



NCCA

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

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Introductory research report on the implementation and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) welcomes the publication of *Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study*. This is the first in a series of research reports on the implementation and impact of the Framework and, as such, provides initial tentative insights into schools' experiences of working with the Framework since its introduction in 2015.

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.

The NCCA looks forward to building on the work done to date by the UL research team and the generous input of time and effort from a multitude of participants, including teachers, principals, students, parents and wider stakeholders. The source materials for this first report include a survey of 965 teachers across 74 schools, as well as one-on-one interviews with 28 school principals and interviews with representatives of 15 stakeholder groups.

Ongoing work in the study involves in-depth case studies of up to 12 schools which include a focus on the perspectives of students and parents, while continuing with online teacher surveys of up to 100 schools and interviews with up to 100 school principals.

While the initial insights published today are necessarily tentative, they include:

- The rationale for change as set out in the Framework is supported by teachers, school leaders and stakeholders.
- This broad level of support for change extends to new pedagogy and assessment practices. The Framework's increased emphasis on key skills, student wellbeing and enhanced opportunities for student voice in the classroom, in learning and in assessment, is highlighted.
- The findings suggest that teachers' classroom practices now facilitate more student-centred learning and there is evidence across all data sources that teacher professional collaboration and dialogue has increased significantly.
- Most principals believe the Framework has had a positive impact on student learning, assessment of learning, reporting of learning, the inclusion of learners, students' wellbeing, student voice and students' interests.

Welcoming the publication of the report, Emer Egan, NCCA Interim Chairperson, said: *“This first report offers initial glimpses into schools’ work with the Framework for Junior Cycle and these early findings show widespread support for curriculum and assessment change in this important stage of young people’s post-primary education. Rigorous, robust research is critical to the NCCA’s work and contributes to a strong evidence base for the Council’s work in developing advice for the Minister for Education.”*

Minister Foley said: *“I very much welcome this first report from the four-year study. The research provides an early indication of the benefits for students’ learning of the new Junior Cycle Framework, which it will be interesting to explore further in the later phases. The support for change from across stakeholder groups is heartening, and the recognition that change is a journey emerges clearly. I look forward to further findings to come from this research, which will be key to evaluating the impacts, outcomes and learnings from Junior Cycle reform”.*

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

- Challenges in managing time, both in terms of individual teacher workload and at whole school management level, including timetabling.
- The need for more time to experience the full value of ongoing, classroom-based assessment as a means of supporting students’ learning journeys.
- The medium- to long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the enactment of the Framework - the impact of school closures on student wellbeing, and on the progressive practices that the implementation of the Framework was generating.

Speaking about the significance of the study for NCCA’s work, Arlene Forster, NCCA Chief Executive, noted: *“The report published today introduces us to the longitudinal study – its aims, its design and, most importantly, its participants. While it reflects the early stage of the study, it clearly signals the potential for the research to gather and describe, in detail, schools’ lived experiences of using the Framework for Junior Cycle to shape teaching, learning and assessment. In this way, the study will, over the coming years, provide detailed and contextualised insights into how practice in Junior Cycle classrooms has evolved and continues to do so since the Framework’s introduction, and how we in the NCCA can support this.”*

It is hoped that this introductory report will help raise awareness of the longitudinal study and signal its value to all involved in shaping the experience of Junior Cycle education for the benefit of our young people. The research team will continue to work closely with schools and stakeholders in the coming years. Their next report which will include the experiences of students and parents, is expected to be published in the second quarter of 2023.

The study into the Framework for Junior Cycle is of major significance to the NCCA’s work, and to the wider education system. The findings will assist the Council in supporting schools’ ongoing work with the Framework for Junior Cycle and in revisiting the Framework and advising on updating it, if and where needed, to support high quality teaching, learning and assessment.

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