

**Planning for Short Courses**

Planning for short courses is a whole-school activity and it is important for schools to consider them within the entire junior cycle programme which they offer their students.

As schools plan a junior cycle programme using the Framework, the short course is a component which can add great value to the experience and the learning of junior cycle students.

The inclusion of short courses offer:

* greater flexibility to broaden students’ learning experiences
* increased choice tailored to the interests and needs of the students
* possibilities to connect with the local community
* formal ways to recognise and report on a wider range of student achievement
* opportunities to incorporate school events and activities of value

Key considerations regarding planning for the inclusion of short courses are outlined below in the following section

1. General considerations for school management regarding short courses

2. Considerations regarding the inclusion of NCCA-developed short courses

3. Considerations regarding the inclusion of NCCA-developed short courses within L2LPs

4. Considering the development of a short course

5. The steps involved for a school in their development of a short course



**1. General considerations for school management regarding short courses**

It is vital that school management are fully briefed on the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*, and in the area of short courses in particular. Carefully accessing the supports regarding short courses is important also. This can be enhanced by…

* examining the various sections of the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*. Of key relevance to short courses are pg.21 and pg.41-2.
* ensuring that school management access the Leadership CPD supports available from JCT.
* considering the inclusion of a workshop on Short Courses within the Whole School CPD support available from JCT
* selecting appropriate members of school staff to attend Short Course CPD support available

from JCT, and enabling them to lead the process of considering a short courses within the school

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* expresses the autonomy available to schools regarding short course provision, and that it will vary from school to school, in accordance with a number of possible factors:

* the design and content of the school’s junior cycle programme
* the resources available
* students’ needs and interests
* teacher availability, expertise and qualifications
* the views of parents/guardians
* how short courses can be integrated into the school timetable

Where schools opt to offer short courses, they are advised to offer a small number of short courses in the initial years and to introduce such courses gradually.

In addition, a student can undertake a maximum of four short courses for reporting through the

Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement.





**2. Considerations regarding the inclusion of NCCA-developed short courses within L2LPs.**

Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) are designed for a small number of students with particular special educational needs. L2LPs are suited to students with general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. The special needs of these students may prevent them from accessing some or all of the subjects and short courses on offer at junior cycle that are broadly aligned with Level 3 NFQ. Such students may be attending either a mainstream school or a special school.

L2LP students will experience Priority Learning Units (PLUs) and short courses that are broadly aligned with Level 2 of the NFQ. All achievements in PLUs and short courses will be reported in the JCPA.

The NCCA have developed two short courses for students who will undertake L2LPs.

* A Personal Project: Caring for Animals
* Exploring Forensic Science

These can be viewed [here...](http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Short-Courses.aspx)

It is vital that school management are fully briefed on the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*, and in the area of L2LPs in particular. This can be supported by the documentation and via the significant supports which are available for schools;

* examining the various sections of the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*. Of key relevance to L2LPs are pg.23-4 and pg.42.
* ensuring that school management access the Leadership CPD supports available from JCT.
* considering the inclusion of a workshop on Short Courses within the Whole School CPD

support available from JCT

* selecting appropriate members of school staff to attend Short Course CPD support available from JCT, and enabling them to lead the process of considering short courses within the school
* sharing practice with other schools to best support students who will undertake L2LPs



**3. Considerations regarding the development of a short course**

Short courses can be developed by schools to suit the specific needs and interests of their students in junior cycle. The NCCA have prepared guidelines and resources to assist schools in their development of short courses <http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Planning/Short-Course-Development>

From JCT’s experience in working with schools, the following are key questions:

*a. Does the short course enhance our Junior Cycle programme in meeting the needs of our students?*

Consider the statements of learning that are contained within the proposed short course and examine if these are being met adequately within your current Junior Cycle programme. This will allow you to clarify if

* the school has curricular components in place (subjects, short courses, wellbeing, other learning experiences) that address these statements already
* there are ‘gaps’ in the Junior Cycle programme in relation to the Statements of Learning

It is notable that short courses offer a school huge scope for teachers to design collaboratively, and for students to engage in active learning and collaborative projects.

It is expected that most of the assessment activities during the teaching of short courses will be formative in nature, which may be welcomed by teachers and students. For summative assessment purposes, the evidence of learning will be generated through no more than two Classroom-Based Assessments. Short course assessment does not involve a terminal exam.

*b. Who should we consult with and what factors should we be taking into consideration?*

In addition to the Junior Cycle programme structure as outlined above, it is important to consider if there is an authentic call for the inclusion of a particular short course within the school.

* Have the BOM, parents, teachers, and students been consulted?
* Does the short course address an area of learning that would be of benefit to the students?
* Have students indicated a desire or interest in undertaking learning in this area?
* Is the area of learning relevant to the local community in which the students live?
* Does the short course build on student experience in their primary education?
* Will the learning prepare students for the challenges in learning and life beyond Junior Cycle?

*c. Have we the expertise on staff to deliver the programme?*

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* highlighted that a school’s provision of short courses relies

on a number of factors, including teacher availability, expertise and qualifications.

It is important that a school has a group of teachers, and indeed management, who are committed to realising the potential of the short courses in enhancing student learning. The work involved in the initial years of the development and implementation of a short course can be significant and,

therefore, teachers with expertise and enthusiasm for the introduction and embedding of the

short course in the school is vital.

*d. In relation to timetabling, what do we need to consider?*

The *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* highlighted that a school’s provision of short courses relies on a number of factors, including the resources available, and how the course can be integrated into the school’s timetable.

* Will your short course be made available for all students, or for students to choose within an ‘option block’?
* Will the short course be run over one, two or three years?
* Is a single or double class period necessary to best facilitate student learning in the short course?
* What temporal (timetable) provision will be offered in each year, mindful that 100 hours of student engagement is required?

*e. Is the short course of a high quality?*

Short courses can be developed by schools to suit the specific needs and interests of their students. The NCCA have prepared guidelines and resources to assist schools in their development of short courses which are available here… <http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Planning/Short-Course-Development> Utilising these supports can assist schools in their development of a quality short course.

It is ultimately the decision of the school whether or not to include a particular short course in its Junior Cycle programme, and it certainly is not in the best interests of the school to include a short course which has not undergone a robust a rigorous development process. The involvement and oversight of management in short course development and in its initial implementation is very important.

Reviewing all programmes in a school as part of School Self-Evaluation will assist in this process also.

*f. Are there options other than including the short course in its entirety on the Junior Cycle programme?*

100 hours of student engagement is substantial, and other curricular option exist for schools under the Framework for Junior Cycle

* parts of the course can be offered as an ‘other learning experience’
* aspects of the course can be delivered in conjunction with other subjects or as part of a school focus week



g. Is there potential to trial strands of the short course before its inclusion on the Junior Cycle programme?

Some schools have trialed aspects of their short course as ‘other learning experiences’ during short course development, prior to introducing the short course in its entirety. This allows feedback from students and teachers to shape the learning and teaching methodologies as well as the assessment approaches involved.

There is significant work involved in the development and implementation of a new short course and perhaps a phased introduction provides security as well as a realistic roadmap for teachers and management.

This aligns with advice within the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* p.21 where schools are advised to offer a small number of short courses in the initial years and to introduce such courses gradually.



**4. The steps involved for a school in their development of a short course**

Having considered and decided to commence the process of short course development, there are a number of steps which a school should undertake to ensure that a course of high quality is developed.

These steps are listed at [http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Planning/Short-Course-Development a](http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Planning/Short-Course-Development)nd include

Step 1: Read and research

Step 2: Consider the proposed short course within the context of your school and the needs and interests of your students

Step 3: Look at the NCCA support materials for developing a short course

Step 4: Use the scoping document

Step 5: Develop, reflect and refine

Guidelines and templates are provided by the NCCA to assist schools in short course development, as well as the opportunity to receive guidance and advice during the process, as outlined below.

The NCCA will provide guidance and advice on the development of one short course per school at three key stages of the development:

1. After the scoping document has been completed

2. After draft one of the short course has been written, taking into account the NCCA feedback on the scoping document

3. After draft two has been written again taking account of NCCA feedback

In developing short courses schools may devise some completely ‘from scratch’ or they may decide to work with external agencies such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or statutory bodies in the development of them.

Key advice:

* It is a good idea to pilot the short course - or parts of it - with a small group of students and evaluate its success before offering it to a larger group
* Schools who have developed their own short courses report that it is a rewarding process but that it takes time. Our experience of working with schools has shown that it could take **up to**

**12 months** to develop one

* It is best to develop a short course in collaboration with others. This allows for discussion and sharing of the planning tasks. It also develops the capacity of the teachers involved to teach the short course when it is complete. It also provides the opportunity for the short course not to be impacted by teacher movement in future years.
* Schools are advised to access the support for short course development provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Junior Cycle Support Service for Teachers (JCT).