



Short Course

Social, Personal & Health Education

Specification for Junior Cycle



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Introduction to junior cycle

Junior cycle education places students at the centre of the educational experience, enabling them to actively participate in their communities and in society, and to be resourceful and confident learners in all aspects and stages of their lives. Junior cycle is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcome for all.

Junior cycle allows students to make a strong connection with learning by focusing on the quality of learning that takes place and by offering experiences that are engaging and enjoyable for them, and relevant to their lives. These experiences are of a high quality, contribute to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of learners, and where possible, provide opportunities for them to develop their abilities and talents in the areas of creativity and enterprise. The student's junior cycle programme builds on their learning in primary school. It supports their further progress in learning. It helps students to develop the learning skills that can assist them in meeting the challenges of life beyond school.

Rationale

Early adolescence is a time of significant change for young people, physically, emotionally and socially. Through the use of experiential methodologies and group work, students have the dedicated space and time in this short course to develop their understanding and skills to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing in a rapidly changing world.

In SPHE, students have opportunities to revisit different themes which focus on developing self-awareness and respect for others, and the skills of self-management, communication, coping, decision-making and relating to others. This spiral approach of revisiting key ideas and topics is familiar from existing approaches to SPHE. This new course builds on this approach but also emphasises the importance of student agency and engagement in the learning process as key to learning in the affective domain. The skills involved are vital for self-fulfilment, for living in communities and for full engagement in learning beyond SPHE. Personal reflection, resilience and empathy are also promoted through SPHE.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. SPHE provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources.

It is important to build on students' learning in SPHE in primary education also. Learning in SPHE is essentially supported by a positive, empowering whole school environment and relevant school policies/guidelines including RSE, anti-bullying and substance-use policies, and child protection guidelines. This broader context for learning in SPHE helps to ensure that students learn to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. These decisions are further supported and encouraged by school, community and national policies and guidelines.

In junior cycle, six indicators—Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware—have been identified as central to students' wellbeing. Learning in SPHE provides learning opportunities designed to enhance each of these indicators thereby contributing significantly to the school's Wellbeing programme in junior cycle.

Aim

This short course aims to develop students' positive sense of themselves and their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. It also aims to build the capacity of young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

Overview: Links

Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages show how SPHE may be linked to central features of learning and teaching in junior cycle.

SPHE and statements of learning

Table 1: Links between junior cycle SPHE and the statements of learning

Statement	Examples of related learning in the course
SOL 11: The student takes action to safeguard and promote his/her wellbeing and that of others.	Students examine how their values, attitudes and behaviour impact on their own and others' health and wellbeing. They develop different resources designed to support young people in making informed decisions for their own wellbeing and that of others.
SOL 5: The student has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision-making.	Students participate in a range of activities that promote responsible behaviours and help them to develop skills for making personal and group decisions that respect their own dignity and the dignity of others.
SOL 6: The student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives.	In SPHE, students have opportunities to discuss opinions, examine problems and decide how these might be approached with their peers, thereby helping them to appreciate the value of different perspectives. By examining case studies and undertaking role-play, students can learn to be more empathetic towards others and to respect different values, beliefs and traditions.

Key skills

In addition to their specific content and knowledge, the subjects and short courses of junior cycle provide students with opportunities to develop a range of key skills. The junior cycle curriculum focuses on eight key skills.

Figure 1: Key skills of junior cycle



This course offers opportunities to support all key skills, but some are particularly significant. The examples below identify some of the elements that are related to learning activities in SPHE. Teachers can also build many of the other elements of particular key skills into their classroom planning.

Table 2: Links between junior cycle SPHE and key skills

Key skill	Key skill element	Student learning activity
Being creative	Exploring options and alternatives	Students explore and evaluate options and alternatives in the context of decisions they make. They record and communicate their learning in creative ways.
Being literate	Expressing ideas clearly and accurately	Students learn to articulate their thoughts and feelings clearly and respectfully through group work, role-play and reflections, and by exploring and discussing scenarios and case studies.
Being numerate	Gathering, interpreting and representing data	Students gather information through questionnaires, surveys and personal records and present their findings in graphic form to different audiences.
Communicating	Listening and expressing myself	Students learn to express themselves clearly and respectfully, to ask for help, to listen to other peoples' viewpoints and discuss ideas and opinions.
Managing information and thinking	Gathering, recording, organising and evaluating information	Students become familiar with how and where they can access information and support to maintain their physical and mental health in a holistic way.
Managing myself	Knowing myself	Students learn more about themselves as they engage in decision-making activities and goal setting. They learn to be flexible, to organise themselves, to plan to achieve their goals and to develop a sense of balance in their lives.
Staying well	Being healthy and physically active	Students learn about taking responsibility for their wellbeing and relationships. They also learn how to include a balanced diet, physical activity and relaxation as part of a healthy lifestyle.
Working with others	Respecting difference	Students learn about group processes and how group membership can affect an individual's thinking and behaviour. They develop greater empathy as they learn about other peoples' perspectives and develop skills for relating effectively to others.

Overview: Course

This junior cycle short course in SPHE is designed to enable students to develop a positive sense of themselves and a commitment to caring for themselves and others.

Strand 1: Who am I?

This strand focuses on developing self-awareness and building self-esteem.

Strand 2: Minding myself and others.

This strand provides opportunities for students to reflect on how they can best take care of themselves and others.

Strand 3: Team up.

This strand focuses on students learning about important relationships in their lives and building relationship skills.

Strand 4: My mental health.

This strand focuses on building positive mental health, examining young people's experience of mental ill health and learning how to support themselves and others in challenging times.

Personal learning diary

The nature of much of students' learning in SPHE is concerned with attitudes, values and feelings and is personal to the student. Students should be encouraged to keep a personal learning diary for the duration of the short course, where they can reflect privately on their learning in SPHE. With the agreement of the student, some of the entries may be used to support different learning activities, but essentially the personal learning diary is private and for the student only.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of students' learning in SPHE, it is essential that students agree a contract with each other and their teacher to ensure that the SPHE classroom is a respectful and safe environment for learning in SPHE.

The Classroom-Based Assessment outlined below reflects the learning students undertake in this NCCA short course. Schools have the flexibility to adapt any NCCA short course to suit their particular needs and school context. If adapting the course, schools may also need to adapt the Classroom-Based Assessment, so that it reflects the learning their students undertook. Schools may also develop their own short course(s) and related Classroom-Based Assessment. Guidelines for schools who wish to develop their own short course(s) are available.

The learning outcomes in this short course are aligned with the level indicators for Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications (Appendix 1).

The SPHE short course has been designed for approximately 100 hours of student engagement.

Expectations for students

Expectations for students is an umbrella term that links learning outcomes with annotated examples of student work. For NCCA developed short courses, in some cases examples of work associated with a specific learning outcome or with a group of learning outcomes will be available. Schools who design their own short courses may wish to create a bank of examples of student work for discussion and for future reference.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements that describe what knowledge, understanding, skills and values students should be able to demonstrate having completed this junior cycle short course in SPHE. The learning outcomes set out in the following tables apply to all students and represent outcomes for students at the end of their period of study (approximately 100 hours).

The outcomes are numbered within each strand. The numbering is intended to support teacher planning in the first instance and does not imply any hierarchy of importance across the outcomes themselves.

Strand 1: Who am I?

Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
How I see myself and others	1.1 appreciate the importance of building their own self-esteem and that of others
	1.2 welcome individual difference based on an appreciation of their own uniqueness
Being an adolescent	1.3 participate in informed discussions about the impact of physical, emotional, psychological and social development in adolescence
	1.4 recognise how sexuality and gender identity is part of what it means to be human and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions
Self-management	1.5 identify short, medium and long-term personal goals and ways in which they might be achieved
	1.6 apply decision-making skills in a variety of situations
	1.7 source appropriate and reliable information about health and wellbeing
My rights and the rights of others	1.8 explain how stereotyping can contribute to a person's understanding and experience of rights and wellbeing
	1.9 appreciate the importance of respectful and inclusive behaviour in promoting a safe environment free from bias and discrimination

Strand 2: Minding myself and others

Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Being healthy	<p>2.1 evaluate how diet, physical activity, sleep/rest and hygiene contribute to self-confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing</p> <p>2.2 critique the impact of the media, advertising and other influences on one's decisions about health and wellbeing</p> <p>2.3 describe what promotes a sense of belonging in school, at home and in the wider community and their own role in creating an inclusive environment</p> <p>2.4 distinguish between appropriate care giving and receiving</p>
Substance use	<p>2.5 demonstrate the personal and social skills to address pressure to smoke, to drink alcohol and/or use other substances</p> <p>2.6 reflect on the personal, social and legal consequences of their own or others' drug use</p> <p>2.7 critique information and supports available for young people in relation to substance use</p>
Respectful communication	<p>2.8 use the skills of active listening and responding appropriately in a variety of contexts</p> <p>2.9 use good communication skills to respond to criticism and conflict</p>
Anti-bullying	<p>2.10 describe appropriate responses to incidents of bullying</p> <p>2.11 appraise the roles of participants and bystanders in incidents of bullying</p> <p>2.12 review the school's anti-bullying policy and internet safety guidelines explaining the implications for students' behaviour and personal safety</p>

Strand 3: Team up

Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Having a friend and being a friend	3.1 establish what young people value in different relationships and how this changes over time
	3.2 evaluate attitudes, skills and values that help to make, maintain and end friendships respectfully
	3.3 recognise their capacity to extend and receive friendship
The relationship spectrum	3.4 explain the different influences on relationships and levels of intimacy
	3.5 analyse relationship difficulties experienced by young people
Sexuality, gender identity and sexual health	3.6 describe fertility, conception, pre-natal development and birth, and the particular health considerations for each
	3.7 explain what it means to take care of their sexual health
	3.8 demonstrate assertive communication skills in support of responsible, informed decision-making about relationships and sexual health that are age and developmentally appropriate
	3.9 reflect on the personal and social dimensions of sexual orientation and gender identity
Media influence on relationships and sexuality	3.10 critically analyse the use of sexual imagery and gender stereotyping in various forms of media
	3.11 critique the influence of media on their understanding of sexuality and sexual health

Strand 4: My mental health

Learning outcomes

Students learn about	Students should be able to
Positive mental health	4.1 explain what it means to have positive mental health
	4.2 appreciate the importance of talking things over, including recognising the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour
	4.3 practise some relaxation techniques
Mental health and mental ill-health	4.4 participate in an informed discussion about mental health issues experienced by young people and/or their friends and family
	4.5 appreciate what it means to live with mental ill-health
	4.6 critique mental health services available to young people locally
	4.7 explain the significance of substance use for one's mental health
Dealing with tough times	4.8 practise a range of strategies for building resilience
	4.9 use coping skills for managing life's challenges
Loss and bereavement	4.10 explain the wide range of life events where they might experience loss and bereavement
	4.11 outline the personal, social, emotional and physical responses to loss and bereavement
	4.12 compare how loss and bereavement are portrayed in a variety of contexts and cultures
	4.13 describe how they might care for themselves and be supportive of others in times of loss or bereavement

Assessment and reporting

Essentially, the purpose of assessment and reporting at this stage of education is to support learning. This short course supports a wide variety of approaches to assessment. Some learning outcomes lend themselves to once-off assessment, others to assessment on an ongoing basis as students engage in different learning activities such as discussing, explaining, researching, presenting, planning and taking action. In these contexts, students with their teachers and peers reflect upon and make judgements about their own and others' learning by looking at the quality of particular pieces of work. They plan the next steps in their learning, based on feedback they give and receive. Ongoing assessment can support the student in their learning journey and in preparing for the Classroom-Based Assessment related to this short course.

It is envisaged that students will provide evidence of their learning in a variety of ways including digital media, audio recordings and written pieces.

Assessment is most effective when it moves beyond marks and grades and reporting focuses not only on how the student has done in the past but on the next steps for further learning. Student progress and achievement in short courses, both in ongoing assessments and in the specific Classroom-Based Assessment relating to this short course will be communicated to parents in interim reporting and in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). To support teachers and schools, an Assessment Toolkit is available online. Along with the guide to the Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) process, the Assessment Toolkit will include learning, teaching, assessment and reporting support material.

Classroom-Based Assessment

Classroom-Based Assessments are the occasions when the teacher assesses the students in the specific assessment(s) that are set out in the subject or short course specification. Junior cycle short courses will have one Classroom-Based Assessment. Where feasible, teachers of short courses will participate in learning and assessment review meetings.

Classroom-Based Assessment: Final project

Students will complete one Classroom-Based Assessment based on learning outcomes in more than one strand of the course. The Classroom-Based Assessment will be designed in consultation with the students. A particular purpose of the Classroom-Based Assessment will be to facilitate developmental feedback to students during their engagement with the task and at the end of the process. The Classroom-Based Assessment for the SPHE short course can be completed in second or third year.

The Classroom-Based Assessment can be produced in written, digital, visual or audio formats and it may be supported in these formats through the use of an interview or presentation.

Features of quality

The features of quality support student and teacher judgement of the Classroom-Based Assessments and are the criteria that will be used by teachers to assess students' final Classroom-Based Assessment.

More detailed material on assessment and reporting in this SPHE short course, including features of quality and details of the practical arrangements related to assessment of this Classroom-Based Assessment, will be available in separate assessment guidelines for SPHE. The guidelines will include, for example, the suggested length and formats for student pieces of work, and support in using 'on balance' judgement in relation to the features of quality.

Inclusive assessment

Inclusive assessment practices, whether as part of ongoing assessment or the Classroom-Based Assessment, are a key feature of teaching and learning in schools. Accommodations, e.g. the support provided by a special needs assistant or the support of assistive technologies, should be in line with the arrangements the school has put in place to support the student's learning throughout the year.

Where a school judges that a student has a specific physical or learning difficulty, reasonable accommodations may be put in place to remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the student's performance in the Classroom-Based Assessment.

Accommodations which enable all students to access learning and assessment are based on specific needs. For example, a student who cannot physically type may use free dictation software to complete ongoing assessments and the Classroom-Based Assessment. Equally, a student who cannot speak may draw/write/type/create visuals and subtitles to present and communicate ideas. A student with a specific learning difficulty may benefit from having learning tasks and activities presented in a different way. Comprehensive guidelines on inclusion in post-primary schools are available [here](#) and guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities are available [here](#).

Appendix 1:

Level indicators for Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications

This short course has been developed in alignment with the level indicators for Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications. Usually, for Level 3 certification and awards, the knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.

NFQ Level	3
Knowledge <i>Breadth</i>	Knowledge moderately broad in range
Knowledge <i>Kind</i>	Mainly concrete in reference and with some comprehension of relationship between knowledge elements
Know-how and skill <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a limited range of practical and cognitive skills and tools
Know-how and skill <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from a limited range of varied procedures and apply known solutions to a limited range of predictable problems
Competence <i>Context</i>	Act within a limited range of contexts
Competence <i>Role</i>	Act under direction with limited autonomy; function within familiar, homogeneous groups
Competence <i>Learning to learn</i>	Learn to learn within a managed environment
Competence <i>Insight</i>	Assume limited responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour



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