

# National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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Strategy for the Implementation of  
**Religious Education**  
as an optional subject for assessment and  
certification in the  
**Junior Certificate Examination**

30<sup>th</sup> June 1998



# Strategy for the Implementation of Religious Education as an optional subject for assessment and certification in the Junior Certificate Examination

## 1. Rationale for the Strategy

### 1.1 consultations

The first phase of consultation undertaken in relation to the preparation of draft syllabuses for Religious Education as an optional subject for assessment and certification at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels identified a number of implementation issues which were of concern to the various partners in education. Further consultations served to re-iterate those concerns, which can be summarised under five headings:

- a) the place of current Religious Education programmes in schools which choose to offer the syllabuses for assessment and certification to all or a part of their student cohort
- b) the future of Religious Education programmes in schools which choose not to offer the Dept. of Education syllabuses
- c) timetabling, in particular at Leaving Certificate level
- d) an adequate provision of resource materials in support of the syllabuses
- e) the in-career support needed for teachers of these syllabuses - three groups can be identified;
  - specialist teachers of Religious Education
  - those with some level of qualification in Religious Education
  - those with no formal qualifications in Religious Education
- f) the nature and organisation of assessment procedures for Religious Education



With the completion of the syllabus documents, the work in progress on the guidelines and the imminent removal of the legislative bar on the state funding of an examination in Religious Education it is now necessary to consider an implementation strategy which might meet some of those concerns.

## 1.2 requirements of an implementation strategy for Religious Education

The strategy devised for the implementation of Religious Education as an optional subject for assessment and certification will need to be sensitive to the unique current situation of this area within the school curriculum. Almost all second level schools offer a programme in Religious Education at junior cycle and the vast majority make some provision in the senior cycle. In general, the aim of such programmes is to foster awareness of and participation in one particular faith tradition. A variety of approaches is used including church or school developed programmes, text book or resource pack driven programmes and programmes developed by individual teachers. While many teachers and schools are committed to the assessment of students in Religious Education and have developed informal school based procedures in support of this, to-date national assessment and certification has not been possible.

The initiative to make available Religious Education syllabuses for national assessment and certification is not an attempt to bring to an end the many innovative and successful Religious Education programmes currently on offer. In fact, many of those who contributed to the preparation of the syllabuses and guidelines were themselves involved in the design and implementation of Religious Education programmes which reflect the best of current practice. The provision of syllabuses for assessment and certification offers a new option to those involved in Religious Education - entering second level students for public examinations in Religious Education.

The particular profile of teachers of Religious Education at post-primary level necessitates as implementation strategy with the flexibility and resources to meet their varying needs. While bodies such as the Religion Teachers Association and the third level pre-service providers can provide some elements of the support needed (see 1.5 below) effective implementation will require the services of full time resource personnel.

The NCCA wishes to provide the Minister for Education and Science with a set of proposals as to how successful implementation of Religious Education as a subject for assessment



and certification can be achieved. This strategy has been prepared with reference to the syllabus for Junior Certificate. A further strategy will be submitted in conjunction with the syllabus for Leaving Certificate. Some of the identified issues will be common to both syllabuses and the possibilities for the inclusion of support for the Leaving Certificate syllabus in the final two years of the developmental phase are indicated.

### 1.3 a phased introduction

The NCCA proposes a phased introduction of the syllabus for Junior Certificate to the system over four and a half years with the option to include support for the Leaving certificate in the final two years. Such phased introduction has a number of advantages:

- it would allow for a developmental period during which structures and resources could be put in place which would facilitate, in the final year of the developmental period, the making available of the syllabuses to all schools at second level
- it would acknowledge the unique position of Religious Education in the schools by allowing schools time to reflect on the implications of the optional syllabuses for their current Religious Education provisions and for resource and staffing requirements
- it would provide the system with a number of schools and teachers who would be familiar with the syllabuses and their management and delivery in schools
- it would allow for the identification and, where necessary, the creation of resource materials which could be used in support of the syllabuses
- it would have a low-level impact on the system
- it would facilitate liaison with pre-service providers
- it offers the possibility for a high quality in-career support - a particular necessity given the profile of the teacher cohort.

The disadvantage of such a phased implementation is that the number of schools permitted to offer the syllabuses is restricted. Evidence would suggest that a majority of schools is anxious to offer Religious Education for Junior Certificate as soon as possible. However, given the particular concerns identified in consultation, the fact that Religious Education for assessment and certification is new to the system, and the diversity in training among the teaching cohort, a phased introduction remains the preferred approach.



## 1.4 Cost

The implementation strategy below has an estimated cost of €30,000 over a period of four and a half years - an average per annum cost of €140,000. The initial phases of the implementation process are significantly less costly than the average figure. The most resource intensive year would be 2001-2002 as the vast majority of schools who wish to offer the syllabus for Junior Certificate will come on stream in that year. It may also be possible, within these resources, to introduce the Leaving Certificate syllabus in a small number of schools, the numbers of teachers and students involved would be quite low.

## 1.5 other sources of support

### 1.5.1 professional bodies

A well established national association of Religion Teachers (RTA) exists to promote the concerns of teachers of Religious Education and the professional profile of the subject. The association has been represented on the NCCA course committee. As a national body with regional networks, it is well placed to provide local, regional and national support for the implementation of the new syllabuses for Religious Education in conjunction with support offered through structures put in place by the Department of Education and Science.

### 1.5.2 third level institutions

The pre-service training of teachers of Religious Education is provided by a number of colleges and institutes of education. Those colleges involved in the preparation of specialist teachers of Religious Education are particularly well placed to offer support to the implementation project. Such support might consist of training for teachers in new areas of content, seminars and summer schools.

### 1.5.3 sources of funding

Bodies providing support for the new syllabuses may be funded to some degree from the resources allocated to the implementation strategy. However, such bodies should be encouraged to access other sources of funding including funds available from Peace and Reconciliation Programmes, religious and other sources.



## Rationale

### 1.6 start up date

The implementation strategy set out below begins in January 1999, with the syllabus for Junior Certificate introduced to 50 schools in the September of that year. Council is aware that this date is within six months of the presentation of the syllabuses to the Minister. However, the extensive consultation process undertaken as part of the preparation of the syllabuses has led to an enthusiasm and readiness within schools to offer the syllabuses for assessment and certification. In addition, recent national developments have underlined the need for education to promote mutual understanding and respect between peoples of diverse religious tradition. The promotion of such attitudes is one of the stated aims of both the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate syllabuses.



Overview of Proposed Implementation Strategy for Religious Education for Junior Certificate  
with the possible inclusion of Leaving Certificate

<p>Initial Phase 1999 (Jan-Sep)</p> <p>communication with/information for schools</p>	<p>Phase One 1999-2000 (Sep-Sep)</p> <p>50 schools offer the syllabus for Junior Certificate</p>	<p>Phase Two 2000-2001 (Sep-Sep)</p> <p>not more than 150 more schools  200 schools in total</p>	<p>Phase Three 2001-2002 (Sep-Sep)</p> <p>option to offer Religious Education as a Junior Certificate subject open to all second level schools</p>	<p>Phase Four 2002-2003 (Sep-Sep)</p> <p>ongoing support for phase three schools</p>
<p>a. examination</p>	<p>no examination</p>	<p>no examination</p>	<p>Religious Education included in Junior Certificate examination of 2002, and subsequent examinations</p>	<p>second year of examination</p>
		<p>communication with/information for schools re. Leaving Certificate</p>	<p>Leaving Certificate syllabus offered in schools</p>	<p>Phase Five - 2004 ongoing support for Leaving Certificate</p>



*Initial Phase*

## 2. Initial Phase (Jan. 1999-Sept. 1999)

### 2.1 a steering committee and co-ordinator

The NCCA proposes that the implementation be divided into five distinct stages. The process would be overseen by a Steering Committee drawn from NCCA and the Department of Education and Science. In addition, the implementation strategy proposed would require the services of a full time co-ordinator for the entire four and a half years of its duration and two other support personnel for phases two. Phases three and four would require the appointment of another full time resource person. (see table below) In the final phases of the implementation of the Junior Certificate syllabus, the team could also provide support for the introduction of the Leaving Certificate syllabus.

Initial Phase Jan - Sep 1999	Phase One Sep 1999 - Sep 2000	Phase Two Sep 2000 - Sep 2001	Phase Three Sep 2001 Sep 2002	Phase Four Sep 2002 Sep 2003
Co-ordinator	Co-ordinator	Co-ordinator plus Team of two	Co-ordinator plus Team of three	Co-ordinator plus Team of three

### 2.2 provision of teacher guidelines and sample papers

The NCCA would make the teacher guidelines available and would also submit draft sample examination papers to the Department of Education and Science.

### 2.3 identification of start-up schools

During this initial phase, schools would be identified as possible participants in an implementation process. The target would be 50 schools initially.

All post-primary schools would be circulated and applications invited for the first phase of the strategy. In selecting the start-up schools regional balance would have to be considered, together



with school type and the full range of qualifications found in the teacher cohort. It should be noted that a number of schools have already submitted their names to NCCA for consideration should such a strategy emerge.

## 2.4 outcomes of the initial phase

The consultation process in this initial phase would have a number of outcomes:

- it would provide valuable information as to the kind of support necessary for schools who are invited to participate
- it would provide information on the different levels of support necessary for teachers of differing professional profile

Following this consultation process a designated number of schools would be invited to confirm their participation in the implementation project. Towards the end of phase one the invited schools would be networked according to region and key personnel in the schools contacted prior to start-up.

## 2.5 launch

The end of this initial phase would be marked by a public launch of the initiative, which would also bring together all the schools involved for a national information seminar.

## 2.6 summary of initial phase (Jan - Sep 1999)

<b>Support Activities</b>	identification invitation information
<b>Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-ordinator</li><li>• NCCA</li></ul>
<b>School Contacts</b>	contact with and visits to participating schools national seminar/launch
<b>Resource Requirements</b>	appointment of Steering Committee and Co-Ordinator with administrative resource



### 3. Phase One (September 1999-September 2000)

#### 3.1 introduction of syllabus in phase one schools

The target schools - known as 'Phase One Schools' - would offer the R.E syllabuses to first year students for examination in the Junior Certificate of 2002

#### 3.2 phase one in-career support

The Co-Ordinator, under the direction of the Steering Committee, would be responsible for the provision of appropriate in-career support during this stage of the process. It may be necessary to call on other Religious Education specialists with expertise in particular sections of the syllabuses on a part time occasional basis. In-career support would be chiefly school based with some regional cluster meetings.

#### 3.3 planning for phase two

In addition to the work of supporting the Phase One schools, the Co-Ordinator would also be responsible for arrangements for the next stage of the implementation process -the extension of the provision to a greater number of schools.

The identification and invitation of these schools would follow the pattern established in the initial phase of the process. The information collected during that initial phase will be a useful resource in the identification of the phase two cohort of schools.



## 3.4 summary of phase one

<b>Support Activities</b>	<p>in-career support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>school based</b> one per school - 50 in total</li> <li>• <b>regional days</b> two per school *</li> </ul> <p>*one may be designated for non-specialists</p> <p>planning for phase two</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selecting phase two schools</li> <li>• making contact with phase two schools</li> </ul> <p>Seminars in conjunction with subject association/third level institutions</p>
<b>Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinator</li> <li>• Resource Personnel (occasional, part-time)</li> </ul>
<b>School Contacts</b>	<p>school based in-service with personnel directly involved in the syllabuses</p> <p>regional meetings (two per region)</p>
<b>Resource Requirements</b>	<p>Co-Ordinator</p> <p>some occasional work by specialists</p>



## 4. Phase Two (September 2000-September 2001)

### 4.1 introduction of syllabus in phase two schools

In September of 2000, Phase Two Schools would begin to offer the R.E syllabuses to first year students for examination in the Junior Certificate of 2003

The total number of schools in this phase would not exceed 150, which with phase one schools would give a total involvement of 200 schools.

### 4.2 in-career support

#### 4.2.1 for phase one schools

The focus of in-career support at this stage should be the project work component of the assessment procedure, as well as ongoing support on content and methodologies.

#### 4.2.2 for phase two schools

As outlined in phase two for Phase One schools at 3.2 above.

### 4.3 planning for phase three

During this phase, the Co-Ordinator and Steering Committee will need to make arrangements for the next stage of the process - the making available of the syllabuses to all second level schools who wish to offer them. In order to service this task as well as to continue to offer quality support to the Phase One and Phase Two Schools, further personnel (at least two) will need to be appointed to the co-ordinating/support team.



4.4 summary of phase two

<b>Support Activities</b>	in-career support <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>school based</b> one for each phase two schools</li><li>• <b>regional days</b> one for each phase one schools two for each phase two schools</li></ul> planning for phase three <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• selection of phase three schools</li><li>• contact with phase three schools</li></ul> Seminars in conjunction with subject association/third level institutions
<b>Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-ordinator</li><li>• Support team (two)</li><li>• Religion Teachers Association</li><li>• Third level institutions</li></ul>
<b>School Contacts</b>	school based in-career support  dissemination of information about the syllabuses to all second level schools
<b>Resource Requirements</b>	Co-Ordinator plus support team (2)



## 5. Phase Three (September 2002-September 2003)

### 5.1 provision of the syllabus for Junior Certificate in all second level schools opting to offer it

The exact number of schools in this final phase of the implementation strategy cannot be determined at this stage. Evidence to date would seem to indicate that most second level schools in the voluntary and community sector and a sizeable number of schools in the vocational sector would wish to make these syllabuses available at Junior Cycle. Consultation with schools indicates that in the schools where it will be offered for Junior Certificate, it will be offered to the entire first year cohort - all the students in a given year would take it for examination purposes.

A clearer picture of the uptake should emerge during the first two phases of the proposed implementation strategy and plans made accordingly.

### 5.2 in-career support in phase three

During this phase of the implementation process, the Co-Ordinator and support team would be required to support the needs of schools at three different phases of the process. It may become necessary - particularly if a large number of schools choose to offer the syllabuses - to supplement the personnel on the support team with teachers from the phase one schools. The advantage of the phased introduction to the system is that a core of teachers familiar with the syllabuses is available as a resource for the later stages of the implementation strategy.

This phase would also provide information for the planning of the implementation of the Leaving Certificate syllabus.

### 5.3 phase one schools

The first cohort of students to sit the Junior Certificate Examination will do so in June of 2002. The focus of in-career support for these schools will be on the preparation for assessment in the Junior Certificate Examination.



## 5.4 phase two schools

As for Phase One Schools in 4.2.1 above

## 5.5 phase Three Schools

As for Phase One Schools in 3.2 above

## 5.6 summary of phase three

<b>Support Activities</b>	<p>in career support to schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>school based</b> one day for each phase three school</li> <li>• <b>regional days</b> one for each phase one school one for each phase two school two for each phase three school</li> </ul> <p>researching needs for Leaving Certificate implementation.</p> <p>Seminars in conjunction with subject association/third level institutions</p>
<b>Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinator</li> <li>• Support Team (three)</li> <li>• Resource Personnel (occasional, part-time)</li> <li>• Religion Teachers Association</li> <li>• Third level institutions</li> </ul>
<b>School Contacts</b>	<p>school based*</p> <p>regional cluster meetings</p> <p>*may need to be scaled down in the light of numbers of phase three schools</p>
<b>Resource Requirements</b>	<p>Co-ordinator and support team plus core group of teachers on occasional basis from phase one schools if necessary</p> <p>*This and subsequent phases may be amended/extended to meet the requirements of support for the Leaving Certificate syllabus. Such addition to the project would require an extra allocation of funding</p>



## 6. Phase Four (September 2003-September 2004)

### 6.1 ongoing support for phase two and phase three schools

This final phase of the implementation project would prepare another 150 schools for the Junior Certificate examination and bring the remaining schools to within one year of examination. Subsequent support for the final group of schools could be provided by the subject association, and the costing includes an allocation in this regard. The use of ICT as a means of offering ongoing support will also be explored.

### 6.2 phase two schools

One day's training, regionally based on preparation for examination, sample papers etc.

### 6.3 phase three schools

One days training, regionally based on preparing projects for assessment, content and methodologies.

### 5.6 summary of phase four

<b>Key Activities</b>	<p>in career support to schools <b>regional days</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one for each phase two school</li> <li>• two for each phase three school</li> </ul> <p>Seminars in conjunction with subject association/third level institutions</p>
<b>Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinator</li> <li>• Support Team (three)</li> <li>• Resource Personnel (occasional, part-time)</li> <li>• Religion Teachers Association</li> <li>• Third level institutions</li> </ul>
<b>School Contacts</b>	regional cluster meetings
<b>Resource Requirements</b>	Co-ordinator and support team plus core group of teachers on occasional basis from phase one schools