

Media statement for the third interim research report on the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle

22 May 2024

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has welcomed the publication of *Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study – Interim report no. 3*. This is the third in a series of research reports on the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle. It provides further insights into schools' experiences of working with the Framework since its introduction in 2015.

Initiated in late 2020, the four-year longitudinal research is an exciting study capturing the views and experiences of teachers, principals, students, parents and wider educational stakeholders. The schools participating in the study represent the rich diversity of schools in post-primary education in Ireland.

The data for this third report draws from school principal interviews and from the second phase of the teacher survey (across a sample of 100 schools).

The insights published today include:

- The rationale for change as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle continues to be supported by principals and teachers.
- The support for change extends to new pedagogical approaches. Principals reported positive changes in teaching and learning practices in junior cycle classrooms, while across most subjects, teachers are broadly supportive of the learning outlined in their subject specifications.
- The Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) have improved students' engagement in subjects and have led to the development of important skills.
- Principals and teachers shared positive perspectives on students' improved confidence levels, their greater awareness of what they are learning, and an overall increase in student voice.
- Insights show more positive relationships in the wider school and in particular, better teacher – student relationships.
- Teacher professional collaboration and dialogue has continued to increase significantly.

The research findings also point to areas requiring further consideration in realising the vision of the Framework for Junior Cycle, including:

- A perceived lack of continuity with the current Leaving Certificate. While teachers and principals acknowledged that students were learning important skills at junior cycle, concerns around preparedness for the Leaving Certificate Cycle remain prominent.
- Dissatisfaction with the junior cycle terminal examinations, particularly the grading bands and lack of choice in the exam papers.

- The CBAs should be afforded sufficient importance in the context of the overall assessment of Junior Cycle. Teachers and principals reported that CBAs supported student engagement but perceived that the efforts put into the work were not fully valued.
- The full and successful implementation of the changes as they were originally intended in the Framework is being inhibited by external demands such as perceived high stakes examinations.

Speaking about the significance of the study for NCCA's work, Arlene Forster, NCCA Chief Executive, noted: *'I'm delighted to see the third interim report published today, and I want to thank the teachers, students, principals and parents who have been part of the study over the last four years. NCCA's work is based on evidence and studies like this with rich insights from schools, enable us to enhance and build on the progress that is being made. This robust and rigorous longitudinal study is a major commitment by the Council and illustrates the depth and breadth of consideration given to such frameworks and their implementation. The final report later this year will present the study's full set of findings and assist the Council in revisiting the Framework and advising on updating it, if and where needed, to support high quality teaching, learning and assessment.'*

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.

This third report is essential to raising awareness and collating data for the benefit of all in the implementation of junior cycle education. The ongoing study will produce a final report later this year. The final report will draw on the findings across the 4 years and the 3 interim reports to explore in detail the core themes emerging and to make recommendations. 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 the final report from the study.

Ends

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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 \(ul.ie\)](#)

Social media: Twitter: @ncca.ie, Facebook: @nccaireland, Instagram: ncca_irl

Background Information:

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body of the Department of Education. We review curriculum and assessment for early childhood, Primary, Junior, and Senior cycles in Ireland. We work with learners, teachers, parents and stakeholders to develop research informed curriculum and assessment. The Council is made up of 26 members representing 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.