Case Study

Key Skills of Junior Cycle

Ireland

Health & Consumers

Santé & Consommateurs

European Commission

KeyCoNet

European Schoolnet
KeyCoNet (2012 – 2014) is a European policy network focused on identifying and analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education. On the basis of the evidence collected through literature reviews, case studies, peer learning visits, country overviews, videos and exchanges between network members, the project’s final objective is to produce recommendations for policy and practice regarding the enablers and obstacles to a holistic implementation of key competence development.

Among KeyCoNet’s current 18 partners in 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), are Ministries of Education/related agencies, universities/research institutes, European organizations, and practice related partners. KeyCoNet also has a growing number of associate members from other countries and stakeholder groups, steadily increasing our network’s scope and influence.

1 The contributions of six interviewees, including policy makers, teachers, project co-ordinators and a teacher educator is gratefully acknowledged.
CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY ................................................................. 6
BASIC INFORMATION ................................................................. 8
SUMMARY ................................................................. 10
INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 11
1. CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE ...................................................... 13
2. SUBSTANCE RELATED ISSUES ......................................... 17
3. PARTNERSHIP RELATED ISSUES ........................................ 20
4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES ............................................. 22
5. MAINSTREAMING RELATED ISSUES .................................. 25
6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS ............................................................ 27
7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES .......................................... 30
8. ACHIEVEMENT OF INITIATIVE’S AIMS ............................... 31
9. NEXT STEPS ................................................................. 32
ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

Part of a series
This case study is part of a series of case studies being produced by KeyCoNet, to highlight various initiatives concerning key competence development, taking place across Europe. Each case study analyzes the initiative’s implementation strategies in depth, and will feed into the network’s recommendations for policy and practice on how to implement a key competence approach in schools most effectively.

How and why was this case selected?
Each year the KeyCoNet network identifies initiatives concerning key competence development across Europe, and a case note is produced providing basic information about each one. Following this, network partners participate in an online selection according to pre-established criteria, as well as an in-depth face-to-face discussion, in order to select the most interesting initiatives to develop into case studies.

The Irish case study analyses the implementation of the Key Skills reform for Junior Cycle education, in which 6 key skills, related to the key competences in the European Framework, are embedded within the curriculum and assessment for 12-15 year-olds. The Irish reform is of particular interest to the network as it represents the most advanced example out of the initiatives identified, of a system wide, holistic approach to key competence development. The embedding of Key Skills was addressed through a holistic approach, in order to ensure the coherence of pedagogical objectives, teaching and learning practices, student assessment and teacher training.

Which methodology has been used?
Case studies are the main tool used by the network to probe beneath the surface of each selected initiative and provide a rich context for understanding the implementation issues involved. The initiatives selected by the network differ in many ways, according to the nature of the key competences addressed, the implementation process used, the number of students and teachers directly concerned, the type and number of actors involved, and the duration and stage of development etc. A multiple-case study design, whereby each initiative generates its own case study, but uses one single prism for a common analysis, was therefore chosen. This method makes it possible to explore diversity, as well as the enablers and obstacles to the initiative’s implementation, as perceived by the initiators and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, through a multiple-case study design it is possible to identify choices, strategies, characteristics, situations or contexts leading to success or failure in a recurrent manner. This will particularly contribute to fuelling the set of recommendations for policy and practice at institutional, local, regional, national and European level, for the effective implementation of key competences in school education.

Each case study included interviews with the initiative’s coordinators and stakeholders, as well as desk research. In some cases, where considered feasible and fruitful, focus groups were also organized. In this particular case study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with two national project coordinators of the initiative, who also work closely with school networks around implementation; a school deputy-principal, two teachers and a teacher educator (pre-service). The case study report is structured as a series of questions under nine topics concerned with the initiative’s implementation. The answer to each question incorporates the views of the various coordinators and stakeholders interviewed, as well as the extensive desk research undertaken.
**Country:** Ireland

**Title of initiative:** Key Skills for Junior Cycle Education

**Coordinator/Organization:** National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

**Key competences addressed:**
- Managing Myself
- Staying Well
- Communicating
- Being Creative
- Working with Others
- Managing Information and Thinking

These 6 key skills relate to the following key competences of the European Framework:
- Digital Competence
- Learning to Learn
- Social and Civic Competences
- Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship.

The transversal skills of critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, decision making and constructive management of feelings also correspond closely with the 6 Key Skills.

**Type of initiative and channels used for implementation:**
This is a system-wide initiative aimed at embedding key skills within the curriculum and all teaching and learning in the context of introducing a new junior cycle programme for 12-15 year old students in all schools in Ireland in 2014.

**Partners:**
The Department of Education and Skills, State Examinations Commission, Teachers’ Unions, School Management bodies and other stakeholders in education are supportive of this initiative.

**Scope:**
This is a national initiative that will impact upon all teachers and students at lower secondary level over time.

**Target groups:**
All teachers in Irish secondary schools and their junior cycle [lower secondary] students are the primary target group. Initial work with 48 schools in a development network is ongoing and the NCCA is also working with other networks that have been established by partner organisations. Providers of pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers are also targeted.

**Time frame:**
2012-2014 for introduction and initial development. September 2014 for introduction to all schools.

**Relevant links:**
- Check out the framework for the Key Skills for Junior Cycle [http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/Key-Skills-Overview-Feb-2013_screen.pdf]
- Additional resources and information are available for teachers and schools here [http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Key-Skills-(1)]
INTRODUCTION

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Ireland. The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment in early childhood, primary and post-primary education. All levels of school education in Ireland are at various stages of curriculum reform and the development and embedding of dispositions and competences are viewed as central to these reforms. The key competences are referred to as key skills, and frameworks for key skills have been developed for lower and upper secondary education.

The key skills are based on the competences set out in the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, but are adapted to suit the Irish context. An integrated approach is taken to these skills, with the competences embedded into the learning outcomes of the formal curriculum and assessment. Emphasis is placed on their role in teaching and learning approaches employed in the classroom. While curriculum and assessment reforms are centrally led, schools are encouraged to develop competences in ways that work best for them and the NCCA has worked closely with schools and teachers in the development of the key skills frameworks. Work has been underway on the embedding of key skills into the upper secondary (senior cycle) curriculum for some time and the first subject to show evidence of this work has been mathematics.

The curriculum and assessment for lower secondary education (junior cycle) is currently under review; as part of that review literacy, numeracy and six key skills have been identified as being central to teaching and learning.

SUMMARY

Both research and direct experience of working with schools has convinced the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland that the embedding of key skills within teaching is a major lever for change – leading to more student-centred and effective learning. Six key skills have been identified as important for students to develop during junior cycle [lower secondary] education – Managing Myself, Staying Well, Communicating, Being Creative, Working with Others, and Managing Information and Thinking. These skills will be a key feature of a new junior cycle which is being introduced by schools in September 2014. This initiative will impact upon all teachers and all students within junior cycle education (12-15 year olds).

The new junior cycle is the most significant reform of the formal curriculum in Irish education for decades and key skills is a major part of that. The embedding of key skills within a new junior cycle programme is a very ambitious project. A range of supports are currently being developed to enable teachers to begin exploring how they can develop these key skills within their classrooms.

Both research and direct experience of working with schools has convinced the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland that the embedding of key skills within teaching is a major lever for change – leading to more student-centred and effective learning. Six key skills have been identified as important for students to develop during junior cycle [lower secondary] education – Managing Myself, Staying Well, Communicating, Being Creative, Working with Others, and Managing Information and Thinking. These skills will be a key feature of a new junior cycle which is being introduced by schools in September 2014. This initiative will impact upon all teachers and all students within junior cycle education (12-15 year olds).

The new junior cycle is the most significant reform of the formal curriculum in Irish education for decades and key skills is a major part of that. The embedding of key skills within a new junior cycle programme is a very ambitious project. A range of supports are currently being developed to enable teachers to begin exploring how they can develop these key skills within their classrooms.
A national network of 48 schools (representing all school types) has been established to work directly with the NCCA. In addition, other school networks are being established by our education partners. These ‘beacon’ schools are generating classroom activities and examples (including videos) which will be shared with teachers within the wider system.

Online materials are under development by the NCCA and are being made available to teachers in all schools, providing them with continuous professional development materials, practical ideas for their classroom and examples of what other teachers have found successful. Over time, Junior Cycle for Teachers, the professional development team for junior cycle, will support all teachers with training so that they can gain confidence in developing key skills within their classrooms. In addition, the introduction of new short courses will provide excellent opportunities to further develop these skills.

The Key Skills of Junior Cycle framework is influenced by international research and by the NCCA’s work with a network of schools that focused on the development of five key skills within senior cycle education (2006-2011). A report on this work can be downloaded from www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Reports/Key_Skills_Initiative_Phase_three_Stories_from_the_Learning_Site.pdf

The pilot project provided convincing evidence of the value of embedding key skills within teaching and learning, and demonstrated the benefits both for teachers and students. More recently, an extensive consultation on the future of junior cycle education took place (2010-2011) and participants affirmed the importance of developing these key skills.

1. CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE

Which contextual factors have been perceived as enablers to the implementation of the initiative, and why?

Junior Cycle reform

A major enabler of the implementation of key skills in junior cycle has been the systemic reform of junior cycle curriculum and assessment. The launch of A Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2012) by the Minister for Education and Skills in October 2012 signalled a strong commitment to curriculum and assessment reform over the coming years. There were a number of points of concern with the current junior cycle, including the dominating effect of the Junior Certificate examination on teaching and learning practice and on school organisation and structures, as well as a sense that the curriculum was overcrowded and inflexible and that the approach to assessment was very narrow.

The six key skills of junior cycle form a key pillar for these reforms, and the skills will be embedded in the curriculum and assessment specifications of all subjects for all schools over a timeframe that will extend from 2014 to 2020. The key skills are viewed as a means to leverage change in the curriculum, in teaching and learning and in assessment. The NCCA, Department of Education and Skills, State Examinations Commission, teachers’ unions, school management bodies and other stakeholders in education are involved in this reform, and work in the area of key skills has drawn particular support.
A need to improve the quality of teaching and learning at junior cycle

A second enabler was the discussions surrounding various pieces of research that point to the need to improve teaching and learning in this phase of secondary education. An extensive longitudinal study by the Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI, 2004-2007) pointed towards the influence on teaching and learning of the externally-assessed final examination; over the three years the focus of teaching narrows, becoming centred on preparation for the examination. It also raised issues of student disengagement mid-cycle and highlighted the importance of supporting schools to better facilitate student engagement in learning.

The TALIS report (2009) told us that more than any other country in the study, teachers in Ireland focus more on what the study refers to as ‘structuring practices’ (how learning is structured and organised) than on student-oriented practice or enhanced learning activities. The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for Irish 15 year olds drew attention to the need for improvements in literacy and numeracy.

A broad consultation with teachers, parents and other stakeholders on the junior cycle emphasised the importance of basic and key skills and drew particular attention to learning to learn, developing confidence and effective communication. Likewise there was a general conversation among employers, parents and the general public about what is important in education and about the different kinds of skills that young people need in today’s world.

Discussions surrounding all of this research continually reverted to the same theme: the need to improve teaching and learning at junior cycle in order to improve student engagement and to develop the skills students need to learn, to live and to work.

Working with schools

Previous work in senior cycle was another enabler for the introduction of key skills in junior cycle. The NCCA launched an initiative with a network of schools in 2006 to explore how key skills could be embedded in teaching and learning across a range of subjects in senior cycle. This initiative helped to build up a body of professional practitioner-based knowledge of ‘what works’ in the embedding of key skills. While the initiative was initially designed to support curriculum development work at senior cycle, it also greatly influenced policy, curriculum and assessment in the review of junior cycle. Teachers from the initiative had direct input into the development of the set of key skills for junior cycle. Reports from the initiative helped shape how the key skills are presented and how their implementation is supported. Probably the most powerful output was the resources developed with and by teachers, and particularly video footage of teachers in classrooms.
showing what the key skills are all about and demonstrating the benefits for students. The findings and outputs from the initiative were shared and made public. This helped to build an awareness of the key skills and an understanding of how they might be embedded in the curriculum and become an important part of teaching and learning in the classroom.

**Which contextual factors have been perceived as obstacles to the implementation of the initiative, and why?**

**Changing mindsets**

A possible disadvantage of the systemic approach to change in the reform of junior cycle is that teachers feel somewhat overwhelmed by the extent of the changes that they are expected to implement. Not only do they need to make the move to key competences, they will also be faced with changes to the curriculum, assessment, school planning, organisation and more. While some schools have already had some experience of key skills through working with NCCA school networks, others are starting from the beginning.

Changing the focus from a strong attachment to the Junior Certificate examination to a focus on quality teaching and learning will take time. There is a sense that the way in which the education system, and society in general, has defined and rewarded the 'good teacher' to date has not helped the journey towards quality teaching and learning. Good teaching has been defined as getting students to perform well in an examination that was quite narrow in scope. Letting go of this system and redefining the role of the teacher is seen as a big challenge for teachers, and indeed for the general public. The model of continuous professional development to support the changes will be crucial to helping teachers make these changes.

Initial teacher education providers also have a role to play in this. New teachers entering the system have mixed experiences and their level of preparedness to handle this new approach varies greatly. It is the experience of some schools that new teachers bring lots of new ideas to the school and are well prepared to introduce key skills to their classrooms. Other schools have had the experience of new teachers coming with little understanding of key competences.

**Time**

Any discussion about making changes in schools inevitably reverts to the lack of time to engage with the changes. Lack of time for planning, for reflecting, for changing direction and for building up new resources have all been cited as issues. Schools feel pressured and find it difficult to build in time for practices that they value, such as reflective practice, team planning and moderation.

**2. Substance Related Issues**

**Selecting and defining the skills**

In line with international trends, and influenced by the Lisbon strategy and the OECD DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) initiative, a framework of key skills for senior cycle was developed as part of the 2004 senior cycle review. This was a challenging process as there was no culture of competence development in the formal school sector at this time. Following consultation, engagement with schools and research, five key skills were identified: information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working with others.
The development of the six key skills for junior cycle was based on the experience at senior cycle and influenced by the EU’s eight key competences for lifelong learning as well as key competence development in other curricula such as those of Quebec, Canada (nine cross-curricular competencies) and New Zealand (five key competences). The identification of the six key skills was also influenced by the schools that participated in the work at senior cycle. The skills identified for junior cycle were: managing myself, staying well, communicating, being creative, working with others and managing information and thinking. These are very closely related to the senior cycle skills, with adjustments made to language and content to reflect the younger cohort. The process of identifying the skills and communicating the rationale for introducing them was supported by the experience of the work with senior cycle schools. Stakeholders are now familiar with the language of key skills and have a commitment to them.

When to introduce key skills

There are arguments for and against introducing key skills at any particular phase of education: primary, junior cycle or senior cycle. Due to the integrated approach of embedding the key skills in the curriculum and in assessment, they needed to be introduced as part of the curriculum reform. Some time was spent developing key skills for senior cycle, but as reform of the curriculum at this level was slow, their impact has so far been limited. However, a major reform of junior cycle provided the opportunity to introduce skills at that level. Hence, the approach in Ireland has been to seize the opportunity where there is a move to reform the curriculum and assessment at a particular level and then to integrate key skills development with that reform initiative.
3. PARTNERSHIP RELATED ISSUES

Which key aspects should be taken into consideration when defining the partnership?

Involving all stakeholders
The NCCA is a partnership council, on which parents, teachers, higher education, school management bodies, business interests, Irish language interests, the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Skills are all represented. Many of these organisations and others were consulted during the development process.

In addition, teachers and school leaders who worked with the NCCA on the development of key skills commented on the importance of the partnership approach between the national agency (NCCA) and schools. They felt that this was important in terms of building trust in the process of incorporating key skills into classroom practice and confidence in the evidence base of the key skills.

Three groups have been identified as requiring further attention as partners in the development of the curriculum generally and in the integration of key skills:

Parents: Parents need to be communicated with through a number of different channels, as they can be quite apprehensive about what the changes mean for their children and concerned that they might be in some way disadvantaged by the new approach. Parents understand the status quo and need regular information on what the change entails so that they can support their children and schools in this different approach to learning.

Students: Students are probably the most challenging group to inform, particularly in advance of the change. In this case, students who will be affected by the change are still in primary education. Schools can certainly play a role in this communication, but appropriate materials should be made available to support them in stimulating discussion with students about what is happening. It is also important that students are actively involved in their learning through key skills. For this reason the key skills of junior cycle have been written in a language that learners of this age can engage with.

Higher education: Some of the interviewees referred to the need for stronger ties between curriculum developers and researchers, with a view to improving the research base and the relationship between curriculum design, research and practitioners. Opportunities for research partnerships might be explored to address this issue.

Communicating the message
There is a sense among partners that the key messages of the reform and of the key skills need to be well communicated to all stakeholders, and particularly to teachers, students and parents. As with any initiative for change, special interests can be over-represented through national media and create uncertainty and fear within the system. Those responsible for the changes need to ensure that clear information and key messages are being consistently communicated through a number of channels.
4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES

Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proved to be particularly effective, and why?

Two strategies have been identified as being particularly effective for the implementation of key skills. The first of these strategies saw NCCA personnel working with school staff to support them in taking an approach that worked best for their own school. This combined approach of teachers taking the centrally-designed key skills framework and making it their own in their own classrooms, with the support of the national agency, was seen as very powerful. In each school there is a person who serves as the liaison between the school and the NCCA, keeping the school in touch with what is happening on a national level and in other schools. This liaison is also responsible for motivating other staff members to incorporate the key skills and to reflect on and share their practice. In many schools the work was started through a core group of teachers in each school who implemented the key skills in their planning and classroom practice. These teachers then shared their experience with the rest of the school staff. This strategy of teachers providing professional development for their colleagues, based on their own experience in their own classrooms, worked very well. The support of a designated external facilitator (from the NCCA) was seen as essential to this process in order to build confidence, help provide ideas on strategies and tactics, establish the research background, motivate the core group when there was a sense of falling back to old ways and support teachers in providing professional development for their colleagues.

While web-based platforms providing background information, video materials and online social networking platforms for teachers to share practice were seen as important and supportive, they are not a replacement for the personal contact with an ‘expert facilitator’. It is noted however, that while this strategy has worked very well for the relatively small number of schools in the school networks, there will be significant challenges in replicating this model when the initiative is rolled out to all schools.

The second strategy that is considered effective is the embedding of the key skills into the curriculum and into assessment. In the initial work with schools on the senior cycle initiative, teachers were working with subjects that did not have key skills embedded into the curriculum and which were tested in the traditional high stakes examination. While teachers still found the use of the key skills in their classrooms to be very effective in improving learner
engagement and teaching and learning generally, some teachers did find it difficult to marry the key skills with the requirements of the curriculum and its assessment. While the embedding of the key skills in the junior cycle curriculum is only under development at the moment, the expectation that subject specifications will be different and that there will be a completely new approach to assessment has already created a sense that key skills are a necessary part of these changes.

Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proven to be most problematic, and why?

It is a little early in the implementation of the key skills of junior cycle to be able to identify any aspects of the strategy as problematic, and it is likely that such issues will be identified through the national rollout. However, the one aspect that has been identified as needing more attention is that of communication. There is a sense that, while the key skills have attracted significant attention and are generally viewed favourably, the message has not been communicated clearly enough to all stakeholders, particularly parents, students and teachers. In addition, as curriculum initiatives move from the design phase to the implementation phase there is a danger that the message of what is important can become somewhat diluted.

There is some evidence that teachers are reluctant to engage with the virtual environment, particularly the online social networking platform, in order to access and share information around the key skills. However, this aspect will be important to the strategy over time, as it enables teachers to support each other and share resources.

5. MAINSTREAMING RELATED ISSUES

If the key competence initiative aims/aimed at mainstreaming, what are/have been the major obstacles encountered to generalise it? /

The key skills of junior cycle will be mainstreamed to all schools from September 2014 as part of the reform of junior cycle. The systemised approach will help to ensure that key skills are a feature of the curriculum in all subjects in all schools. However, there are likely to be challenges in this mainstreaming process.

Replicating the professional development model

While working with schools in the senior and junior cycle school networks, the model used was a bottom-up, top-down approach (as described in the previous section). This model depended on schools having access to an external facilitator that could provide the school with support and visit the school once or twice during the school year. It will be important for the professional development process to support teachers and school managers to build competence and confidence in working with the key skills. Schools will need to be encouraged to develop leaders within the school who will drive the process. Replicating this model on a national level may be challenging, particularly at a time when financial resources are scarce.
Building teacher’s content knowledge

There is sometimes a perception that key skills are soft skills and that working with them can result in a ‘dumbing down’ of subject knowledge. Experience with the school networks has shown that this is not the case; moving to a key skills approach means that teachers need to be very competent in their subject discipline and comfortable with the issues that students may raise. Teachers will therefore need support for content knowledge in their subjects as well as for pedagogy.

School structures

In order to implement the key skills effectively, schools will need to make changes to how they structure the school day and in some cases to the structure of their physical classrooms. Most schools operate on a 35-40 minute class period. Teachers and school managers have reported that it is very difficult to engage in creative and collaborative methodologies in that time. Likewise, tradition-}

al classrooms may need to be reorganised to allow for collaboration and different ways of conducting research and presenting work.

The phasing of the developments

Junior cycle reform will be phased in from 2014 to 2020, commencing with one subject in 2014 and followed by four or five subjects each subsequent year. Efforts will have to be made to maintain the momentum on key skills with all staff, not just those involved with the subjects that are being phased in.

6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS

To what extent has the initiative been designed as a systemic one from the starting point, i.e. introducing changes in several areas related to the student curriculum [such as teacher training, assessment, school organisation, etc.]?

The implementation of key skills in junior cycle has been part of the systemic review of junior cycle from the outset. The key pillars of the Framework for Junior Cycle are:

- The Principles for Junior Cycle Education
- Statements of Learning
- Literacy, Numeracy and Key Skills.

A framework has been developed for the six key skills, which sets out the elements and learning outcomes for each skill. The skills are embedded into the curriculum and assessment as each subject is being revised and as new courses are developed. Support materials (including toolkits, videos, etc.) have been made available online for schools and teachers. Key skills are included in the con-
tinuous professional development provided for teachers to support the implementation of the new junior cycle reform. Because the key skills will be embedded in the curriculum they will also be evident in both formative and summative assessment.

What have been the enablers encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The very fact that key skills are part of national discussions around the reform of junior cycle helps to raise awareness of the key skills, their purpose and their benefits. They are very explicitly a part of the long term vision for junior cycle. Added to this, the fact that the key skills are embedded in the curriculum and will be embedded in assessment will be significant enablers to their implementation.

Changes to assessment at junior cycle, where there will now be opportunities for school-based assessment, opens up the possibility to assess students’ work in a variety of ways that are supportive of skills development.

A body of support materials, many of which have been developed by teachers themselves, supports teachers in their efforts to begin using the key skills. Of particular value here are short videos showing how teachers use the skills in their own classrooms.

What have been the obstacles and/or challenges encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The scale of the initiative as it is rolled out to all schools will make the model of working with schools and teachers difficult to replicate. Changing teachers’ mindsets in a sustainable way is likely to be a challenge.

How have the obstacles and/or challenges encountered been overcome?

It is too early in the implementation to adequately evaluate the obstacles.

Have some parts of the original design of the initiative [from the systemic point of view] been abandoned and why?

The key skills of junior cycle have been based on the key skills developed for senior cycle in an earlier initiative and much was learned from that process. Informed by the work with schools and consultation with other partners, the senior cycle key skills were adapted and renamed to produce key skills appropriate for junior cycle.
7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES

In case a simultaneous/real time evaluation process has been part of the initiative:

An evaluation process was built into the two initiatives with schools, but an evaluation process has not yet been put in place for the wider systemic reform. School self-evaluation (SSE) has recently been introduced by the inspectorate; this will provide opportunities for schools to examine their own practice within their own context and to report on their strengths and areas for improvement in their own school community. The emphasis in SSE is on teaching and learning and on improving outcomes for students. SSE should help schools to reflect on, examine and improve teaching and learning in the classroom, within the context of the new junior cycle and the key skills.

What have been the obstacles to implement it, and why?

An evaluation of the broader systemic reform is planned for 2014.

What have been the difficulties or risks that have been solved/avoided thanks to the simultaneous evaluation process, and why?

Evaluation of the earlier initiative on key skills in senior cycle showed us that the key skills and the language used to communicate them should be accessible to students as well as teachers. This resulted in a rethink of how to present the skills in a way that is easily understood.

8. ACHIEVEMENT OF INITIATIVE’S AIMS

Have the original aims of the initiative been achieved?

The original aims of the early initiative with schools have been achieved. The initiative showed us:

- how key skills can be embedded in the teaching of a range of subjects;
- the kinds of teaching methodologies that are most appropriate for the fostering of these skills;
- the challenges in embedding key skills.

The evidence gathered from classroom practice in the work with schools has informed key skills policy for junior cycle.

It is too early to say if the aims of the broader implementation of key skills in junior cycle have been achieved.
9. NEXT STEPS

What is planned next for the initiative?

Professional development for school leaders and teachers commences this autumn and the key skills will feature in that work. A new curriculum specification with key skills embedded in the learning outcomes, will be introduced in September 2014 for the subject, English. New curriculum specifications will be made available for all junior cycle subjects over the next six years. Changes to assessment, emphasising formative assessment and a broader range of assessment methods, will also support the development of the key skills.
European Schoolnet is the coordinator of the KeyCoNet Project.

European Schoolnet is the network of 30 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.

Since its founding in 1997, European Schoolnet has used its links with education ministries to help schools make effective use of educational technologies, equipping both teachers and pupils with the skills to achieve in the knowledge society.

In particular, European Schoolnet pledges to:

• Support schools in achieving effective use of ICT in teaching and learning
• Improve and raise the quality of education in Europe
• Promote the European dimension in education

The KeyCoNet project has been funded with support from the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. Responsibility for this publication lies solely with the author, and the Commission is not responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.