

Junior Certificate School Programme

What is the JCSP?

The Junior Certificate School Programme is a national programme sponsored by the Department of Education and Skills and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. It originated in the early school leavers' programmes initiated by the Curriculum Development Unit. Currently the programme is operating in over 240 schools throughout the country.

Aims

The Junior Certificate School Programme aims to provide a curriculum framework that assists schools and teachers in making the Junior Certificate more accessible to those young people who may leave school without formal qualifications. It attempts to help young people experience success and develop a positive self-image by providing a curriculum and assessment framework suitable to their needs. On completion of the programme students receive a profile which is an official record of their achievements from the Department of Education and Skills.

What is the aim of the JCSP?

The aim of the Junior Certificate School Programme is to provide a fresh approach to the Junior Certificate Programme for potential early school leavers who are struggling to cope with secondary school. It is an intervention for these students based on the concept that all young people are capable of achieving real success in school.

Is this an alternative to the Junior Certificate?

No, the Junior Certificate School Programme is not an alternative to the Junior Certificate. It is a framework that is designed to help schools and teachers develop an imaginative approach to the Junior Certificate course. All the students in the Programme must be entered for the Junior Certificate examination.

What is the difference between the JCSP and the Junior Certificate?

The Junior Certificate School Programme is a way of working within the Junior Certificate. It is designed especially to help young people who have had a difficult experience of school and may be potential early leavers. Through a system of profiling a student's work in Junior Cycle classes, students are provided with opportunities to engage with the curriculum and to achieve success at school. They get an official certificate of their achievements, validated by the Department of Education and Science, in addition to their Junior Certificate Examination Certificate.

Do students sit the Junior Certificate examination?

We are currently in the process of inquiring about our students sitting the English and Maths sections of the exam. Information to follow throughout the year.

Which students should do the JCSP?

The JCSP Programme is aimed at 12–16 year olds who are potential early school leavers.

Can a group of students within a class do the Programme?

Certainly. It is up to the teacher and the school to decide what way they want to organise the students in their classes.

How is students' participation in the Programme explained to them?

Students are told that they are doing the Junior Certificate Course. Instead of waiting to do an exam to get a certificate after three years, they can begin to work towards their exams immediately. Teachers will take a chunk of their subject, called a statement, which 'states' that they can do something. This statement will be put on their certificate as soon as they have achieved the required number of learning targets.

e.g. 'The student can apply the basic knowledge and skills necessary to produce artefacts using engineering materials.'

Students can build up their own JCSP Profile throughout Junior Cycle by completing targets and statements with their teachers. By the time they come to sit their exams they will realise that they have been successful learners and will feel much more confident about doing the Junior Certificate exam.

What do students gain from being in the Programme?

Students get an opportunity to become more involved in their own learning, discussing statements and meeting targets. Through engagement with this learning process, students begin to succeed and go on to build on this success. Throughout their time on the Programme the JCSP team seeks out opportunities to reward and praise students and to give them useful feedback on their performance. In addition, the JCSP team tries to make positive contact with the students' families. When the students sit their Junior Certificate exam they also get a certificate from the Department of Education and Science and a profile listing all they have achieved while on the Programme.

Should the learning targets in the statements be explained to the students?

It is important that students are aware of the learning targets that are ahead of them. It is important to emphasise that these targets are part of the Junior Certificate examination syllabus and that success in them is a stepping-stone to success in the Junior Certificate examination itself.

Is it necessary to involve the students in tracking their own progress?

JCSP teachers have found that involving students in monitoring their own progress gives them an increased sense of control over their own learning and leads to greater motivation in achieving learning targets. Experienced JCSP teachers report

that this involvement is an important aspect of the delivery of the Programme. It lets the students know how they are getting on regularly and rewards their success with encouragement and praise.

Can students be helped to make the transition from primary to secondary?

Many JCSP schools now run transfer programmes for students moving from primary to secondary school. These programmes take some of the strangeness and fear out of moving into secondary school by allowing the 6th class primary pupils to explore their new school, meet some teachers, hear from 1st and 2nd years about the highlights of the year and in some cases try a few classes.

How long does a student need to be in the Programme to receive a Final Profile?

A student has to complete one year working on the Programme in order to receive a Final Profile.

Can a student be profiled if they have left the school?

Yes, any student who has completed one full year in the Programme is entitled to a profile and certification. However, the profile and certification can only be awarded at the end of third year.

Do many students fail JCSP?

Students cannot fail JCSP. The Programme is about success. Achievable statements are carefully chosen. Students get an opportunity to complete a series of statements and build their own success profile – a profile listing all the things they can do.

What are the core subjects?

There are no core subjects as such. However, all students must be entered in the Junior Certificate Exam in English and Maths and they must follow a suitable course in Irish.

Do parents have a role in JCSP?

Parental involvement is encouraged and welcomed in JCSP. Schools increase the frequency of contact with parents with emphasis on passing on 'good news'. Many schools hold parent days to exhibit work done, award certificates of achievement and generally celebrate with parents their children's successes. Parents are invited to become actively involved in their children's education by working with the school in encouraging good attendance, punctuality and homework and by praising progress made.

What is a statement?

A statement describes an area of knowledge, a concept or a skill. It states that a student knows, understands or can do something e.g. *'The student can carry out a simple research project and display the results appropriately.'* Statements are divided up into learning targets.

How do the statements relate to the Junior Certificate syllabus?

The subject statements reflect areas of the Junior Certificate syllabus while explicitly stating the basic skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the examination. The syllabus is divided into short-term achievable goals.

What are learning targets?

Learning targets are specific short-term goals which, when combined, lead to the successful completion of a statement. They outline the steps to be followed and the material to be covered if the student is to achieve competence in the more long-term goal: the statement.

Do all students do the same learning targets at the same time?

It varies. It depends on the class, the subject and the teaching style of the teacher.

Is there a set time for completing a statement?

No, not at all; some statements such as those related to projects may be achieved in a relatively short time, while others may be worked on over the three years.

Is there a maximum or a minimum number of statements that can be chosen?

No, there is no set number of statements. Students can work on any number of statements. Ideally, at any one time the total number of statements each student is working on should be small. If these are achieved or are going well, additional statements can then be selected.

How many statements should teachers begin with?

Choose a small number of statements to work towards. Only achievable statements should be chosen. Some teachers may select just one statement to work on.

How do teachers decide which statements to work on?

First establish the abilities and needs of the individual or class group and then set realistic and achievable targets. Take into account the necessity to get a good grounding in the basic skills and knowledge needed for progress in subject areas. Choosing statements based on those needs will help build the Programme. It is important that only achievable statements are chosen. Remember, the statements chosen are not additional to the Junior Certificate course; rather they will form a framework for planning and teaching a syllabus.

What is the best way to record student progress?

Many schools have developed their own version of student folders with copies of the statement and learning targets. These are kept in school and reviewed regularly in class so that the students can keep track of their own progress using the three-box system to record progress.

Who awards the statements?

Any teacher on the JCSP team who has worked through a statement with a student can recommend awarding that statement to the student. The JCSP team considers the recommendation at a profile meeting and decides on the award of the statement

When is a statement awarded?

In general students can be awarded a statement when they are competent in at least 80 per cent of the learning targets in the following four areas:

- Frequency – almost always carries out task: 80 per cent plus of times
- Accuracy – accurate enough for a given purpose
- Independence – almost totally independent
- Sustainability – retains the knowledge or skill for about a month

An important element in awarding statements is the *teacher's professional judgement*.

What is profiling?

Profiling is the process of gathering positive information about what the student has achieved and recording what the student can do. Through profiling a student can gain recognition for subject work completed in preparation for the Junior Certificate exam and also for skills and abilities which they may have developed and which may not be directly examinable in that exam. The Student Profile Handbook contains a bank of learning targets arranged into statements that reflect areas of the syllabi of the Junior Certificate.

What is a profile meeting?

A profile meeting is a meeting of the JCSP teaching team. It is usually organised by the co-ordinator with the objective of updating the records for a particular group of students. Teachers discuss the progress of each student to date and recommend which students have completed enough work to be awarded statements

What is a student profile?

A student profile is a positive record of statements that a student is working on or has achieved. This profile is compiled throughout Junior Cycle.

What is final profiling?

Final profiling occurs at the end of 3rd year, just before the Junior Certificate exam. Its purpose is to record, for the last time, the progress made by students about to sit the exam. The team of teachers agrees on the total list of statements to be awarded to each student. Subsequent to the Final Profile meeting the co-ordinator sends this information to the JCSP office. Here a presentation folder is compiled for each student which includes:

1. A certificate of participation validated by the Department of Education and Science
2. A list of statements completed by that particular student

The presentation folders are returned to the schools where the co-ordinator adds in a reference for the student. The students are then presented with their Final Profile at a graduation or award ceremony in their school which is usually attended by staff and parents.

At what stage are the statements for the Final Profile decided upon?

The final decision as to which statements are to be awarded is made at the Final Profile meeting in the last term of third year.

JCSP Teachers in St. Ultan's:

Mrs. Walsh	Senior A
Mrs. Byrne	Senior B/Coordinator
Mr. Martin	Senior C
Mr. O' Brien	Senior D
Tommy Fearon	Woodwork Teacher
Paula Corcoran	Cookery Teacher