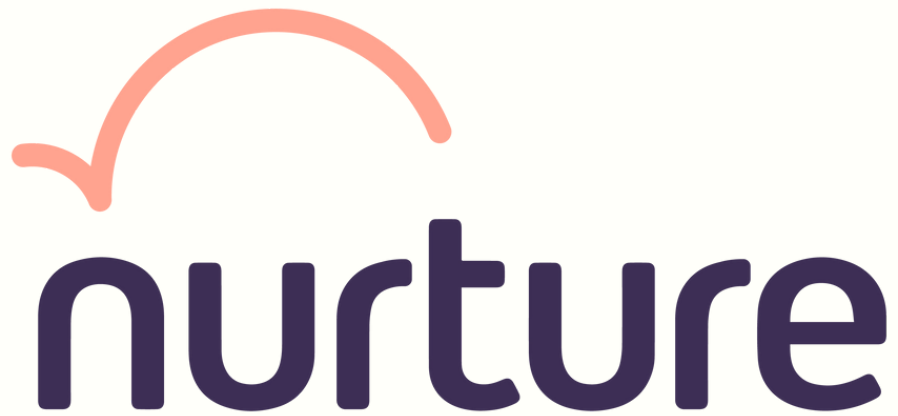




Implementing the Junior Cycle Framework
Digitally- A Guide For Leaders to Improve
Learning Experiences For Your Students &
Schools



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- Alignment with Statements of Learning and Subject Syllabi
- Key Skill Tracking
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Introduction



The new junior cycle framework has changed many aspects of the assessment and administration processes of teachers, school leaders and of course students. The inclusion of teacher marked elements was introduced to reduce the pressure of terminal examinations as well as providing the students with adequate opportunities to demonstrate the development of their content knowledge and skill attainment. In this guide, we will examine each of the new aspects of the Junior Cycle framework and present a sample of how to successfully integrate digital formative assessment and feedback.

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2. Alignment with Statements of Learning and Subject Syllabi
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Principles, Statements and Skills:

The first major change to the Junior Cycle is the development of eight underpinning principles to the Junior Cycle which are integrated with 24 statements of learnings and eight key skills.

24 & 8

Statements of
Learning

Key Skills

Underpinned by 8 principles

These additions are to be seen as informing the development of and expression through learning outcomes in each syllabi - that is that each learning outcome should be aligned to one or more of these new additions. The eight principles can be described as a high level view of the educational activities within a school: supporting learning, choice and flexibility, quality, cultivating creativity and innovation, fostering engagement and participation, continuity and development of learning, inclusivity and ensuring students are well. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure these principles are upheld and actionable everyday. Teachers can do this by being mindful of the principles and incorporating the statements of learning in their plans where possible.

Tip:

Each new syllabus will contain the most relevant statements of learning (with examples) for your subject. This means you won't have to review each statement and cross check these within your subject.





Alignment with Statements of Learning and Subject Syllabi

With the increased emphasis on developing students more holistically via the 24 statements of learning, it is more important than ever to explore opportunities to embody these statements into our everyday practice. While it falls on school leaders to ensure their subject and short course offerings target the full range of skills, statements and principles - teachers play the role of incorporating these statements into their teaching. In each subject syllabus the most pertinent of these statements is explicitly called out with examples. However, integration into assessments is sorely lacking. Additionally, these are longitudinal objectives, not one off experiences. So how do we implement and track these statements? One of the most effective ways is to explicitly embed these statements into key junctures of your schemes of work; for example assessments or checkpoints.

Research has consistently shown that effective learning occurs when we explicitly link feedback to the objectives of the lesson or task ([Hattie & Timperley, 2007](#)).

Aim to link feedback to learning objectives



So, as well as planning for our curriculum links, we should plan the statement links. For example, statement of learning 18 (SOL) states “The student observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions”. Therefore, a science teacher should explicitly link this SOL to any of their experiments as they are actively working on this statement.

Try this:

As you create your assignments or lesson plans, make explicit reference to the SOLs that students will be working on. Encouraging record keeping allows them visibility on what SOLs they are working on - and provides evidence for inspections. If your school is using Nurture, you can use the learning objectives features to track these and provide feedback.



Key Skills and Tracking



Perhaps one of the biggest changes made to the Junior Cycle system is the inclusion of a set of key skills which all students are expected to demonstrate mastery of over their three years in lower secondary and beyond school. These skills are: being literate; managing oneself; staying well; managing information and thinking; being numerate; being creative; working with others and communication.



Each contains a subset of learning expectations which can be used as measures for development. However, how does one determine when a skill has been improved upon? Harder still, how does someone identify where these skills are worked upon and provide feedback toward improvement. One method is to explicitly identify the key skills students will be expected to demonstrate in the lesson/scheme of work. However, tracking and providing feedback on progress becomes substantially more difficult especially over the course of the year. While some have found success with a journaling approach, consistency and a coordinated whole school approach is required for this to become habitable and effective.

Try This:



In lessons where key skills are being addressed, make it explicit and ask the students to make a note of this somewhere - copy book, journal or any other class specific workspace. Then, at the end of the lesson or a particular sequence, give your students 2-4 minutes to reflect on their demonstration or development of these skills. Bonus tip: If you create a specific method for this skill tracking/reflection process (i.e. a specific copybook), build in a review lesson every term. Sit down with each student and go through their skill development and reflections, then provide feedback on how they can progress in the coming term.



Formative Assessment and Feedback

While technically not a new aspect to the Junior Cycle Framework, there is an increased emphasis on embedded formative practices into everyday teaching and learning. Formative practices should be used as a two way process, informing teachers of their students progress in real time allowing for decisions to be made in response to their progress while also providing students an opportunity to identify their current gaps in skills/knowledge and receive the appropriate feedback to move their learning forward. Formative practices are time intensive, but if done correctly, save time by reducing cognitive barriers to learning. As such, they can be difficult to integrate into classroom practice and unfortunately, not all practices are appropriate for each subject or cohort of students. However, one formative practice has been shown to increase student attainment by 30% - withholding grades (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996).

However, simply withholding grades on their own is not an effective way to provide feedback, a structured approach to feedback is necessary to empower students and move their learning forward. The most effective structured approach to feedback comes from Hattie and Timperley's framework (2007). Here they describe students needing three answers to move forward: Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?

Personal Feedback - Assignment 2



Action
Feedback



Process
Feedback



Next
Steps



Audio Feedback

LISTEN



Worked Solution

VIEW

Top tip:

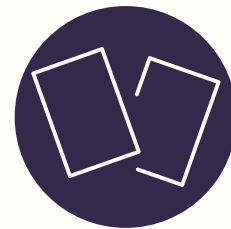


No matter what method you use for providing feedback, it will all be for naught if students don't engage with it. Ego is the biggest killer of engagement - and giving a score is the number one way to engage it. So try this, group students based on similar feedback for their work, print off the feedback as statements (or as close to this as possible) and cut them up into separate statements. In their group, ask the students to figure out which statements match to which piece of work - this little bit of detective work means that students read and interpret the feedback (which may or may not be for them specifically) before associating the feedback with their own work. By grouping the students according to similar needs i.e. failing to meet a specific learning objective, then each piece of feedback they read bears some relevance to their learning.

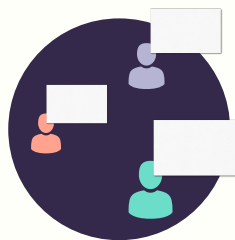
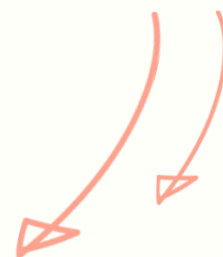
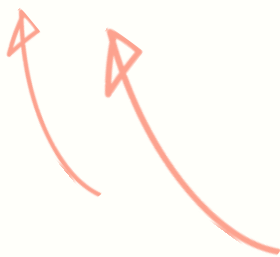
**Group students
based on feedback
similarities**



**Pass them printed out
feedback statements
on all their work**



**Class Exercise:
Peer Feedback
Matching**



**Let them match feedback
statements to work of
peers & their own**



Classroom based assessment and assessment task



Without a doubt the single biggest change to the Junior Cycle was the inclusion of classroom based assessments. While many subjects had some elements of this before (see Science coursework B), there is now a specific focus on a soft teacher accreditation piece rather than external accreditation. However, the CBAs do not count towards the final JCPA, they do however align with the assessment task which is externally validated by the SEC. It also acts as a way to validate that the student has indeed been the owner of the work presented in their CBAs.

CBAs happen twice during the Junior Cycle, once in second year and once in third year. CBAs are used to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and content knowledge in a way that terminal examinations cannot. Students are assessed on specific tasks as set out in the specification of each subject. Students are marked using a document called the "features of quality" which help support the teacher's judgement. Students are then scored at four levels of achievement - exceptional. Above expectations, in line with expectations and yet to meet expectations.

Once CBA2 is completed, students will be able to start their assessment task. This written assessment assesses what students have learned thus far and the skills they have developed. This forms 10% of their final grade and is to be completed in the presence of a teacher over two class periods.

Top tip:



While the CBAs don't form part of a scoring contribution to the students overall JCPA, the skills and learning students get from them are invaluable. They also help develop the students ability to communicate their learning in a manner suitable for external validation and accreditation purposes. Drafting can be a very useful tool for promoting development of students' skills for communicating their skills/knowledge in CBAs. Given that they are marked on a descriptor basis, this allows for targeted feedback (using the tip from above) to move students from one band to another.



Reporting for student improvement



Another change made in the Junior Cycle Reform was the change in recognition from a Junior Certificate to a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. This new end of cycle report is more flexible in the information included on the award. In general it will include the SEC grades, short course descriptor awards, classroom based descriptor awards, level 2 learning programmes and a section on other areas of learning. While this new reporting metric provides a more detailed insight into the students progression and attainment, it could be further improved with the starting of skill development - particularly given the focus on developing these skills through the key skill framework. If you've been reading this guide from the start, you will have already come across a neat way to track skills, making them easily exposible for JCPA reporting.

Top tip:



Reflection and confidence are two key indicators of long term success in students. Additionally, confidence influences student engage with feedback. Try to capture a student's confidence level at the point of submission. Being able to surface this, challenge it and ask the student to reflect on their performance in relation to their confidence has been shown to increase long term student success. A simple emoji or one worder on confidence provides enough evidence to be acted on.



How Nurture simplifies this



Nurture simplifies formative assessment and feedback. Based on research, our structured approach to providing formative feedback is pedagogically agnostic and highly effective, making it useful for teachers of all subjects and levels.

In this guide we discussed how making the statements of learning and learning objectives explicit can increase student attainment. We provided you with a non-technological way of achieving this, using Nurture, you can seamlessly integrate this strategy into your teaching and learning.

Assignment Learning Objectives

1

What are the **themes of the poem**?



Edit Feedback

2

Identify & **explain 3 literary devices** used:



Give Feedback

3

Summarise the poem into a tweet



Give Feedback



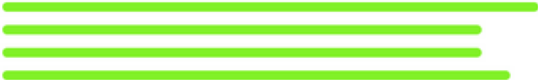
How Nurture simplifies this

We use Learning Objectives to act as our explicit way of showing the SOLs or curriculum links. So the student knows the goal of the task which as we mentioned above is a key aspect of providing feedback - aligning it to the goals of the task (assignment). To ensure we can move the learning forward then, we need to align the feedback to these goals. This is where Nurture's structured approach to formative feedback kicks in. Using Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model of effective feedback, we guide you through providing Task, Process and Self-Regulated feedback to students based on the learning objectives that they need feedback on.

Personal Feedback



Your Grade **84%**

How did you do? 

How was your process? 

Your next steps are: 



Audio Feedback
[LISTEN](#)



Worked Example
[VIEW](#)



How Nurture simplifies this

Giving the students goals, explicitly stating the SOL of skills they're developing and providing world class feedback is all well and good, but what if they don't engage with the feedback? At Nurture, we know that the two major blockers to feedback are Ego and Confidence. That is why we capture confidence at the point of submission ([learn more about that here](#)). As discussed earlier, delaying the ego response is vital to engagement with feedback. That is why we withhold the grade. However, to ensure that this withholding is beneficial, we develop the students metacognition by asking them to engage in a reflection on the feedback they've received from their teacher - via an emoji response or through a 3-2-1.

3-2-1 Student Reflection



What are 3 things you learned?



What are 2 things you found interesting?



What is 1 question are you left with?



%

Unlock Grade

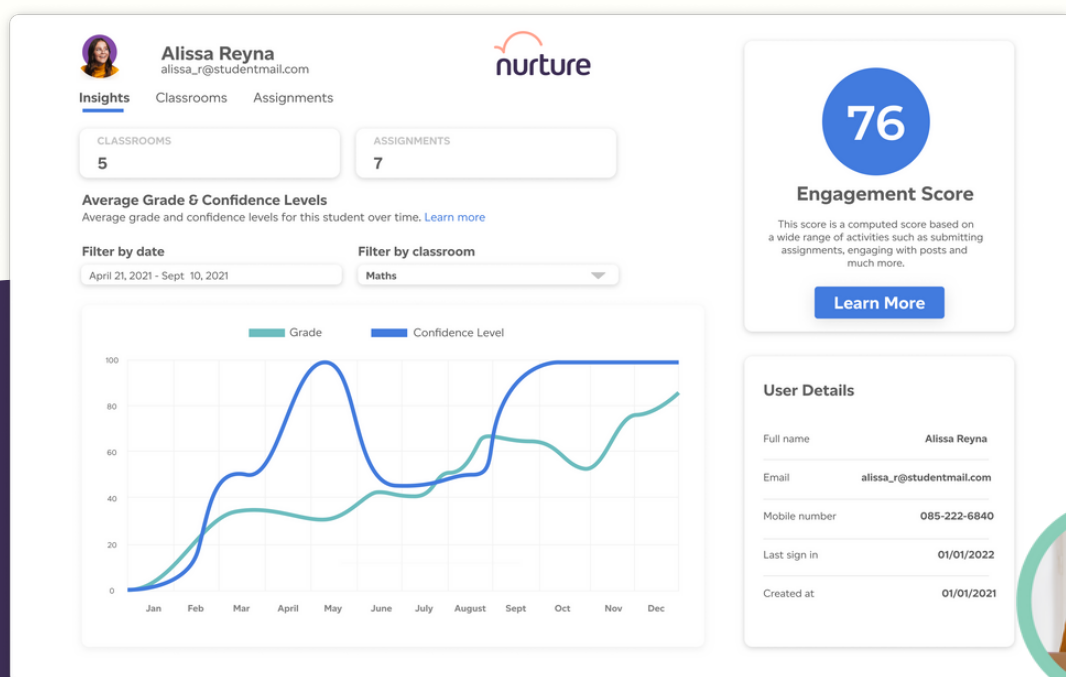


How Nurture simplifies this

Nurture also can help with CBA drafting. For example, we can use the features of quality as our learning objectives (similar to how a rubric works) and provide students feedback and a descriptor of their current draft. This allows students the opportunity to create their CBA and receive structured and effective feedback on their progress, affording them the opportunity to improve on their submission before the final version. Having a digital copy of the CBA and the feedback will also be a fantastic resource for students to refer to when it comes to their assessment task as not only will they have the CBA itself, but teacher feedback, their own confidence and reflections and can visually see the improvements over a number of drafts.

While doing all of the above, you are contributing to the student's learner passport. As more and more teachers contribute to this we are building a holistic report of the student's development - what skills are they developing or mastering, what are their strengths and weaknesses etc. All of which leads to a more realistic JCPA report recognising the achievement of each individual student over their Junior Cycle.

'Learner Passport'





Summary:

While teachers and school leaders adapted to the changes thrust upon them in the Junior Cycle reform, there still exists the possibility to further increase student achievement. This guide was created to highlight some of the major changes made in the Junior Cycle Framework (2015) and demonstrate how Nurture provides an pedagogical agnostic and effective way for capturing, tracking and providing feedback on some of the new elements such as key skills, statements of learning and CBAs.

Have any queries or want to get access to a demo account? Drop us a message,



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