posted on the NCCA website during the summer. Watch out for more details on the report's findings and recommendations in the next edition of **info@ncca**.

Something to say about senior cycle?

You have? Then, watch out for the opportunity to air your views in the autumn. Yes, soon you will have an opportunity to tell us what you think about the new senior cycle developments that are underway. We are preparing a consultation pack that will outline some new subjects, some changes to existing subjects and proposed changes to assessment, among other exciting developments. Packs will be distributed to all schools in October and we are really looking forward to hearing your views. In the meantime, check out **www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle** to find out more.



Science in primary schools

The research project on science in primary schools is nearing completion. Carried out by Dr. Janet Varley and her team at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, this research will add to our understanding of children's experience of the science curriculum. The findings, together with those of the Primary Curriculum Review, will help to identify recommendations for action.

Watch out for the final report on the NCCA website in June.

Framework for Early Learning

Want to know about what's happening with the *Framework for Early Learning*? Well, you'll be glad to know that the development of the framework is nearing completion and we hope to publish it in early 2009. In the meantime, check out the early childhood education page on the NCCA website for regular updates and further information. You'll also find two new background papers, completing the suite of four papers which set out the theory, research and practice 'behind' the framework. The papers focus on

- Children's early learning and development
- Education and care
- Learning through play
- Supporting learning through assessment.

Sharing results with parents

Remember the DVD on children's learning in the primary school, and the accompanying e-booklet on the curriculum? Or the tipsheet, *Helping your young child to get ready to read and write*? Well, we have now developed two new leaflets with parents in mind, this time on standardised testing. The leaflets help to explain what test results mean, one using STen scores while the other focuses on standard scores. They could be quite a useful resource in the coming weeks if you are involved in using standardised tests with your class(es). You can check them out following the links at **www.ncca.ie/primary/assessment**.

Digipack guidelines

The innovative format of the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* has caused quite a stir. The 'digipack' consists of an overview booklet and a CD-ROM



featuring all 44 guidelines. And now we have put together a short movie or 'Quick Tour' to further assist you in navigating and accessing these guidelines. The tour highlights some of the features of the CD-ROM, for example, how to search the guidelines for key words or key phrases or how to copy and paste the text you want. Teachers can select material that is appropriate to each student's personal strengths and learning needs. To access the Quick Tour, go to **www.ncca.ie/postprimary/inclusion** and follow the 'Special Education Needs' link.

Learning in detention/care settings

The NCCA has developed a draft curriculum framework for use in children detention schools, high support units and special care units. We would like to hear from you about the proposals if you are a teacher or stakeholder in the units and schools attached to these settings. The draft curriculum framework is available to download from the NCCA website as is a consultation questionnaire, which can also be completed online. We look forward to hearing your views.

For further information on any of the projects mentioned on this page, please visit our website at **www.ncca.ie**.

To comment on **info@ncca** or suggest topics for inclusion, email: **newsletter@ncca.ie**

Ringling the changes

Syllabus development in junior cycle

The new primary school curriculum has been implemented and the senior cycle is currently undergoing a major overhaul - but what is happening to the junior cycle curriculum?

Well, lots actually! Changes to subject syllabuses, long discussed, are coming closer.

Rebalancing and what it means

The first piece of news is that five syllabuses have gone through a process of 'rebalancing' and are now ready for consultation. These are: **Art, Craft, Design, English, Music, History** and **Home Economics**. Each draft syllabus can now be downloaded from the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/juniorycycle.

Basically, rebalancing of syllabuses involved

- updating the syllabus and removing unnecessary overlap within the syllabus with material taught at primary level, or taught in other junior cycle subjects

- lining the syllabus up with any changes at Leaving Certificate
- rewriting the syllabus to a common template
- writing learning outcomes for each part of the syllabus
- showing how the syllabus links with and develops from the Primary School Curriculum
- making minor changes to assessment.

Is that not revision of these subjects?

While this may seem a lot of change, the work is really about making space and creating time. You will still recognise most, if not all, of the elements you already teach from the current syllabus.



Who did this work?

The rebalancing has been carried out by representative NCCA course committees, each of which has worked to develop a modern, streamlined syllabus that is clear about what is to be taught and what is to be learned. Care has also been taken to ensure that the integrity of each subject is maintained.

Why have the syllabuses been rebalanced?

Schools and teachers have long been of the view that the junior cycle curriculum is overcrowded. However, overload is in the eye of the beholder!

The decision taken by schools as to how many subjects they suggest their students take for their Junior Certificate sometimes is a factor in this 'overload'.

However, from a teacher's perspective, there appears to be less and less time to teach the subject. Students are changing; they have a wider ability range, some are learning English as an additional language and their learning styles are more diverse so it is no wonder that the courses seem to have become longer rather than shorter! This factor, along with overlap within and between the subjects, sometimes results in a lack of time to cover the course with the quality of learning engagement with students that teachers would like.

The Junior Cycle Syllabus Template

Introduction

This provides information on the nature of the subject and what it contributes to junior cycle education.

Aims

These are broad statements that describe how a study of the subject will influence or change the learner.

Objectives

These focus specifically on the type of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that the subject seeks to develop.

Syllabus overview

This is a table presenting the various sections of the syllabus and the options available. It is a useful guide to planning.

Differentiation

This provides information on how the needs of all learners can be met through the use of different approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.

Assessment

This sets out the broad principles of educational assessment and describes how the subject will be assessed for certification purposes.

Topics and learning outcomes

This, the main part of the syllabus, is broken down into sections and topics. The information is laid out in a clear tabular format. Importantly, **learning outcomes** are included for each topic.

Statement of links

These show how the subject builds on the student's primary school experience and how the subject links with the curriculum at senior cycle.



How are the rebalanced syllabuses different?

The first thing you will notice about the rebalanced syllabuses is that they are presented in a different format. Each has been set out to a common template. The elements of the template are set out on page 6.

How can learning outcomes help teaching and learning?

The use of learning outcomes is the most significant difference between the rebalanced and current syllabuses. Learning outcomes provide clear statements on precisely what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of studying the subject. Because of this, learning outcomes can give you, the teacher, a good start on planning for teaching and learning. They also provide a framework for integrating content and skills and help in deciding what assessment approaches are best to use.

Where can I find the rebalanced syllabuses?

The NCCA has set up a dedicated consultation space on its website for the five subjects. You can find it at www.ncca.ie/juniorycycle.

When you select your subject on the site you will find

- a copy of the rebalanced syllabus
- a description of the changes that have been made to the syllabus
- an on-line questionnaire.

How can I express my views?

We would encourage you to download the syllabus and the notes from our website and complete the **online questionnaire**. You can do this on your own or you might prefer to discuss the syllabus with colleagues in your subject department and respond as a group. You may also have the opportunity to express your views through your subject association.

Remember - the consultation will continue until the end of May.

What will happen to your feedback?

We will compile the feedback on all of the syllabuses. The course committees for each subject will then meet to make whatever amendments are necessary. Once finalised, each syllabus will be considered by the Junior Cycle Review Committee and presented to the Council of the NCCA for its approval.

Remember, you have the opportunity to communicate your views on the rebalanced syllabuses (Art, Craft, Design; English, Music, History; and Home Economics) through the online consultation, now, on www.ncca.ie/juniorycycle.

Keep an eye out for further consultations on revised subjects on the NCCA web site in the near future!



While this may seem a lot of change, the work is really about making space and creating time.



What's happening in the other junior cycle subjects?

Here is an overview of developments that are taking place in other areas of the junior cycle curriculum.

Business Studies:

The syllabus is being revised and lined up with the new Leaving Certificate Business course.

Irish:

Adjustments are being made to the syllabus to take into account changes arising from an increased emphasis on oral competence in the Junior Certificate examination.

Technology subjects:

These are being revised to a common framework and work on the first of these subjects, Technical Graphics, is underway. The subject will be brought into line with the new syllabus at senior cycle.

Classical subjects:

A new subject, Classics, is being developed. It will incorporate the three existing subjects: Latin, Ancient Greek, and Classical Studies.

Modern languages

(French, German, Spanish, and Italian):

These subjects were developed to a common framework with learning outcomes. They will be among the next group of subjects to undergo rebalancing.

Geography:

Geography is in the final stage of rebalancing and the syllabus will be available for consultation later in the year.

Mathematics:

Exciting developments are taking place with Mathematics through *Project Maths*. You can read about *Project Maths* elsewhere in this issue of **info@ncca**.

Civic, Social and Political Education:

CSPE has now been in the system for more than ten years. Review of the syllabus will take into account the proposed introduction of a related senior cycle subject, Politics and Society.

The NCCA

In 2008, the NCCA comes of age. It's our 21st year in existence, so, like all 21 year olds, we decided it was time to get out more and see more of the education world, or at least, make sure that the education world gets to see more of us!

If you are a primary principal or deputy-principal, you may have spotted the NCCA stand at the IPPN (Irish Primary Principals' Network) conference in Killarney – yes, it was the one with the chocolate. Delegates at the conference had a chance to meet with NCCA staff, ask about different projects, check out the publications and organise extra copies for colleagues. We in turn got to hear about how NCCA guidelines were being used in schools, get suggestions for our work and chat about the Primary School Curriculum as it moves towards its tenth anniversary.

We were also at Dáil na nÓg in Croke Park in February, to hear from delegates across the country who had gathered to discuss education reform and mental health. Over the course of the year, the NCCA stand, and NCCA staff, will be appearing at conferences and events for teachers, principals and school management. Drop over. Have a look. Have a chat. Have a chocolate!

As well as working on our 'actual' appearance, we have also been planning some improvements to our 'virtual' presence in the education world. You probably already know about www.action.ncca.ie (and can read more about it elsewhere in this issue). This new NCCA website – **Assessment, Curriculum and Teaching Innovation on the Net** – is where you find what we call the Sunday night stuff – the sample lessons, the Assessment for Learning

(AfL) material, the ICT framework, the English as an Additional Language (EAL) support materials..... the kinds of things you might just be looking for on a Sunday evening as you organise the week ahead!

But we also have things for the rest of the week. The podcasts on assessment in classrooms are proving a big hit – rumour has it they have been viewed on trains and buses across the country, as well as at staff in-service days. Student teachers have also been busy downloading from the site. Learning support teachers and those working in home school community liaison have been using the streamed version of the DVD for parents of children in primary schools. We are getting lots of feedback, and suggestions for the next phase of ACTION, so watch that space too!

★ Full-Time Education Centres

Visit the 'NCCA day' at your local Education Centre. Dates available at: www.ncca.ie.

Athlone Education Centre	Tel: 090 - 642 0400	www.athedcen.com
Blackrock Education Centre	Tel: 01 - 236 5000	www.blackrockec.ie
Carrick-on-Shannon Education Centre	Tel: 071 - 962 0383	www.Carrickedcentre.ie
Clare Education Centre	Tel: 065 - 684 5500	www.clare-education-centre.ie
Cork Education Support Centre	Tel: 021 - 425 5600	www.cesc.ie
Donegal Education Centre	Tel: 074 - 97 23487	www.ecdonegal.ie
Drumcondra Education Centre	Tel: 01 - 857 6400	www.ecdrumcondra.ie
Dublin West Education Centre	Tel: 01 - 452 8000	www.dwec.ie
Galway Education Centre	Tel: 091- 74 5600	www.galwayec.ie
Kildare Education Centre	Tel: 045 - 53 0200	www.eckildare.ie
Kilkenny Education Centre	Tel: 056 - 776 0200	www.eckilkenny.ie
Laois Education Centre	Tel: 0502 - 7 2400	www.laoisedcentre.ie
Limerick Education Centre	Tel: 061 - 31 2360	www.lec.ie
Mayo Education Centre	Tel: 094 - 902 0700	www.ecmayo.ie
Monaghan Education Centre	Tel: 047 - 7 4000	www.metc.ie
Navan Education Centre	Tel: 046 - 906 7040	www.ecnavan.ie
Sligo Education Centre	Tel: 071- 913 8700	www.ecsligo.ie
Tralee Education Centre	Tel: 066 - 719 5000	www.edcentreralee.ie
Waterford Teachers' (Education) Centre	Tel: 051 - 31 1000	www.wtc.ie
West Cork Education Centre	Tel: 023 - 5 6756	www.westcorkeducationcentre.com
Wexford Education Centre	Tel: 053 - 923 9100	www.ecwexford.ie

in 2008

Coming to a space near you

But if you are neither a conference-goer, nor a lover of virtual space, is there any chance of meeting NCCA in this year of out-and-about? Absolutely. In the course of the year, the NCCA will be coming to an Education Centre near you. In the course of the NCCA Day in your local centre, NCCA staff will be there for those who want to drop in to chat about particular concerns or suggestions about primary or post-primary curriculum and assessment, or get copies of NCCA publications. Early childhood practitioners are also most welcome and we will be able to bring you up-to-date on the Framework for Early Learning. We will have a couple of afternoon sessions as part of the consultations on revised or rebalanced syllabuses – these will be of particular interest if yours is one of the subjects in the ‘changing’ list. In the evening time, we will host a seminar for primary and post-primary teachers and principals on different aspects of NCCA work. So if you have a burning issue, a particular concern, a suggestion or idea, watch for details coming to your school about your local NCCA Day.

But, maybe your education centre is not that ‘local’. Maybe a seminar or drop-in session is not for you..... could the NCCA come to your school? We could, but only if you get a few schools together! We often get requests to come for staff days or school planning days, but given that we are a small (but hard-working) organisation we can’t take up these invitations. However, if a group of schools in a town or area gets together, we can usually help out, and in this year, we are giving particular priority to this work, especially with so many consultations underway on junior and senior cycle.

We hope to meet many more of you whether virtually, or actually, in the course of 2008. If you just want to get in touch with us, to ask a question or find out about work in progress – don’t forget you can always call our office in Dublin. Since early in 2008, the office has been staying open through

lunch-time on Wednesdays following feedback from post-primary teachers in particular who suggested that it was a pity that at a time when many of them could call, the NCCA offices were closed. It turns out they were right! Lots of queries come in at that time. But you can call anytime during the hours listed. And if you find yourself in front of an online computer, don’t forget to email. You will always get a response, usually within two days. Keep in touch!

Opening Hours of NCCA Office

Monday	9.15 – 12.45 1.45 – 5.30
Tuesday	9.15 – 12.45 1.45 – 5.30
Wednesday	9.15 – 5.30
Thursday	9.15 – 12.45 1.45 – 5.30
Friday	9.15 – 12.45 1.45 – 5.15
Phone	01 661 7177
Email	info@ncca.ie

EDUCATION CENTRES



Do your students like maths? What's your own experience of maths? Are you a maths teacher looking to do things differently, but wondering how to go about it and where to get resources? These are some of the issues to be addressed in a new initiative for post-primary mathematics – *Project Maths*. Maths education at second level is about to change!

How is *Project Maths* a different approach?

You may already be familiar with the traditional approach to curriculum change whereby the subject is reviewed by a representative course committee with the NCCA before the syllabus is implemented with the aid of a support service. This project is a new approach as it involves you, the teacher, and your students from the very beginning. In this way the *real-life experiences* of teachers and students in the teaching and learning of mathematics feeds directly into the syllabus development process.

Why are we changing the syllabuses?

Performance of students

There has been increasing concern about student performance in mathematics and calls for urgent review of the syllabuses. While some changes were made to the Junior Certificate syllabuses and examinations, it was clear that a major review and overhaul was required. It was also recognised that new approaches to teaching and learning were needed if students were to gain a deeper understanding of mathematics and develop their skills in a way that better prepares them for further study as well as for their future lives.

The NCCA prepared a discussion paper and used the responses to its consultation to develop proposals for curriculum change in post-primary mathematics. Research conducted in schools by the ESRI also pointed to the need to revisit the issue of the different syllabus levels and the reasons for,

and timing of, student choice of levels. By comparison with most other subjects, lower numbers of students are taking mathematics at Higher Level (both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate), which has a knock-on effect on third level courses and careers that rely heavily on mathematics.

'A lot of the time with maths I just follow the method and do not understand why I should do so. After a while I get some understanding of the reasoning.'
(Student)

The transition from primary to post-primary

The ESRI study also indicated the need to consider the transition from primary school to second level mathematics and to try to provide greater coherence between the two. For this purpose, a bridging framework was developed between primary and post-primary schools to link learning and teaching in the primary school with that at second level (particularly, but not exclusively, the first year of junior cycle).

To achieve greater alignment between primary and post-primary mathematics, five strands have been identified which will be applied to both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Mathematics syllabuses:

1. Statistics and probability
2. Geometry and trigonometry
3. Number
4. Algebra
5. Functions.

'How much communication is there between Primary and Post-Primary teachers with regard to the knowledge/implementation of these curricula? Virtually none, I would say.' **(Maths teacher)**

How will the changes be made?

Project Maths involves a phased implementation of curriculum change in mathematics for all schools over a four year period beginning in September 2010 and will affect both junior cycle and senior cycle. This change will follow the up-coming two-year period of intense engagement with an initial group of schools.

So, what will be different?

Seeing fractions

John was given $\frac{3}{4}$ of a chocolate bar to share with his friend. He gave his friend $\frac{1}{3}$ and kept $\frac{2}{3}$ for himself. Draw a diagram to represent this and find what fraction of the bar John kept for himself.

$\frac{3}{4}$ of the bar



$\frac{2}{3}$ of the $\frac{3}{4}$

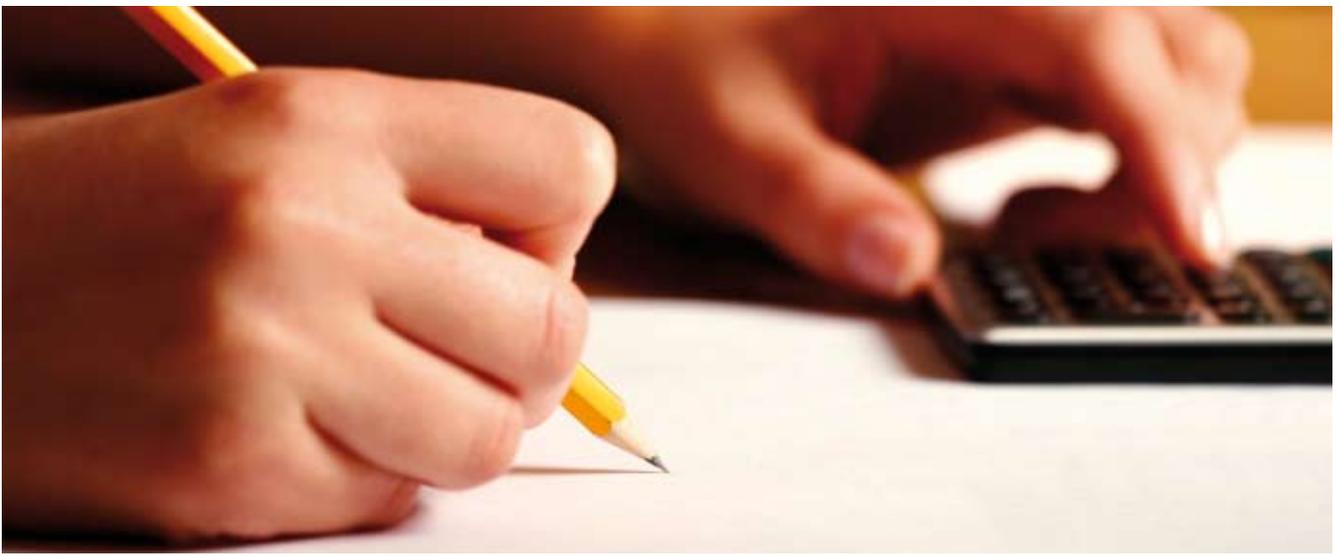


$$\frac{2}{3} \times \frac{3}{4} = \frac{6}{12} = \frac{1}{2}$$

Answer:

John got $\frac{6}{12}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of the bar.

In the revised syllabuses students will meet mathematics in more relevant contexts. They will develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills and explore patterns and relationships in mathematics, building on their



experience in primary schools and progressing gradually to more abstract concepts. They will learn to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills, develop confidence in their own ability to 'do' mathematics and lay a foundation that will enable them to follow a broader range of courses and careers, including those which involve mathematics.

'Real life maths problems would make the leaving cert maths course more interesting.'

(Text message from student)

Will all syllabus levels be revised?

The changes to the syllabuses and examinations are intended to encourage a greater number of students to take Junior Certificate Mathematics at Higher Level. A target of 60% of the cohort is planned and it is hoped that half of these students will continue to study mathematics at Higher Level in the senior cycle. This represents a significant improvement on the current take-up levels. The remaining 40% will study an adjusted Ordinary Level syllabus. This arrangement will be kept under review during the initial stage of the project. If it becomes clear that a separate lower examination level is required to cater for some students, this will still be based on the adjusted Ordinary Level syllabus.

What about the examinations?

As part of the syllabus revisions, changes to examination questions will also be implemented on a phased basis, corresponding to the strands that are being revised. Thus, for example, the first group of students will see changed

examination questions in statistics and probability, and in geometry and trigonometry at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. Because of the phasing and the engagement with an initial set of schools, students in the first group of schools will have some changed examination questions by comparison with all other schools. The questions will adopt a different approach, reflecting the changed emphasis in *Project Maths*, but the standard, range and choice of questions will be kept the same for all candidates.

How was the initial group of schools selected?

Every school was contacted in April and invited to participate in the project. Based on agreed criteria, a representative sample of schools (reflecting school type, size, gender, etc.) was selected from those who expressed interest in participating and these schools are currently being contacted to confirm their participation. Don't worry if your school has missed the chance to be involved in the initial group as we will be keeping you informed of all of the developments of the project (including lesson plans!) on www.ncca.ie.

What will these schools do?

The schools will introduce revised syllabus strands on a phased basis, beginning with their first year and fifth year students, in September next. Teachers of mathematics will be supported in implementing the changed syllabuses with each of their classes, using the teaching methods and the resource materials that will be provided, with professional support from a Maths

Support Service. The experience of these teachers and their students will enable the NCCA to learn as much as possible about the syllabus revisions, and the teaching and learning resources, in order to help shape any refinements needed before these revisions and resources are scaled up to all schools.

What about text books?

The publishers are briefed about the developments on an ongoing basis and they will gauge when to publish revised editions of textbooks. A combination of current textbooks and new resource materials for the revised syllabus strands will be used in the initial introduction of the changes. These resources will be provided to the schools involved in the initial phase of the project but will also be readily accessible to all schools on www.ncca.ie.

What about schools which are not involved at the start?

While a small group of schools will be involved initially, all schools will implement the phased changes in due course. Information on *Project Maths*, including schedules, revised syllabus strands and support materials, will be available on the NCCA website and updates will be included in NCCA communications to schools.

All teachers of mathematics will receive professional support, including classroom resource materials, prior to and during implementation of the syllabus changes. So remember to keep in touch with our website, www.ncca.ie, to keep track of all of these exciting developments in *Project Maths*.

The School

The NCCA recently completed an initiative with primary schools on reporting to parents. To begin this work we developed eleven report card templates. Schools - 33 in all - tried out some of them when they reported to parents during the year and at the end of the school year.

Twenty-nine of these schools worked directly with the NCCA (15 of these in partnership with INTO) and four schools chose to participate by using the end-of-year templates they had downloaded from the NCCA website. The original draft templates are still available to view and download (www.ncca.ie). You will notice that they differ from one another depending on whether they are intended for infants or first to sixth classes, or for mid-year or end-of-year reporting.

The principals and teachers from the participating schools, and many of the parents who received the reports for their children, sent us feedback on their experiences with the templates and offered valuable insights into what they considered to be important when schools report to parents on the progress of their children.

So, what did teachers and parents tell us was important in reporting? And did they agree?

In fact, they *did* agree, on **four key areas**:

1. Reporting on the child's progress in meeting the targets of the curriculum.
2. Reporting on the child's disposition as a learner.
3. Reporting on the child's social and personal development.
4. Involving the child in the reporting process and helping parents to support their child's learning.

But agreeing on the four areas of importance is just a first step. Within each of these areas there are further issues to be considered and questions to answer, questions that have more to do with **how best** to report on progress and achievement.

Key Area 1:

How best to report on the curriculum

So, how much detail should be provided in reports? Essentially, the templates offered a number of possibilities ranging from one that listed broad curriculum headings to one that was broken down into discrete subjects and strands.

If you think of reporting on a curriculum area (like languages) then a template intended for use with infant classes might offer you a general *Learning and Using Languages* heading and a space to write a short comment, or separate spaces for *Oral Work*, *Emergent Reading* or *Early Writing* with tick boxes beside each heading to indicate the level of progress and achievement.

So, in this one example, you have **three important questions**

- Should schools report on the curriculum areas in an integrated way or strand by strand?
- Should reporting be through teacher comments (a narrative approach) or using ticks on a scale or continuum?
- When school reports use scales (showing progress from, say, 1 to 5) or when they use a continuum (showing progress by placing a tick somewhere on a line between 😊 and 😊) or even when they describe achievement or progress by reference to *Excellent*, *Good*, *Fair* and so on, what **exactly** do they mean?

The answers to these questions came out as a fairly unequivocal...*well, it depends!!*

Teachers and parents agreed that when it comes to reporting on the curriculum, the more detail about progress and achievement the better. That means that they were happier when the subjects were listed one by one and when the areas of *English*, *Gaeilge* and *Mathematics* were set out strand by strand. But, here as in other

areas, strong feelings were expressed that in reporting for infant classes and especially for children with special educational needs, more generalised formats and approaches were more suitable and useful. Really, the general agreement was that the reporting format should reflect the nature of the teaching and learning as closely as possible.

Parents indicated that they liked when teachers wrote down their judgements on the pupil's progress in comment form – they appreciated being able to recognise their child in the words of the teacher. On the other hand, teachers, while recognising the importance of the narrative comments, saw great value in the accuracy and *honesty* of the scales; they wanted to be clear, objective and fair.

But, an important part of that fairness, in their eyes, was the supportive stance they wished to bring to reporting, so they often saw themselves juggling the demands of being accurate in reporting on the child's learning while at the same time wishing not to undermine the effort and enthusiasm the child was bringing to learning. The ideal then for most teachers was an opportunity to record achievement by means of a point of a scale (say from 1 to 5) while retaining the option to add a qualifying or explanatory comment where the need arose.

Key Area 2:

How best to report on the child's disposition as a learner

What did teachers and parents tell us was important here? This area was something of an innovation in the NCCA templates and was welcomed by teachers and parents as a much-needed opportunity to give an overview of the child's learning. It was especially valued as a place in which the teacher could comment positively on the child whose progress might be limited despite having made huge efforts during the year.

Report

It does exactly what it says on the template...

YOUR CHILD AS A LEARNER		
Is interested in learning: perseveres and participate	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Thinks creatively and solves problems	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Completes schoolwork	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Works on his/her own	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Works with others	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Cares for work and possessions	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY

YOUR CHILD'S SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT		
Mixes with others	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Relates to adults	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Behaves in classroom and in playground	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
Manages feelings	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY
(other)	WITH SUPPORT ←	→ INDEPENDENTLY

The teacher places a tick or 'x' on the point on the continuum (see example) where, in his or her opinion, the child best sits. Some teachers recommended that, in addition, areas such as *Homework* and *Punctuality* might be included as headings in this section of the report.

Parent feedback on this area of the report was clearly supportive and it was felt by some to provide a deeper insight into the child than simple statements of academic achievement.

Key area 3:

How best to report on the child's social and personal development

When parents come to parent-teacher meetings, questions that are never far from their minds are: *'Is my child happy in school?'* *'Does he/she get on well with the other children?'* Indeed, there is a long tradition of reporting on these aspects of children's development in Irish primary schools and the templates (see example) sought to reflect that too.

Key area 4:

Supporting parental and child involvement

The advice offered from teacher to parent about the ways in which

parents in the home could support the learning process emerged as one of the undoubted highlights of the report card templates.

Some teachers expressed an initial nervousness about this area of reporting, feeling that parents might see their well-intentioned advice as intrusive or pushy. However, parent feedback showed how highly parents regarded the advice from the school about the practical things they could do to support their children's learning.

All the templates provided an open space in which the child could make a contribution to the school report. Some schools used this space to include the child's drawing of him or herself learning, or of some image from school, or a photograph of the child. Others were reluctant to use it for classes other than infants and all schools agreed that including the child's contribution was a challenging aspect of reporting.

What other challenges were there?

Of the challenges, logistical and otherwise, that did arise there are two that it might be helpful to think about. The first of these is the challenge of how schools can use reporting to help

meet the diverse language needs of an increasingly multi-cultural population of primary school parents. The second challenge arises from the recognition that a report card is a comparatively small piece of paper or card, and that it is very difficult to convey in it all the complexity of learning and development that happens during a child's school life. So, the challenge is in seeing where and how the report card fits in with all of the other things schools do to keep up a regular flow of communication with home. In describing their reporting practice, virtually all of the schools stressed the value they placed on informal, open-ended contact with parents, which happened on a day-to-day basis and was not confined to occasions of formal reporting.

So what is happening in this area now? You will know about the NCCA Guidelines on *Assessment in the Primary Curriculum* which were sent to all schools last February. Here you will find interesting and practical material on assessment and reporting. You might also have heard about the research on reporting practice in Irish schools carried out for the NCCA by a team from UCC led by Professor Kathy Hall. You can read the final report on our website, at www.ncca.ie

Transition Units

Getting it together

“ I think transition units are a great innovation. So many schools are doing similar modules. I am currently developing a TY programme in a new school and feel that I am reinventing the wheel and I would really appreciate a database of resources. ”
(TY Coordinator)

Tired of reinventing the wheel?

If you've ever sat down on your own, or with your colleagues, to devise a transition year module, you too may have wondered if you are reinventing the wheel. It's not always easy to come up with fresh ideas for modules that will capture the imagination of students and that are interesting to teach and in keeping with the spirit of transition year.

You would imagine, with over 500 schools offering the programme, that there must be some other teachers out there who have come up with innovative ideas that you could adapt and use with your students. And you'd be right. That's one of the reasons why the NCCA has been developing **transition units** - to make the sharing of ideas possible.

What are transition units?

Transition units (TUs) are one of the new senior cycle curriculum components. They are 45 hour units, intended to be offered by schools to transition year students. The idea is that, in the future, schools will include a variety of TUs as part of their transition year programme. Just to reassure you, however, TUs aren't intended to be 'exam' courses; they won't be externally assessed, and won't count for 'points'. The aim of assessment in a transition unit is to provide the type of feedback to students that supports their learning and encourages the development of their self-assessment.

Here's one I (we) made earlier!

The NCCA has already been working with teachers in the Senior Cycle School Network to develop sample transition units and these are now

posted on the senior cycle website. Yes, that's right folks, they are sitting there ready to be used or adapted to suit your own needs and those of your students.

Here's a list of sample TUs currently available at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle.

Sample transition units:

- Soap Operas and Popular Culture
- Food Matters
- Legal Studies
- Sports Coaching
- Reading the Silver Screen
- Introduction to Genetics & Biotechnology
- Discovering Irish Art
- Media and Communications
- Setting up a Green School
- Ireland - a Level Playing Field?

We will be adding more TUs over the next few months, eventually building a comprehensive bank of resources for schools.

“ This is extremely useful and important work. As a TY coordinator I believe such units could enhance the experience for teachers and students alike. ”

Create your own TU

Many of you are already teaching creative TY modules so why don't you and your subject departments develop them into TUs for September

2008? To help you get started we have made the TU template available to download from our website, along with a helpful handbook on how to write up a transition unit.

Why use the template?

Teachers from the Senior Cycle School Network who have been writing up their own TUs have discovered many advantages to engaging in this work. It

- provides an opportunity for critical reflection on their current TY programme
- provides a tool that supports teachers in capturing on paper what they are already doing
- helps teachers develop the language and skills of curriculum development
- promotes better planning and communication within the transition year team.

How would you go about writing up a Transition Unit?

If you are teaching a TY module that would be worth sharing with others then why not have a go at writing it up as a transition unit? You'll find everything you need on the NCCA website.

Your first step is to download the template for transition units and the handbook. The guide will take you through the process step by step. There are 13 sections on the template that you need to write up. Some are very simple, but some require a bit more thinking, especially if you don't find yourself using the language of curriculum development on a day-to-day basis!

On the next page you will see a list of the different sections of the template. We've highlighted a few parts which are then explained further.

1. Title of transition unit
2. Area of study
3. Overview
4. Links
5. Summary outline of unit
6. Breakdown of unit
7. Aims
8. Learning outcomes
9. Key skills
10. Methodologies
11. Assessment approaches
12. Evaluation
13. Resources

Summary outline of the unit

This is a short step-by-step description of what students will actually be doing in the unit. This allows you to describe exactly what is involved in teaching your TU. You are not expected to give class lesson plans, but instead give a broad outline of the process. This outline should be detailed enough to give another teacher who has not taught this unit a good idea of how to go about doing something similar.

Breakdown of the unit

This gives an idea of how the TU is broken down between class contact time, out of school visits, exhibitions, independent research, and so on. This will, of course, vary according to the area of study. For example, a geography TU might involve the following:

Class contact time:

30 hours,
(3 class periods for 15 weeks)

Data gathering:

5 hours

Independent research:

5 hours

Preparing and presenting a report:

5 hours

Total: 45 hours

Aims

There should be only three or four aims which are general statements that say what the TU hopes to achieve. These aims (unlike the learning outcomes) can be broad. For example, the aims of a TU on media and communications could be to



- foster students' awareness of the principles of communications
- promote students' visual literacy
- provide cultural enrichment
- develop ICT skills.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are brief and specific statements that tell us what the students will be *able to do* at the end of studying a TU. All learning outcomes begin with a verb. Useful verbs include: *recall, identify, define, describe, summarise, interpret, explain, discuss, demonstrate, investigate, analyse, write, plan, design, formulate, evaluate, present, measure, operate, perform, construct, listen with respect, co-operate as part of a team.*

Learning outcomes may be

- content based
(e.g. analyse an historical event)
- product based
(e.g. prepare a report)
- or**
- process based (e.g. conduct an experiment, conduct a role-play, listen with respect to different view points).

Key skills

This section describes the types of skills that students will encounter through participating in the TU. Five key skills have been identified as important in helping senior cycle students to become effective learners. These are *information*

processing, critical and creative thinking, communicating, working with others, and being personally effective. This section asks you to think about how the key skills might be embedded in the teaching and learning of your particular TU.

What next?

Once you have written up your transition unit using the template then it is often useful to pass it onto a colleague to read through it and see if they can offer any further ideas. If you wish, you can forward it to the NCCA (e-mail: schoolnetwork@ncca.ie) and we will offer some further feedback and support.

In the next issue of **info@ncca** we will be taking you through other aspects of the template, bringing you more details of what's happening in the schools that are currently developing their own TUs, and discussing ways in which they can be shared with others.

Don't forget to check www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle for the latest news!



It's very worthwhile to have TUs written to a common template. Sharing of good practice is to be encouraged.



Ready for ACTION?

Assessment, curriculum and teaching innovation on the net

Get ready for an ACTION packed tour as we take a sneak preview of what will be our most teacher-friendly website yet. Yes, that's right, 'teacher-friendly' as in designed to inform classroom practice. The first phase of work on ACTION is now complete, so let's take a look at what's in store for you in September.

What is ACTION?

ACTION (www.action.ncca.ie) is the third in the NCCA's 'suite' of websites. Our corporate website, www.ncca.ie, houses information about past and ongoing work at NCCA, along with our publications. On our curriculum online site, www.curriculumonline.ie, you can browse and search through the Primary School Curriculum and post-primary syllabuses.

The youngest of the trio, ACTION, (or, **A**ssessment, **C**urriculum and **T**eaching **I**nnovation **o**n the **N**et) lives up to its name. It is designed to show, rather than tell, the 'how to' of teaching and learning through media like video, photograph, text and audio. Using specific projects and sample classroom activities observed in real

classrooms, ACTION provides you, the teacher, with resources and ideas to support classroom practice.

What can I find on ACTION?

For this first phase of work on ACTION, we've chosen **three special projects**. These projects are Assessment for Learning, ICT Framework and English as an Additional Language. All three projects saw us working with schools to record teachers' engagement with curriculum initiatives. We gathered teachers' resources, recorded classes in action, photographed students working together and collected samples of students' work.

Each project on ACTION comprises two components:

- information on the specific project
- sample activities

Projects

The **Assessment for Learning** (AfL) project presents samples of student work which have been collected by teachers in post-primary schools from everyday work situations. They are not show-cases of exemplary standard but cover a range of student output, some more successful than others. What the examples have in common is that they follow an AfL pattern of teaching and learning, providing support for teacher judgement across a range of subjects in junior cycle.

The **ICT Framework** offers a structured approach to using ICT in curriculum and assessment by identifying the types of learning with ICT (including knowledge, skills and attitudes) appropriate for students. As such, the ICT Framework is not a curriculum area or a syllabus. It is not presented as an *add-on* to teaching and learning but as a tool to help teachers to integrate ICT in teaching and learning. You can navigate the framework with ease on ACTION and find sample activities which teachers have developed based on curriculum objectives.

The **English as an Additional Language** (EAL) project presents the *English as an Additional Language in Primary Schools Guidelines* alongside materials and resources which were gathered in schools where there are varying numbers of children for whom English is an additional language. These resources are available to assist in 'showing' the *how to* of EAL alongside the descriptions in the guidelines.

Sample activities

The **sample activity** space is the same across all projects. Each sample activity provides details of what a teacher did (developed and used) with his/her class to work through an activity and the resulting student work. A tabbed index (as shown on page 17) is used on all sample activity pages for accessing the information and resources available.

NCCA suite of websites

Corporate website



www.ncca.ie

Curriculum Online website



www.curriculumonline.ie

ACTION website



www.action.ncca.ie

Sample activity tabbed index

Curriculum Links ICT Framework Links Description Tools and Resources Review and Reflection Student Work

As each sample activity is unique, tabs only appear where there is information or resources available to fill them. One sample activity may make use of the first three tabs only, while another might require them all.

What makes ACTION different?

ACTION makes use of different types of media to bring the information and materials available to life: text, video, audio, photographs, flash paper, scanned images, PowerPoint presentations and much more! These additional uses of media are usually found under the *Tools and Resources* or *Student Work* tabs within the sample activities space.

Scanned images



Flash Paper



Video



How do I find what I'm looking for?

You can browse through the materials on ACTION through the three project pages, AfL, ICT Framework or EAL. Alternatively, you can use one of the two search options available on the site.

Index Tab	Contents
Curriculum Links	Details of the curriculum/syllabus areas which are covered through the sample activity. This tab contains direct links to our curriculum online website so you can complete your own planning if you decide to use all or some of the sample activity details.
ICT Framework Links	If a sample activity includes the use of ICT, this link will provide details of the ICT Framework learning outcomes which are achieved.
Description	Details of how the activity was carried out in the classroom, for example, what was needed, what level it is aimed at, preparation and procedure.
Tools and resources	Details on the tools and resources required to work through the sample activity, including teacher-produced materials to support the activity and information sheets on tools used.
Review and reflection	Details of the teacher's review and reflection of the activity after it has taken place.
Student Work	Samples of what the children and students did during the sample activity and materials they produced.

The first search option is a keyword search which uses the Google search engine on the ACTION site only. If you want to find information on how to use a digital camera to record a field trip in a hurry – use this search option and, hey presto, you'll find details of one teacher's use of digital cameras to record her class's field trip to Sean Walsh Park.

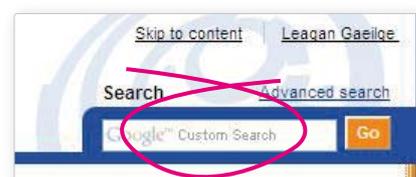
The second option, the advanced search option, will help you find sample activities and associated materials by category. The categories available are:

- Sector:** Early Childhood, Primary or Post-Primary
- Subject:** Curriculum subject
- Project:** AfL, ICT Framework or English as an Additional Language

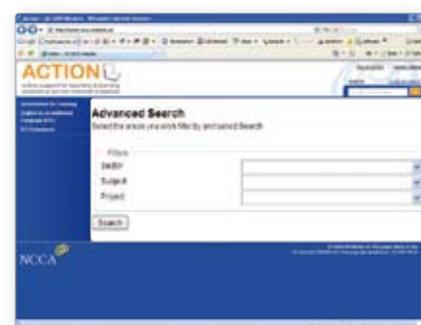
You can use as many or few of the categories to find what you are looking for. Each selection you make limits the options available at lower levels. For example, if you select 'primary' then only the subjects in the primary school curriculum will be available to select at the next level.

ACTION search options

Search option 1: Google search



Search option 2: Advanced search



So, that's ACTION in action. Have we piqued your interest? We'll be going live in September, so make sure to try it out for yourself. There will be a feedback form provided on the site so that you can let us know what you think.

Watch out for an update on ACTION in the September issue of info@ncca and remember - keep checking back as we'll be adding more to the site in September and beyond.

The facts of the matter

Junior Certificate Subject Fact Sheets

Are you a first year tutor or guidance counsellor who needs to give basic and concise information to your students about the different subjects available in junior cycle? Or maybe as a primary teacher you are interested in how some of the areas of the Primary School Curriculum that you teach develop at post-primary level?



Well, help is at hand. The NCCA has put together a set of fact sheets which give information about each junior cycle subject. These fact sheets will provide you with some of the answers to both your questions and your students' questions. They may also be a very handy resource for you to 'pull out of the drawer' before information evenings and school open days!

The junior cycle subject fact sheets have been designed with sixth class pupils and first year students in mind, but they will also be useful for parents or guardians.

The need for information for both parents and students became apparent from the ESRI report, *Moving On* (NCCA summary report available on www.ncca.ie), which reported on the experiences of first year students

following their transition from sixth class to post-primary school.

For sixth class pupils, moving to post-primary school can be a challenging, exciting and daunting experience. According to parents' comments documented in the report, a factor contributing to the students' nervousness was not knowing what to expect in the new school, including the introduction of new and unfamiliar subjects.

The report indicated that when it came to decisions on subject choice, pupils relied on their friends and families for advice. The junior cycle subject fact sheets will help schools allay their students' anxieties about the different subjects they may be taking and help the students and parents make more informed decisions in relation to their choices. By providing these fact sheets, each school too is helping to ease the transition for these students between primary and post-primary.

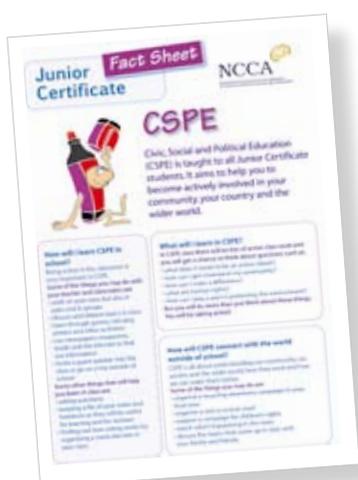
The fact sheets provide clear, concise and 'student friendly' information on the different subjects. They contain information on what the students might learn in each subject as well as

- how they may learn each subject
- how the subject will be examined at Junior Certificate
- how the student might learn more about the subject outside of school
- how the student can continue the subject at senior cycle.

The fact sheets also provide

- a selection of useful websites which provide further information on each subject
- information about how the subject develops from primary to post primary

The junior cycle subject fact sheets will be available to download from the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie). Each sheet comes in a neat and user-friendly format so that they can be photocopied onto two sides of an A4 page. Let us know what you think of them by emailing: newsletter@ncca.ie.



“ The fact sheets provide clear, concise and 'student friendly' information on the different subjects. ”