

Consultation Report on the Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

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1. Introduction

Overview

The Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Home Economics was made available for national public consultation from 10th October to 18th November 2016.

The background paper provided an overview of the existing Home Economics syllabus, including structure and content. It reflected on the experiences of students and teachers in the Home Economics classroom and presented some outcomes and trends regarding performance and uptake in the Junior Certificate examination. The paper compared the subject internationally, presenting overviews of the subject in other countries around the world as well as identifying key trends in principles, philosophies and pedagogies underpinning the teaching of Home Economics internationally. It explored current research and issues in home economics education, seeking to present some considerations for the development of the new specification.

The aim of this consultation period was to seek the views of the public in relation to the considerations which would guide the development of the new specification for Junior Cycle Home Economics.

Consultation Process

There were two main avenues for consultation feedback: an online survey and written submissions.

The online survey comprised a mixture of rating scale questions (five-point Likert scale) and space for free-text comments. The survey grouped questions under the following broad areas for feedback:

- Existing Junior Certificate Home Economics syllabus
- Purposes and philosophical underpinnings of Home Economics at junior cycle
- Influences on Home Economics education in the 21st Century
- Assessment in Junior Cycle Home Economics
- Brief for the review of Junior Cycle Home Economics
- A copy of the survey questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

Opportunities to participate in the consultation were promoted in several ways: notices were placed on the NCCA website homepage and on JuniorCycle.ie webpages; announcements were made in the October NCCA newsletter (with a reach of over 11,000) and on social media (Twitter) throughout the

period; requests for submissions and flyers were circulated to education partners via the development group and the Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) placed a promotional banner on their website homepage.

Respondents and demographics

In total, there were 244 responses to the online survey and two written submissions from organisations and one written response from individual. Organisations who wished to be named are included in Appendix 2. The majority of respondents were Home Economics teachers (70%). Additionally, there was a high participation rate amongst pre-service teachers of Home Economics (14%) and a further 8% as third-level students. Figure 1 shows the demographic breakdown of respondents.

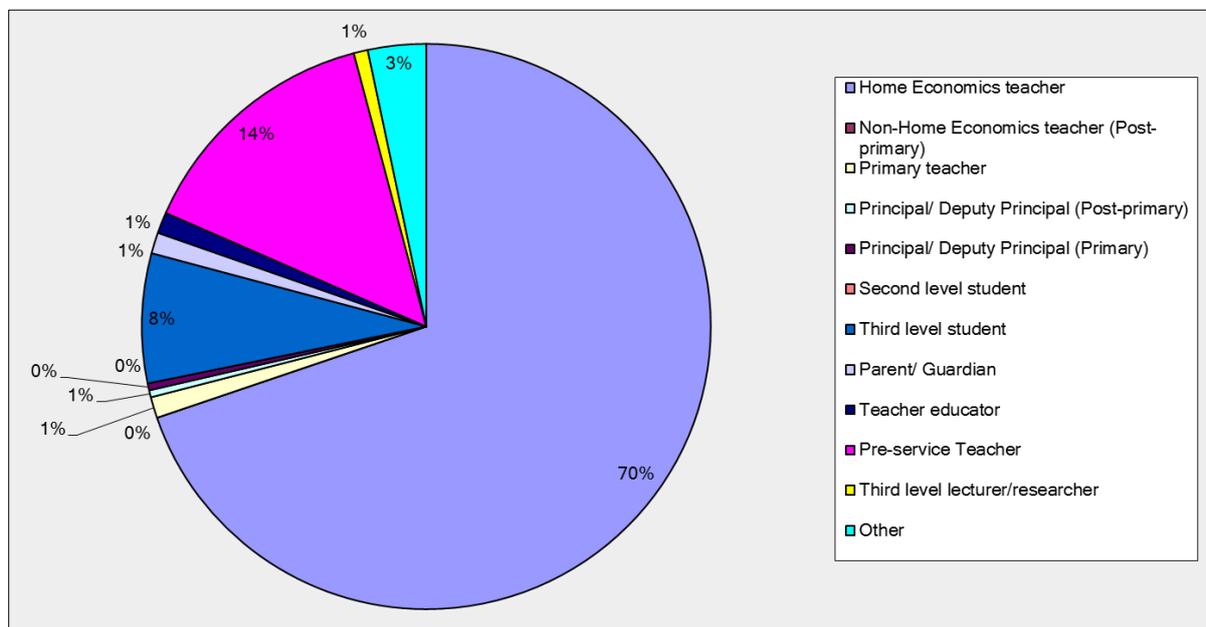


Figure 1: Consultation respondents by demographics.

2. Consultation Findings

In general, the background paper was well received, with many respondents welcoming it for its detail and for providing a good overview of the current landscape of Home Economics education. Considerations for newer focus areas, such as sustainable and responsible living were also well received. Overall, teachers are happy with many aspects of the current syllabus, but welcome an opportunity to review and bring content up to date. There was general consensus on the need for a reduction in the amount of content covered at present, and a desire for an increased focus on developing skills in depth:

I very much believe that the current syllabus ... allows students to learn valuable skills that will be of use to them in their future lives. (online respondent)

Although the current syllabus requires updating I feel that Home Economics has huge ability to promote and develop translatable and lifelong skills to students. (online respondent)

We have a wonderful opportunity to breathe fresh life into the subject ... I welcome change!! (online respondent)

The course requires a reduction in size if we wish to expand on transferable, practical skills as due to the time limit these are not being developed fully. (online respondent)

Detailed findings are presented below, grouped by the five focus areas addressed by the online survey.

2.1 Current Junior Certificate Syllabus

Respondents in this section of the survey were presented with a number of statements in relation to the existing Junior Certificate syllabus and asked to state their agreement or disagreement. Percentage responses are presented in the table in [section 2.1.3](#) below. Respondents were also given an opportunity to provide free-text comments regarding any changes they would most like to see in a new specification. This section yielded the most responses from participants (65) and the following is a summary of the main trends emerging:

2.1.1 Areas of strength

Respondents to this section were overwhelmingly supportive of the practical nature of the subject, citing it as an important strength of the current course and something to be retained in any new specification:

I very much believe that the current syllabus (both in content and structure) allows students to learn valuable skills that will be of use to them in their future lives. (online respondent)

I very strongly recommend that the practical element of Home Economics still be a key aspect to the new specifications. (online respondent)

The practical component of the syllabus was also highlighted as developing important, transferrable life skills. It was noted by teacher respondents, however, that there was often not enough time to cover practical elements of the course, frequently due to the large amount of theoretical content to be covered. This will be explored further below under considerations for improvement.

Some respondents noted that the almost unique position of Home Economics as one of the few subjects focused on developing practical life skills, such as cookery and home and resource management, should be particularly highlighted in the new specification:

The practicability of the subject is something no other subject has. It makes the experience of studying Home Economics unique and very useful to students' lives. (online respondent)

Home Economics was also seen as being a key area of the curriculum to link with the newer focus on Junior Cycle key skills, and that the new specification should allow more opportunities for students to develop skills such as critical and analytical thinking:

There should be a greater focus of other skills not just practical but creative, critical thinking, craft etc. (online respondent)

2.1.2 Considerations for the new specification

(a) Review and reduce content

The vast majority of responses throughout the survey noted the need for a reduction in content in any new specification. The breadth of content of the current syllabus is seen as too broad, often at the expense of the practical elements and developing other skills in depth:

I would like to see the content of the curriculum narrowed, so that rather than briefly touching on "all" issues, we can focus on the content that defines home economics. (online respondent)

To reduce the content will empower us, as educators, to give our students relevant lifelong skills that will help them, as students, tackle the practical perennial problems they will inevitably encounter. (online respondent)

Less content so you have more time to focus on practical skills & active learning methodologies. (online respondent)

Open comments to this section were very detailed in suggestions for areas of content which could be merged or removed in a new specification. Textiles was a particular area mentioned repeatedly as in need of review and reduction. Overall respondents were in favour of reducing content in textiles

learning and limiting its focus to relevant life-skills such as repair of items or making alterations. Learning to turn up hems, sewing buttons, upcycling and correct care for clothing were seen as a more relevant focus for this area of the subject, rather than making an entire item. Particularly in today's world where the cheap availability of clothing and textiles often means students may not use the skills learned in constructing a garment:

The textile aspect, making an item can be expensive, it is difficult to justify the cost impact of making an item, which many students will never do again, things have become too cheap to buy. (online respondent)

The 'repair, remake, reimagine' concept has huge potential within a Home Economics syllabus framework. (online respondent)

Useful skills like how to sew on a button, turn up a hem, understand properties of textiles in relation to clothing / household items ... (online respondent)

Respondents also cited resource management as an area in need of review to remove unnecessary content. Study of appliances, services to the home and room planning were mentioned as examples of content which students of this age group might not find to be relevant and enjoyable learning:

Reduction of Resource Management section- Services to the home too detailed and ... students not overly interested at JC. (online respondent)

It was noted by some respondents that this could possibly be merged with consumer studies.

(b) Cross-curriculum review

A review of overlapping content with other subject areas in the curriculum was seen as one way to address content overload in Home Economics. Respondents felt that there was significant overlap with science in terms of physiology and systems covered:

The reduction in the overlap with science would be an appropriate way to reduce the content i.e. remove the heart, lungs etc. (online respondent)

Similarly, consumer studies was mentioned as a possible area for review to avoid repetition of content covered in business studies.

(c) Updating content

Overall, respondents welcomed the opportunity to bring the subject more up to date with recent developments and include new focus areas. Updating food pyramid data in nutrition in line with new research was noted as an obvious area. Including a focus on food allergies, food sustainability and food footprints were mentioned, including evaluating organic and free-range foods. Modern technologies and ease of access to information also requires a reflection on what is essential for students to learn in Home Economics. For example, is there a need to rote-learn nutritional tables of information when such items are readily available online? Should there be more focus on being able

to read food labels and develop an awareness of food advertising? New diets and trends are continually emerging and it is essential that students are equipped with nutritional knowledge and skills to be able to evaluate these:

Students should leave this subject with critical thinking skills as the world of health and nutrition is constantly changing and also hugely influenced by media and advertising. It is not good enough for students to know content and in particular even some of the facts students learn are now refuted in research. (online respondent)

The current Home Economics curriculum, although clearly popular and hands-on in nature, fails to encapsulate essential aspects that fit within this area of study – primarily issues of sustainability, consumerism and health (e.g. food literacy). (online respondent)

(d) Progression to Senior Cycle

Another consideration for the new specification frequently cited was the progression to Leaving Certificate Home Economics. Many respondents mentioned a significant gap or jump between the current junior and leaving certificate programmes, though responses were somewhat mixed as to whether elements of the junior certificate need to change to enable clearer progression or whether some aspects of the Leaving Certificate syllabus itself were in need of review. For example, a lack of focus on practical cookery at Leaving Certificate was noted.

I feel there needs to be a better link between Home Economics at Junior cycle and Senior Cycle. For many students, the jump between them is immense... it's like a new subject at times. (online respondent)

(e) Gender imbalance

Addressing gender imbalance was also acknowledged by many respondents as a key consideration for a new Junior Cycle Home Economics specification. Although only 42% indicated the course was not gender-inclusive enough to encourage males to study the subject (see table below), the desire to make the course more appealing to male students was frequently raised in qualitative comments:

changes need to be such that a greater gender balance is achieved in uptake. This is the key challenge. (online respondent)

it is positive to see Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and food and health literacy feature in a separate section of this paper ... this bodes well for the new Home Economics specification and should ensure that it is a popular and compelling choice for students (male and females) looking to make healthy, ethical and sustainable choices for themselves and their families in a globalised world. (online respondent)

How the subject is presented in the supporting examples of student work was suggested as a consideration for addressing this:

Deliberate efforts should be made to design a specification that is gender inclusive. The annotated exemplar tasks that will be made available should be carefully selected to encourage more males to take the subject. (online respondent)

2.1.2 Quantitative data

Table 1: Responses to question 5 – Existing Junior Certificate syllabus.

Answer Options	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
The content of the current syllabus is too extensive at junior cycle.	58%	14%	28%
Elements of the current syllabus are outdated and irrelevant.	62%	14%	25%
The current syllabus provides adequate knowledge and skills for students' future life, study and work.	79%	7%	14%
The current syllabus is not gender inclusive enough to encourage males to study the subject	42%	21%	37%
The current Home Economics syllabus has a good mix of theory and practical elements	86%	5%	9%
Our current junior cycle students learn Home Economics in a hands-on/experiential way.	75%	14%	11%
The structure of the syllabus (core and optional area of study) allows students an element of choice	57%	15%	29%
The current syllabus prepares students adequately to progress to Leaving Certificate Home Economics	51%	15%	34%
The current Home Economics content provides appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills for students.	82%	10%	8%
The current Home Economics syllabus develops transferable life skills.	93%	3%	5%
Students at junior cycle find Home Economics useful and interesting.	91%	6%	3%
Students at junior cycle find Home Economics difficult and boring.	9%	8%	84%

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

2.2 Purpose and philosophical underpinnings of Home Economics education

Respondents in this section were asked to articulate what they thought the core purpose and philosophical underpinnings of Home Economics education should be. Again, there was a mixture of statement responses and open-ended comments (27 comments in total).

In relation to the overarching purpose of Home Economics education, it was noted that:

Home Economics makes a unique contribution to the education of young people ... It is unique in being the only school subject which concerns itself with teaching and learning about human relationships and development, resource management, foods and nutrition, clothing and textiles and housing and design: and it is unique in that it integrates these into holistic considerations of daily life. (St. Angela's College, Sligo, written submission)

Home Economics is well recognised as an applied subject combining theory and practice. It emphasises the process of learning and the development of relevant lifeskills ... (Dr Kathryn McSweeney & Dr Mary Magee, written submission)

(a) Food and health literacy

Food and health literacy were overwhelmingly seen as primary key purpose of Home Economics education:

Food Literacy should be considered as a key strand in the new specification. (online respondent)

I believe that there should be a significant emphasis on developing transferable lifeskills that will enable students to live a healthy lifestyle. (online respondent)

Table 2: Responses to question 6 – Purposes of Home Economics

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Engaging students with junior cycle Home Economics...					
...can improve their health and wellbeing.	1%	2%	3%	10%	84%
...can develop their food literacy skills.	1%	2%	5%	17%	76%
...has a role to play in fostering a healthy attitude and positive relationship to food.	2%	1%	1%	21%	76%
...facilitates students to develop transferable skills for living.	1%	1%	5%	20%	73%
...can develop discerning consumers.	1%	3%	13%	35%	49%
...can develop problem solving skills.	2%	4%	15%	30%	49%
...can develop their creativity and textile manipulation skills.	2%	5%	22%	27%	44%
...enables them to be creative and innovative.	1%	4%	15%	37%	43%
...can develop critical, analytical thinkers.	1%	5%	16%	36%	42%
...can develop financially-responsible people.	1%	6%	23%	32%	39%
...has a role to play in protecting the environment.	2%	8%	22%	31%	36%
...enables them to be ethical, ecological and socially-responsible citizens.	3%	6%	26%	33%	33%

Notes: A '5' rating indicates most importance. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

Both the ranked statement responses and qualitative comments placed nutritional knowledge and developing practical food and culinary skills as the most important purpose of Home Economics education. In particular, educating young people on the link between nutrition and food choices and their impact on health was seen as the central role of Home Economics education. The impact on emotional health and well-being was noted as an important area to be highlighted in the new specification, especially in light of the new focus across Junior Cycle on Wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a core element in Home Economics and needs to be emphasised in new syllabus. (online respondent)

In my opinion the underlying principle of Home Economics is linked to the key skills of the junior cycle. It is essential to focus on students understanding the role that they play in their own physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. (online respondent)

(b) Transferable life skills

Open responses in this section also emphasised the important and broad range of transferrable life skills Home Economics seeks to develop in young people, ranked as the fourth most important purpose of Home Economics education above.

Although JC Home Economics is content over laden it has huge ability to develop skills such as time management, research, problem solving and allow students to make informed decisions on their health and lifestyle. (online respondent)

Home Economics is a fantastic subject that I believe would benefit every student. Everyone must eat, live as healthily as possible, consume, create and manage their own lives; Home Economics at junior cycle provides a superb grounding for all these aspects of our lives to thrive. (online respondent)

(c) Sustainability and the environment

Interestingly, the purpose of Home Economics in relation to the environment and sustainability brought mixed responses. Some respondents highlighted education for sustainability as an important aim for Home Economics, including local sustainability in this:

Sustainability has become an important aspect of the Home Economics course e.g. waste separation in the kitchen, the making of compost, choosing household equipment which are energy efficient ... choosing to buy local food produce in independent butchers, green grocers etc. - all expensive ... but a good investment for society in the long run. (online respondent)

The statement in relation to the environment – “has a role to play in protecting the environment” – was ranked amongst the lowest at 36%. However, throughout the survey, most respondents welcomed a sustainability perspective in the new specification – see also section 2.3 below where sustainability is discussed further.

(d) Centrality of the family

Similarly, the word ‘family’ was read in different ways by respondents. Many queried the term in the open comments in question 7, and suggested it might be read in too narrow a focus:

The word 'family' may be considered to be contentious by some. (online respondent)

The family unit' ... [is] too general and immediately makes one think of the traditional nuclear family... not always the case! (online respondent)

This feedback was stronger in other sections of the survey (see section 2.3 below), with many calling for the term ‘family’ to include a broad definition so as to be inclusive of all family types in today’s modern society:

We advocate for a definition of the family which is broad and inclusive to reflect the many different types of family structures in society. Importantly, no other subject on the curriculum deals with the family, thus this needs to be strongly represented within the Specification. (St. Angela’s College, Sligo, written submission)

The term ‘family’ should be redefined to reflect the loved experiences of young people and should be reflected in the proposed systems thinking approach, whereby young people can simultaneously identify with multiple ‘families’ and communities ... (online respondent)

The focus on functions of the family and the place of Home Economics in preparing students for the range of issues dealt with by family life was supported though, as shown in the table and responses below:

Individual and family empowerment and well-being are core tenets of home economics education. Therefore, the focus of the rationale for the specification should be on achieving optimal and sustainable living for individuals, as members of a family unit and members of a wider society. (online respondent)

Table 3: Responses to question 7 – Philosophical Underpinnings of Home Economics.

Answer Options	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Home Economics has a role to play in addressing real life problems of individuals and families	92%	5%	3%
The core emphasis of Home Economics is addressing practical, real world, perennial problems of families and individuals in a socially responsible way.	86%	9%	6%
Empowerment and well-being are core tenets of Home Economics	84%	12%	4%
The family unit is central to the theoretical underpinnings and philosophy of Home Economics.	61%	31%	8%
The subject at junior cycle should be re-branded and not re-named	59%	21%	20%
The subject at junior cycle should be re-named	17%	25%	58%
There is no unified theoretical and philosophical base for Home Economics.	8%	36%	56%

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

(e) Subject rebranding

The suggestion of renaming or rebranding the subject was unpopular. 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed with renaming the subject, with respondents worried that such an exercise could lose the essence of what the subject is about.

I strongly disagree with the renaming of the subject as I fear it would lead to fragmentation of the subject which would in turn diminish the richness of the subject. (online respondent)

We would strongly disagree with any change to the name of the subject which may lead to fragmentation. However, we would advocate for a re-branding of the subject at junior cycle, and mirror the sentiments expressed by the International Federation for Home Economics (2008) in this regard. (St Angela's College, Sligo, written submission)

Where rebranding was considered, some respondents saw it as a possible opportunity to make the subject more gender-inclusive and appealing to male students. However, even rebranding should be approached with caution:

I would consider that rebranding / renaming the subject may be worthwhile but it would depend on the nature of the rebrand / rename and the potential of how the subject would be perceived as a result of any of these changes. A rename may appeal more to male students. (online respondent)

One suggestion was to ensure that strand titles should be written in a more appealing way:

...the subject development group, in considering the various stands and elements for inclusion...should make every effort to ensure that the titles are user-friendly, appeal to the target audience and encourage more males to study the subject. (online respondent)

2.3 Influences on Home Economics education in the 21st Century

Section 5 of the background paper described some of the influences on Home Economics education in the 21st century as well as newer perspectives (such as Education for Sustainable Development) and this part of the survey asked respondents to evaluate the role of these perspectives in shaping the new specification.

Table 4: Responses to question 8 – Evaluating influences on 21st Century Home Economics.

Answer Options	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Strengthening the position of Home Economics as the only curriculum subject concerned with family empowerment and wellbeing is important.	87%	7%	6%
The current Home Economics syllabus is no longer relevant to the lives of students in the 21st century.	13%	13%	74%
The Home Economics specification should ensure currency and relevancy of content.	91%	9%	0%
Home Economics can play an important role to encourage students to think and act globally.	88%	9%	3%
Education for Sustainable Development and responsible living should be a key element underpinning all areas of study in the specification.	76%	19%	5%
Home Economics has the capacity to develop a healthy attitude and positive relationship with food in a holistic way.	99%	1%	0%
Home and Resource management should be considered as a key contextual strand or area of learning in the new specification.	69%	21%	10%

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

Responses in this section reiterated many of the themes discussed earlier: wellbeing, a focus on food literacy, review of home and resource management, and sustainability.

(a) Education for Sustainable Development

There was more support shown here for including a focus on sustainability and responsible living: 76% agreed or strongly agreed that Education for Sustainable Development should be a key element underpinning all areas of study in the specification – see table above. This was backed up by the open responses. Some respondents explicitly related sustainability to being more environmentally considerate mentioning, for example, students discussing biodegradable packaging, composting, energy efficiency in the home. Others cautioned repetition in this area:

Will sustainable development not be covered already in Geography and other subjects? (online respondent)

The area of wellbeing and sustainability i.e. being more environmentally considerate etc. are areas that should be in the new specification. (online respondent)

(b) Food Literacy

Almost all (99%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Home Economics has the capacity to develop a healthy attitude and positive relationship with food in a holistic way.

Food literacy must also be encompassed to reflect the broad range of food and cooking skills. (online respondent)

I believe food and health literacy should be the key area of focus. (online respondent)

Culinary skills need to remain at the core of the 21st century Home Economics. They are transferable lifeskills that students need to foster and develop. (online respondent)

(c) Global perspectives

The use of the term global also raised some mixed responses. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Home Economics can play an important role to encourage students to think and act globally.

To ensure currency and relevancy of content, the global nature of Home Economics must be highlighted, alongside the skillset that it helps students to foster in terms of operating equitably and sustainably in a globalised world. (online respondent)

However, some of the following comments questioned to what extent emphasis should be placed on global perspectives in Home Economics. Some respondents noted that the focus on family perspectives was the central focus, and that global perspectives should not be given undue weighting which would take away from this:

While I do feel that Home Economics can encourage students to think and act globally, however, I would not like to see the new specifications focus solely on the global aspect, it is important to still have a strong focus on the individual and family. (online respondent)

Before acting globally, they need to act as individuals and then as families - global is aspirational. (online respondent)

(d) Family Empowerment

Whilst responses to statement questions relating to the role and function of the family as a core focus of Home Economics were generally high, use of the word family itself raised a lot of feedback, as mentioned briefly above.

Clarification was sought by respondents as to the definition of family, with respondents frequently noting it could be read in a very traditional sense of a nuclear family:

I'd like some clarification of what is meant by family here. I'm pretty sure you mean all types of families but it is ambiguous. (online respondent)

Most felt that the specification should be reflective of the many current structures of family in modern society, and many requested that a broad, inclusive definition of family should be included in the new specification:

If the word family is to be used in the subject, a definition of the word family needs to be formulated with respect to changes in society. (online respondent)

I can see why the focus of the family is of importance however, I would have reservations about how this would be delivered in the classroom when family dynamics are at such variants. (online respondent)

(e) Home and resource management

Home and resource management is generally supported as being an important aspect of learning, however, respondents questioned the weighting this might have when compared to other learning areas of Home Economics:

Home and Resource Management should interweave freely throughout, but not be a key contextual strand. (online respondent)

Home management needs to be presented in a more practical way so that the students can put efficient management systems in place easily and in a practical way ... (online respondent)

In addition to reviewing relevancy of certain content mentioned earlier, feedback also suggested it could possibly be integrated into other areas of learning or made into an optional area.

(f) Other suggestions

Other comments in the survey feedback suggested that a focus on promoting safety awareness should be included in a new specification:

Introducing health and safety awareness through, for example, the safe use of materials and equipment, will no doubt help young people to understand safety better and develop a safety culture they can take with them to the workplace.

Health and safety (theory and practical) should be included as an area of learning or at the very least be included as a cross-cutting theme or thematic strand across all areas of learning.

2.4 Assessment in Junior Cycle Home Economics

The focus of question nine of the survey was to gauge what respondents thought Junior Cycle Home Economics should focus on assessing.

(a) Practical assessment

Respondents were overwhelmingly in support of the current form of assessment, with its components of practical cookery assessment; craft, childcare or textile project; and a final written exam assessing theory.

Two thirds of respondents in the open comments strongly stated that practical assessment should be retained:

It is vital that we retain practical assessment as this is what consolidates learning for students and makes the theory transferable to their everyday lives. (online respondent)

I think the current assessment methods (practical cookery, craft project as well as written paper) is a comprehensive method of assessment. (online respondent)

Views were also strongly expressed in relation to the weighting of the practical assessment, with most respondents insisting that practical assessment should be retained at 50% of the allocation of marks. Others called for an increase in the weighting of this component, with a corresponding reduction in the theory to allow for this.

The current percentage for coursework/practical element should be maintained or increased. (online respondent)

This was also reflected in the statement responses below with assessment of practical cookery skills placed as the most important focus of assessment (79%).

Table 6: Responses to question 9 – Assessment of Junior Cycle Home Economics

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Assessment of junior cycle Home Economics should focus on assessing...					
Practical cookery skills	1%	0%	3%	18%	79%
Application of skills in real life contexts	2%	1%	2%	19%	76%
Problem solving skills	1%	1%	8%	30%	61%
Creativity and textile manipulation skills	3%	4%	20%	31%	42%
Application of knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar situations	1%	4%	19%	40%	36%
Knowledge and recall of facts	7%	20%	34%	26%	12%

Notes: A '5' rating indicates most importance. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

(b) Project work

Respondents also commented on the need for retaining a project-based component in the new specification, with many citing students' enjoyment and sense of achievement from creating something.

I strongly believe it is important that practical cookery skills as well as project work (textiles, craft or childcare) are still a substantial aspect of the assessment of Home Economics. (online respondent)

They really enjoy this aspect of the course and it's fantastic to see their skills develop and creative sides emerge over the 3 years of study. (online respondent)

Both the practical cookery and project options were seen as a valuable way of allowing students to apply their knowledge and skills learnt, something which cannot be done in a written exam alone:

To give the students the tools to be able to apply their knowledge, to problem solve and to critical analyse and reflect on situations ... is empowering students not just for the "exam" but for life. (online respondent)

Some suggested changes included possibly staggering the timing of the project-based assessments.

The design brief process was noted as being central to developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and advocated the use of this methodology across the subject:

We welcome comments in the background paper...in regard to the importance of the design brief process across the subject...'in food studies, design and craft, textile skills and consumer studies in order to develop transferable skills...Application of design process methodology is important as a core approach in Home Economics to develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. (St. Angela's College, Sligo, written submission)

(c) Theory

Overall, respondents were not in favour of increasing the assessment of the theory component, particularly in light of the reduced number of hours allocated to the teaching of the new specification.

Calls were made for ensuring assessment of the theory was undertaken in a broader, more varied way. An interesting report mentioned in two of the written submissions noted the over-emphasis on recalling factual knowledge in the written examinations, with calls for this to be considered as part of designing assessments for the new specification:

An analysis of JC Home Economics examination questions over 10 years (McSweeney 2014) reveals a predominant focus on the recall of factual knowledge. We suggest that going forward, assessment of junior cycle Home Economics could be approached in a more progressive and holistic manner. Using a problem based approach, students are presented with a scenario where they have to apply their knowledge and skills to different contexts... (St. Angela's College, Sligo, written submission)

This submission also noted the need to be cognisant of not over assessing every element of the new specification. Assessment of theory was noted as important in ensuring students are prepared for senior cycle Home Economics:

Excellent level of assessment of both practical and knowledge currently ... I don't think this should change ... theory needs to be assessed in order to prepare students for senior cycle as well as enable their understanding of topics. (online respondent)

Overall, feedback is overwhelmingly supportive of the current assessment model – practical, project work and written exam – and would like it retained in the new specification.

3. Brief for the review of Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 5 of the background paper presented considerations and issues to be addressed in the development of the new specification. This included how the course might be organised, whether it will continue to be structured around core areas of study and an optional area of study; which contextual strands or other thematic strands should be included; the issue of gender inclusivity; issues of breadth and currency of content of the course; and how the course can develop the keys skills of junior cycle.

Participants were asked to reflect on these considerations and provide feedback in this section of the survey.

(a) Course structure

There was overarching consensus to structuring the new specification around a number of core areas of learning or strands – 91% agreed that this would be an effective or very effective approach:

Table 7: Responses to question 10 – Features of a new specification

Answer Options How effective would each of the following features be in improving Home Economic education at junior cycle?	Not effective	Effective	Very effective
Reduce the breadth and amount of content in the course	15%	53%	32%
Ensure the course is gender inclusive in its presentation and language register	3%	43%	53%
Organise the course around a core area of study only and integrate other areas such as child development, design and craftwork and textile studies into the core	50%	34%	17%
Organise the course around core thematic strands and areas of learning such as family and social systems; food and health literacy; education for sustainable development; home and resource management; design and craftwork	9%	48%	43%

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

There were no comments in relation to the example strands listed in the last statement, though commentary throughout the survey supported these as important aspects of learning.

One respondent expressed concern at integrating some of the current option areas into core strands:

*Concerns with overloading the specification with optional areas included into the core. It is enjoyable for both teachers and students that we have optional areas.
(online respondent)*

However, other views agreed that the current offering of three optional areas needs to be reviewed in light of the analysis provided in the background paper regarding actual student uptake of the three options in practice:

The statistical analysis of candidate performance in each examination component ... highlights an important issue regarding the distribution of students completing each of the optional areas of study ... The background paper correctly points out that maintaining each of these components as optional areas needs to be carefully considered. It might be better to integrate some necessary components of each option into strands. (online respondent)

Whilst separating the areas of learning structurally into a number of strands was favoured, it was noted by respondents that the integrated nature of learning across these areas should be emphasised in the new specification:

It is commendable that this section [of the background paper] also emphasises the integrated nature of learning in Home Economics. These principles should inform the design of the specification. (online respondent)

There was also a call for providing guidance to teachers on the respective weightings of each strand, in the absence of percentage weightings in the specification as compared to existing syllabus advice.

(b) Developing students' skills

Table 12: Responses to question 10 – Considerations for the new specification

Answer Options The specification should...	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Reflect the centrality of the family as the core	61%	27%	12%
Emphasise the importance of practical Home Economics skills	99%	1%	0%
Highlight the importance of sustainable, responsible living	92%	7%	1%
Develop students' creativity and innovation skills	93%	5%	2%
Develop students' problem solving skills	95%	5%	0%
Develop students' critical, analytical thinking skills	95%	5%	0%

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole integer.

In regards to development of skills, there was a high level of agreement that the new specification should seek to develop a range of problem-solving, critical thinking and analytical skills as well as foster creativity and innovation.

Home Economics at junior cycle needs to be holistic and developmental. Adopting this type of approach can provide the foundational skills for the future acquisitions of learners' competences and higher order skills of critical reflection, moral judgement, discernment and ethical practice. (Dr Kathryn McSweeney & Dr Mary Magee, written submission)

The practical nature of Home Economics makes it an 'added value' subject in developing the higher order skills along with organisational skills, knowledge and a positive attitude to the area of home life as a vital part of each persons' wellbeing. (online respondent)

However, some of the commentary cautioned that the expectations here should be mindful of the age of students and not be over demanding. This was also noted in relation to the common level of the new specification being mindful and open to students of different abilities:

Students are between 12-15/16 at this stage of their life. It is important we don't lose sight of their age in terms of their development of critical and analytical skills. (online respondent)

We recommend that the new Home Economics specification should be cognisant of the ability of learners at junior cycle, and not demand too much. The new specification can develop critical, analytical thinkers but only to a point (given that the learners are at junior cycle stage or Level 3 on the National Framework for Qualifications). (St. Angela's College, Sligo, written submission)

Some concerns were expressed regarding the proposed timetable changes across subjects at second level – something not discussed in the background paper nor the remit of the new specification. Respondents were worried that a change to 1 hour classes would impact the ability of teacher and students to undertake practical course work and assessment in this reduced time. Similarly, other consultation feedback noted class-sizes as an issued to be addressed and others called for the subject to be mandatory, items which cannot be addressed in the new specification.

4. Conclusion

It is clear that while there are many positive aspects and experiences of the current junior certificate Home Economics syllabus, many teachers welcome an opportunity to review the subject and bring it more up to date, both in terms of content and current trends.

There was consensus on the purpose and philosophical underpinnings of Home Economics education with the centrality of the family and the development of transferable lifeskills being a core tenet. The practical nature of the subject was viewed by respondents as a core strength of the subject. Food literacy; education for sustainable development, resource management and practical elements such as cookery and craft are seen as key areas. The necessary updating of particular areas such as resource management and textiles and craft to make it more contemporary was acknowledged by respondents. Practical assessment in particular, was seen as a strength and something which should not be decreased in the new specification.

A key consideration for the new specification will be to review what is essential learning in Home Economics. There was consensus on the need for a reduction in some content covered at present in order to focus on the development of essential practical skills and ensure areas including education for sustainable development would be addressed. Ensuring currency and relevancy of content covered will be a key consideration for the new specification.

A key challenge for the development group will be how to make the new specification more appealing to male students and address the acknowledged gender imbalance in its uptake.

Ensuring progression to senior cycle was also reinforced by consultation feedback, with suggestions that this might inform the review and reduction of the theoretical content of the syllabus.

Overall, feedback received supported the suggested structuring of the course around key areas of learning such as family and society, food and health literacy, resource management and design and craft, and integrating other aspects, which are currently optional, into these strands.

The consultation process was extremely fruitful in both supporting some key directions for structuring the new specification and in terms of suggestions for new areas to be included. The level of engagement and detailed responses of participants must be acknowledged and the NCCA is very grateful for the feedback received. Feedback received will be shared with the Home Economics development group and will guide the broad directions of the new specification.

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Introduction

The aim of this consultation is to hear the open and honest views of teachers, parents, students and interested parties on the Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Home Economics. The generation of the Background Paper and Brief is the first stage of the curriculum and assessment development process. It provides a background to the development of a specification for Junior Cycle Home Economics which will be published in September 2017.

This consultation will involve gathering feedback through this survey and targeted meetings. The consultation process will close on the 18th November 2016. The NCCA would greatly appreciate your feedback. This feedback will inform the work of the Home Economics Development Group.

Please read the paper which can be downloaded [here](#).

Then complete this questionnaire as fully as possible but feel free to skip any item that is not relevant to you. The questionnaire is divided into six parts: 1. Participant's details 2. Junior Certificate Home Economics 3. Purpose(s) and philosophical underpinnings of Home Economics at junior cycle 4. Influences on Home Economics education in the 21st century 5. Assessment in Junior Cycle Home Economics 6. Brief for the review of Junior Cycle Home Economics.

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 1: Participant's details

* 1. I am responding as a ...

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Home Economics teacher | <input type="radio"/> Third level student |
| <input type="radio"/> Non-Home Economics teacher (Post-primary) | <input type="radio"/> Parent/ Guardian |
| <input type="radio"/> Primary teacher | <input type="radio"/> Teacher educator |
| <input type="radio"/> Principal/ Deputy Principal (Post-primary) | <input type="radio"/> Pre-service Teacher |
| <input type="radio"/> Principal/ Deputy Principal (Primary) | <input type="radio"/> Third level lecturer/researcher |
| <input type="radio"/> Second level student | <input type="radio"/> Other |

Other - please specify

2. Responding on behalf of ... (if applicable)

3. School type (if applicable)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Voluntary secondary school | <input type="radio"/> Vocational school |
| <input type="radio"/> Community school | <input type="radio"/> Community college |
| <input type="radio"/> Comprehensive school | <input type="radio"/> Other |

Other - please specify

4. You can provide your name and email address to enable us to follow-up on particular issues that you may identify. However, the survey data will be anonymised and we will ensure that no views that you articulate will be attributed to you or your school/organisation or be reported in any way that would allow you or your school/organisation to be identified.

Name

Email address

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 2: Junior Certificate Home Economics

Research looking at how teachers and students are experiencing the current Junior Certificate Home Economics course is outlined in section 3 (p. 19) of the background paper.

5. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The content of the current syllabus is too extensive at junior cycle.	<input type="radio"/>				
Elements of the current syllabus are outdated and irrelevant.	<input type="radio"/>				
The current syllabus provides adequate knowledge and skills for students' future life, study and work.	<input type="radio"/>				
The current syllabus is not gender inclusive enough to encourage males to study the subject	<input type="radio"/>				
The current Home Economics syllabus has a good mix of theory and practical elements	<input type="radio"/>				
Our current junior cycle students learn Home Economics in a hands-on/experiential way.	<input type="radio"/>				
The structure of the syllabus (core and optional area of study) allows students an element of choice	<input type="radio"/>				
The current syllabus prepares students adequately to progress to Leaving Certificate Home Economics	<input type="radio"/>				
The current Home Economics content provides appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills for students.	<input type="radio"/>				
The current Home Economics syllabus develops transferable life skills.	<input type="radio"/>				
Students at junior cycle find Home Economics useful and interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
Students at junior cycle find Home Economics difficult and boring.	<input type="radio"/>				

If you wish, please provide additional comments regarding any changes you would most like to see in a new Home Economics specification:

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 3: Purpose(s) and philosophical underpinning of Home Economics at junior cycle

Home Economics has traditionally played an important role in the education of young people in Ireland. The purposes and philosophical underpinning of junior cycle Home Economics education for the 21st century are introduced in section 4 (p. 23) of the background paper.

6. Regarding the purpose(s) of junior cycle Home Economics, please respond to the following statements showing your level of agreement where 5 is of most importance and 1 is of least importance.

Engaging students with junior cycle Home Economics...

	1	2	3	4	5
...can develop their food literacy skills.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can improve their health and wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can develop their creativity and textile manipulation skills.	<input type="radio"/>				
...enables them to be ethical, ecological and socially-responsible citizens.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can develop discerning consumers.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can develop financially-responsible people.	<input type="radio"/>				
...has a role to play in protecting the environment.	<input type="radio"/>				
...enables them to be creative and innovative.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can develop problem solving skills.	<input type="radio"/>				
...facilitates students to develop transferable skills for living.	<input type="radio"/>				
...has a role to play in fostering a healthy attitude and positive relationship to food.	<input type="radio"/>				
...can develop critical, analytical thinkers.	<input type="radio"/>				

Additional comments in relation to the purposes of junior cycle Home Economics education.

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 4: Influences on Home Economics education in the 21st century

Section 5 of the Background Paper (p.31) describe some of the influences on Home Economics education in the 21st century.

8. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Strengthening the position of Home Economics as the only curriculum subject concerned with family empowerment and wellbeing is important.	<input type="radio"/>				
The current Home Economics syllabus is no longer relevant to the lives of students in the 21st century.	<input type="radio"/>				
The Home Economics specification should ensure currency and relevancy of content.	<input type="radio"/>				
Home Economics can play an important role to encourage students to think and act globally.	<input type="radio"/>				
Education for Sustainable Development and responsible living should be a key element underpinning all areas of study in the specification.	<input type="radio"/>				
Home Economics has the capacity to develop a healthy attitude and positive relationship with food in a holistic way.	<input type="radio"/>				
Home and Resource management should be considered as a key contextual strand or area of learning in the new specification.	<input type="radio"/>				

You may wish to add further comments relating to issues raised in regards to the influences on the Home Economics education in the 21st Century, in section 5 of the Background Paper. If so, please use the space below.

Background Paper for Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 5: Assessment in Junior Cycle Home Economics

The Background Paper raises some points about the current Junior Certificate Home Economics examination. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements where 5 is of most importance and 1 is of least importance.

9. Assessment of junior cycle Home Economics should focus on assessing...

	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge and recall of facts	<input type="radio"/>				
Practical cookery skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Creativity and textile manipulation skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Application of knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar situations	<input type="radio"/>				
Problem solving skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Application of skills in real life contexts	<input type="radio"/>				

If you wish, please use the space below to add further comments in relation to assessment in Junior Cycle Home Economics.

Section 6: Brief for the review of Junior Cycle Home Economics

Section 8 of the Background Paper (p.45) outlines issues that will be addressed in the development of the junior cycle Home Economics curriculum and assessment specification.

10. How effective would each of the following features be in improving Home Economic education at junior cycle?

	Not effective	Effective	Very effective
Reduce the breadth and amount of content in the course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure the course is gender inclusive in its presentation and language register	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organise the course around a core area of study only and integrate other areas such as child development, design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organise the course around core thematic strands and areas of learning such as family and social systems; food and health literacy; education for sustainable development; home and resource management; design and craftwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please indicate how important each of the following areas are in the context of a new specification for Home Economics where 5 is of most importance and 1 is of least importance.

Junior Cycle Home Economics should teach students

	1	2	3	4	5
... practical food and culinary skills	<input type="radio"/>				
... nutritional knowledge	<input type="radio"/>				
... meal planning	<input type="radio"/>				
... household technology	<input type="radio"/>				
... garment construction	<input type="radio"/>				
... design and craft skills	<input type="radio"/>				
... textile studies	<input type="radio"/>				
... sewing skills including machine and hand stitches	<input type="radio"/>				
... making a household item	<input type="radio"/>				
... consumer studies	<input type="radio"/>				
... health education	<input type="radio"/>				
... social studies	<input type="radio"/>				
... the family	<input type="radio"/>				
... childcare	<input type="radio"/>				
... home studies	<input type="radio"/>				
... resource management	<input type="radio"/>				
... safety in the home	<input type="radio"/>				
... design principles in the home	<input type="radio"/>				
... services to the home	<input type="radio"/>				

12. Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements.

The specification should...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Reflect the centrality of the family as the core	<input type="radio"/>				
Emphasise the importance of practical Home Economics skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Highlight the importance of sustainable, responsible living	<input type="radio"/>				
Develop students' creativity and innovation skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Develop students' problem solving skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Develop students' critical, analytical thinking skills	<input type="radio"/>				

Additional comments on the Brief for the review of junior cycle Home Economics:

Overall Comment(s)

13. General comment: If you have further comments on the background paper please outline them in the box below.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please do not forget to press 'Submit' when you are finished.

If you have completed a hard copy of this questionnaire, please return it to:

**JC Home Economics Background Paper Consultation,
NCCA,
James Fintan Lalor Ave,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois.**

A summary of the findings will be published on the NCCA website at the end of the consultation.

Appendix 2: List of Organisations

The following is a list of organisations who either submitted an online survey or a written submission:

- Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE)
- A Partnership with Africa, Dublin.
- Castletroy College, Limerick.
- Creagh College, Gorey, Wexford.
- Home Economics Department, St Angela's College, Sligo.
- Health and Safety Authority.
- Portlaoise College, Laois.
- Safefood.
- Temple Carrig School, Greystones.

