

**Assessment practices and their impact on
home economics education in Ireland**

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B.Ed., M. Ed. (T.C.D.)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Stirling

Faculty of Education

December 2014

Abstract

This study was prompted by an interest in the extent to which the aims of home economics education in Ireland are being served by the assessment carried out at a national level. This interest led to an empirical investigation of key stakeholders' perceptions of the validity of home economics assessment and a critical evaluation of its impact on teaching and learning. The data collection primarily comprised interviews with a selection of teachers and other key people such as students, teacher educators and professional home economists; and a complementary analysis of curriculum and design of Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics assessments during the period 2005-2014. The analysis of interview data combined with the curriculum and assessment analyses revealed the compounding impact and washback effect of home economics assessments on student learning experience and outcomes.

This impact was reflected in several areas of the findings including an evident satisfaction among the respondents with junior cycle assessment, due to the perceived appropriateness of the assessment design and operational arrangements, and dissatisfaction with curriculum and assessment arrangements at senior cycle as they were considered to be inappropriate and negatively impacting on the quality of learning achieved. The respondents candidly pointed to what they considered to be an acceptance by some teachers of unethical behaviour around the completion of journal tasks.

The respondents indicated that summative assessment practices are commonly used in home economics classrooms and the findings strongly suggest that external examinations are influencing teaching methods by demanding a test-oriented pedagogy to enable students to achieve certificate points. The technical analysis of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examination questions confirmed that these external assessments predominantly promote lower-order learning and there are clear indications of a washback effect on the quality of learning achieved. There is a view that the subject's position in the curriculum is weakened due to a lack of coherence around practice, as well as a lack of advocacy and leadership in the field. There was little evidence of the impact of home economics education and many of the interviewees merely 'hoped' that home economics made a difference in the lives of students. The study also showed that

there are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession.

While not immediately generalisable to all home economics teachers or settings in schools, this study nonetheless implies that if the views and practices of the respondents were to be replicated across the whole of the home economics education community, it would not be safe to view national assessment results as a valid indicator of learning and achievement standards in the subject. There are grounds in this work to argue that the subject's values and purposes are not supported by existing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment arrangements.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor John Gardner, for his expert guidance, unwavering support and constant encouragement during this research. His insight and inspiration challenged and broadened my personal and academic perspectives and deepened my professional learning. I am grateful for his generosity in giving advice and feedback and for his meticulous attention to detail as the work progressed, as well as his empathy and support at all times.

I am very grateful to my second supervisor Professor Mark Priestley, for his guidance and professional advice. I also wish to acknowledge the academic and personal support I received during the early stages of my Ph.D. studies from my second supervisor at Queen's University Belfast, Dr. Debie Galanouli.

I am indebted to the teachers and key stakeholders involved in this study for giving so freely of their time and for sharing with me their views and expertise. I wish to acknowledge the positive engagement and contributions from all the participants in this research.

I wish to express a sincere thank you to the office staff of the Deputy Principal of Education and Students at the University of Stirling for their hospitality. Especially, I wish to acknowledge John's P.A., Lorna Valentine, for her efficient scheduling and management of meetings. Lorna's consistent gentle caring manner was a source of great comfort to me during my visits to Scotland. Thank you to the library staff at the University of Stirling, St. Angela's College, Sligo, and the James Joyce Library, U.C.D. for their efficient and courteous assistance. I am grateful to all the individuals and organisations, including the Association of Teachers of Home Economics, the International Federation for Home Economics and the Teaching Council, who gave me access to information. A sincere thank you is also extended to members of the public who responded to an advertisement in *Ireland's Own* and donated old school home economics textbooks for this research study.

Finally, I wish to express gratitude to my family and close friends for their support and encouragement in the completion of this study. I wish to especially acknowledge my dear friend Ken Browne who journeyed with me to the finish line.

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
ARG	Assessment Reform Group (UK)
ARIA	Analysis and Review of Innovations in Assessment (UK)
ATHE	Association of Teachers of Home Economics (RoI)
BEd	Bachelor in Education
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DATI	Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction
D&T	Design and Technology
DES	Department of Education and Skills (formally Department of Education and Science until 2010) (RoI)
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute (RoI)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)
HEM	Home Economics Matters (E-journal)
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IES	Irish Educational Studies
IFHE	International Federation for Home Economics
IJHE	Irish Journal of Home Economics
IYF	International Year of the Family
JCSA	Junior Cycle Student Award (RoI)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (RoI)
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research (UK)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
RoI	Republic of Ireland
SEC	State Examinations Commission (RoI)
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education (RoI)

TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Project
TFD	Textiles, Fashion and Design
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research coincides with national and international educational developments that are demanding new learning skills and assessments and a movement away from didactic teaching. In the Republic of Ireland (RoI), much debate focuses on the design of curriculum and assessment that will promote the development of key skills and competences (see for example, Hyland 2011; OECD 2009; Quinn 2012 and Smyth *et al.* 2011).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) document: *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle – Innovation and Identity* (NCCA 2011) sets out a vision for a new junior cycle¹ in the RoI that includes a broadening of the learning experience and assessment system. The intention is for the traditional Junior Certificate examination to be phased out and replaced with the ‘Junior Cycle Student Award’ (JCSA) (RTE 2014), a school based model of assessment to include both formative and summative assessment from September 2014. Fundamental changes to curriculum and assessment were revealed in the follow-up document: *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES 2012), which will apply to English from 2014; science from 2015, business and Irish from 2016, art, craft and design and modern languages from 2017, home economics, mathematics, music and geography from 2018 and the remaining subjects from 2019. The changes include much focus on skills and competences, which in a home economics context could include such areas as communications skills or consumer competence.

1.1 Background to the study

While working as a teacher in second-level education in Ireland, teaching the subjects home economics to junior cycle and senior cycle students, I developed a keen interest in the area of assessment. By and large, routine teaching practices involved the teaching of subject knowledge, the development of student understanding of key concepts, the efficient coverage of a curriculum and the preparation of students for examinations. The development of subject attitudes, values and skills at senior cycle level were arguably much less important than the high-stakes final examination (the Leaving Certificate)

¹ Second level education in Ireland is provided in two cycles. Junior cycle education (lower secondary education) is

that required the students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of key subject areas. The system had settled into a predictable routine in which teachers, students and those companies producing examination paper booklets for students knew the topic areas that were frequently assessed. Trends were relatively easily identified in examination papers over the years and students could be well prepared to answer the questions 'expected' to appear on examination papers. Junior cycle assessment also involved a practical examination and the students were facilitated to perform these skills repetitively in an attempt to improve their practice, as 'practice makes perfect'. At senior cycle, the practical tasks were written up in a pro-forma journal, and the focus was on the completion of the practical tasks and 'write-up' of practical work. The assessment criteria and marking schemes strongly guided classroom teaching and learning practice for this component.

This was my experience of teaching and my awareness of other ways of teaching or assessing was limited. The State examinations were strongly influencing my practice and the key challenges were covering the broad curriculum and achieving good results for my students. Looking back, it was clear that the testing had a powerful influence on all aspects of the home economics curriculum delivery. The curriculum areas were extensive, as they covered the study of nutrition, food science, resource and home management, social studies and textile studies. Like many of my colleagues, I narrowed the curriculum I taught to fit closely with the demands of the test, in order to generate good student grades. Narrowing of the curriculum restricted the use of class time to relating subject content more widely to everyday life. The cycle of restricted curriculum was self-perpetuating, however, as my narrowing of the content was highly desired by students, parents, and by management – all of whom praised my glowing results. This inevitably compounded the problem that I now know to be 'teaching to the test'.

As time went on, I reflected more and more on the situation and ultimately began to question how effective my daily practice was including my choice of pedagogy and assessment. My final steps on the road to my academic Damascus were occasioned by an external inspection of the school's home economics provision. The subsequent inspector's report recommended the exploration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) practice and I remember wondering how assessment could support learning. Assessment

for me at that time and probably the majority of my colleagues was either the national examinations or the Christmas test.

Initially I did not understand the concept of AfL, and there was very little information available about its use in a home economics context. I sought to develop my own knowledge in the area, in order to improve my own practice and around the same time, I changed roles and accepted a lectureship in home economics education (Bachelor in Education (BEd) programme). This provided me with a great opportunity to explore the area of assessment in home economics in-depth. My own concerns were in turn stimulated by curriculum reforms that were beginning to emerge (see section 1.4 on curriculum and assessment innovations). I began to initiate change in my assessment practice and the assessment practices of my student-teachers through the formal inquiry into the efficacy of assessment in promoting learning in home economics. This inquiry led to the interrogation of the validity of national home economics assessment, and a critical evaluation of the impact of assessment on teaching and learning. The remainder of this chapter outlines how I set about doing this.

1.2 Gaps in research based knowledge of home economics education

Any formal inquiry will begin with a review of what is known about the topic in question. Home economics is neatly defined by the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) in their position statement (IFHE 2008). This position statement aims to anchor the subject of home economics in the 21st century and it identifies four dimensions, or areas of practice (IFHE 2008, p.1). These were:

- 1) an academic discipline involved in scholarship, research and in the creation of new knowledge;
- 2) an arena for everyday living in households, families and communities and for developing human growth potential and human necessities;
- 3) a curriculum area that facilitates students to discover and develop personal human resources, capabilities and life-skills; and
- 4) a societal arena to influence and develop policy and advocacy for the overall sustainable wellbeing of individuals, families and communities using transformative practices.

Item 1 is to some extent evident in second level education, but more so at third level. Items 2 and 3 are self-evident in a school context, but item 4 involves home economists working in the community, for example in family welfare and policy-related roles for government bodies. There are many real world challenges such as the global economic context, food safety, food security, environmental and sustainable development that impact on society, and the practice of a home economist professional in the view of the IFHE is ‘constantly evolving’ and addressing the phenomena and challenges of everyday life that are not typically one-dimensional (p.1). The multidisciplinary nature of the subject is viewed as a key strength by the international organisation (2008, p.1):

This disciplinary diversity coupled with the aim of achieving optimal and sustainable living means that home economics has the potential to be influential in all sectors of society by intervening and transforming political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological, at glocal levels.

This latter description reflects the consideration of local and global factors when initiating societal change.

Schön (1971) argues that ‘society and all of its institutions are in *continuing* processes of transformation’ (p.30) and that these transformations need to be understood, guided and managed. In his view, this requires being ‘adept at learning’ and having the capacity to bring about ‘continuing transformation’ (p.30). Arguably, in a home economics context, there is a need to explore the nature of the process by which the professional body transforms itself as there is little empirical evidence of this transformation to date. Moreover, some commentators such as Pratt (1986 cited in Attar 1990) assert that home economics teachers ‘tend not to be involved in pushing back frontiers of knowledge at all, leaving it to other professions to bring about changes in thinking’ (p.84). For example, there is no particular impetus to be at the frontiers in research in textiles, nutrition etc. Furthermore, Pratt argues that “‘internal” debate of critical issues is absent’ (p.84). It is difficult to contest these views, as home economics tends to be a subject that mediates the good practice and knowledge developed in its multi-disciplinary core areas, such as nutrition, health sciences and social policy. Pendergast (2013) is also of the view that the discipline of home economics requires a balance between educational theory and research. For example, evidence-based practice clearly illustrating that home economists’ ‘presence’ and actions in the world make it a better place, could in her view, strengthen the subject’s position globally (p.2).

The IFHE in their position statement (2008), claim that one of the four essential dimensions of home economics education and the professional practice of home economists, is the demonstration of ‘capacity to take critical, transformative/ emancipatory action to enhance wellbeing and to advocate for individuals, families and communities at all levels and sectors of society’ (p.2). However, Attar (1990) in a withering critique of home economics education asserts that home economics claims ‘it prepares all pupils for all kinds of living’, but in her view, these claims are unsubstantiated and simply assertions (p.19). They have ‘never been seriously investigated, and have hardly ever been questioned’ (p.19) and in my view, this is true 24 years on. At the beginning of this study, I was only aware of a few examples of how home economists acted as transformative agents or how critical, transformative and emancipatory action could be achieved in practice outside of the classroom or inside, especially in the context of an examination-driven system. I held the view that the generation of practice-referenced research to support this statement could enhance the work of the profession, by showing how home economics education can appropriately address some of the challenging issues impacting on society in current times, and how the subject is making a difference in the lives of people. Therefore, this study proposes to explore teachers’ and other stakeholders’ perceptions of the contribution of home economics to Irish society today.

One of the most important publications in recent times on home economics education is the edited collection produced by Pendergast, McGregor and Turkki (2012), who are among the most cited academics in the field. In the introduction to their edited collection *Creating Home Economics Future: The Next 100 Years*, they assert that the subject can make a contribution to a sustainable future. The publication has 34 international contributions, but none from Ireland. This suggests, at least on face value, that home economics education in Ireland is not an area of dynamic development, and contribution to academic thinking in the subject is lacking. This is demonstrated by the decline in academic outputs. For example, the *Irish Journal of Home Economics* (IJHE) wound up with its last issue in 1994, and the online journal *Home Economics Matters* (HEM) lasted only between 2007 and 2010. A trawl of the *Irish Educational Studies* (IES) journals (n=31) over the last 10 years reveals no home economics research papers. The influential body, the Teaching Council featured over the same period only one

output in the field and this in fact is my own work (McSweeney 2012). In addition, the Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) has no research-based outlet.

The only forums for discussion on home economics are sponsored by groups and institutions such as the subject association (ATHE) and St. Angela's College, Sligo (the sole provider of teacher education in home economics in Ireland). The ATHE offers leadership of the subject area, albeit from a limited resource base. For example, they have contributed the definition below to the debate on the role of home economics education in Ireland (2008, webpage).

Home Economics combines aspects of science, nutrition, cooking, parenting skills and finance. Students learn about the inter-relationships between diet, health, family, home and choice and the management of resources ... Home Economics delivers vital skills that enable students to lead effective lives as individuals and family members as well as members of the wider community.

I believe home economics offers more than this, but the dearth of research-based knowledge relating to the subject mission and practice in an Irish context makes a clarification of its role difficult. The small scale studies that I was able to find, as well as the defunct publications *IJHE* (1990-1994) and *HEM* (2007-2010), do give a valuable snapshot of contemporary issues in the field. A number of small studies have focused on discrete aspects of the subject including, for example: reflective practice in teacher education (Magee 2007), education for sustainable development (Maguire *et al.* 2013), body dissatisfaction and dieting (Mooney 2007), healthy eating in primary school (Mooney *et al.* 2011), nutrition and lifestyle knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (Mullaney 2008), AfL (McSweeney 2012) and 'lesson study' with a focus on the improvement of home economics classroom pedagogy (McSweeney *et al.* 2012). This is a modest collection of small studies and two important observations must be emphasised. Firstly, aside from my own work, none of the studies refer to assessment in home economics and there has been no research, or other reflection on the impact of assessment arrangements on teaching and learning experiences in home economics education. Secondly, the studies are not coordinated or strategically coherent in terms of researching the field.

It is clear that there is therefore a pressing need to gather evidence of the effectiveness of home economics education on a wider and more in-depth scale. This is beyond the scope of the present study, which is instead designed to offer insights into teachers'

perceptions of the place of home economics in education, their role in delivering it and the influence of assessment on how they do it. Later in the literature review, I explore the role that home economics is designed to play in society in some depth; however, it is useful at this point to set out briefly its nature before addressing the gaps in our knowledge about the impact of assessment arrangements.

1.3 Values and mission of home economics

Kuhn (1977) defines a paradigm as being ‘what the members of a scientific community, and they alone, share’ (p.294). McGregor (2006) argues the importance of making visible the ‘sum total of the belief-set, values, and practices prevalent in a given professional community’ (p.8), i.e. on the basis of Kuhn, the paradigm to which the community owes its allegiance. Knowledge within a community of professionals is therefore its intellectual capital and asset, and it contributes to the overall vision and strategic plan of a profession. As the previous section showed, there is a dearth of research-based knowledge in the field in an Irish context, especially referring to the subject mission, values and practice. McGregor (2006) argues that with an invisible paradigm, there is no knowing what a group stands for and how to set about achieving collective goals and vision. Moreover, if home economics professionals carry a variety of views regarding the practice of home economics education, it inevitably weakens the subject position in the curriculum. Arguably this deficit lies at the heart of the constant ‘battle’ by teachers to defend the subject and justify its place in the curriculum (see Attar 1990 and Pratt 1986, cited in Attar 1990) and there is a real threat to the sustainability of home economics as a subject.

Aside from the lack of research and professional dialogue regarding practice, collective goals and vision in an Irish context, there are other factors that could influence the subject’s existence in the curriculum. These include perceptions as to: whether home economics is perceived as a valuable academic subject and/or as a gendered subject, and as a consequence, how its value is perceived by policy makers, teachers, students and wider society. Some commentators such as Attar (1990) argue that home economics has a ‘persistent identity problem’ (p.9), and my experience reflects this. I believe home economics, which in the past was labelled a Cinderella subject, continues to be a misunderstood subject in current times. For some these may be overly subjective views, and for me to comment authoritatively, it is incumbent on my research to identify whether

these factors actually exist. Attar contrasts ‘the inside view of home economics and the non-expert outside view’ (1990, p.10), with the ill-informed latter predominating. This suggests that the research design should include a systematic and focused investigation of how the subject is perceived and to articulate the mission of the subject as perceived by teachers and other stakeholders. This study therefore seeks to address this gap in knowledge and to determine whether its values and purposes are supported by current pedagogy and assessment arrangements.

Teachers’ beliefs and their impact on teaching have been widely researched and ranges from the original theoretical treatments of Bandura (1986), Nespor (1987) and Pajares (1992) etc. to current survey research such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2014). In the context of Irish schools, there is a distinct paucity of evidence about teachers’ beliefs and their impact on teaching, and there is much less information available in a home economics context. One intention behind this study, therefore, is to bring tacit knowledge to the surface regarding beliefs, attitudes and opinions with a particular interest into whether assessment in home economics is guiding home economics practice.

So what is it that we do not know as a result of research in home economics being so sparse? For example, do we know what contribution home economics education is designed to make in society? Having established that knowledge, do we know if teachers in Ireland perceive its values and mission in the same way? Do we know how this perception is affected by the assessment arrangements in which they work? And do we know how these arrangements affect how they teach home economics? These are important questions and the pursuit of answers to them has in various ways informed and underpinned the work of my research.

1.4 Curriculum and assessment innovations

Clearly, considerations of the curriculum in schools and related assessment arrangements are crucial dimensions for this study. In this year, 2014, a framework for junior cycle (DES 2012) will be enacted by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). This framework comprises eight underpinning principles (e.g. creativity and innovation; wellbeing; engagement, relevance and enjoyment), six key-skills (e.g. communicating, being creative and managing myself) and 24 statements of learning

(e.g. describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships; learns how to think and act sustainably). On average, most junior cycle students currently study 9-12 subjects, but in the new junior cycle (JCSA), most of them will study 8-10 full subjects and a maximum of four short courses. Schools will have greater flexibility in terms of the subjects, short courses (equivalent to half a subject) and learning experiences offered. Importantly, it will be at the discretion of schools to offer subjects in particular fields as short subjects of study, or full subjects in line with the individual needs and interests of students. This means that subjects will inevitably be competing for a place on the curriculum and it is possible that home economics may not be offered as a full subject in some schools.

The nature and role of assessment looms large in the public domain and diverse views exist about practice, nationally and internationally. The pressing needs of students to have qualifications at the end of their studies and the parallel accountability agendas of governments around the world demand an appropriate summative assessment system. In Ireland, a factor that influences students' subject choice is the ability of that subject to earn Leaving Certificate 'points' for students. Looney (2006) notes the 'towering presence' and importance of the Leaving Certificate examination on the educational landscape, because the Leaving Certificate is viewed as a high-stakes examination and 'gateway' qualification (p.349) for employment and entry to higher education. Hyland (1999) had earlier argued in a similar fashion that the students tend to select subjects that they consider can support their goals, which in this case is to accumulate the highest number of points in the Leaving Certificate. If home economics is not meeting these student aspirations, student choices would be expected to decline over time. This is in fact the case with the Chief Examiner of home economics in her Leaving Certificate reports (SEC 2001; SEC 2004; SEC 2007a and SEC 2011a) documenting a decrease totalling 13% in subject uptake over the last decade. In contrast, the Chief Examiner's Junior Certificate reports on the examinations (SEC 2003; SEC 2006a and SEC 2012a), which do not have the same high stakes pressure, have indicated a 4% increase in subject intake.

The former Minister of Education and Skills has emphasised the need for change on the basis that these types of summative assessments have a strong influence on teaching and learning practice (Quinn 2012). It does this primarily by narrowing the students'

experience, with a focus on learning that enables them to do well in final examinations rather than on the broader learning outcomes of a subject. Groups such as the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC) have for some time been highly critical of rote learning practices (for home economics, an example might be the memorisation of lists of vitamin characteristics), and they have campaigned for an educational system that gives expression to talent, develops authentic skills and provides quality learning for young people. The Head of Education Policy at IBEC (Donohoe 2012) endorses the new developments at junior cycle, acknowledging the real opportunity to support the development of critical and analytical thinking, creativity, communication skills, management of information skills and teamwork skills in learners, which the new design espouses. The new curricular developments and proposed assessment reform present opportunities for 'planned washback'. Donohoe (2012) commented that 'if done right, this could prove to be the most important education reform of recent years. It presents a real opportunity to move away from the dominance of rote learning and support the development of critical thinking in students' (webpage).

Washback is a term that has been used by a variety of writers including for example, Hamp-Lyons (1997), Alderson (2004) and Hawkey (2006) to describe the influence of examinations on teaching and learning. Washback can lead to both positive and negative effects that impact at the micro-level of teaching and learning rather than the macro-level of impact socially. For example, in a negative context, teachers may professionally desire to address the subject aims and mission, yet in practice can be constrained by the limitations created by the examination system. This paradox resonates with my own experience.

Washback can of course have a positive impact. For example, desired skills can be developed and can improve the learning in the construct being measured, when the assessment questions or tasks are designed to elicit evidence of these constructs and skills. Well-planned assessment tasks therefore have the potential to generate 'planned washback', and desirable improvements in teaching and learning. This in turn could make students more motivated to achieve learning goals rather than performance goals, with a likely positive impact on the affective outcomes of education. Clearly, then, it is important for me not to rule out potential positive impacts of washback on either student performance or student motivation when I am examining washback effects in this study.

The quality of classroom assessment in home economics was addressed formally by the DES in the Inspectorate report *Looking at Home Economics: Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools* (DES 2008). The practice of assessment was described as effective in most of the schools, but concerns were expressed about the use of a range of assessment modes to assess all aspects of the syllabuses. The literature reveals little in the way of research into the impact of assessment on student learning and methods that support the betterment of pedagogy and student outcomes. Boud (2000) argues that assessment in any subject has the double duty of supporting learning and developing autonomous learners. Stobart (2008) also emphasises the importance of recognising this double duty of assessment; ‘assessment in the here-and-now which leaves students better equipped for the next task’ (p.170). Therefore one aim of my study was to explore the impact of home economics teaching and assessment on student outcomes from the perspective of teachers and other key stakeholders.

1.5 Validity matters

Examination practices in Ireland have remained relatively unchanged since the 1970s, when Madaus and MacNamara (1970) conducted an extensive analysis of ‘the reliability of Leaving Certificate marks and the types of intellectual activity for which marks are awarded’ (p.vii). They reported frequent prediction of examination questions and memorisation of answers to these questions by students. In their view, the syllabuses emphasised content to the detriment of skills and ‘intellectual functioning’ (1970, p.135):

For too long the cart has been before the horse; final marks [the marks achieved in final examinations] have been treated by society as the ultimate goal of education. Intellectual curiosity, the joy of discovery, involvement in intellectual issues – in a word, all those activities and responses which contribute to true learning have been subordinated to, often sacrificed to, a public examination. To restore things to their proper order is the most pressing problem in Irish secondary education at the present time.

It is interesting to note how pertinent this problem is today. For example, Hyland (2011) has described the system as no longer fit for purpose because it neglects the development of capabilities and dispositions of students by rewarding rote learning, instrumental learning and memorisation. In 2002, the NCCA initiated consultation on senior cycle assessment, and their report noted that the Leaving Certificate has ‘stood the test of time’, enjoys public confidence in terms of ‘standards, status and currency’

(p.43). Interestingly the report (NCCA 2002, p. 43) made clear that validity is of secondary concern in comparison to objectivity.

The perceived objectivity of assessment arrangements is seen as a major strength of the Leaving Certificate. In the process, the validity of the assessment modes and methods, their compatibility with the aims and objectives of subjects, are often viewed as secondary concerns.

One aspect of validity is whether or not the examinations address the learning outcomes properly and, to this end, it is interesting to examine the cognitive and other demands of the national examinations. Back in 1970, Madaus and MacNamara did a full cognitive analysis of the Leaving Certificate, but unfortunately did not include home economics. Instead they looked at English, Irish, French, Latin, history, geography, mathematics, physics and chemistry. As part of my study, I decided to do an examination analysis that was informed by the Madaus and MacNamara study and also by the Anderson *et al.* (2001) framework. This analysis helped to determine whether home economics assessments cover a wide range of constructs and skills identified in the subject domain. Combined with the views of teachers and other key stakeholders regarding home economics assessment practice, this analysis was designed to reveal the compounding impact of home economics assessments on student outcomes.

Another aspect of validity is the extent to which the curriculum and assessment in home economics addresses the needs of contemporary society. Consideration of whether the subject is addressing the mission and underpinning philosophy of the subject, and of whether the curriculum content is current and viable, is therefore necessary as students, their teachers and society may be short-changed if the subject is not considered to fulfil its stated aims and educational goals.

1.6 Research design

This study centres on the relationship between assessment in home economics education, and teaching and learning approaches, teachers' beliefs and the quality of learning in examination-oriented contexts. Arguably the role of the subject is widely misunderstood in society due to a lack of engagement in professional dialogue regarding the fitness for purpose of the curriculum and the appropriateness of pedagogy and assessment to support the development of quality learning. However, the lack of empirical evidence about the efficacy of home economics practice does not help to

address this problem or the subject's positioning in the curriculum. My own journey of professional inquiry has prompted me to explore how such an examination-oriented system impacts on the learning of students. My curiosity has therefore led to my central research question:

Are assessment practices in home economics education in Ireland fit for purpose in serving the educational aims of the subject?

The literature review needed to underpin this research pursuit plays at least two roles. The first is a conventional review of existing research in the field and the conceptual frameworks informing a curriculum/assessment type of study. The second is essentially a piece of desk-based research spanning the evolution of home economics as a school subject, its role in society and the social and cultural contexts which have influenced it over time. This latter study is therefore designed to establish the philosophy and central values of home economics, and to provide a platform to explore whether home economics education in Ireland is fit for the purpose of serving its educational aims. Once these are established, the empirical dimensions of the design consider how these values are perceived and acted out. This entails an examination of stakeholders' perceptions of:

- the rationale, knowledge, understanding and skills underpinning home economics educational practice
- the validity of home economics assessment in relation to the curriculum and subject mission
- the impact of assessment on how home economics is taught and on the quality of student learning.

The perceptions of key actors in home economics education such as teachers and students can be augmented with more technical approaches to assessing the validity of home economics education. For example, it is possible to use established frameworks to analyse the curriculum and design of current examinations. The research design seeks to combine these perceptual and analytical approaches as a means of exploring the overall validity of home economics education and the effect of assessment arrangements on them. It is worth pausing at this point to consider the key actors mentioned above.

In terms of capturing the status quo of home economics teaching, some form of observation study would suggest itself as appropriate, for example, in a representative range of home economics classrooms and lessons. However, regrettably this was not a practical option and the alternative focus on teachers' perceptions and their opinions is set out later in the methods chapter. One means of strengthening this approach, which I have used, is to ask a wider group of experts in the field with additional perspectives what their views are on the assessment of home economics and its effectiveness in serving the educational aims of the subject. This included for example, university lecturers, national examination panel members and students (as the 'consumer' experts).

1.7 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is set out in seven chapters as follows. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and a rationale for the research, while also establishing the context of the study. Chapter 2 presents the first part of the literature review which takes its lead from Dennehy (2007) who argues that 'the past is a foundation upon which present and future advancement of knowledge rests' (p.57). An examination of the evolution and historical development of the subject enables a better understanding of current practice and perceptions. The chapter also considers the different perspectives on the mission and underpinning philosophy of the subject, the variety of conceptual frameworks guiding practice and the contextualisation of curriculum policy.

Chapter 3 offers the second half of the literature review covering the assessment of curriculum knowledge, understanding and skills in home economics. This includes assessment paradigms, principles and design practices; and validation frameworks available for appraising examinations. Chapter 4 outlines the rationale for the chosen methods and the factors affecting the research design, including the design of the research instruments. Chapter 5 presents the results of the analysis of the curriculum, examination questions, coursework tasks, and the interview and focus group data. Chapter 6 offers a thematic analysis of the interview data, a discussion of compounding findings and their implications. Finally Chapter 7 presents the concluding remarks,

limitations of the study, recommendations for future practice and a reflection on personal learning.

Chapter 2 Literature Review I: Home

Economics- the Subject

2.1 Introduction

Unlike those studies that begin with a clean sheet of paper, so to speak, and proceed to determine from the literature those areas of a topic that may merit research, this study has been prompted by a concern to identify how an academic school subject, namely home economics, may be impacted upon by one of its key processes; assessment. This literature review therefore has the primary task of collating what is known about the subject and its assessment, in order to refine the central focus of the study, which is to investigate whether home economics assessment arrangements are fit for purpose.

A second, but not secondary in the sense of being less important, task for this review is to establish the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in which a national curriculum defines a body of knowledge and skills to impart to the nation's young people. For example, what theoretical frameworks for curriculum design determine how home economics fits into the curriculum in Ireland and why is it there? Tracing how home economics education was perceived to be 'gendered' is partly a historical pursuit and partly a result of the sociological dimension of curriculum design. A brief, but not developed analysis of the development and impact of gender behaviours and roles from a sociological, psychological and feminist perspective is important to this study, as these perspectives arguably affect the way home economics education is viewed. Furthermore, pervasive assumptions about women's work and roles stem from a domestic and gender ideology and these beliefs also influenced the formation of the identity and knowledge base of home economics. Illuminating the origin of identity issues is essential for this study as the role of home economics education essentially must be couched in this context.

Particularly important for this study is the need to examine how teachers perceive the role of home economics in the curriculum leading to a consideration of theories about teachers' beliefs and how they impact on practice. The study therefore seeks to appraise how assessment impacts on teachers' beliefs and practice and part 2 of this review also considers the 'washback' effect of examinations, a major issue under the theoretical umbrella of assessment validity. Fitness for purpose in terms of the assessment of the home economics curriculum is a validity issue and the conceptual framework of validity needs to inform the research.

There are a variety of views about the subject of home economics, and some well-informed and some not. To enable a consistent basis for this research, it is useful therefore, to consider the development of the subject's identity, its name, antecedents, mission and purpose, and to review contemporary discourse about the role of the home economist. The locus of the research question can then be placed in this context, enabling further contextual insights from the assimilation of research data.

2.2 The development of the identity of home economics

In philosophy, genealogy is an historical technique used to question the totality of philosophical and social beliefs and ideologies existing over a period of time. One of

Foucault's ideas about genealogy (1977, pp.139-140) refer to the interrogation of those elements which:

we tend to feel [are] without history ... it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances where they are absent, the moment they remained unrealised.

Bouchard (1977, p.147) outlines how solid foundations of the past became 'through Foucault's archaeological retrospective, an open site: the clearing away of a new space for investigation and the opening of new questions' (p.7). In much the same way, the use of an 'archaeological method' in the context of this study clears away a new space for the investigation, and opening of new questions about current practice in home economics education. As Bouchard (1977) argues, this involves recognising 'the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats' as well as diagnosing 'the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength' (p.145). Similarly, Beddoe (1998) argues that 'we need to know our past to understand our present. The present is a product of the past: we are moulded and conditioned by a past of which we are alarmingly ignorant' (pp.1-2). The 'persistent identity problem' identified by Attar (1990) in my view has yet to be fully interrogated. To fully understand what home economics essentially is necessitates the identification of the elusive qualities that shape the subject's mould or identity. This involves an examination of the subject name, the impact of domestic ideology on the design of the home economics curriculum and subject status. First of all, it is important to examine the subject names used over two centuries, the nature of these changes and their impact on the identity of the subject of home economics.

2.2.1 Searching for a name

'Domestic economy' was an optional subject taught in national schools in Ireland from the late 1800s and in second level schools from 1883. A book used in Irish national schools entitled *Domestic Economy A Class Book for Girls* (The Royal School Series 1889) defines domestic economy as 'the science which teaches the right management of the family home' (p.5). The etymology of the title originates from the Latin *domesticus* and *domus*, which relates to a 'home' or 'house', and the word 'economy' originates from the Greek word *oikonomia* meaning 'household management' (*oikos* meaning a

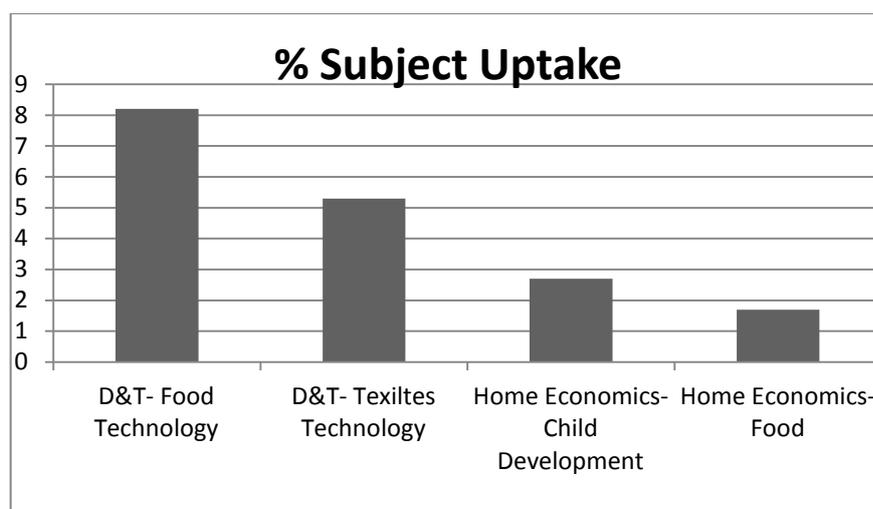
'house', and '*nomos*' meaning law, or management). Domestic economy was gradually eliminated from the national school curriculum as a 'domestic science' version of the subject evolved during the early 1900s, being offered in second level schools from 1924. The next change came along when the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools (Department of Education 1967-1968) made reference to the subject of 'home economics' for the first time in 1967 and this subject replaced domestic science in the curriculum. From 1969, the senior cycle programme was called 'Home Economics-Scientific and Social'.

In a sense, the renaming of the subject several times could be viewed as an attempt to re-position the subject in the curriculum and to establish academic recognition. In advice for the home economics community, Attar (1990) suggested that renaming the subject was an action that could 'shed the old prejudices along with the old name' (p.91). However, she argues that a name change only has a short-term effect (1990, p.92):

Even if bad memories do linger on, the same attributes which made it formerly unattractive or liable to be disparaged are likely to set off once more the process of investing a name with negative associations ... 'economics' and 'science' are not words with low-status associations. 'Domestic' and 'home', on the other hand, are ... As long as the focus of home economics is on the home and family, there is little its supporters can do to improve its image by varying its name.

This focus may not easily change however, as the international organisation (IFHE 2008) assert that 'the preferred name of the field of study and profession is "Home Economics" ... The Federation is committed to re-branding and re-positioning, not renaming the profession' (p.2). The subject title home economics is used in approximately 60 countries (IFHE 2014) and in their view, the international use of the title has strengthened the case for not changing it, as a name change could result in a loss of international identity and subject fragmentation. There is some credibility in this view as the renaming and re-orienting the subject in England and Wales from 1990 for example, resulted in subject fragmentation. Home economics along with craft, art and design and business studies were subsumed into design and technology (D&T), a new interdisciplinary subject in the national curriculum in 1990 (Harris and Wilson 2003). General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) home economics continued to be offered in the curriculum alongside D&T; however, according to Gill (Gill 2013, p.6), there is a low level of student uptake (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 D&T/home economics subject uptake in England 2012



As illustrated in Figure 1, GCSE D&T/home economics popularity in England was low (18% total uptake) in 2012. In comparison, Junior Certificate home economics in Ireland was taken by 39% of the cohort of students in 2013 (SEC 2013a). This contrast in uptake could partly be attributed to subject fragmentation and renaming, where aspects of home economics are offered as stand-alone subjects as well as subsumed into D&T, rather than as one complete multi-disciplinary subject, as is the case in Ireland. As recently as June 2014, Hurst (2014) reported that the examination regulator, Ofqual, announced their decision to discontinue home economics as a GCSE subject from 2015, due to overlap with D&T. This trend indicates that the subject position has weakened in England considerably and that in Ireland, the sustainability of home economics in the curriculum could equally be a real threat if the multi-disciplinary subject becomes fragmented. This could potentially happen if home economics education is offered as a short course instead of a full subject in the new junior cycle programme. If this trend materialises, it will inevitably lead to subject fragmentation and specialisation in aspects of home economics such as: food studies, home design and management or design and craftwork.

Home economics departments in colleges and universities across the world use an array of related subject titles such as: home economics and human ecology (Malta), home economics and craft science (Finland), family studies and home economics (Ontario), human sciences (Texas Technology University and Iowa State University), human environmental sciences (University of Arkansas), natural resource sciences

(Washington State University) and family and consumer sciences (America). The attempt to rename the profession by some countries indicates a divergence in views about the appropriateness of the title of the field, and the possible dilemma experienced by professionals in improving the subject position within academic communities. The implications of this apparent unease are significant. Brand recognition inevitably is more difficult with a variety of subject names in use. Furthermore, it could be argued that the use of many subject names over time has eroded the focus of home economics and it is indicative of a discipline struggling to establish roots and gain recognition.

2.2.2 Being on the margins: gender issues

During the 1800s and 1900s, 'norms' of maleness and femaleness and social divisions were overtly embedded throughout the school system using textbooks, role-modelling, and through the design, organisation and implementation of the curriculum. It is important to initially explore the reasons for these practices and thereafter to analyse the role of home economics education in perpetuating such norms. One approach is to take an interdisciplinary slant using sociology, psychology and feminist perspectives in the conceptualisation of the gender identity of home economics. While borrowing from these perspectives, I concede that my treatment of them is not in-depth, but sufficient to cast light on key dimensions of the subject's identity.

Fiske (1987) argues that 'our culture consists of the meanings we make of our social experience and of our social relations ... It also situates those meanings within the social system, for a social system can only be held in place by the meanings that people make of it' (p.20) These cultural 'meanings' influence power relations. For example, Fiske (1987) asserts that 'culture is deeply inscribed in the differential distribution of power within a society' and these 'power relations can only be stabilised or destabilised by the meanings that people make of them' (p.20). Moreover, Taylor (1995) identifies that the nature of cultural processes are 'dynamic', where people act as 'agents' in 'shaping the social structure' (p.5). In society, there are a variety of deeply embedded views about gender and according to Taylor (1995), 'such meanings are organised at a number of interrelated levels within a dynamic ideological system' (p.5). She argues that 'coherent sets of meanings', which exist at a broader level, are known as ideologies, however 'both discourses and ideologies operate in a dynamic ideological field' (p.5). This section attempts to expose discourse and a set of meanings relating to gender and the

following section continues by examining at a broader level, the establishment of domestic ideology and its impact on the design of the home economics curriculum and subject status.

The meaning of masculinity and femininity varies across cultures and throughout time. Deeply rooted in history and in biblical creation stories is 'androcentrism', a term Bem (1993) associates with 'male centeredness' or the belief that males are the standard or norm (p.2). The use of the word 'man' historically implied a person be it man or woman and it assumed that the man was the chief member of the species. The historical subjugation of women can be explained by the 'gender order' and patterns of power relations existing between men and women. For example, patriarchy as defined by Macionis and Plummer (2005) is 'a form of social organisation in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (pp.312-313) and it has prevailed throughout human history.

According to Tovey and Share (2003), there are also those who subscribe to the 'natural differences' school of thought or 'sociobiology' (p.467). They argue that the division of labour is based on the biological differences between men and women. According to Purvis (1987), 'biological determinism' or the belief that biological differences such as brain structure, size, hormones, body size and strength lead to the 'supposed inferiority' (p.254) of women both intellectually and physically can be a contributing factor to the subordination of women. An alternative perspective on power relations is offered by de Beauvoir (1997). In her view, 'the great historical defeat of the feminine sex' was 'the upsetting of the old division of labour' (p.85) and this was accelerated by industrialism. In a primitive division of labour, 'man hunts and fishes, woman remains in the home; but the tasks of domesticity include productive labour ... and in consequence woman plays a large part in economic life' (p.85). There are also commentators such as Macionis and Plummer (2005) who claim, that 'historical notions of a "woman's place" in current times seem far from natural and are losing their power to deprive women of opportunities' (p.201). Whilst they acknowledge the existence of gender differences, they argue that equality is improving 'in important respects' (p.201). Arguably, gender differences are more pronounced in the developing world, and among certain cultural and religious groups. However, Jerpbak (2005) provides evidence of the existence of 'conditional equality' in American culture: 'Men may traditionally condition equality

with the assumption that women can have equal rights as long as it doesn't interfere with their primary family responsibilities' (p.15).

Similarly in an Irish context, one could question whether society still operates from a more traditional standpoint. The legal system has been associated with the reinforcement of gender roles historically in Ireland. Article 41.2 of the Constitution of Ireland², expresses contemporary (male) opinion of the time (1937), and through the use of language, it continues to perpetuate gender stereotyping in current times by assigning roles or societal functions specifically to women.

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved (Irish Statute Book 1937, Article 41.2.1).

The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home (Irish Statute Book 1937, Article 41.2.2).

These articles continue to provoke controversy today. For example, Smith (2012) argues that 'by rendering women's presence in the public sphere unnecessary, the Constitution problematically attributes the status of derivative dependency to women as a group' (p.3). In a similar fashion, Mullally (2013) argues that legal recognition is given to the ideal of 'separate spheres' and that the reference to women's role in the home in the Constitution reflects Catholic social teaching and the deep-rooted view that a woman's natural sphere is in the home. Although the articles are not coercive and the provision could be viewed as recognition of the unremunerated role that women play in the home, Mullally (2013) argues that this work is undervalued largely because it is unpaid. Moreover, she argues that this work 'has often remained invisible with little official recognition of its significance to the everyday functioning of society' (p.2).

Historically, home economics was designed to enhance women's work in the home and would have contributed to the well-being of families and 'the common good'. Yet, there was a significant level of disagreement regarding the role of home economics. For example, Heggestad (2005) argues that the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s were critical of home economics as it was associated with the perpetuation of

² The Constitution of Ireland is the fundamental law of the country.

conservative social values and the reinforcement of traditional models of gender roles. However, an underlying and often unacknowledged problem with home economics education is that it primarily relates to home life and because this work is largely unpaid and remains invisible, it is not valorised.

According to Brady (2012), gender norms enshrined in the Constitution are inappropriate now and ‘provisions such as those dealing with women’s obligations to home life are at odds with the lived experience of the majority of Irish women’ (p.7). Moreover, Smith (2012) notes the marked shift in the organisation of work-care relationships and responsibilities within families in Ireland. She notes that ‘the orthodox model of family care, that traditionally relied on a largely gendered breadwinner/unpaid caregiver binary, is in decline, with many families now structured around “the adult worker family”’ (p.1). The Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2012), substantiate this view as currently 28% of women are ‘looking after home/family’ and 46% are at work³ (p.27). A critical examination of these statistics reveals that the niche market for home economics education is changing as there is a notable decline in the orthodox family model. This suggests that a change in focus to ‘the adult worker family’ may help shed some of the old prejudices associated with the subject historically. Another positive development towards shedding old prejudices is the setting up of the Convention on the Constitution (Government of Ireland 2013) to consider the amendment of the clause on the role of women in the home.

Socialisation of gender roles

Macionis and Plummer (2005), explain that the gender order is the way in which society ‘shape notions of masculinity and femininity into power relationships’ (p.308) and they assert that the social experiences of men and women shape the development of society. The subject of home economics has been criticised for being an agent that socialises girls to fulfil a domestic role in life, but what is unknown to date is the extent of the role home economics played in shaping the social experiences of women in Irish society.

Gender roles are culturally developed at a young age through contact with one’s family, the media and other agencies of socialisation such as school and in the school

³ Others are recorded as retired, student or unemployed.

curriculum. Current legislation in Ireland prohibits discrimination in educational provision, and the Education Act of 1998 (Irish Statute Book 1998) stipulates that ‘schools must promote equality of opportunity for both male and female students’ (p.13). However, a wide range of commentators would argue that schools as social institutions have been widely associated historically with cultural reproduction, the construction of gender and the socialisation of girls and boys in different ways (see for example, Arnot 1984; Askew and Ross 1988; Attar 1990; Beddoe 1998; Deem 1984; Paechter 2000; Summerfield 1997; Tovey and Share 2003; Whyld 1983a and Whyld 1983b). For example, Askew and Ross (1988) argue that ‘sexism in schools is a microcosm of sexism in society’ and that discrimination and social division based on gender is perpetuated by schools (p.x). Macionis and Plummer (2005) explain that sexism is a concept orientated around ‘the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other’ (p.312). This belief usually manifests as the social domination of men over women. Similarly Platt and Whyld (1983) explain that ‘sex discrimination’ are ‘general practices which put people at a disadvantage because of their sex’ and sexism ‘makes us think such discrimination is justified’ (p.6). These are subtle practices, often unconscious, and difficult to eradicate. Bias within education can transpire in the curriculum by the manner in which subjects are packaged and offered to students, in classroom and textbook language, classroom content and imagery and in pedagogy arising from teachers’ beliefs.

According to Attar (1990), Plait and Whyld (1983) and Wynn (1983), the subject of home economics significantly contributed to the reinforcement of ‘femininity’. For example, girls’ reading books used in national schools from 1831⁴ gave an account of normal codes of lady-like behaviour and the role of girls in caring for their future husband and family. This practice clearly indicates the enculturation of young girls in stereotypical female roles through the medium of education and the perpetuation of domestic ideology through education. The texts were often persuasive and eloquently described. Take for example, *Domestic Economy: A Class Book for Girls* (The Royal School Series 1889), a publication sanctioned by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland. This publication communicates and strongly affirms cultural

⁴ National education was established in Ireland in 1831.

expectations of young women regarding their ‘own high mission’ (p.134) and role within their own ‘special sphere’ (p.135). The book acknowledges the increasing ‘talk now-a-days’ about ‘woman’s [women’s] rights’ (p.134). The great responsibility of home-making was further embellished and imposed in a guilt-invoking fashion (The Royal School Series 1889, p.135):

Is there not ample employment for all the energies of the most energetic in our own sphere? When once our eyes are opened to the importance and greatness of our work – and it is **the greatest work in the world** [emboldened in original] – we shall desire no position which may disturb or distract us.

Another example of these books consolidates this view. A *Domestic Economy Reader for Irish Schools* was published in 1904 and it was entitled *How Mary FitzGerald Learned Housekeeping*. The author, O’Connor Eccles, skilfully narrates a story about the FitzGerald family. It is interesting to observe in this textbook, how key values are portrayed through story-telling. For example, Mrs. Fitzgerald had some classic yet persuasive lines that affirmed typical feminine behaviours (1904, pp.27-28):

“How particular you are, mother, about being exact, and neat, and orderly. Why is that?” “I will tell you why, dear- because I know it is important, and because I am now trying to give you a lesson in life. Habits of neatness, of order and exactitude may be easily cultivated when one is young ... These habits form character, and they teach self-control, two most important things. In time they become mechanical, and cost no effort.

The intended readership of domestic literature would have included housewives, servants and school pupils. The books describe traditional expectations of women, normal ‘lady-like’ behaviour and skills young ladies should acquire in life. It is no surprise that the flood of manipulative texts which promised harmony and efficiency in the home through the medium of the domestic routine irritate feminist activists. For example, Wynn (1983) takes the view that school textbooks of this kind ‘persuaded girls to accept their inferior social position’ (p.201) and Attar (1990) documents how domestic economy readers stipulate that all work in the home is women’s work. This view could be a cause of consternation in modern society, but not where traditional practices exist. Patterns of social arrangements vary considerably across the globe and many social structures are not free from exploitation and oppression.

Social learning theory has also been used to explain the development of ‘norms’ of maleness and femaleness and gender differences. Shibley Hyde (2007) explains that the

behaviour of children can be viewed as being influenced by principles of operant conditioning. Gender-appropriate behaviours she argues are rewarded and perpetuated, and children learn by 'imitation and observational learning' (p.54). Similarly, Giddens (2006) outlines how positive and negative reinforcements received in the socialisation process perpetuate conformity to expected sex roles. He outlines how typical male characters are involved in more active and adventurous play 'while females are portrayed as passive, expectant and domestically oriented' (p.461). In his view, 'once a gender is "assigned", society expects individuals to act like "females" or "males"' (p.461).

This view aligns with a functionalist approach to sociology. A functionalist approach 'sees society as a system of interlinked parts which, when in balance, operate smoothly to produce social solidarity' (Giddens 2006, p.467). Tovey and Share (2003) outline how functionalists view masculinity and femininity 'as a complementary set of roles that span the family (in particular), the public sphere and the workplace' (p.233). They argue that 'socialisation for functionalists is ... the preparation of people for the proper fulfilment of such sex roles' (p.233). Furthermore, they argue that 'it is in the practices of everyday life that these expectations are fulfilled and reproduced' (p.461).

People are predisposed to process information on the basis of gender. Bem's gender scheme theory (1981) can offer insights into how children gradually learn the content of society's gender schema; 'the particular behaviours and attributes ... that are linked with their own sex and hence, with themselves' (pp.354-355). Self-esteem is also connected to specific gender schemas. Shibley Hyde (2007) explains the gender scheme theory by noting how for example, a girl's self-esteem 'begins to be dependent on how well she measures up to her girl schema ... she becomes internally motivated to conform to society's female gender role' (p.69). Similarly, Platt and Whyld (1983) assert that self-image is influenced by sexism, because 'girls and boys continue to make gender-typed choices', and it is obvious that they are affected by what they consider appropriate for their sex' (p.7). For example, Attar (1990) notes that pupils take subjects considered 'appropriate' to their sex (p.54). Home economics, is arguably shoe-horned into being a girls' subject by a whole range of factors.

Gender statistics derived from student participation in Junior Certificate examinations in 2013 (SEC 2013a) confirm that Attar's views are relevant today regarding the existence

of such ‘hard’ masculine and ‘soft’ feminine subjects. Metalwork, for example, is perceived to be the most masculine subject (92% boys taking the examinations) in the Irish curriculum, followed by materials technology (87% boys), and technical drawing (86% boys). In contrast, at the perceived ‘softer’ end of the curriculum is home economics (85% girls), music (70% girls) and art (63% girls).⁵ It is interesting to compare this set of statistics with statistics reported 30 years earlier by Hannan *et al.* (1983) in the first significant Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) commissioned report on gender in Irish education. They showed that the only Leaving Certificate subject with entirely female participation (1979-1980) was home economics, and the subjects with only male participation were the technical subjects; engineering and building construction (p.xxiii).⁶ Home economics, art and music are categorised in the report as ‘accomplishment subjects’ (p.253). Hannan *et al.* (1983) set about examining what accounts for such sex differentiated choices and how a sex differentiated culture explains sex differences in subject choices. They concluded that ‘sex differentiated values and expectations’ influence choices (p.285) and that the role of early learning and socialisation experiences, a deeply institutionalised system of sex roles as well as school cultural assumptions resulted in differentiated subject uptake. Home economics may have changed superficially since, but not fundamentally as a mere 12% of boys took Leaving Certificate examinations⁷ in home economics and 15% of boys took Junior Certificate examinations in home economics in 2013 (SEC 2013a). These statistics bring to light the low level of male participation in home economics education and raises issues such as why boys are reluctant to enter home economics classrooms and what are the implications if they do.

There is little empirical research about boys’ participation in home economics education. However, Attar’s study (1990) revealed that boys expected home economics to be about cooking and this was attractive to those who chose the subject. Their teachers reported that ‘boys are not as likely as girls to do well or to take the subject seriously’ (p.124) and one teacher reported that the boys’ involvement could be

⁵ Typewriting showed significant female participation, however, this subject was only taken by a total of 188 students nationally (87% girls).

⁶ Also included were Greek, Hebrew and mechanics, subjects taken by small numbers of boys.

⁷ Statistics include numbers of students taking both higher and ordinary level home economics.

explained by ‘the call of the adolescent stomach’ (p.124)! One reason for the poor uptake of home economics by boys is offered by Wynn (1983). She argues that attitudes persist regarding the curriculum offering of home economics. ‘These attitudes provide a hidden curriculum which encourages pupils to conform to stereotyped roles’ (p.200). Furthermore, she asserts that knowledge and awareness of curriculum changes are limited. ‘These attitudes show a lack of understanding of much current teaching of home economics, and of its potential’ (p.213). The entry of boys into the home economics classroom ‘may not change the world’ but is vital:

Without this aspect of school life the education of boys is incomplete; boys need to be encouraged to be self-sufficient, and need to know as much about food, nutrition, fabrics, decision-making, organization of time and all the other aspects of the subject as do girls. (Wynn 1983, p.211)

Arguably, there are other factors that discourage some boys from studying home economics such as prejudice around sex roles. Kessler *et al.* (1987) acknowledge that ‘particular kinds of behaviour, particular ways of being, are culturally dominant’ (p.234). These patterns of masculinity or femininity are presumed to be natural, and deviation from this norm attracts ridicule and antagonism. Prejudice existed around changing sex roles during the 1970s and 1980s and Attar (1990) reported how boys studying ‘recreational home economics’ were subjected to ‘taunts of homosexuality from their peers’ and ‘many people consider boys who enjoy cooking rather ‘effeminate’ (p.120).

Another unresolved gender contradiction is the significant discrepancy that exists between exclusivity of women (n=1624) to men (n=4) working as home economics teachers in Ireland (Teaching Council 2014). In essence, the subject is taught almost exclusively by women, who act as role models and ultimately perpetuate the pattern. Paechter (2000) argues that home economics teachers were ‘until recently inducted into this world through separate training institutions’ and arguably led to the development of an ‘ultra-feminine ethos’ (p.61). However in Ireland, home economics education is not physically integrated into the university system⁸. There are currently two male students

⁸ St. Angela’s College is a college of the National University of Ireland, Galway and a provider of university level education including a Bachelor in Education and Master in Education programme in home economics. The college campus is located in Sligo, in the North West of Ireland.

on the B.Ed. home economics programme in Ireland, out of a total of 247 students (St. Angela's College 2014). These statistics overall can hardly support the cause to rid the subject of its gendered legacy now or in the immediate future.

Similarly, Jerpbak (2005) argues that the current situation where almost all family educators and family consumer science teachers/home economics teachers are female 'seems so diametrically opposed to the very make-up of family in our society' (p.9). He attributes this trend to the persistence of gender ideology in society and invites family education practitioners to 'critically question why there are still so few men in the field, and take some meaningful action toward not only professing but representing the full equality we say we value for families' (p.9).

As mentioned earlier, home economics has been criticised by commentators such as Attar (1990) for perpetuating conformity to expected sex roles and playing an important role in the socialisation of girls. My own experience suggests that this role often attracts sexist and belittling comments that can have a negative impact on the identity of the home economist and perceptions about home economics as a subject. For example, 'glib' comments restricting home economists to the role of domestic goddess are frequently made and in my view these assertions are based on the traditional profile of the older domestic science 'expert'. Moreover, subtle reference would frequently (and irritatingly for home economics professionals) be made to 'stirring and stitching' activities. Tovey and Share (2003) argue that such 'jokes and throwaway remarks relate directly to the "proper" roles of the sexes' and prove the resonance of functionalist approaches in 'everyday life and popular culture' (p.233). Whyld (1983a) explains that these stereotypes are really clichés. These 'ready-made phrases' are the 'prefabricated strips of words and mixed metaphors that come crowding in when you do not want to take the trouble to think through what you are saying' (p.70). This type of subtle behaviour is problematic and difficult to change especially as when it is viewed as natural, it is very difficult for people to recognise when they are being sexist.

Platt and Whyld (1983) argue that this type of culture as can be deeply embedded. Often unconsciously held views and attitudes, and generalised assumptions about gender attributes have an effect on 'our expectations of behaviour' (p.7). These 'supposed limitations of behaviour' are considered to be 'both real and incontrovertible', resulting in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (p.7). They explain that once a characteristic is

‘accepted unquestioningly as being “natural” for a particular sex, this serves as a powerful instrument for discriminatory treatment, and is often used as evidence of the supposed “natural” difference’ (p.7). These views appear to be immutable despite attempts by the profession to re-brand and modernise practice.

Another plausible dimension to the subject identity debate is that some home economists may hold deeply embedded traditional beliefs about practice and these views are often highly resistant to change as they are often latent and remain unchallenged. Similarly, Heggstad (2005) reported that some home economists and policy makers were more focused on the home and enforced traditional models of family life and gender roles whereas others were ‘concerned with the broader social environment’ (webpage). Diversity in views amongst the home economics profession regarding the subject mission and practice make attempts at eradicating generalised assumptions and stereotypes about the subject more challenging.

2.2.3 Domestic ideology

Culturally, Ireland under British rule during the 1800s and early 1900s was influenced significantly by developments in Britain. An examination of the growth of domestic ideology in Britain and gender ideology in America assists in illuminating the emergence of similar cultural norms in an Irish context and of parallel nineteenth-century female educational traditions. This ideology arguably had a compounding effect on the emergence of domestic education/home economics education in the Irish curriculum.

Beddoe (1998) denotes how British middle classes sought to bring stability to society by ‘strengthening the idea and role of the family’ (p.24). Similarly, Hall (2013) reports that a ‘well-ordered daily routine’ (p.17) and ‘a new morality’ (p. 21) was promoted as a *sine qua non* by the Evangelicals. She asserts that it was a quest for evangelicalism⁹ including ‘the reform of manners and morals, a new view of the nation, of political power and of family life’ that drove this movement. 1780-1830 became known as ‘the making of the industrial bourgeoisie’ (Hall 2013, p.15):

⁹ During the 1780s, Evangelicals were staunch members of the Church of England and their movement gathered momentum with the middle class especially.

Their class definition was built not only at the level of the political and the economic ... but also at the level of culture and ideology. The new bourgeois way of life involved a recodification of ideas about women. Central to those new ideas was an emphasis on women as domestic beings, as primarily wives and mothers.

The pre-industrialised family unit, consisting of an extended family operating as a unit of production, was discarded for a 'bourgeois view of the family – male breadwinner, dependent home-based wife and dependent children' (p.23).

The rise in industrialism resulted in the movement of productive work from the home to the factory and this resulted in the formation of private and public social spheres. Hall (2013) notes that a split between 'the world as hostile and the home as loving' occurred, and as a result, the home became the woman's sphere and the world outside became the sphere of men (p.24). Beddoe describes how this split manifested (1998, p.23):

Within the family the wife was to be the centre of the home – the perfect wife, the perfect mother and the perfect lady. Hers was the private domain: her husband's the public.

Burman (2013) argues that historically, women were subjected to persuasive doctrine (from men) about the existence of 'separate spheres' (p.25). The media in Beddoe's view (1998), in each age has been suffused with 'dominant stereotypes, to which women were persuaded or coerced to conform' (p.22). She describes how the 'Perfect Lady' image as illustrated in Figure 2, emerged due to the rise in domestic ideology during Victorian times. Essentially the Perfect Lady was expected to 'acknowledge and inwardly assimilate the fact that she was inferior to men' (Beddoe 1998, p.24). This message was projected from the pulpit, in magazines, paintings, poems and in manuals.

Figure 2 The Perfect Lady



In the Irish milieu, religious and domestic virtues were also closely associated. Deeply embedded in Irish society, according to Smith, is the ‘private model’ of care-giving, predicated on a ‘gendered division of labour between a breadwinner and a homemaker (2012, p.3):

Women’s biological capacity for childbirth has long been conflated with the social construction of “mother”, who is represented as the universal source of care. This ideology also underpins Roman Catholic teaching, which promotes the complementarity of traditional gender roles and which had a particularly powerful impact on the development of Irish social norms.

According to Redmond and Harford (2010), under the Free State government¹⁰, Catholic ideology was unavoidable and ‘the established values and ethos of the Catholic Church were thus placed at the centre of the nascent political system’ (p.642). As a result, there was a significant impact on the role and freedom of women.

Despite pervasive political and religious influences, Beddoe (1998) documents how ‘the idea of the wife at home to look after house and family became increasingly desirable’ (p.29) and that this desirability perpetuated the interminable domestic ideology. Essentially, the stereotype was deeply engrained in Irish and British society, and as Beddoe (1998) suggests, ‘the hold the image held over people’s minds’ (p.29) was significant. Arguably, domestic ideology contributed to the devaluation of women’s work. In a similar vein, de Beauvoir (1997) exposes her view that upsetting the old division of labour subjugated women. She argues that man became the proprietor of land and ‘also of woman’ (p.85). Consequently she became restricted to domestic duties, ‘for woman’s housework henceforth sank into insignificance in comparison with man’s productive labour – the latter was everything, the former a trifling auxiliary’ (p.85).

Another aspect of domestic ideology according to Burman (2013) is that the ‘institution of the dependent family supported by a male breadwinner and free domestic labour from women, is at present the basis of capitalist reproduction’ (p.12). During the last

¹⁰ The Irish Free State was established as a dominion of the British Commonwealth of Nations in 1922. In a referendum in 1937, Irish citizens voted in favour of becoming a sovereign nation.

century especially, the role of women in the public sphere was limited, but on occasions they were needed and Beddoe (1998) argues that capitalism profited from cheap female labour. She also explains how women's work has been persistently devalued and worth less than the work of men. She argues that women's work at surface level was probably viewed by men as 'monotonous and uniform' as it related to domestic chores and childcare duties (p.4). For these reasons, the field of home economics education as Heggstad (2005) reports can be viewed by some as 'fundamentally narrow, dull and socially conservative' (webpage).

Jerpbak (2005) provides an analysis of the parallel growth of 'gender ideology' and the paternalistic division of social duties in America. He argues that dominant forces of 'political economy' shaped the nation and the school agenda. These forces affected the 'manifestation and proliferation' of gender ideology at the time when family education/home economics evolved (p.9). He argues that schools were 'the political vehicles ... for the main purpose of forging the structure of economic life' in the country (p.10). In his view, family education 'played into the political economy agenda' and he questions 'who are we really serving in family education, families or political economy?' (p.10). He notes a significant growth in individualism, materialism, industrialism and capitalism and its associated social challenges. Furthermore, he argues that 'a social crisis was at hand' (p.11) and that greater educational responsibility was assigned to schools. Domestic education/family education thus addressed social challenges in the past, but Jerpbak (2005) argues that 'the utilisation of schools to strengthen and bolster the economy by specifically training people to meet economic needs establishes a questionable power structure among those in charge of setting educational agendas' (p.12). He raises important questions for consideration by the home economics profession, questions that in my view are in the main overlooked.

It was Catherine Beecher (1800-1878) who advocated the creation of a sanctum for women in the school curriculum. Beecher was a social reformer and forerunner of home economics education and according to Heggstad (2005), she 'argued for the importance of domestic life and sought to apply scientific principles to childrearing, cooking and housekeeping' (webpage). Beecher (1848) first proposed the establishment of 'domestic economy' education for women to be 'trained for their profession' and as housewives and mothers (p.5). The establishment of the home economics profession

according to McGregor (2006) was a response to the Industrial Revolution and collapse of the Agricultural Revolution. Home economics education in her view endeavoured to add influence and respect to household work. In an Irish context during the early 1800s, domestic education was valorised for addressing the pressing socio-economic needs and living conditions of society at a time when the country was impacted by political unrest, religious divides and economic instability. Daly (1981) reports the primary aims of Irish educational policy in the 19th century as the education of the poor, the eradication of illiteracy and the improvement of basic living standards. The development of rudimentary skills was a key focus. In essence, domestic subjects including needlework, cookery and laundry work (the antecedents of home economics) were valued for the improvement they could offer to the living standards of the poor.

There has always been disagreement among home economists about the role of home economics. For example, Brown (1985), a well cited home economist argues that Beecher's view:

preserves without challenge the existing social structure of the family. In so conceptualizing domestic economy and limiting it to women, as Catherine Beecher did, the groundwork was laid for a field of study that catered to the Victorian cult of womanhood, that unconsciously froze the status quo of the paternalistic family with its negative effects on personality and social relations, and that encouraged non-reflective and anti-intellectual positions regarding not only the family but also larger social order and domestic economy itself. (1985, p.239)

Similarly, the Australian home economics Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that historically, the home economics profession had a role to play in the 'organised effort' to 'feminise women's education' in America (p.5). Yet, the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) claim they did not consciously adopt a domestic feminism stance. From their point of view, as Arcus (2005) exemplifies, it was a movement for the education and emancipation of women that influenced the emergence of home economics and the formalisation of the profession. However, the existence of this 'one-sided gender ideology' (p.12) and the neglect of home economists at the time to question the socio-political status quo was criticised by Jerpbak (2005). He argues that the preservation and enhancement of 'established values' (p.13) considered to advance the economy were of 'primary importance' at the time. Moreover, he notes that opposing viewpoints regarding the mission of home economics were conveyed at a

series of ten conferences held at Lake Placid (New York) between 1899 and 1908 for Americans who advocated 'better home living' (p.4). Despite the dissenting voices, 'advocating equality of education for both men and women in family matters', Jerpak (2005) argues that the Lake Placid conferences 'embraced the political economy of the culture, setting the precedent for the future of public family education' (p.13). He asserts that 'social efficiency doctrines served to bolster the American political economy' in schools and was 'especially evident in family education' (p.14). Furthermore, Doolittle and Camp (1999, p.2) argue that:

proponents of social efficiency held that only an efficient society could create a positive environment in which the individual could prosper and find satisfaction. Social efficiency advocates went on to contend that public schools were an arm of the social system; and, as such, they had an inherent mission to further the good of society by contributing to its efficiency.

The advocates of better home living embraced this doctrine and Heggstad (2005) reports that 'a movement took shape that slowly defined itself and began pursuing specific goals' (webpage). The fourth lake Placid Conference in 1902 is widely associated (see Dennehy 2007; Curriculum Corporation 1996 and Kieran *et al.* 1984) with the launch of the home economics movement, the establishment of the profession and the production of the following definition of home economics (Curriculum Corporation 1996, p.4):

Home Economics in its most comprehensive sense is the study of laws, conditions, principles and ideals which are concerned on the one hand with man's [sic] immediate physical environment and on the other hand with his [sic] nature as a social being, and is the study of the relation between these two factors.

The IFHE was thereafter established in 1908 in Fribourg, Switzerland, and a forum was created for the exchange of ideas and to attract public attention to the importance, value and dignity of the work of women in the home. Emerging ideas about home economics from America reflected contemporary issues such as 'the impact of industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration on households and families; the changing status of women; the expansion of science and technology; the movement for the education of women and for women's suffrage; and the introduction of new academic disciplines in higher education' (Curriculum Corporation 1996, p.4). Home economist, Margorie East

reported during the 1980s that the Lake Placid proceedings established the home and family as the key foci in home economics studies (Curriculum Corporation 1996, p.4).

Ellen H. Richards (1910) was another influential figure in the emergence of home economics. She wrote about 'the betterment of living conditions, through conscious endeavour, for the purpose of securing efficient human beings ... not through chance, but through increase in scientific knowledge' (p.vii). Jerpbak (2005) argues that 'political economy ideology' is 'prolific' in her work (p.15). One of Richards's most influential writings on the profession was *Euthenics* (1910, p.158):

Household engineering is the great need for material welfare, and social engineering for moral and ethical well-being ... If the state is to have good citizens, productive human beings, it must provide for the teaching of the essentials to those who are to become the parents of the next generation. No state can thrive while its citizens waste their resources of health, bodily energy, time and brain power, any more than a nation may prosper that wastes its natural resources.

Jerpbak (2005) points to 'the false consciousness of this ideology' by the profession and 'the consistent ignoring of contradicting views' (p.15). For example, an alternative analysis of Victorian domestic ideology, gender ideology and political economy ideology is that these ideologies contributed to women's subordinate societal position and pervasive assumptions about women's work and roles. The bottom line is established by Burman (2013) as she argues that the unpaid nature of domestic work indirectly propagates the assumption that it is not 'real' work. In her view, women 'are hamstrung by the ideology of domesticity' (p.9). She identifies that 'the domestic ideal has resulted in a variety of handicaps for women', such as lower wage earning, and other social and psychological consequences (p.13). Arnot *et al.* (1999) in their writings on Victorian values refer to the 'cult of female domesticity' (p.33). Furthermore, Jerpbak (2005) argues that the 'ethical dilemma' facing education is 'the dualism between the best interests of children and families and the best interests of an economically prosperous capitalistic nation' (p.16). In his view, the implications for family education/home economics are 'especially poignant' (p.17). 'A field of study that proclaims a devotion to the betterment of families needs to hear the critical voice that poses the possibility that intention and reality may be in contradiction (p.17).' The Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that the degree to which a government influences

family decision making is a cause of unease, but the level of concern is dependent on one's 'interpretation of what is good for society and for the family' (p.7).

2.2.4 Who controls what knowledge should be made available to children?

The question of who controls what knowledge should be made available to young people can be answered by looking to what Broadfoot (1996) calls the 'expressive ideology of industrial society' (p.109). She identifies 'three levels of social functioning' (p.108). At the first level are societal goals which are 'legitimated by expressive ideologies' and in the case of a capitalist society, the conception of social goals would range from 'economic theories to theories of personal motivation such as acquisitiveness and personal responsibility' (p.108). Secondly, societal processes are 'legitimated by instrumental ideologies – accepted conceptions of how to reach defined goals' (p.108). She argues that these conceptions are context specific and are 'the product of a particular historical social formation' (p.108). Thirdly, she notes the important contribution of 'educational apparatus' (educational discourse and politics) to determining what these social processes are (p.113). Broadfoot's writings provide insight into the forces driving current curriculum and assessment reform in Ireland. Other major writers in the field such as Young (1971) argue that the selection of knowledge for a curriculum is based on 'available knowledge at a particular time' and it involves 'conscious or unconscious choices' (p.24). These choices according to Bernstein (1971) reflect 'both the distribution of power and the principles of social control' (p.47).

Different knowledge areas in the curriculum are perceived to be more valuable. Young (1971) notes that the organisation of knowledge in the curriculum is dependent on 'the power of some to define what is "valued" knowledge' (p.32) and this leads to a stratification of knowledge and the identification of areas of 'prestige' and 'property' (p.32). The former refers to 'the different social evaluations placed on different knowledge areas' (p.32) and assumptions 'that some kinds and areas of knowledge are much more "worthwhile" than others' (p.34) and the latter suggests 'the notions of "ownership" and freedom (or restriction of access)' (p.32). Similarly, Wynn (1983) explains that a high status was traditionally associated with 'abstract, rarified, "male" knowledge and a lower status assumed for applied knowledge of relevance to everyday life or to people' (p.199). Moreover, Slowey (1987) argues that the sexual division of

labour evident in Irish society was ‘reproduced through the sexual division of knowledge – that is, the knowledge men and women require to perform their “appropriate” tasks’ (p.116). However, as Young (1971) puts it, there are many views on ‘what is to be taken as knowledge, how accessible to different groups any knowledge is, and what are the accepted relationships between different knowledge areas’ (p.32).

Clearly, home economics was not considered to be a ‘powerful’ form of knowledge and the applied nature of the subject and the association with home life and unpaid work did not earn it social prestige. Attar (1990, p.22) asserts that:

If knowledge is power, then some forms of knowledge are more powerful than others. It is no accident that the least powerful forms of knowledge are taught to the least groups of people. Home economics is still taught mainly to pupils who are female, working-class and often deemed low achievers.

The subject of home economics was commonly viewed as a low status and non-academic knowledge area suitable for lower ability girls (see Attar 1990; Curriculum Corporation 1996; Summerfield 1987 and Whyld 1983a) and has had a long struggle to gain recognition in the curriculum. Schools in Ireland offered either an academic curriculum or a more vocational and technical curriculum, depending on the needs and ability of students. Parkes (2007) notes how home economics was viewed as a technical subject in the secondary school curriculum, similar to metalwork and woodwork. According to Summerfield (1987), many schools regarded domestic subjects as inferior and ‘it was clear that the schools themselves relegated them to a secondary position’ (p.157). Whilst the relegation of home economics may not be common practice today, Whyld (1983a) argues that ‘old habits die hard’ (p.66).

Arguably, home economics teachers are struggling to escape the unwanted legacy of low educational status. Teachers and students according to Young (1971) are ‘socialised within an institutionalised structure which legitimates such assumptions’ (p.36). My experience reflects this and such assumptions often remain unchallenged. Attar (1990) claims that home economics teachers failed to establish academic recognition for their subject area, however I am not sure this view is valid in current times. For example, Parkes (2007) argues that with the expansion of education and the school population in Ireland during the mid-1970s, the curriculum also expanded to address the wider needs of students and as a consequence ‘home economics grew in importance’ (p.111).

Certainly issues of gender, identity and subject status have resulted in gendered marginality for the subject over time and the historical emphasis on practical skills over academic knowledge, entrenched the interminable low status legacy. Yet, Paechter (2000) asserts that ‘the perceived ability’ of home economics teachers to engage students and keep them ‘out of trouble’ is well recognised and ‘has given them a special status and purpose in many schools’ (p.55), although this importance stems ‘directly from their academically low status position’ (p.55).

The position of home economics in the curriculum into the future arguably will be influenced by whether the subject is sufficiently valorised by society, policy makers and school managers. My own experience suggests that there are unchallenged assumptions about the subject and whilst the body of home economists may not easily change these assumptions, a concerted effort to promote the relevance and value of home economics education to key stakeholders can to some degree ensure its sustainability in the curriculum. This can also be achieved ultimately through what Jackson (1968) calls the ‘interactive’ realisation of a curriculum (pp.151-152) that is fit for purpose in terms of addressing the subject mission and aims. Young and Whitty (1977) define this as ‘curriculum as practice’ or the ‘social reality of “curriculum” ... [involving] subjective interventions and actions of teachers and pupils’ (p.237).

2.2.5 A cause of general educational harm?

Bernstein (1971) argues that ‘educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience’ (p.47). He notes how ‘forms of experience, identity and relation are evoked, maintained and changed by the formal transmission of educational knowledge and sensitivities’ (p.47). The formal transmission of home economics education arguably impacted the experiences and identity of young people who studied the subject. This is the reason why Attar (1990) delivered a withering critique of home economics education. She argues that home economics has been a cause of ‘general educational harm’ (p.2) because of its effect of limiting the experiences and opportunities for women especially.

Attar’s view is legitimate to some degree, but many women did not have higher level educational opportunities during the 1900s and arguably, were limited by the ‘type’ of education offered and pursued in second-level education. For example, Cullen (1987) alludes to limitations imposed on the education of girls in Ireland and expectations

regarding their educational outcomes. Clearly, the discrimination evident in Irish education was in her view ‘only one part of the overall patriarchal organisation of Irish society’ (p.2). Girls were not expected to develop their ‘intellectual powers fully’ for fear they would be equipped ‘to compete with males for economic, social or political power’ (p.1). This type of discrimination is further exemplified by Hannon *et al.* (1983) who argue that the ‘servicing role’ of women in family, communal and economic life had ‘psychical costs’ for them (1983, p.286):

Those educational, occupational, and general social achievements that are most socially rewarded in our society are those in which women have significantly under-achieved while those roles in which they do achieve- in family, communal and general caring roles- are ones which have become increasingly less socially rewarded.

Siddiqui (2008) asserts that although home economics historically aimed to address socio-economic changes and developments in family systems and functions, the subject placed too much emphasis on training for the domestic roles of women. This she argues resulted in segregated educational opportunities for girls and no change to the patriarchal status quo. Similarly, Cullen (1987) reports that Irish girls were required to ‘study a limited range of academic subjects and cultural subjects to accomplishment level only as well as domestic skills’ necessary for their future (p.1). Home economics was explicitly recognised as a subject suitable for girls that could fulfil the latter.

There has been substantial feminist polemic surrounding home economics because of the effect it had on women’s education. Many commentators were against school-based education for the home as they felt that these home arts could be acquired at home. For example, Attar (1990) was unable to rationalise why the study of home economics was necessary. In her view, it was a ‘kind of exorcism, a response to the dull sense of suffering, of walled-in-lives’ (p.xi). The ‘harm’ and ‘evil’ Attar alludes to in her writings about home economics arises from her argument that home economics ‘rests on no convincing evidence’ that the field is really a valuable field of study (p.23). Yet, Attar has been criticised by Pendergast and the IFHE Think Tank Committee (2013) for her deliberate attack on the field in her 1990 publication *Wasting Girl’s Time*. In their rebranding document, they argue that the belief that home economics is ‘a low status area of knowledge’ is ‘perpetuated by intentional attacks to devalue the field’ (p.36). In recent personal correspondence with Attar (Attar 2014), she revealed that the

underlying problems with the subject area were never properly addressed and that some home economics teachers were in agreement with her views and thought the subject was essentially finished, whilst others were very upset and angry with her publication.

2.3 Essential dimensions of home economics in education

This section aims to explore the evolution of home economics education over two centuries, the mission, nature and role of home economics education, the curriculum and theoretical frameworks guiding practice.

2.3.1 A backward glance

In order to understand how home economics curricula have developed, it is important to consider it in each phase of the education system. There are essentially three of these in the section that follows as there are three main axes of the home economics curriculum: primary (national), intermediate, and technical/vocational. These are dealt with respectively from the years circa 1800-1922 for primary education, 1878-2014 for intermediate and secondary education, and from 1881-1992 for technical and vocational education. A key focus is maintained on the development and growth of the so-called domestic subjects and how the knowledge base of home economics subsequently evolved in the Irish second-level curriculum.

The domestic subjects of needlework, cookery and laundry work existed in primary, secondary, technical and vocational education in Ireland during the 19th and 20th centuries and they amalgamated to become domestic economy. As mentioned earlier, this subject evolved into domestic science and finally home economics in second level education in Ireland, in the latter half of the 20th century. The improvement of living standards was a key focus of educational policy in the early 1800s. Domestic subjects were valued for the improvement they could offer to the living standards of the poor. Needlework, spinning and basic cookery education was provided to young girls on the fringe of society. The religious teaching orders¹¹ had a key role to play in the stimulation of educational activities in the early 1800s.

¹¹ The Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy, the Ursuline Sisters and the Loreto Sisters made a significant contribution to the education of girls in Irish society.

Domestic subjects in national education

A national school system was established in 1831. Seven Commissioners were appointed to a Board of Commissioners with the role of aiding and monitoring primary education in Ireland. Coolahan (1981) explains that the Commissioners were involved in the distribution of grants, the establishment of rules and regulations of the board, controlling the curriculum, publishing and sanctioning textbooks, suspending teachers and removing managers (pp.13-14). The Commissioners published annual reports and they are a comprehensive source of data on the evolution of domestic education in Ireland. Significant outputs included the Powis Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (1868-1870) and the Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction (Belmore Commission 1897-1898).

Needlework was a compulsory subject for all female students in national schools where there were female teachers and it was taught in schools from the early 1800s. The purpose of needlework education for example, was clearly identified in a needlework book published by direction of the Commissioners of National Education. The book entitled *Simple directions in Needle-work and cutting out; intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*, outlines the value of needlework education as follows:

The practical knowledge of needlework, and its appendages of cutting out, altering, repairing ... must always be regarded as highly useful to females generally and particularly so to those of the poorer classes, whether applied to domestic purposes, or as a mode of procuring a decent subsistence. (National Model Female School 1835, p.5)

Portelli (2009) outlines how the subject was considered as the ‘mother of the domestic arts’ and seen as a vehicle for improving social conditions and promoting domestic thrift (p.134). Durcan (1972) reports how senior girls in England were allowed to bring in clothing for mending from home thereby connecting learning with the domestic life of the girls (p.101). A view held by Attar (1990) was that the tradition of needlework and ‘its acceptability as a genteel lady’s occupation’ possibly compensated ‘for its status as a domestic subject’ (p.88). Overall, the subject was considered to be the most important and appropriate form of manual work for girls. A Commissioner (Belmore Commission 1897) noted that ‘it was taught in schools for its practical utility and not for intellectual training’ (p.407).

Cookery was first introduced as an alternative subject in Ireland around 1892. According to Dale (1904), the object of cookery instruction was to instruct students on how to utilise by intelligent methods, the limited resources and simple food ingredients available to them, but it was not designed to train girls as finished cooks. The minutes of evidence of the Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction (Belmore Commission 1897) reveal that cookery was normally taught in schools over a six week period and this was deemed to be insufficient for the achievement of societal well-being. Cookery education was difficult to deliver due to the expense of providing trained teachers, cookery ingredients, cooking equipment and materials including fuel for fires and the difficulty of transporting ingredients to and from school. For these reasons, many regarded the teaching of cookery as a luxury. In the absence of financial assistance, many classes were predominantly theoretical, concentrating upon cleanliness, scullery work, care of kitchen utensils and principles of plain cookery.

The subject of laundry work was offered as an optional subject in a minority of national schools in Ireland by the late 1800s. Laundry work was considered to contribute to health and home comfort. However, the subject of laundry work never enjoyed a high status. Domestic economy was taught for the first time as an optional subject in Ireland in the late 1800s to girls in fifth and sixth classes (usually between the ages of 11-12). The Belmore Commission (1897) sets out how domestic economy instruction made reference to the management of homes the pupils came from and involved the theoretical study of housewifery. Practical and theoretical cookery and laundry work were also studied in domestic economy and for that reason; the domestic economy programme could be easily adopted by schools as an alternative to the cookery and laundry work course. Separate components taught during the 1800s as individual subjects were for the first time merging into one subject.

The curriculum of the early 1900s (pre-independence) was known as the *Revised Programme for National Schools*. Domestic economy consisted of theoretical and practical components, but scientific principles were rarely applied to the practice of cookery. Domestic science was taught in Ireland in national schools from the early 1900s and it consisted largely of elementary science that enhanced the teaching and learning of cookery. Little practical work was conducted and instead, a scientific body of knowledge relevant to the home and family life evolved. The need to combine the

teaching of scientific theories with practical work was identified in inspectors' reports during the early 1900s.

The domestic subjects of needlework, cookery, laundry work, domestic economy and domestic science were offered in Irish education during the 1800s- early 1900s reflecting the curriculum of study also on offer to girls across the British Isles. However, the direction of domestic education for girls in Ireland steered its own path under the Irish Free State Government. The new programme of primary instruction issued in 1922 by the National Programme Conference under the Irish Free State Government included needlework as an obligatory subject studied by girls in third class upwards (usually aged nine). The needlework syllabus included; knitting, mending, basic sewing stitches and the manufacture of garments. Cookery and domestic science were additional subjects included in the syllabus. The cookery syllabus (National Programme Conference 1922) included the study of household management, first aid, table laying, budgeting, the preparation of simple dishes, and cookery for ill and convalescing people. Laundry work did not feature in the new primary school curriculum and was phased out of primary education over time.

Domestic economy and domestic science were amalgamated within the primary system in 1922 and from then onwards was called domestic science. Domestic science thereafter was an optional subject taught in primary schools where teachers and facilities were available. As overlapping had occurred between programmes offered in first and second level education, domestic subjects were weaned from the national school system into the second level system. A new Primary Certificate Examination was introduced in 1929, made compulsory in 1943, and abolished in 1967. The Primary Certificate Examination for girls consisted of an examination of Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography and Needlework. Needlework maintained its value as a subject in the primary curriculum and was the only domestic subject taught from the early 1800s to survive in the primary school curriculum until 1971.

Domestic economy and domestic science in intermediate education

An Intermediate Education Board for Ireland was established in 1878. The Intermediate Education Board was assigned several duties including the organisation and implementation of a system of public examinations. They were responsible for the provision of fees to school managers based on the results of pupils sitting public

examinations. Domestic economy was offered only to girls from 1883 in intermediate education. The domestic economy syllabus (Report of the Intermediate Education Board 1883) included; food, plain cookery, household economy, the human body, clothing, laundry, domestic duties, study of work, household management, lighting, ventilation, simple cures and nursing in illness, essentials and maintenance of a sanitary dwelling, domestic appliances, income, expenditure and thrift. The Palles Commission (1899) reported that domestic economy had become the most popular practical ‘science’ subject studied by girls. The subject was previously labelled as a domestic subject but for the first time now appeared as a practical science subject. However, the subject lacked scientific depth and never gained academic status within intermediate education. Resources were not widely available at the time to facilitate practical teaching methods and the subject content focused on practical domestic issues.

Domestic science was introduced as an optional subject in secondary education and examined in the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate Examinations from 1924. The science of household work gained recognition during the early 1900s for the first time. The subject content adopted a more academic focus and included elementary physics, chemistry, biology, microbial science, and hygiene. The domestic science syllabus for the Intermediate Certificate consisted of four different sections: cookery, needlework, hygiene and household knowledge. Domestic science teachers played an important role in educating students about daily living. For example, budget cookery and preservation techniques were taught during the war years. Young ladies were educated about economy, technology and improving the efficiency of homes.

Domestic subjects and technical education

A Royal Commission on Technical Instruction was conducted between 1881 and 1884 and it identified a need for technical education. Intermediate education reflected a traditional bias towards academic subjects and a literary curriculum and this prohibited many from entering or completing secondary education in Ireland. The need for practical education evolved. It was evident in the reports of the Commissioners of National Education that training of the hand and eye, and training of the intellect were valued. From April 1901, grants were distributed by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) to secondary schools on request for the development of household economy instruction, the purchase of apparatus and building laboratories.

Household economy instruction included cookery, laundry work, dressmaking, and any approved practical instruction in household management. Financial aid was also provided for the establishment of rural domestic economy schools and so-called residential schools of domestic economy. A group of 70 'Itinerant teachers' were engaged in giving domestic economy instruction in hundreds of rural centres and girls over 14 years of age received practical training in the residential schools of domestic economy after they had completed primary, junior cycle, or senior cycle education. Local communities regarded the schools as finishing schools and the girls who completed the courses were held in high esteem.

The course of study in these programmes prepared girls for domesticity and they were trained to become efficient housewives and 'to perform efficiently the work of rural life' (DATI 1905-1906, no.6). In another initiative, cottage domestic science classes assisted in elevating the general standard of living among poor, working class people with instruction on making sheets consisting of flour bags, old socks stitched between two sheets to make a warm winter bed cover, sewing, hygiene, basic cookery, making beds and horticulture (DATI 1911-1912).

Classes in domestic economy 'overflowed the bounds assigned to them ... and girls took possession of classrooms that tradesmen should have filled' (Department of Education 1924-1925, p.131). Hyland and Milne (1992), recount how the need for industrial and economic reform in Ireland resulted in the establishment of a Commission on Technical Education in 1927. The Commission recommended that the curriculum of secondary schools should include science, drawing, manual instruction and domestic economy as obligatory subjects due to their vocational value. Vocational schools taught domestic science from 1930.

The dual system of secondary and vocational education treated home economics-related education differently. Secondary level education reflected a traditional bias towards academic subjects and domestic science was a subject examined in the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Within the vocational system, domestic science was a subject examined in the Day Vocational Group Certificate examinations from 1947. Domestic science in the vocational sector was more practical, but the areas of cookery, needlework, laundry work and household management were common in both sectors. Coolahan (1981) reports that a common junior cycle curriculum was introduced in 1966

and this allowed for the provision of technical courses in secondary schools and the Intermediate Certificate in vocational schools. Mullaney (2007) notes that the subject name changed from domestic science to home economics in 1967 and a new home economics programme was introduced in 1968. The Junior Certificate replaced the Intermediate Certificate and the Day Vocational Group Certificate from 1989 and the first examinations were held in 1992. The last major change of recent times was the introduction of the Leaving Certificate home economics programme called 'Home Economics- Scientific and Social' in 1969. It was revised in 2002 and examined for the first time in 2004.

2.3.2 Mission, nature and role of home economics

Efforts were made by the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) to locate home economics in a contemporary context through the publication of a professional position statement in 2008. Acknowledgement was given to the historical origins of home economics and its 'context of the home and household', but the focus of home economics in the 21st century has extended to the 'include the wider living environments' (p.1).

The IFHE (2012) assert that home economists 'focus on the fundamental needs and practical concerns of managing everyday life resources' (p.10) and that home economics education empowers individuals, families and households to realise sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods, to act as responsive citizens and to be a contribution to sustainable societies (p.26). Issues impacting upon well-being and quality of life are vital concerns of home economics education. They argue that home economics education is a 'key factor' influencing the improvement of daily life skills (p.8). By turning 'basic knowledge, best practices and techniques' into everyday life skills, families are empowered to manage their lives effectively and act as competent members of a consumer society in an ever-changing world (p.8). 'Individuals, families and communities can make the best use of the scarce resources available and also add value to them in a sustainable manner' (p.8). They further argue that home economics education 'empowers women and families to meet ... daily challenges and opportunities' (p.8). Interestingly, reference is specifically made to the empowerment of 'women' and families, although the mission statement is more gender neutral:

To promote awareness that families and households are the prime nurturing environment for every human being and to promote the concept of families and households as operating within a larger social, economic and physical environment, and also to press for the recognition of the need for education for home and family life in all areas, for both genders, for all age levels and in all societies. (IFHE 2012, p.20)

The family is recognised by home economists as a dynamic unit. For example, the IFHE outline how ‘families and their obligations to fulfil their multifaceted functions are influenced by a variety of developments in their own structure, and in their economic, social, ecological and political surroundings’ (2012, p.6). Education and empowerment in such areas as resource management, financial literacy, food security and nutrition, for example, can enable individuals and families to responsibly realise sustainable and satisfying lifestyles.

2.3.3 A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field

Pendergast and the IFHE Think Tank Committee (2013) locate the profession in a contemporary context by stating that home economics is a field of study ‘situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities’ (p.3). A transdisciplinary approach suggests a movement across branches of instruction of learning, for example, drawing from disciplines that include the natural, biological, social and behavioural sciences, arts and humanities. According to McGregor (1997), the field of home economics borrows knowledge from many disciplines, but has its own knowledge base about families. The IFHE (2008) position statement sets out the subject content specific to home economics as follows: food, nutrition and health; textiles and clothing; shelter and housing; consumerism and consumer science; household management; design and technology; food science and hospitality; human development and family studies; education and community services (p.1).

The disciplinary diversity of the field is viewed as a key strength by the profession (IFHE 2008) as it allows ‘for the development of specific interpretations of the field’ (p.1). This breadth as such enables home economists to influence and transform the political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems at local and global levels. Knowledge and skills from all of these areas are integrated into one interdisciplinary field and this education enables the solving of practical problems of everyday living. Turkki (2005, p.281) argues that home economists are:

individuals who link a variety of knowledge and redirect it for the needs of households, families and consumers ... Our speciality knowledge is based on seeing the whole, having an integrative knowledge base and understanding and being able to work with specialists from other fields.

For example, she notes how home economists work across a wide spectrum of areas such as consumer education, citizenship education, family education, environmental education, nutrition and health education and future education.

2.3.4 The home economics curriculum

Acknowledging the risk of being overly simplistic, all curriculum subjects may be reasonably expected to aim to prepare young people for the life they lead outside school and adulthood. Home economics is more oriented to preparing young people for everyday life and/or the world of work than some subjects, for example, the hard sciences. The curriculum set down for home economics enjoys a type of double existence; one being the body of knowledge and content developed over the years and another, the design and structuring of this corpus of knowledge to deliver young people who are ready for this world. Paradoxically, however, the curriculum has stayed broadly the same over the decades and is arguably quite resistant to change in relation to what society feels is necessary for young people's development. This may be due to the changing values of the wider society not being accepted by those who are charged with deciding the content of the curriculum. The mediating process is the teaching and learning that schools provide in order to deliver the stated curriculum with the result that 'older' values or put another way, values that are no longer appropriate to modern society continue to be promoted.

This is not to say that the subject has not historically responded to broader societal influences on the family with changes in curriculum content and focus. The Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that the central focus of home economics education throughout time was the 'wellbeing of families and individuals in everyday activities' (p.7) and with this central tenet, there is the need for home economics to change as the structure and nature of home and family changed. Siddiqui (2008) argues that home economics has indeed evolved to address socio-economic changes in society and changes in family systems and functions.

A common theme in classes during the 1800s and early 1900s was that of thrift, particularly relevant as education was seen as a medium of improving living standards. Wynn (1983) argues that this ultimately 'gave way to the middle-class "ideal home" image, thus ensuring a market for mass-produced consumer goods' (p.201). She notes that there was 'an obsession with the creation of order' (p.203). In her view, one of the most destructive aspects of home economics was 'the widening of boundaries of this concept of disorder so that women are encouraged to become obsessed with trivial household tasks, as "the house-proud woman"' (p.203). For example, she identifies the persistent 'ritualisation of meal patterns' as another way of 'maintaining order and ceremony in the home' (p.203).

The Curriculum Corporation (1996) note how management principles such as 'efficiency to maximise output' were introduced in the workplace after World War I in America (p.5). They argue that 'scientific management' diffused into the knowledge base of home economics and that the 'home worker in her workplace was to be trained to apply work simplification techniques to the management of the home and family' (p.5). Household routines were evident in textbooks at the time with lists of rules and guidelines for efficient home management. Technological and scientific developments introduced new challenges to family life. Economic necessities and increased leisure time resulted in greater numbers of women entering the work-force. Wynn (1983) notes how the world of work was integrated into home economics and the 'dual role' of women was acknowledged (p.204). She observes how a dual role was seldom considered for men and how 'even the idea of one and a half roles for both sexes has rarely merited serious treatment' (p.204).

IFHE (2012) argue that home economics responded to changes in society. Home economics reoriented focus from the work of the housewife (1950-1960s) to the dual career woman and then the unpaid and paid work of both men and women, thus reflecting the viewpoint of gender equality. There was a greater focus on social science during the 1970s, as well as scientific principles. The Curriculum Corporation (1996) observed that there was a 'realisation that the social sciences also had application to the household. The focus shifted from a concern about basic health and living conditions towards social and emotional aspects of family and individual lives' (p.6). From the 1970s, the subject reflected the growth of consumerism and the development of

consumer legislation. The Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue plausibly that this emphasis on consumer economics was an attempt to make the subject more relevant to boys. During the 1980s, economic and social changes influenced the home economics curriculum, with substantial emphasis on budgeting and thrift in recessionary times. From the 1990s, there was then a greater technological focus reflecting the growth in the use of technology in society and its extension to the home.

The ubiquitous debates on climate and ecological changes have also prompted a reorientation of the subject towards education for sustainable development. The Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that in modern society, the lives of individuals, families and society have ‘become more complicated as a result of socio-cultural, legal, economic, technological and ecological changes’ (p.7). Families and individuals are increasingly affected by ‘global economic trends, ecological sustainability, gender equity, and social justice and they are also more aware that these factors are important to their well-being’ (p.9). The Curriculum Corporation (1996) links well-being ‘to satisfactory ways of meeting social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs, as well as needs for food, clothing and housing’ (p.7).

In summary, home economics has responded to a plethora of changes over time and the subject has enabled students to ‘interpret’ and adjust to these changes. However, Wynn (1983) argues that as a discipline home economics tends not to consider issues in depth, for example in relation to wider economic and political factors (p.204). For instance, the exploitation of food technology by business (e.g. use of food additives or genetically engineered foods).

2.3.5 Frameworks guiding home economics practice

The profession of home economics is constantly evolving and the IFHE assert that ‘there will always be new ways of performing the profession’ (2008, p.1). Change such as the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society and globalised economy ‘with all-encompassing effects on society and culture’ (p.2), demands that both home economics teachers and home economists are ‘expert novices, that is, good at learning new things, given that society is constantly and rapidly changing with new and emergent issues and challenges’ (2008, p.1).

McGregor (1997) argues that there are many perspectives and theories that have guided home economics practice over time including the scientific paradigm, the organismic paradigm and the contextual paradigm. Schneider (1994) asserts that an understanding of the ideologies driving societal change is important, and this includes ‘identifying the hidden assumption about the human person, family and society that lie beneath each ideology, and for detecting who it is that is promoting the change and the reasons for it’ (p.7).

The scientific paradigm

There is agreement that the positivistic scientific paradigm was associated with earlier home economics practice (see Baldwin (1991) and McGregor (1997)) but this is not unusual, perhaps, as Schneider (1994) argues that a scientific approach called ‘scientific rationalism’ (p.6) was commonly adopted in the study of society from the Industrial Revolution onwards. In her view, this approach was ‘applied to the study of society and people’ (p.6) while Baldwin (1991) defines it as ‘a theory of knowledge insisting upon the exclusive validity of empirical-analytic science’ (p.45). McGregor (1997) argues that this paradigm ‘assumes that everything can be controlled, measured, manipulated and predicted’ (p.3). In her view, home economists frequently adopt this paradigm ‘often without realising they are doing it’ (p.3) and that this technical mode of practice ‘assumes that we are the experts who mould families as they respond to external stimuli’ (p.6). We embody this paradigm ‘by telling people what to do ... It assumes that informed, rationale people will act on information to achieve their self interest’ (p.6).

Economic theory is grounded in the scientific paradigm and the focus is on the individual striving for personal well-being. McGregor (1997) argues that ‘as professionals, we tend to disagree with the results of consumer policy and marketing practices adopted within this paradigm since they place money before people’, yet we often do not question capitalism (p.3). Furthermore, ‘we were taught to teach families how to be “good consumers” without teaching them how to appreciate the long term ramifications of their decisions and actions’ (p.3).

Baldwin (1991) argues that ‘positivism continues to dominate home economics to [the field’s] detriment’ (p.45) as ‘the subject matter of home economics has been compartmentalised, and specialisation has been promoted’ (p.45). This perspective does not address ‘complex problems of the family and society or of home economics as a

field' (p.45) with fact frequently separated from value and moral questions brushed aside:

We ignore the moral implications of what we do professionally; we do not address the moral questions embedded in family issues; and we fail to recognise our obligation to engage in public examination and validation of social norms. (Baldwin 1991, p.45)

Furthermore, she argues that the positivistic scientific paradigm perspective does not support 'inquiry through rational argumentation' (p.45). There is disengagement in 'rational argumentation for agreement on concepts central to the mission' (p.45).

The organismic paradigm

Systems theory evolved in the 1970s and it underpins the 'organismic paradigm', also known as the 'developmental paradigm'. McGregor (1997) argues that this paradigm 'perceives relationships between individuals and family members as developmental towards a final goal' (p.6). The focus of this paradigm is upon the relationship between family and its environment and the pursuit of familial well-being. Key and Firebaugh (1989) argue that 'the family is characterised by a system of complex interrelationships with both its micro- and macro-environments' (p.16). This viewpoint takes into account the exchange that occurs between families and external systems as they obtain resources and this involves the dynamics of input, throughput, output and feedback. Instead of responding to stimuli from the environment, as in the scientific paradigm, people are actively involved in shaping the relationships between themselves and their environments.

The contextual paradigm

The contextual paradigm integrates elements of the scientific paradigm and the organismic paradigms. There are many interpretations of this paradigm and writers in the field have developed different perspectives such as human ecology, critical reflection and emancipation. In this paradigm, the locus shifts from the pursuit of personal well-being and striving for familial well-being to the quest for societal well-being.

McGregor (1997, p.8) argues that the contextual paradigm is premised on critical theory:

which provides a means for us to raise the consciousness of and enlighten people whose suffering is brought about by their own cooperation in maintaining

certain practices such that their life conditions are not conducive to a healthy state of well-being and quality of life. The resultant self-understanding, stemming from reflection and dialogue about life's conditions, leads to revision of their role in society shaped by the new found belief that they can make a difference.

Critical science is rooted in human interests. According to Baldwin (1991, p.46) this theory:

deals with the root causes of social conditions and their impact on human life, e.g., the social dysfunction caused by the displacement and distortion of communicative action by strategic (technical) action ... the increasing specialisation and 'insulation of the expert,' resulting in the 'fragmentation of consciousness' and making it increasingly difficult to gain a holistic conception of society and its problems. Critical theory is concerned with 'what ought to be the case' and offers a rational basis for change.

A number of writers in the field (for example, Johnson and Fedje 1999; McGregor 2006 and Montgomery 2008) argue that home economics education is moving towards the contextual paradigm and a 'critical science-based approach'. Critical science is an approach used to explain how human happiness and social autonomy can be achieved. McGregor (2006) argues that a critical science perspective to practice involves 'separating the tacit and hidden ideologies, assumptions, and paradigms that affect how persons know themselves in relation to others in the world' (p.205). It involves movement beyond a 'customary approach' and 'taking things for granted', or just accepting and coping with present conditions, to probing 'beneath the surface meanings of words and symbols to address the root cause of a problem instead of merely treating the symptoms' (p.206). Home economists' refusal to accept the status quo 'that supports inequalities, injustices, and abuses of power' (p.210) is 'an inherent part of *transformative* practice'; it gives a 'voice' to individuals and families, and develops active and critical citizens (pp.205-206). McGregor (2006, pp.208-209) argues that the basic tenet of this approach is that people proactively seek to improve living conditions and:

that improvement is contingent upon consciousness of social realities that exploit or dominate, and upon liberation from these forces ... Otherwise, they continue to pursue passive, dependent roles and remain blind both to their own power and to opportunities for beneficial change.

In essence, critical science theory is associated with power relationships, especially 'distorted power relationships', its contribution to personal freedom from inner

constraints (biases, lack of a skill, or point of view) and social freedom from external constraints (such as oppression, exclusion and abuse of power relations) (pp.210-211).

McGregor (1997) argues that elements of the scientific and organismic paradigms are evident in home economics practice today. These paradigms are being challenged by the contextual paradigm, which has been advocated by some leaders in the field as far back as the late 1970s.

Technical and practical reasoning

Technical and practical reasoning approaches are of relevance to the field of home economics due to the practical nature of the subject. Flyvbjerg (2001) defines 'techne' as 'application of technical knowledge and skills according to a pragmatic instrumental rationality' and it refers to 'know how' practices (p.56). The danger associated with this type of approach is that it becomes accepted practice and is 'no longer seen as a form of rationality' (p.374). Dunne (2005, p.374) recounts how knowledge is assembled and controlled using this type of approach:

To technicise a practice is to make it over in such a way that control over its key operations is maximally assured by a method whose successful implementation can be monitored systematically and unambiguously ... Typically, this entails disembedding the knowledge implicit in the skilful performance of the characteristic tasks of the practice from the immediacy and idiosyncrasy of the particular situations in which it is deployed ... Through this disembedding it is supposed that what is essential in the knowledge and skill can be abstracted for encapsulation in explicit, generalisable formulae, procedures, or rules – which can in turn be applied to the various situations and circumstances that arise in the practice.

The 'straightforward application' of the formulae, procedures and rules assumes that all situations can be addressed successfully in the same way 'without need for any new insight' (Dunne 2005, p.375). My own experience suggests that home economics practice is often technical and preoccupied with procedures and rules. This type of approach aligns with the aforementioned scientific paradigm. Moreover, Attar (1990) cites an example of how disjuncture can sometimes appear between home economics practice, what she labels as 'superior common sense' and the context of learning. Attar is avowedly not a fan of home economics and she argues that consensus existed among the students and teachers interviewed in her study that home economics taught 'skills

for living', without there being an explicit agreement 'about the nature of those skills' (p.13). In Attar's view (1990, p.13):

those teachers who had shifted the emphasis of their work well away from traditional craft skills talked in abstract terms about concepts, analysis and evaluation, in effect redefining 'skills for living' to mean 'skills for applying skills for living'.

Attar further argues that 'skills for applying skills for living' translates as 'a form of superior common sense, but the world of home economics is not a common-sense world. It has its own rules and restrictions' (p.14). She explains that:

the rules sometimes spring from a need to construct home economics around a central core of factual information, which is not open to negotiation. But verifiable fact, convention, value judgements, even etiquette overlap in home economics to such an extent that there are many examples of arbitrary and inflexible statements about the correctness of pupils' responses.

Attar (1990, p.15) witheringly reasons that the real-life situations to which home economics refers are:

fantasy constructions, moral tales showing how people who have learned to employ a refined form of common sense ought to live. The faults for which home economics candidates are criticised are scarcely faults in any other context, but the achievements and responses presented as models of correctness for them are also curiously unreal. This is the inevitable result of imposing norms, absolutes and limits on the messy business of real life.

Arguably, the process of disembedding knowledge from tasks and the immediate context can result in the ritualisation of practice and less meaningful and less creative responses to situations. A *techne* approach to practice arguably cannot generate the maximum capacity for empowerment and effective problem solving in real-life situations.

This type of 'technical' rationality or '*techne*' (technical reasoning) is in direct contrast to the concept of '*phronesis*' or 'practical' rationality (practical reasoning). As set out by Dunne (2005) and others such as Carr (2004) and Flyvbjerg (2001), *phronesis* is grounded in an Aristotelian approach. Flyvbjerg (2001) reasons that '*phronesis* is associated with 'practical common sense' (p.56). Similarly, Dunne (2005) argues that '*phronesis* is characterised as ... a rational orientation to action (*praxis*), as in the case of *techne*, to production (*poiesis*)' (p.375). A *phronetic* approach as outlined by Dunne (2005) involves 'an action-orientating form of knowledge' (p.375). It is experiential in

nature and not confined to ‘generalised propositional knowledge’ (p.375). Moreover, it is not removed from the experience and character of the practitioners or the context of learning. Arguably, this type of approach would support the attainment of quality learning in a home economics context. It has an ‘ability to engage in the kind of deliberative process that can yield concrete, context-sensitive judgements’ (p.376), a quality that is essential when dealing with real-life problems and opportunities. ‘Phronesis thus concerns the analysis of values- “things that are good or bad for man” [sic] – as a point of departure for action ... Phronesis requires an interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires consideration, judgement, and choice’ (Flyvbjerg 2001, p.57).

Dunne (2005) defines ‘judgement’ in this context as ‘the cultivated capacity to make such calls resourcefully and reliably in all the complex situations that they address’ (p.376). He acknowledges that some situations are typical and they may require an ‘already established and well-rehearsed procedure ... but they may not be exactly to type, deviating in an indefinite number of respects’ (p.376). These judgements according to Carr (2004, p.133) involving thinking and acting:

on the basis of sound practical reasoning about what, in a particular concrete situation, would constitute an appropriate expression of this good ... Unlike *techne*, it is not a skill that can be learned in isolation from, and then applied in, practice. Rather *phronesis* is a moral and intellectual virtue rooted in a natural human capacity to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way.

Carr (2004, p.376) further explains how this disposition is realised:

Judgement is more than the possession of general knowledge ... it is the ability to actuate this knowledge with relevance, appropriateness, or sensitivity to context. In each fresh actuation there is an element of creative insight through which it makes itself equal to the demands of a new situation.

Past experiences can inform judgement making and each experience provides ‘new’ learning (p.377). This type of approach resonates with the contextual paradigm and critical science-based perspective, as it encourages self-reflection and the development of a holistic conception of society and its problems. Moreover, this approach is considered to be the most effective in terms of attaining the subject mission and aims and ultimately transformative practice. It is easy to comprehend how a *techne* approach is frequently adopted in a home economics context. For example, Dunne (2005) argues

that technical rationality is ‘most at home’ when goods are produced and in a home economics context, this is often the case as much attention is given to the production of cookery dishes and textile products. The production process involves planning and implementation. Dunne (2005) argues that ‘rationality here resides in the planning: it is just to the extent that this planning can be abstracted from the nitty-gritty of the actual productive activity and preformulated in a set of prescriptions governing the latter that the whole process qualifies as “rational”’ (p.379).

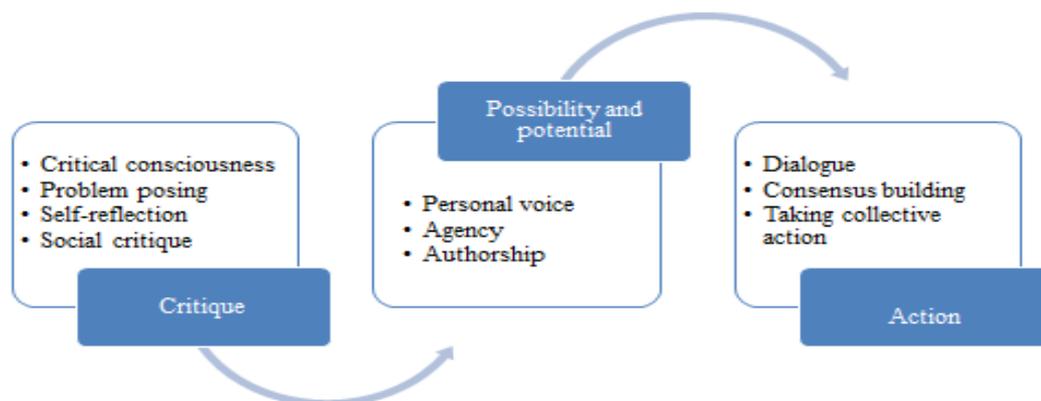
Empowerment

Empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby individuals gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions, and implement such change in their own lives and the lives of others. As such it is a key construct in home economics. Page and Czuba (1999) define empowerment specifically as ‘a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important ... It challenges our assumptions about power’ (p.1). However, the Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that empowerment is multi-dimensional and ‘any particular discipline or practice would need to be wary about claiming too significant a contribution to its development’ (p.10).

Rehm (1999) suggests that three languages of empowerment prevail: a language of critique, a language of possibility and potential, and a language of action. These are illustrated schematically in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Language of Empowerment

Language of Empowerment



McGregor (2006) elaborates on these identified languages arguing that critique involves ‘unearthing unspoken assumptions, values and ideologies’ (p.211). As the figure shows, this process can involve four stages: critical consciousness, problem posing, self-reflection and social critique. The first language of empowerment ‘critique’ refers to how people develop a ‘slow realisation’ (p.211) that problematic situations can be changed. Situations are reframed and this involves self-reflection. Through a process of social critique, the current power relations are revealed, the ‘patterns of domination’ (p.211) are challenged and the balance of power changed. The second language of empowerment ‘possibility and potential’, involves ‘reframing thinking to illuminate the possibilities of breaking free from oppression’ (p.212) and this involves personal voice, agency and authorship, and the ultimate goal of taking ownership of ideas and expressing them to others. The third language of empowerment ‘action’ involves three stages: dialogue, consensus building and taking collective action. This final stage involves activities such as: ‘talking, listening, sharing, perspective taking, questioning, responding, reframing, adapting, suggesting, and even challenging silence’ (which could be indicative of confusion, anger, discomfort, anxiety, or serious contemplation) (p.212). Consensus building involves ‘careful listening’ in order to understand other perspectives and through dialogue, learning from ‘the opposing view’ and from contradictions to one’s own views (p.212). Finally positive actions ensue from consensus building and collective actions are taken ‘to right the wrongs’ (p.212).

A critical examination of Rehm's three languages of empowerment (1999) suggests that the disposition and process of becoming and being empowered is multi-faceted and complex. In the absence of empirical evidence about how such a framework can be implemented in practice, it would appear to any practitioner to be ambitious. Although the subject mission (IFHE 2008) clearly articulates a strong desire for professionals to be influential in the broader societal arena, for example, by achieving 'empowerment and wellbeing' using 'transformative practices' and facilitating 'sustainable futures' (p.1), there is little concrete evidence or support available to practitioners that would entice them to adopt such practices.

Transformational change agent

The transformational change agent is a concept featured in the IFHE (2008) position statement and discussed by McGregor (2006) in her writings on leadership. Home economists assert they can create impact for positive societal change and family well-being as empowering leaders and change agents. McGregor (2006) argues that 'change agents deliberately bring about innovations; [and] they are conscious architects of events' (p.163). Furthermore, they 'exert power and influence to accomplish broader desired ends by impacting human political systems or altering people's entire social reality' (p.163). The nature of social change and transformation in her view, involves addressing the 'root causes and systemic nature of social problems' (p.163). Social change is not affected by working 'outside the system to fix problems that are symptomatic of large social ills', which McGregor (2006) describes as '*management issues*' (p.172). Instead working '*within* the system' to transform values and challenge ideologies (for example those that shape policy and trade decisions), can create circumstances that contribute to family well-being and quality of life (p.172). This is what McGregor essentially means by the role of professional transformative change agent acting to shift societal values towards human betterment.

The IFHE (2008) position statement provides further evidence of how home economics professionals have enacted their transformative powers and in a way, this is a counter-argument to Attar's claims (1990) about the value of the subject. For example, home economists were 'instrumental to instituting the 1994 IYF [International Year of the Family], which centred "family" as a political issue' and subsequently made a difference to family life across the globe. The role of the home economist in

empowering families and households (including parents, one-parent, multi-generational, elderly, partnerships, children and singles) to address social and economic challenges such as: poverty, hunger, social exclusion, economic insecurity, heightened workload/pressure to perform, demographic development, migration and family structure/networks, is promoted in the current campaign to mark the 20th anniversary of the IYF. Initiatives to alleviate poverty and improve gender equality and social justice are concerns of home economists. For example, the IFHE are actively involved in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (UN); the Food and Agricultural Organisation; the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. Home economists also collaborate with non-governmental organisations on family and human rights issues, for example, peace education, women's empowerment, gender issues and intervention projects. They actively lobby for the well-being of families. Some home economists act as 'active entrepreneurs' and fulfil a role as consultant in major businesses and organisations dealing with personal home economics, care and customer services. In the educational field, home economists have initiated education for sustainable development in school contexts, and education for individual and family well-being through the design of home economics curricula.

Although these are all notable achievements, my experience suggests that the professional body of home economists in Ireland is not proactive in initiating such feats. Schrage (1990) aptly explains that collaboration is 'purposive' and involves 'creating a shared understanding ... and a desire or need to solve a problem, create, or discover something' (p.36). As the following section illustrates, the majority of home economics teachers do not engage in collaboration and this begs the question why not.

2.4 Professional identity

In Ireland, there are currently 519 home economists registered with the Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE 2014) out of a total of 1,624 registered teachers (Teaching Council 2014). It was founded in the 1960s and throughout its history, it has aimed 'to provide a medium of expression for the collective opinions of members on matters affecting home economics and to promote home economics in education and society' (ATHE 2008, webpage). Unfortunately, only 32% of home economists

currently avail of this platform to engage in professional discussion and the development of the practice of home economics education in Ireland.

As Goodson (1983) points out, ‘subjects are not monolithic entities but shifting amalgamations of sub-groups and traditions. These groups within the subject influence and change boundaries and priorities’ (p.3) Paechter (2000) reasons that subject groups as a whole can maintain a distinct identity by preserving a ‘strong classification between itself and other groups’ (p.10). She argues that teachers and students are ‘socialised into a supposedly unified culture based on the fiction of the subject as discipline’ (p.10). Geography for example, originally was vulnerable as it sat between the science and humanities. The emergence of university departments dedicated to the discipline (similar to home economics) established its ‘disciplinary status’ further and this served the purpose of socialising future professionals into the subject culture. Paechter (2000) and Goodson (1983) both note how the Geographical Association was territorial and vehemently protected the subject borders. Furthermore, Paechter (2000) argues that ‘the public face of unity preserves the fiction that they are based on something more fundamental than the successful dominance of a particular interest group. Similarly, one can assume that home economists working in a school or community context and the home economics professional group such as the ATHE share a unified, common interest and set of beliefs that was possibly developed during their own schooling and third level studies. Paechter (2000) argues that the ‘fiction’ of fundamental identity plays a role in the sustainability of the subject ‘as part of the taken-for-granted curriculum’ (p.10).

Present orientations and disciplinary conversations about the subject of home economics are varied. The focus of home economics professionals in current times is on ‘future proofing’ which refers to the anticipation of future developments impacting on the field of home economics education. IFHE’s (2008) position statement outlines that future proofing is important for the creation of a sustainable vision. This would involve taking action ‘to minimise possible negative consequences, and to seize opportunities’ (p.2).

Turkki (2005) claims that home economics is ‘deeply grounded in society and that its services will always remain fundamental’ (p.273). She asserts that two orientations exist in general. Home economics professionals can work as experts on specific family and consumer science subject areas, or alternatively they can use an integrative approach to

‘human action’ to introduce ‘general expertise from everyday life’ (p.273). She alleges that the split-orientations could cause a ‘sense of separation and segmentation if the professionals do not hold any common body of knowledge or see the importance of maintaining the professional identity’ (p.273). The thread of her argument is that in current times, educational systems are under review, in terms of their fitness for purpose in fulfilling societal needs, and the question to be considered in her view is, what type of vision home economists should base their practice on.

2.5 Teacher beliefs

Clandinin and Connelly (1987) define ‘personal practical knowledge’ as ‘experiential knowledge “embodied and reconstructed out of the narrative of a teacher’s life”’ (p.490). Pajares (1992) argues that ‘the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgements, which, in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom’ (p.307). However, Nespor (1987) suggests that ‘little attention has been accorded to the structure and functions of teachers’ beliefs about their roles, their students, the subject areas they teach, and the schools they work in’ (p.317). Moreover, Pajares (1992) acknowledges that ‘as a global construct, belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation’ (p.308). Arguably, in a home economics context, there is little empirical information available about teachers’ beliefs. However, some theoretical work is available in the field.

McGregor (1997) argues that teachers’ views about phenomena or events are ‘shaped by their philosophy, research training, life experience and practice’ (p.1). In her view, the existence of different knowledge bases, assumptions, values and belief systems among practitioners in home economics influences their practice, how problems are defined and how the knowledge base is shaped. Furthermore, she reasons that self-knowledge is a prerequisite to being a change agent. In order to affect change, professionals require awareness of their ‘own biases, perceptions, capabilities, limitations, prejudices, assumptions, motives, beliefs, values, expectations – all of the baggage and jewels they carry around with them’ (p.164). However, this is not as straightforward as it may seem. For example, Lysaght and O’Leary (2013) suggest that teachers can hold deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning, and as a result, they can be highly resistant to change. These beliefs persist because they are often latent and unchallenged. Similarly, Wynn (1983) argues that some home economics teachers may

have a set of 'values and stereotypes' that are taken for granted and unquestionably accepted, yet if the field wishes to be widely accepted, the position they take 'must appear neutral, fair and normal' (p.207). In McGregor's view (2006), this type of professional accountability arises when professionals are aware of their inner selves and are in a better place to correctly understand and interpret situations encountered in the external world.

Arguably, the impact of beliefs on practice is significant. Pajares (1992) explains that when faced with any particular situation, the teacher can be 'uncertain of what information is needed or what behaviour is appropriate. It is the episodic core of beliefs that makes their use so likely in just such a circumstance ... the teacher uses beliefs and belief structures, with all their problems and inconsistencies' (pp.311-312). Bandura (1986) addresses the 'centrality of the self-efficacy mechanism in human agency' and argues that 'people often do not behave optimally even though they know full well what to do' (p.390). 'Accomplished performances' stem from the use of 'self-referent thought' in mediating the 'relationship between knowledge and action' (p.390). Efficacy is not a 'fixed act' and it involves 'generating and testing alternative forms of behaviour and strategies' (p.391).

Summary comments

The overriding impression in reviewing the aspects of home economics-related literature in this chapter is that the various commentators make largely plausible assertions even when they are formed more on opinion than empirical inquiry. In that sense, it is difficult to challenge their common sense analyses of the impacts of social norms and practices on home economics identity, curriculum structure and evolution as a subject. A nagging worry, however, is that the often-made argument of the inferiority of the subject in the grand scheme of curriculum theory and design may well be matched by an extremely low level of academic challenge or critique in the literature in relation to its tenets and mission.

Chapter 3 Literature Review II: Assessment in Home Economics Education

3.1 Assessment

Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.

Albert Einstein

There has been a lot of international discourse about ‘what evidence counts’ for the assessment of students’ learning and the danger exists that ‘conceptions of quality’ can be driven ‘by what is easily measurable’ (Smyth and McCoy 2011, p.4). Similarly, Hyland (2011) argues that assessment at home and abroad tends to focus on what is ‘easy to measure, rather than what is most important’ (p.13). However, Mansell, James and the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2009) argue that in high-stakes examination situations, important questions need to be asked. For example, is the assessment data ‘valid in measuring all that is felt to be important in education?’ (p5). This chapter begins with a general overview of the assessment literature and progressively focuses on aspects of assessment that may be argued to impact most directly on achieving the aims of home economics education.

3.1.1 Assessment context and paradigms

Boud (2000) reasons that ‘as members of a discipline, a profession or an educational institution we follow the norms of practice with which we are familiar’ and in an assessment context, we are most familiar with summative assessment practices (p.160). However, he argues that assessment has a multi-faceted duty including the assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning, focusing on immediate tasks and on the implications for life-long learning (e.g. self-assessment), and addressing the process of learning and domain of subject content (p.160).

Much discourse on assessment focuses on the use of assessment to support teaching and learning and how assessment information is used to provide information on the quality of schools. The focus on academic achievement and performance accountability is deeply rooted in Irish education. The comprehensive Madaus and McNamara report (1970) suggested that the examinations at the end of second level education were not fit for purpose and that they weakened the potential to generate ‘intellectual curiosity, the joy of discovery, involvement in intellectual issues’ (p.135). However, it is only in recent times that the Irish educational landscape has begun to change. Formal assessment in second level schools today involves two examination diets; the Junior

Certificate examination at the end of three years in second level education and the Leaving Certificate examination at the end of senior cycle¹².

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) longitudinal study conducted by Smyth and her colleagues from 2005-2011 (Smyth *et al.* 2007; Smyth 2009; Smyth *et al.* 2011, and Smyth and McCoy 2011) significantly influenced curriculum and assessment reform in Ireland. The experiences of over 900 students in 12 case-study second-level schools in Ireland were recorded over the six years from their entry to the junior cycle (approximately 12-15 age) to their leaving the senior cycle (approximately 16-18 age). The research involved an analysis of survey data, in-depth interviews with the students (including early leavers) and supplementary accounts from their parents and school staff.

Evidence shows that many first year students do not make progress, second year students reportedly became disengaged and third year students' experiences tend to be 'dominated' by the Junior Certificate examination (Department of Education and Skills, DES 2012, p.v). By third year, 'the focus of learning narrows, the emphasis is on rote learning and for many students, the examination does not lead to positive learning experiences and outcomes' (DES 2012, p.v). Similarly, the Smyth *et al.* (2007) report concludes that the Junior Certificate examination sets 'the tone for student experiences in a number of ways: the teaching methods used, the amount of work assigned to students and teacher expectations, the use of private tuition ("grinds"), and student perceptions of school climate' (Smyth 2009, p.3).

The now former Minister for Education (DES 2012, p.v) clearly took the professional and research-based evidence on board as significant curriculum and assessment changes are being introduced in junior cycle education on a phased basis from September 2014; the overall goal of which is 'to improve the learning experiences of students' (DES 2012, p.v). The reforms propose a sea-change in the nature of second-level education in Ireland and involve phasing out elements of the traditional Junior Certificate and implementing in its place, a school-based model of assessment.

¹² Senior cycle involves a period of two or three years of study. Schools can offer an optional Transition Year between junior cycle and senior cycle education.

Smyth *et al.* (2011) also report on the effect of the Leaving Certificate on students' learning experiences. Senior cycle education reportedly is 'characterised by greater use of teacher-led instruction, with an emphasis on "practising exam papers" and doing homework' (p.xvi). They note that 'learning for the exam' was the key focus (p.xvii):

Those with high aspirations, become more instrumental, focusing on what is likely to 'come up' on the examination paper, and expressing frustration with teachers who deviate from the curriculum to provide broader educational experiences. (Smyth *et al.* 2011, p.xx)

In a home economics context, this suggests that deviating from the curriculum in order to address broader subject goals would be frowned upon. The Smyth *et al.* (2011, pp.xx-xxi) study concludes that:

The Leaving Certificate tends to narrow the range of student learning experiences and to focus both teachers and students on 'covering the course'. Such a focus would appear to be at odds with the kinds of flexibility and critical thinking skills needed for young people to flourish in a constantly changing world.

Furthermore, the examination is a cause of 'significant levels of stress' as it is perceived to be 'a very "high stakes" exam' (p.xvii). 'Much of the 'stress is a result of constant reminders from teachers about the exams and the expectations of their parents' as well as 'their own desire to do well and fear of not securing the course or college they prefer' (p.xvii). Similarly, Looney (2006) acknowledges that the Leaving Certificate is a high-stakes examination and 'gateway' qualification, which has a 'towering presence' on the educational landscape (p.349). Earlier in 1999, The Commission on the Points System¹³ brought to light the impact of the system of selection for third-level entry on learning, teaching and assessment. A number of 'damaging effects' came to light in the report such as the:

negative impact on students' personal development; choice of subjects by students to attain the highest levels of points for entry to third-level education; a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the

¹³ The points system is a selection system for third-level education. Entry into courses is based on the results of Leaving Certificate examinations and the total number of points accumulated by students. A 'points' score is allocated to each grade awarded in the Leaving Certificate. For example, A1 = 100 points, A2 = 90 points, B1 = 85 points and so on (CAO 2014).

attainment of examination results. (Commission on the Points System 1999, p.46)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) sought to address the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Points System and the ‘unresolved curriculum and assessment issues’ (NCCA 2002, p.2). The review of senior cycle education is continuous and ‘some of the important features of this work includes the development of key skills and new ways of assessing’ (NCCA 2014, webpage). However, Smyth and McCoy (2011) argue that reform and making an appreciable difference to student outcomes ‘will ultimately depend on the extent to which principals and teachers are supported in acquiring the skills to develop their practice’ (p.20). Moreover, they argue that the progression from a ‘richer and engaging learning experience to a narrower one focused on a terminal exam’ (from the new junior cycle to the senior cycle programme) needs to be further addressed and ‘even though assessment approaches will become more varied at junior cycle, the high-stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate will (continue to) have a “back-wash” effect’ (p.18).

3.1.2 Summative assessment

Summative assessment is a ‘label’ that describes how assessment is used. Arguably, the intended purpose of summative assessment is to indicate what students know and understand at a given point in time and usually at the end of a period of learning. Harlen (2008) argues that in summative assessment ‘the concern is to judge achievement against broader indicators, such as level descriptors or grade level criteria’ (p.139). However, how assessment data is actually used can vary. Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) argue that ‘results that are fit to be used for one purpose may not be fit to be used for another’ (p.7). Moreover, the multiple use of assessment information ‘to facilitate judgments on the quality of most elements of our education system’ such as teachers, managers and the government can be problematic (p.7). For example, schools may take ‘actions designed to improve its performance in the measured assessments’ such as drilling students ‘in techniques for earning marks at the expense of teaching for deeper understanding’ (p.7). This appears to be the case, as it is widely accepted in international and Irish contexts that the assessment tail is often guilty of wagging the curriculum dog.

Hyland (2011) argues that there is an ‘over-emphasis on rote-learning and not sufficient emphasis on the application of knowledge’ (p.8) in the current educational system. Moreover, the NCCA survey (n=241) on teachers’ marking and grading practices at Leaving Certificate level, revealed that over half of the respondents use published State Examination Commission¹⁴ (SEC) marking schemes as a classroom tool, to plan tests and in examination preparation (NCCA 2013). For example, one respondent described marking schemes as a ‘gold standard’ as they ‘are the only way students will learn what is acceptable as no book has ALL the correct definitions’ (p.36). This suggests that marking schemes can be used prescriptively to guide examination preparation. This shortcoming was acknowledged by one teacher who argued that marking schemes can have ‘a negative influence on students to produce rote answers’ (p.36). Marking schemes were considered to be a useful teaching resource if they are not used specifically to ‘teach solely to the test’ (p.38). Students and parents can be ‘driven by points ... rather than a rounded education’ and ‘marking schemes can feed into this’ (p.39). Interestingly, the marking schemes were so important to some teachers that there was a suggestion that ‘specific preparation and training in the use of marking schemes’ should be a compulsory element of initial teacher education programmes.

Whilst aspects of summative assessment may attract criticism for a variety of reasons, it is also the case that it can fulfil important functions. According to Mansell, James and the ARG (2009), quality summative assessments involve the active participation of students. The monitoring of student progress and the use of a range of assessment modes to assess learning are also identified as quality dimensions. Mansell *et al.* (2009) continue their argument by stating that summative assessment ‘is static and one-way (usually the teacher or examiner judges the pupil)’ and that it ‘follows a set of pre-defined questions’ (p.9).

The study of teacher engagement and empowerment in assessment, both summative and formative, was a central concern of the Analysis and Review of Innovations in Assessment (ARIA) research project conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) from

¹⁴ The State Examinations Commission is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the second-level examinations of the Irish state: the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate (SEC, 2014a).

2006-2008. In the context of teacher engagement and empowerment in the practice of assessment, Gardner *et al.* (2011) map out characteristics of quality classroom assessment practice that were ‘derived from the views of experts (including teachers)’ although these findings are presented with the view to further endorsement, adaptation and refinement (p.117). The findings show that quality summative assessment relates to the use of a range of activities that are appropriate to ‘the subject matter and age of the child’ and provide opportunities for students ‘to show what it means to be “good” at particular work’ (p.116). Moreover, transparent practices around marking criteria, the assessment of student learning outcomes and marking procedures that involve collaboration and dialogue amongst teachers are considered to be beneficial. Finally, the encouragement of students to use the results of assessment to improve learning can consolidate good practice. Arguably, all of these standards can enhance the assessment of learning practices of teachers, ‘where teachers make dependable assessments of students’ learning for reporting to the students or other stakeholders’ (Gardner *et al.* 2011, p.105).

3.1.3 Formative assessment

Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) argue that formative assessment involves ‘the use of day-to-day, often informal, assessments to explore pupils’ understanding so that the teacher can best decide how to help them to develop that understanding’ (p.9). For an assessment task to be formative, the assessment information must be used to progress learning. Black and Wiliam (2009) define practices as formative when ‘evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted and used by teachers, learners or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps of instruction’ (p.9). Information is gathered during the learning process (as opposed to the end of a unit of work) to inform and modify learning. Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) reason that formative assessment is an integral part of the learning process and is ‘on-going and dynamic (feedback can be given both to the pupil and the teacher)’ (p.9). Moreover, they argue that teachers have difficulty implementing formative assessment as it is ‘a central part of pedagogy’ and ‘it may challenge them to change what they do, how they think about learning and teaching, and the way in which they relate to their pupils’ (p.9).

The term Assessment for Learning (AfL) evolved in the 1980s and early 1990s as a parallel term to formative assessment. Gardner (2012) argues that whilst AfL

‘comprises the same time-honoured practices as formative assessment’, the term AfL is less likely to be used to describe the use of multiple small-scale summative assessments of learning which are sometimes used to provide diagnostic information or, in combination a final assessment of learning. He argues that the two terms can be used interchangeably ‘when there is no ambiguity in the type of assessment process being described’ (p.3). Whether AfL or formative assessment are the terms chosen to describe the process of using assessment information to inform learning, the literature and most notably Black and Wiliam (2009) suggest that these approaches are effective. This is argued to be due to the relationship between the quality of interactive feedback and the quality of learning, which combine to raise the level of student involvement and achievement, increase equity of student outcomes, especially for previously under-achieving students, and improve students’ ability to learn.

Wiliam and Leahy (2007) and Black and Wiliam (2009) have provided theoretical foundations for formative assessment in recent years in an attempt to offer a rationale within a framework of broader pedagogical theories and to unify diverse formative assessment practices. Black and Wiliam (2009) develop the meaning of formative assessment by referring to ‘moments of contingency’ (p.212) which occur in teaching and learning and during the process of collecting evidence of learning coupled with the action that leads to adjustments. These moments of contingency may be synchronous or asynchronous i.e. adjustments are made respectively either to the direction of teaching during a discussion in ‘real time’ or when correcting homework or considering evidence at a later stage. Teachers, learners and peers are considered agents in decision making and their decisions are informed by evidence. As Black and Wiliam (2009) argue: ‘how teachers, learners and their peers create and capitalise on these moments of contingency entails considerations of instructional design, curriculum, pedagogy, psychology and epistemology’ (p.6).

The previous quotation hints at the complexity of AfL as a pedagogical approach that uses multiple assessment activities to enhance learning. There are many variations on how this information is presented and the connection to formative assessment warrants elucidation. Wiliam and Thompson (2007) conceptualise formative assessment based on three key processes, similar to Stiggins *et al.* (2007) who identify questions relating to the establishment of where the learners are in their learning, where they are going and

how they will get there. In their framework, Wiliam and Thompson (2007) identified three agents involved in the process (teacher, peer and learner), three processes (where the learner is going, where the learner is right now and how to get there) and five key strategies: 1) explaining and sharing learning intentions and success criteria, 2) engineering classroom discourse and learning activities that elicit evidence of student understanding, 3) providing ‘feedforward’ (feedback that moves learners forward), 4) encouraging peer interaction and collaboration and 5) encouraging self-regulated learning.

There are many types of activity that enable the achievement of the five key strategies. The dominant focus (Wiliam 2000a; Black *et al.* 2003 and Wiliam 2007) has centred on categories that arose from evidence of their effectiveness in improving learning namely the following types of activities: sharing success criteria with learners, classroom questioning, comment only marking, peer and self-assessment and the formative use of summative tests.

One particularly relevant conclusion of the *Learning How to Learn Project* (2001-2005)¹⁵ outlined by Pedder and James (2012, pp.41-42) was that an inquiry approach to teacher learning is productive:

If teachers are prepared and committed to engage in the risky business of problematising their own practice, seeking evidence to evaluate in order to judge where change is needed, and then to act on their decisions, they are thus engaging in assessment for learning with respect to their own professional learning. Helping students to do the same with respect to their learning becomes less challenging because teachers are familiar with the principles and processes through inquiry into their own practices.

Black and Wiliam (2009) referred to the process of stimulating thought amongst learners, which can lead to active learner involvement, but less predictable classroom dialogue. For them, formative interaction is a ‘contingent activity’ (p.212). They argue that in a formative mode, ‘a teacher’s attention must be focused on what she or he can learn about the student’s thinking from their response’ (p.212) and it involves what

¹⁵ The Learning How to Learn research project in the UK aimed to advance both understanding and practice of learning how to learn in classrooms, schools and networks (TLRP 2014). The project involved universities including: Cambridge, Reading, The Open University and King’s College, schools in five local educational authorities and two ‘Virtual Education Action Zones’.

Davis (1997) calls 'interpretative listening' (p.364). However, the bi-directional interpretive process of teacher assimilation of student responses and student interpretation of teacher responses is not clearly understood as it depends on how any response is interpreted.

Perrenoud's (1998) shares a similar view, that a teacher's focus is on interventions that regulate learning and 'any intervention has to involve an incursion into the representation and thought processes of the pupil to accelerate a breakthrough in understanding a new point of view or the shaping of a notion which can immediately become operative' (p.97).

3.1.4 Home economics assessment arrangements

Junior Certificate assessment in home economics involves a written examination (50%), a food and culinary skills examination (35%) and optional study project work (15%). Leaving Certificate assessment in home economics involves a written examination (80%) and the completion of a written food studies coursework component in a pro-forma journal (20%). This is commonly referred to as 'the journal'. Students who opt to take the Textiles, Fashion and Design (TFD) elective, have slightly different assessment arrangements comprising an examination (70%), a written food studies coursework component (20%), and a TFD practical coursework project (10%).

The most recent report by the Inspectorate into home economics (DES 2008) noted that teaching, learning and assessment of home economics is of a high standard in the majority of schools. However, the report identified the need for the improvement of classroom pedagogy in 20% of cases observed (n=289 lessons), the use of an expanding range of questions (classroom and homework) to support students in the development of higher order thinking skills and the need to focus on the delivery of feedback to help improve learning. The use of a variety of assessment modes to address the attainment of the learning outcomes of the syllabuses was recommended in 25% of cases whilst in all cases the inspectors recommended that subject departments further explore the principles of AfL. The application of AfL in a home economics context has not been reported to any significant extent in research literature and the DES (2008) and MacPhail and Halbert (2010) respectively note a lack of clarity about the assessment of

student progress and a lack of detail on how assessment is to be ‘operationalised’ (MacPhail and Halbert 2010, p.24).

3.1.5 Assessment and teacher beliefs

Adopting an AfL-type pedagogy can foster the challenging of a teacher’s beliefs about practice and Pedder and James (2012, p.37) argue that teachers and students develop new understandings and perspectives of each other and the nature and practice of teaching and learning when authentically adopting an AfL approach.

It involves transformations in classroom processes, and this entails change not only in what teachers and students do but also in how they relate ... As learning becomes more explicit and visible, students and teachers are helped to become more conscious of the “how” and “why” of learning as an invaluable support for developing more effective strategies and increasing agency, autonomy, accountability and informed choice in learning.

James (2006) notes ‘that assessment practice is sometimes out of step with developments in learning theory and can undermine effective teaching and learning because its washback effect is so powerful’ (p. 58). Similarly, Harlen (2004) argues that teachers can have a narrow view of assessment and can often be unsure about how to respond to evidence of learning: ‘Many teachers have a narrow view of assessment and do not know how to respond to freedom to use evidence from students’ actions, projects and processes’ (p.15).

Social constructivist learning theory views learning as a social process in which the individual develops meaning. Torrance and Pryor (2001) explain that this perspective positions assessment as a socially embedded process. However, Lysaght and O’Leary (2013) argue that in practice, teachers who operate from models based on ‘behaviourist learning theories and scientific measurement will not easily give way to those based on social constructivism and sociocultural theories of teaching and learning’ (p.219). This incongruence between teacher beliefs and practice in their view can inhibit the integration of AfL.

3.2 Validity matters

Messick (1989) who has written extensively on validity, defines it as ‘an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on

test scores or other modes of assessment' (p.13). This is a sophisticated definition which is not always well understood. For example, the SEC (2007b) define validity merely as 'the accuracy with which an examination paper measures what it is intended to measure' (p.25). The latter does not take into account what the test scores really mean. For example, Wiliam (2000b) considers this type of definition to be unsatisfactory as it does not take into account what the results of assessments mean. He argues that:

an assessment does not purport anything- it tests simply what it tests. The purporting is done by those who claim that a particular test result tells us something beyond just the result of that test ... this is why it has become increasingly accepted ... that validity is not a property of a test at all, but a property of the conclusions that we draw on the basis of test results. (Wiliam 2000b, p.108)

In a similar vein, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (2013) describe validity as 'the extent to which test scores are appropriate for the uses to which they are intended to be put' (webpage).

3.2.1 Types of validity

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the aspects of validity that are important to consider in terms of home economics assessments. Validity is an umbrella concept that is content, construct, criterion and consequence-related. An assessment may only seem to measure what it claims to measure and be deemed to be face valid. Content validity exists when 'a representative sample of the content of whatever objectives or specifications the test was originally designed to measure' is assessed (Brown 2000, p.8). The SEC (2007b) achieve content validity by ensuring that 'the subject content of every question' is 'within the range of content outlined in the syllabus' (p.25). However, most assessment experts would qualify this (e.g. NFER 2013) by arguing that content validity relates to both the relevance of the content and the adequate sampling and coverage of the subject.

Construct-related validity demonstrates 'the extent to which test scores accurately represent the amount of characteristic X possessed by each person tested' (NFER 2013, webpage). A construct may be defined as 'part of a theoretical model of a person's cognition- such as their understanding of a certain set of concepts or their attitude toward something' (Wilson 2005, p.6). Whilst Brown (2000) defines it as 'an attribute, proficiency, ability, or skill that happens in the human brain ... [that] is defined by

established theories' (p.9). In essence, constructs refer to internal traits that can be inferred from observing behaviour such as 'overall English language proficiency' (Brown 2000, p.9). Examples in a home economics context might include empowerment, sustainable development, well-being, dexterity in terms of practical skills and characteristics such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, some of which present considerable challenges for assessment design.

Gipps (1994) argues that high construct validity can be achieved through the assessment of all aspects of identified constructs and that failing to do so may result in scores that do not represent an individual's ability to perform a certain construct. In a contrary view, construct validity is seen by Wilson (2005) to be more complex and without 'a particular single form' (p.6). Rather, 'it extends from one extreme to another, from high to low, small to large, positive to negative, or strong to weak' (p.6).

Another aspect of validity is criterion-related validity and this 'concerns the relationship between scores on the test in question and other assessments of performance' (NFER 2013, webpage). The consequential aspect of validity is particularly important to my study as my purpose is to explore how assessment affects home economics education, i.e. what consequences does it have? NFER (2013) reason that this aspect of validity is concerned with 'the intended and unintended consequences of using test scores for particular purposes' (webpage). They argue that 'one of the most frequently discussed concerns is the backwash effect that high stakes school assessments can have on the curriculum' (webpage).

3.2.2 Washback/backwash

Pearson (1988) argues that the influence of external examinations can be seen working in a backward direction- hence the term "washback" (p.98), a term that means the same as NFER's backwash but is arguably used more widely. The influence of impending examinations on attitudes, behaviours, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents is the particular washback effect in which I am interested. Its effect exists on a spectrum; at one end driving a 'teaching to the test' approach and at the other promoting constructive changes in teaching and gains in learning.

Wall (1997) differentiates between test impact and washback. The former refers to 'any of the effects that a test may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the

classroom, the school, the educational system or society as a whole' and the latter is defined as 'the effects of tests on teaching and learning' (p.291). According to Alderson and Wall (1993), the term washback refers to 'influence' (p.117). They report how some writers suggest that 'a test's validity should be measured by the degree to which it has had a beneficial influence on teaching' (p.116). Morrow (1986) takes the view that 'washback validity' indicates the quality of the association between a test and related teaching. 'The test is invalid when it has negative washback' and one 'validity criterion' Morrow (1986) proposed is 'a measure of how far the intended washback effect was actually being met in practice' (p.6).

Positive washback

Alderson and Wall (1993) argue that washback is a 'phenomenon on whose importance all seem to be agreed, but whose nature and presence have been little studied' (p.115) and that 'good tests should have good effects' (p.117). For example, a positive effect can be generated, desired skills can be developed and learning in the construct being measured can be improved. Swain (1985) argues that test designers can 'bias for best' and 'work for washback' (pp.42-44). In a similar vein, home economics assessments could require students to demonstrate skills that realistically represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in daily life. This would be a desirable washback effect especially as it is well documented, (see for example, DES 2001; IFHE 2008 and Stack 2008) that the subject aims to address daily life situations and problems. Alderson and Wall (1993) discuss how positive effects can be generated through examinations and one effect is that 'the curriculum is put into effect' (p.115). Pearson (1988) also contends that 'good tests' encourage 'beneficial teaching-learning processes' and they 'will be more or less directly usable as teaching-learning activities' (p.107).

Alderson and Wall (1993) argue that 'the Washback Hypothesis seems to assume that teachers and learners do things *they would not necessarily otherwise do* because of the test ... But this also implies that a "poor" test could conceivably have a "good" effect if it made teachers and learners do "good" things they would not otherwise do' (p.117). They cite examples in which students apply themselves more and 'take the subject being tested more seriously' (p.117). This may be an over-simplification as it is not clear that the washback effect they are crediting is operating without other powerful influences such as the quality of the teaching. Nevertheless, they argue that 'hard work

is presumably more “desirable” than no work at all’ and that external tests potentially raise extrinsic motivation (p.117). Black and Wiliam (1998) prefer to ground the issue on the argument that ‘the ultimate user of assessment information which is elicited in order to improve learning is the pupil’ (p.8). A positive consequence of assessment is that students have the potential to use information gleaned from assessment to inform their own learning.

Negative washback

Tests, whether good or bad, have the potential to generate negative effects. Clearly, the most obvious problem is anxiety which can be created in the learner when they are required to perform under pressure. According to Alderson and Wall (1993), this type of pressure results in abnormal performances, which can add to levels of anxiety. Teachers may also experience anxiety due to ‘the fear of poor results, and the associated guilt, shame or embarrassment’ (p.118). The consequence of this anxiety is that it could ‘lead to the desire for their pupils to achieve high scores in whatever way seems possible’ (Anderson and Wall 1993, p.118). One of the major problems in such circumstances is that this can result in curriculum distortion and excessive coaching for examinations.

Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that a negative consequence of assessments is that students become more focused on the marks than on their own learning needs. For example, difficult tasks involving higher-order thinking may be avoided and often they ‘spend time and energy looking for clues to the “right answer”’ (p.9). Assessments can affect the self-esteem of students if they are exposed to frequent experiences of failure. Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that they are ‘led to believe that they lack ability ... so they “retire hurt”, avoid investing effort in learning which could only lead to disappointment’ (p.9).

It is well-documented that the high-stakes associated with the Leaving Certificate examination have a serious consequential effect on teaching and learning with researchers such as Hyland (2011) observing that ‘its backwash effect on teaching and learning and on the student experience, especially in senior cycle, is considerable’ (p.4). For example, the Chief Examiner of home economics (SEC 2011a) reports some incidences of direct transcription from textbooks in food studies coursework assignments ‘where candidates made little or no attempt to analyse the information and in some centres, it was noted that the work presented was remarkably similar,

suggesting that the research may not have been conducted by the individual candidate' (p.9). The Inspectorate (DES 2008) claim that cheating, copying or transcribing reduces the 'learning potential, including opportunities for independent research' and 'real learning' (p.38). Similarly, Smyth *et al.* (2007) reported the tendency of students to frequently adopt an instrumental approach to the completion of homework. The frequent practice of students transcribing answers from textbooks was reported, 'you just write it out from the book, you don't think about it' (p.109). The Inspectorate (DES 2008) argues that the frequent use of exercises from workbooks that accompany textbooks is only useful for encouraging the recall of information.

Over-practising and rehearsal of cookery tasks was observed by Attar (1990, p.17) in her study of a sample of home economics classrooms and in her view, it was to the detriment of student enjoyment.

The limits of examination syllabuses and the artificiality of the classroom setting may also sometimes circumscribe learning ... Their teachers do not think that enjoying cookery is the point: there are too many points and concepts to get across in the time ... No one was talking about how the food tasted, or even behaving as if that mattered.

Similarly, Paechter's study (2000) categorically showed that the teachers were 'breaking the rules' in order to meet the requirements of sometimes unrealistic tasks that demand more time to complete than is available. Moreover, Hennessey *et al.* (1993) reported how a 'veneer of accomplishment' is achieved in course-work projects (p.81). Arguably, the washback effect of pursuing such accomplishments is that creativity has to be stifled.

3.2.3 Range and fitness for purpose of assessment

There are multiple assessment components in home economics that aim to assess a range of learning. In the context of home economics education, the Inspectorate (DES 2008, p.38) noted the excellent assessment of practical culinary skills, but they advise that:

The assessment of students' progress in Home Economics should include the assessment of all components of the syllabuses. This should include the practical work and project work and, where relevant, provide opportunities to incorporate the design process.

This type of approach would be a better indicator of students' progress since, as one report cited, 'the assessment of, for example, the theoretical component only, restricts the attainment of a wide variety of learning outcomes for students' (p.36).

Very little evidence about the fitness for purpose of home economics assessments exists outside of Chief Examiner's and Inspectorate reports periodically published on the SEC and DES websites. Some writers in the field, however, do provide an account of how students prepare for practical examinations, or how they respond to assessment tasks such as the design process. For example, Attar (1990) observed in her research study, practices where students frequently rehearsed a small number of recipes for the practical examinations 'even if this appeared contrary to the ethos' of the examinations. She reports how the students 'would have "something up their sleeve" which they felt able to prepare with confidence (p.13). It was reported that teachers frequently issued the same recipe to all students to use during class time and this set limits on their 'notional freedom of choice' (p.14). Moreover, Paechter (2000) reports that teachers are frustrated with 'closely specified design briefs' (p.86) and such highly structured examination tasks in Atkinson's view 'enabled many students to achieve success in terms of performance, whilst on the other hand, they have wasted valuable educational opportunities for the development of high order thinking skills' (Atkinson 2000, p.277).

However, in addition to the problem of closed specified tasks, Paechter (2000) draws attention to the problem associated with the time required to complete the tasks. She cites an example of a task requiring students to create an 'energy bar' to be consumed as a meal substitute on a hike. She argues that the teachers considered that 12 hours was insufficient time to complete the assigned tasks and the issue was compounded by the fact that school results would be published. Paechter (2000) notes how this pressure placed on teachers and students was contrary to the subject ethos. Previously, emphasis was placed 'on showing what students can do, rather than demonstrating their failures' (p.87). In response, teachers admitted to stepping around the issues. Some teachers interpreted the 12 hour limit as 12 hours of 'work' and this excluded preparation work. The total lesson time realistically may have been 20 hours and Paechter (2000) reports that some teachers incorporated the task into homework activities. One teacher summed up the variation in examination practices which inevitably impact on the fairness and validity of the examinations: 'Yes they're all breaking the rules. We all have. We were

hiding that we were doing this from each other' (p.87). Furthermore, in this teacher's view, the assessment of D&T project work dictates 'the process used by those pupils' and stifles creativity as it promotes a linear design model approach (Paechter 2000, p.277).

Wilson and Harris (2004) report that 'inflexible assessment methods used to judge pupils' D&T project work has dictated the processes used by those pupils' (p.60). Atkinson (2000) has also examined the effect of D&T project work in enhancing the development of creativity, innovative thinking and problem solving concluding that the assessment of project work influences the processes used. However, she argues that the achievement of high performance and the attainment of higher order thinking skills can be made 'compatible' (p.277) by encouraging the use of 'flexible, appropriate design and problem solving strategies through modified schemes of assessment' (p.277). She contends that less formulaic strategies in curriculum and assessment documentation would ensure that students focus on stages of the design process, the 'critical and analytical thinking skills' and the 'creative thinking skills' involved (p.277). She argues that critical and analytical thinking skills are more easily taught and assessed in this way and recommends that teachers develop a more comprehensive understanding of the design process in order to enable their students to develop thinking skills and 'to portray an output from that thinking' (p.277). In my view, the development and assessment of creative thinking is challenging, but Atkinson proposes that teachers will continue with existing 'successful' teaching strategies with examination classes 'unless pupils are explicitly rewarded with higher marks' for higher order thinking skills (Atkinson 2000, p.277).

3.2.3 Examination question demand

According to the DES (2001), examination questions are designed to test the knowledge, values, dispositions, competences and skills outlined in the syllabus. However, Hyland (2000) reports how traditional pen and paper assessment practices fail to capture much of student's learning. There is some empirical information available on the quality of test items in external examinations, but there is much less information available in the area of classroom assessment practice and even less in the area of in home economics.

Question design

Black and Wiliam (1998) point to short-comings in assessment design practice in classrooms. In relation to question design, they argue that questions are not critically reviewed in terms of what they actually assess (p.6). They state that ‘the quality of test items, i.e. their relevance to the main learning aims ... need scrutiny. Good questions are hard to generate and teachers should collaborate, and draw – critically- on outside sources, to collect such questions’ (p.12). Reinforcing the point in a home economics context, more than half of the most recently published home economics inspection reports revealed that the majority of questions assigned for homework at second level were of the lower order variety (DES 2008).

Frequent discussions about the development of higher order thinking skills in schools have occurred over the last decade. For example, Hyland (2011) in a discussion paper on the transition of students from second to third level education observes that the Leaving Certificate has been criticised with ‘monotonous regularity’ by employers, the Higher Education Authority, academics, the media and the public for not achieving the desired development of higher order skills. However, there is a dearth of information about how these specific attributes and skills are attained in daily classroom practice and especially through carefully crafted question design.

Krathwohl (2002) claims that Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom *et al.* 1956), is a useful tool for curriculum mapping, assessment design, differentiating learning and lesson planning, and it remains the most used and preferred taxonomy today. For example, the State Examinations Commission in Ireland (SEC 2007b) uses the taxonomy in the formulation of assessment objectives for an assessment grid that assists in the design of high-stakes summative assessments. The SEC assessment grid illustrates whether ‘various cognitive skills are being tested in appropriate proportions and whether the content tested is an appropriately balanced sample of the content’ (SEC 2007b, p.33).

Anderson *et al.* (2001) have revised Bloom’s Taxonomy to take the form of a Taxonomy Table. This is a two dimensional framework with two sets of defined categories including knowledge dimensions and cognitive processes, which define expectations for student learning. The revised framework is claimed to advance Bloom’s Taxonomy, as it progresses from the cognitive to the constructive, from what

students know, to how they think. The Cognitive Process Dimension has the ‘verb’ descriptors 1. Remember, 2. Understand, 3. Apply, 4. Analyse, 5. Evaluate and 6. Create, whilst the Knowledge Dimension maps the four knowledge types: A. Factual Knowledge, B. Conceptual Knowledge, C. Procedural Knowledge and D. Meta-cognitive Knowledge. Anderson *et al.* (2001) explain how teachers begin an ‘analytic journey from the statement of an objective to its placement in the Taxonomy Table’ (p.31). The analytic journey involves the examination of the verb in the learning outcome, assessment objective or question in the context of the six categories of the Cognitive Process Dimension and the examination of the knowledge nouns in the context of the Knowledge Dimension. Plotting this on the table enables questions to be aligned to specific learning outcomes, thus facilitating the alignment of assessment and learning.

Classifying the cognitive demand of questions is not without challenges. Although test items may be carefully constructed to avoid unplanned difficulties for students, or what Case and Swanson (2002) call test-item flaws, candidates may respond in a different way to that intended by teachers and assessment designers due to frequent practising of questions in preparation for examinations. Hyland (2011) argues that ‘higher order skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation etc. are usually required to achieve Grades A or B. However, many students have indicated that intense preparation and examination practice enables them to obtain high grades by learning off by heart evaluations or analyses prepared by others, and regurgitating these at the examination’ (p.11). The task of distinguishing between ‘answers learned off in advance of the examination’ and ‘analyses and evaluations which are original and are the work of the candidate’ (p.12) is difficult and is clearly a major validity issue associated with current examinations.

Summary comments

This chapter has completed the literature review that both underpins my approach to the study and addresses the research objective of identifying assessment paradigms, principles, design practices and validation frameworks available for appraising examination questions. The paucity of research in home economics assessment is

reflected in the review and underpins the rationale for conducting the research that is now recounted in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 Methods

4.1 Preamble

This chapter sets out the specific steps which were followed in undertaking this research. The rationale behind the chosen research design is presented along with a discussion about the related merits and limitations. This is followed by an account of the methods used to collect the data and the methods for analysing and presenting them. Included in this chapter is a discussion about important validity, reliability and ethical considerations relevant to the work. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations, generalisability of the findings and a short summary.

4.2 Reflexive standpoint

In one sense, the complexity of the research aim demands a mixed method design that can address a variety of issues. In simple terms, the design needs to incorporate a combination of methods including desk-based historical research, qualitative inquiry through interviews and focus groups, and the analysis of curriculum and examination documents. In reality, this mix comprises a choice of ‘fit for purpose’ methods to collect the most appropriate data and allow me systematically to make the most secure interpretations. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), however, ‘all research is interpretive; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied ... Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions he or she asks and the interpretations the researcher brings to them’ (p.19). I must therefore heed the warning that my interpretations may be informed by my own beliefs and I must guard against a misinterpretation of the data my methods produce.

4.3 Design framework

Of paramount interest in designing the research was the need to explore the relationship between assessment and teaching and learning approaches in home economics education, home economics teachers’ beliefs and the quality of learning in examination-oriented contexts. This set of research explorations seeks to address the central research question guiding this study:

Are assessment practices in home economics education in Ireland fit for purpose in serving the educational aims of the subject?

4.3.1 Multi-method approach

A methodologically rich approach was adopted in order to provide a broad, triangulated range of data, using complementary methods of data collection, which can strengthen inferences through corroboration. The research design broadly takes an investigative and interpretative approach based on qualitative data. Gray (2014) promotes such approaches due to the ‘highly contextual’ nature of research data that is ‘collected in a natural “real-life” setting’ (p.161). Similarly, Filstead (1970) argues that qualitative inquiry enables the researcher ‘to “get close to the data”, thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself’ (p.6). This suits my research because as Cohen *et al.* (2011) would argue, the educational context is ‘multi-layered and not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research’ (p. 219).

Qualitative research will often provide a greater depth of information with a limited number of participants while quantitative approaches will generally provide less in-depth data from a larger number of participants. Proponents of the latter would argue that its results are more likely to be generalisable to a wider population, whereas the former allows for greater explanation of ideas. Quantitative dimensions to this study were ruled out early in this research process partly for practical reasons (the practicality of engaging with large numbers of participants), but mostly because of the hugely complex and multiple influences, aspirations and processes that impact upon the context of the study.

The qualitative approach is not without disadvantages. It is a commonly held view (e.g. see Lapan *et al.* 2012; Lincoln and Guba 1985 and Patton 2002) that qualitatively generated findings may not be generalisable to wider populations. However, generalisation to the whole community of home economics teachers in Ireland is not a goal of this study. Instead it intends to gain an insight into a ‘slice’ of home economics practice in Ireland; and the use of a qualitative interpretivist approach is most appropriate and preferred. Insights are gained into individual situations rather than ‘universal truths about the world’, as Broom and Willis (2007) would argue (p.26).

An interpretivist point of view is particularly appropriate for this study because such a viewpoint ‘is inherently meaningful’ and in order to understand ‘a particular social action ... the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action’ (Schwandt

2000, p191). Furthermore, from an epistemological point of view, ‘interpretivists argue that it is possible to understand the subjective meaning (grasping the actor’s beliefs, desires and so on) yet do so in an objective manner’ (p.193) and this description neatly fits the design of this study, which covers the beliefs, views and vision of a cohort of home economics teachers (p.193).

Patton (2002) argues that ‘qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source of *grounded theory* that is inductively generated from field work, that is, theory that emerges from the researcher’s observations and interviews out in the real world’ (p.11). This approach resonated strongly with my thinking as I planned the research. Corbin and Holt (2011, p.113) define ‘grounded theory’ as:

a set of grounded concepts integrated around a central category/theme to form a theoretical framework that explains how and why persons, organisations, communities, or nations experience and respond to events, challenges, or problematic situations,

but note that the methodology has evolved over time. For example, Clark (2005) developed a post-modern approach to grounded theory. Her approach involving situational analysis methods does not seek to establish formal theory, or aim to be conclusive. Instead, it seeks ‘a more situation-specific substantive theory’ (den Outer *et al.* 2013, p.1506).

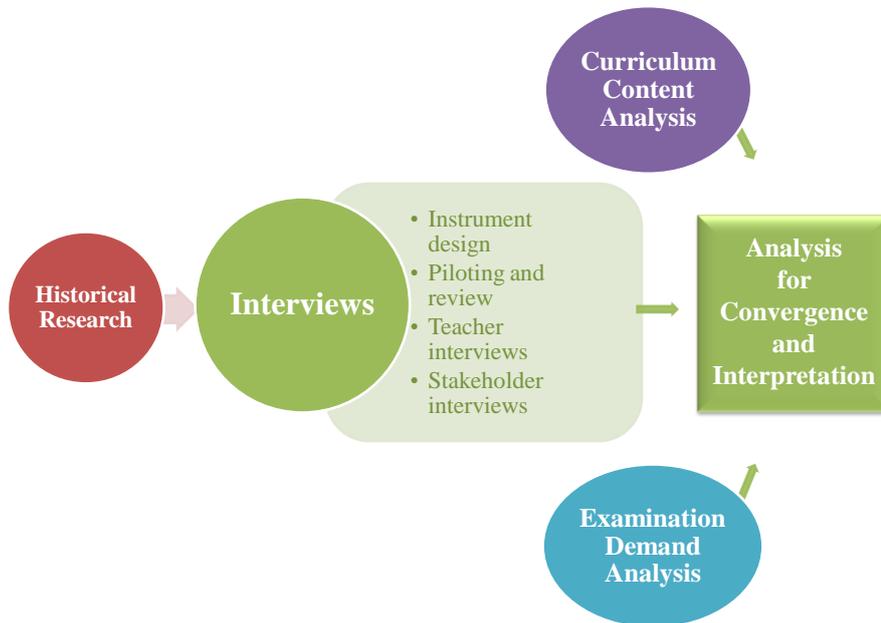
Similarly, my research question is arguably less focused on generating theory than in providing a conceptual analysis of a complex situation, but the grounded theory processes are particularly apt for my empirical purposes. Indeed, Glaser and Strauss (1967), the creators of grounded theory, argue that ‘such a theory fits empirical situations’ (p.1). Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) note that Glaser and Strauss (1967) viewed the data and process of analysis as ‘social constructions’ (p.41) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that it involves an interpretation of ‘a reality’ (p.523) both from our own experience and the participants’ portrayal. ‘It remains realist because it addresses human *realities* and assumes the existence of real worlds’ (p.523). Grounded theory is therefore a useful method of developing knowledge and what Corbin and Holt (2011) call ‘naturalistic data’ (p.114) from the subjective experience of home economics teachers and myself as the researcher.

Grounded theory also ‘looks at how “variables” are grounded – given meaning and played out in subjects’ lives (p.524). In a way, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue, it involves the portrayal of ‘moments in time’ (p.522). The ‘social world’ of home economics education can be viewed as being ‘in process’ as subjects and circumstances are in a state of constant flux (p.522). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that ‘a constructivist grounded theory seeks to define conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their realities’ (p.524), but these realities do not reach a level of generalisability. The generation of a set of concepts offers ‘both explanation and understanding and fulfil the pragmatist criterion of usefulness’ (p.524). Moreover, they note the potential to ‘gloss over meanings within respondents’ stories’ (p.524) and to fracture data and this can lead to limited understanding. In essence, it is assumed that there is limited entry into the world of the participant and the meaning of the story. Taking cognisance of these criticisms is important and I recognised the need in my planning and research design to take care not to ‘gloss over’ meanings within the stories that constituted a major part of my data.

4.4 Data collection

As Figure 4 depicts, the design of this study involved a combination of historical review and analysis, teacher and other stakeholder perceptions, and analyses of examination (‘demand’ analysis) and curriculum documents. I considered that my study needed a baseline of identity, values and mission for home economics education and an element of historical research was initially conducted. This was necessary in order to determine the antecedents and evolution of the subject we know today as home economics. I felt this background was vital in determining how to investigate the selected teachers’ values, beliefs and perceptions and how the curriculum today intends to impart a body of knowledge and skills to the nation’s young people. This historical review set out largely in Chapter 2 was followed by a three-pronged approach, addressing the aspect of ‘fitness for purpose’ from three directions: the central research approach of seeking key actors’ perceptions and beliefs backed up by curriculum content analysis and examination demand analysis. This multiple methods approach (see Figure 4) facilitated the convergence of findings and the formulation of considered interpretations to address the research question. The following sections set out the details of the baseline historical research and the three ‘prongs’ of the research design.

Figure 4 Multi-method approach



4.4.1 Historical research

This section sets out the approach taken to the historical review presented mainly in Chapter 2. Ary *et al.* (1972) argue that historical research is ‘an attempt to establish facts and arrive at conclusions concerning the past’ (p.453). The analysis of documentary evidence is an approach derived from historical methods, which Duffy (2010) argues ‘are essentially concerned with the problems of selection and evaluation of evidence’ (p.124). A documentary analysis of educational records was considered to be a valuable source of data in this study. A ‘problem-oriented approach’ was chosen over a ‘source-oriented approach’ (Duffy 2010, p.125). The latter involves allowing the study of primary sources to reveal areas worthy of research. The former, which was adopted in this study, involves becoming informed about the subject from secondary sources as a starting point, establishing the locus of the historical study and thereafter referring to primary sources that serve to deepen understanding of a particular area. These techniques were applied in one chapter of the literature review and in the discussion chapter that follows later in the thesis.

The purpose of the historical review was to reveal how the subject of home economics evolved, its values and underpinning philosophy and the content of the taught

curriculum. It provided a platform from which to conduct a curriculum inquiry and the empirical research study. Furthermore, it enabled the development of insights that could potentially assist in addressing current issues. As might be expected, what it did not do was offer a directly valid comparison to contemporary practice due to the differences in contextual circumstances.

Document searches are similar to literature searches. The ‘problem-oriented approach’ (Duffy 2010) makes it necessary to decide what historical information is required. The most salient issues included the development of the field of home economics and the evolution of home economics in the school system, the identification of core values and the progressive development of subject knowledge. It was also important to systematically and objectively decide what sources were needed; a process which Duffy (2010) calls ‘controlled selection’ (p.132).

Familiarity with the evidence enables decision-making regarding which sources of information are pertinent in addressing the research question and it was necessary to make as ‘balanced selection as possible’ (Duffy 2010, p.132). It was then necessary to locate and access suitable data from primary sources including parliamentary documents, reports and archival material such as school text-books. The *Annual Reports of the Commissioners of National Education*, the *Reports of the Intermediate Education Board* and the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction* were identified as offering a significant amount of valuable data. For instance, insights into the lived experiences of teachers and students are anecdotally reported by inspectors in these documents.

In addition, old textbooks were sourced through the placement of an advertisement in the magazine *Ireland’s Own* and this strategy resulted in access to extremely valuable and authentic sources of data. The following textbooks mainly used in Irish national schools were sourced: National Model Female School (1835) *Simple Directions in Needle-work and Cutting-out*¹⁶, The Royal School Series (1889) *Domestic Economy: A Class-book for Girls*¹⁷ and O’Connor Eccles’s (1904) *How Mary Fitzgerald Learned*

¹⁶ A book loaned for the purpose of this research from a private collection.

¹⁷ A publication sanctioned by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for use in Irish schools.

Housekeeping. In reference to the critical analysis of documents, Duffy (2010) argues that they can be subjected to ‘external criticism’ and ‘internal criticism’ (p.134). The latter refers to the rigorous and critical analyses of documents and the former to the analysis of the authentic and genuine nature of the source. Sourcing authentic school text-books served to enrich the findings of this study. Secondary sources of data consulted included key Irish historical texts such as Coolahan (1981), Durcan (1972) and Luddy (1995) and so forth. These books initially informed the historical study, but they also served to corroborate emerging evidence gleaned from primary sources.

4.4.2 Interview survey

The empirical dimensions of the research were designed firstly to determine how the subject values are perceived and enacted in practice. Specifically, the latter relates to how the planned curriculum is interpreted and implemented. The second purpose of the empirical research design was to determine views in relation to the extent to which assessment in home economics impacts on teaching and learning and the realisation of the subject mission and educational aims.

A variety of instruments could determine how the subject values, curriculum and assessment are perceived and enacted in practice. For example, a questionnaire or survey could capture areas of agreement and disagreement regarding the practice of home economics among the cohort of home economics teachers in the RoI (n=1,624) (Teaching Council 2014). However, access to this sample was assessed to be both difficult and costly. Furthermore, a questionnaire survey may not actually capture an in-depth set of data relating to key foci, ‘signature’ pedagogies, and how assessment can best support learning. Studying what goes on in home economics classrooms would ideally be achieved using classroom observation techniques, but access to classrooms was also adjudged to prove likely to be difficult. Arguably a programme of classroom observations, for example, could illuminate how the curriculum or assessment is enacted, but it may not explicitly reveal perspectives and beliefs influencing practice. For these reasons, a large-scale survey and a classroom observation programme were ruled out.

Instead, gathering the views of a smaller sample of home economics teachers through dialogue was considered to be the most feasible option open for data collection. In this sense, it is a conventional study as many researchers such as Fontana and Frey (2003)

would argue that ‘interviewing is one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings’ (p.61) and in the context of this study, home economics teachers and their practice. Although on a much smaller scale, this option offered opportunities to gain insights into myriad factors influencing the teachers’ beliefs and practice. Seidman (2006) argues that the interview process is a ‘meaning-making’ (p.7) process and ‘mode of inquiry’ (p.8) that involves ‘understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience’ (p.9).

In this study, the interview schedule was therefore designed to enable the teachers to express their own views on home economics practice and in particular on:

- the rationale, knowledge, understanding and skills under-pinning home economics educational practice
- the validity of home economics assessment in relation to the curriculum and subject mission and
- the impact of assessment on how home economics is taught and the quality of student learning.

Instrument design

The main data collection method in this study was from semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was semi-structured in order to allow interviewees the freedom to raise and discuss issues of importance to them, as well as having some loose structure to follow up on interesting responses and to ensure all topics that relate to the research objectives were covered in-depth. Robson (2002) argues that with this style of interview, the wording and sequence of questions can be changed and explanations given where appropriate. The adaptability of the schedule is an advantage, as it is possible to ‘probe responses and investigate motives and feelings’ (Bell 2010, p.161). The use of open-ended questions can stimulate discussion and yield rich data. Areas of interest that consequently arise can be probed. Robson (2002) notes that open questions are flexible. They can be used to clarify any misunderstandings, ‘enable testing of the limits of a respondent’s knowledge, encourage co-operation and rapport’ and enable an interviewer to assess ‘what the respondent really believes’ (p.276). Open questions were favoured for this study as they have the potential to generate expected responses and extended comments as well as producing unanticipated answers. Whilst allowing

greater freedom during an interview, open questions have the potential weakness of leading to a loss of interview structure and the collection of data that are more difficult to analyse. To avoid this effect, care was taken to plan the lead and prompting questions in advance.

Fontana and Frey (2003) note how the spoken word ‘has always a residue of ambiguity’ (p.61). The design of the interview schedule therefore involved consideration of the wording of questions. These were designed to address the research question and to produce the required information. It was important not to confuse or make any interviewees uncomfortable by asking poorly constructed, ambiguous or confusing questions. It was important to consider the different meanings that could potentially be associated with the words used in the questions. Bell (2010) argues that leading and ‘presuming’ questions should be avoided. The former using emotive language or through the question structure ‘can lead respondents to answer questions in one way’ and presuming questions are a ‘source of error’, as they reveal the researcher’s ‘strong views about a subject’ and they overlook ‘the fact that everyone may not feel the same way’ (p.147).

With these considerations in mind, it was important to think about what it was that I was seeking to find out, and this process was guided by the research objectives and the overarching research question:

Are assessment practices in home economics education in Ireland fit for purpose in serving the educational aims of the subject?

The final instrument with lead and probing questions is presented in Appendix 1. The following section outlines how the instrument with four areas for conversation was designed and trialled, and the following chapter (see 5.3) outlines how the instrument was improved through piloting.

Fitness for purpose is a term associated with quality and the realisation of specifications or guaranteed outcomes. In order to determine if home economics education does the job it is designed to do, it was necessary firstly to determine what home economics is and how the practice of home economics is viewed. The following lead question was designed to provide this information:

1. What are your views on the mission, vision and practice of home economics education?

Generally, if interviewees provide the required data after asking the leading question, probing or prompt questions will not be required. However, this question is an encompassing compound question examining big issues and interviewees may conflate their answers and speak in general terms about home economics. Therefore, to allow me to unpack teachers' views on each aspect of the question and as an aide-memoire, subsidiary questions were planned. Overall, the combination of lead and probing questions created the structure of the interview schedule. Planned probing questions were designed to extract information on the mission, vision and practice of home economics education and an example of a probing question is:

What is the role of a home economist?

The practice of home economics can be viewed in different ways. Finding out about societal expectations and perceptions, and stakeholders' perceptions regarding home economics practice is important in determining how the purpose of home economics education is defined. For this reason, the following question was asked to gather each interviewee's comments and insights:

What is the perception of home economics in society?

A vision statement of the subject from the point of view of interviewees served to identify what they would like the subject to accomplish. 'A good vision statement provides the inspiration for the daily operations' of professional practice in this context and it moulds 'strategic decisions' (Hom 2013, webpage). Contrasting the 'mission' and 'vision' responses in this study, enabled the development of a better understanding of where the subject is actually positioned and what the aspirations and desired goals are from the perception of stakeholders.

Secondly, in order to determine if home economics education does the job it is designed to do, it was necessary to determine the educational aims of the subject and specifically, the knowledge, values and skills under-pinning home economics educational practice. This suggested the next lead question:

2. In your view, what are the key values, skills and competences that are nurtured in students through home economics education and what is it that makes home economics unique?

This question specifically looks at values, skills, competences and uniqueness. Specific probing questions were designed to extract information on each component of the question. For example, the following are open questions that led to a discussion on the subject values and outcomes.

What impact does home economics have on the lives of students?

What do students learn from studying home economics?

Thirdly, in order to determine fitness for purpose of home economics practice and pedagogy, it was important to gain an insight into how learning takes place in a home economics setting and how the subject mission is addressed. For that reason, the following lead question was designed:

3. In your view, what type of learning do you expect your students to achieve?

Probing questions were asked on the process and outcomes of learning. For example:

How do your students learn and acquire knowledge?

Do students apply and analyse and how?

Finally, the research question queries how assessment practices influence the quality of home economics education. It was important to find out the extent to which this influence is positive or negative, in what is commonly known as the ‘washback’ of assessment. The following lead question aimed to determine the impact of home economics assessment on practice.

4. What are your views on the assessment of home economics, for example in the classroom, in the school and in the Junior and Leaving Certificates?

This question sought to provide evidence of the validity of home economics assessment in relation to the curriculum and subject mission and the impact of assessment on how home economics is taught and on the quality of student learning. This was firstly achieved by asking the following question about classroom assessment practice:

What types of assessment do you use in the home economics classroom?

The interviewees' comments provided insight into summative and formative assessment practices. School assessment practices potentially influence classroom practices and the views of stakeholders regarding these influences were considered important. Thereafter, views regarding the impact of the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate were sought. It was important to plan questions that could provide information about all assessment components. For example, there are three optional areas at senior cycle and one of these areas Textiles, Fashion and Design, whilst not studied by many students, involves a coursework assessment component. It was important to establish views about the assessment of this area of the syllabus as well as the compulsory Food Studies coursework assessment component and the examination paper.

More specific questions about the assessment of student values and skills were planned. It was important to determine fitness for purpose of assessment practices in relation to the subject mission and how assessment impacts on classroom practice. The following prompting questions addressed this need:

In your opinion, how does assessment impact on teaching and learning?

Does home economics assessment address the mission of the subject?

Finally, a prompting question asking interviewees to consider assessment changes that would be of benefit, was another way of extracting information on what was considered to be working and what was not. Furthermore, this question provided ideas for change that were considered when compiling the recommendations in this study.

The order of these four questions also required consideration. Bell (2010) argues that the manner and order in which questions are presented can influence the establishment of a rapport with interviewees. Therefore, the interviewees were led into the topic of assessment in a gentle manner by firstly establishing the context and capturing perceptions about the subject of home economics, followed by a discussion around the values and skills that home economics education is considered to develop. This was followed by a discussion on teaching, learning and assessment in home economics.

Following teacher interviews, survey methods were extended to a broader cohort of stakeholders to validate the emerging conclusions. This group included initial teacher

education providers in home economics, managers and representatives from bodies such as unions and the subject association executive. All of the stakeholders had a background in home economics education and their supplementary perspectives enriched the earlier findings. The interview schedule was adapted slightly to ensure that the instrument was fit for purpose with each type of respondent. Question 3 addressed the area of learning from their perspective as a stakeholder. In the examples below, the variants of this question for teachers and the other respondents is illustrated:

3. Teacher perspective: In your view, what type of learning do you expect your students to achieve?

3. Stakeholder perspective: What are your views on the type and quality of learning that is achieved in home economics classrooms?

Questions 1, 2 and 4 were designed for teachers and stakeholders. These questions referred to the subject mission, values, skills, competences and learning and since all stakeholders have qualifications in home economics education, the questions were within their scope of practice.

It was important to be aware of the limitations associated with interviews as a research instrument, such as the potential for bias arising from the interviewer's approach. Bell (2010) and Robson (2002) argue that interviews are highly subjective and this can foster unconscious bias. It was important for me to be aware of potential interviewer effects and I took precautions to minimise them, for example, by refraining from expressing my own views.

Interview process

Interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes in length were conducted face-to-face, and by telephone via Skype when face-to-face meetings were not possible. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone for face-to-face interviews and using *Pamela* software for Skype during Skype/telephone interviews. As an interviewer during these one-to-one sessions, it was important to put the interviewee at ease by explaining the interview process and the purpose of the research. Notes were recorded by hand during the interviews to provide a summary of respondents' answers and to record points of interest in more detail. Following each question, a summary of the respondent's answer was communicated for respondent validation. This provided the respondent with an

opportunity to reflect upon their answers, to clarify and elaborate on points made, if they wished, and to acknowledge if the interpretation was accurate.

4.4.3 Focus groups

The research design also involved the use of focus group interviews with students. The purpose of the focus group interviews in this study was to have a discussion on learning and assessment in home economics from the point of view of students. These collated views, albeit a small sample, served to enhance and triangulate the findings from the teachers' interviews.

Patton (2002) defines a focus group as 'an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic' (p.385). Whilst Krueger and Casey (2009) argue that typical groups contain 5-10 people, fundamentally it is an interview with a 'twist', that is 'participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say' (p.386). Subtle differences are not as easily extracted as main themes, but as Patton (2002) argues 'the power of focus groups resides in their being focused' (p. 388).

In this study, it was not feasible to conduct interviews face-to-face with students due to the difficulties involved in scheduling interviews in school settings with limited time availability. The aggregated advantage of a group interview was therefore considered to be more valuable as it was cost-effective and served to increase the range of views captured. The social context encouraged multiple interactions and dialogue among the respondents. The conversation flowed and the level of convergence and divergence of views was noticeable as the group discussions progressed.

In conducting the focus groups, it was important to ensure a balance in response time between questions asked and responses received from members of the group. Each group interview was also managed to ensure no member dominated and silent members, once noticed, were encouraged to participate. It was important to foster the sharing of all perspectives, including what Patton (2002) calls 'minority perspectives' (p.387). He notes that these viewpoints may not be shared if they will attract 'negative reactions' (p.387), therefore ground rules were established at the outset of group interviews; for example, having respect for the views of others.

The group interviews with students were valuable as they produced rich data that was both ‘cumulative and elaborative’ (Fontana and Frey 2003).

Instrument design

A semi-structured interview schedule, similar to the teacher interview instrument was considered suitable for the focus groups as it offered greater flexibility during the gathering of data. As with the teacher interviews, the schedule consisted of four questions oriented around home economics education and values, learning and assessment. It was important to use language that was accessible to the students as this put them at ease and assisted me in establishing a rapport with them. The lead questions were:

1. What is the subject of home economics all about in your view?
2. In your view, what do you learn from studying home economics?
3. Tell me please how you learn in a home economics classroom.
4. What are your views on the assessment of home economics?

These questions allowed the exploration of the views of the students relating to home economics education and their reasons for holding these views. This required a variety of prompting and probing questions that facilitated the unpacking of the students’ views. For example:

How do other people view home economics?

What impact does home economics have on your life?

How do you learn practical skills in home economics?

The final revised schedule is found in Appendix 2. Focus group interviews are useful forum for identifying trends and patterns and in this study they were used to capture the views of groups of junior and senior cycle students from different schools. It was also a useful means of capturing the views of boys about the subject of home economics and two groups were comprised only of boys.

Group interview process

The focus group interviews of approximately 30-40 minutes in length were conducted face-to-face and recorded using a Dictaphone. Fontana and Frey (2003) argue that particular skills are required to conduct a group interview such as flexibility,

objectiveness, empathy, persuasiveness and listening. They highlight the importance of ensuring equal participation within the group in order to achieve the ‘fullest coverage of the topic’ (p.73). The interviewer also assumes the role of moderator ‘which calls for the management of the dynamics of the group’ and being ‘sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction’ (p.73). Furthermore, as Fontana and Frey (2003) argue, ‘the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression ... and “groupthink” is a possible outcome’ (p.73). It was therefore important to keep these factors in mind when conducting interviews and to avoid such effects.

4.4.4 Sampling

An over-arching criterion for selecting the sample was that the interviewees could speak to the fitness for purpose of the second-level home economics curriculum and assessment. Students of home economics would have firm views on the practice of home economics, but they may not be well-informed about broader curriculum and assessment developments impacting practice. Therefore, the key participants were teachers and their participation was designed to enable me to develop an understanding of the beliefs underpinning their pedagogical practice, and how these beliefs influence curriculum delivery, learning and assessment practice. I began with the notional sample of 50 interviewees on the basis that my recursive data analysis would ultimately determine when saturation was achieved. The representativeness and parameters of the sample was considered. For example, invitations were extended to home economics teachers who work in a range of sectors such as: secondary schools, community/comprehensive schools, further education and Post Leaving Certificate (PLC). The views of teachers with a range of experience from newly qualified to retired (over 30 years of experience) and teachers working in single-sex and co-educational schools were collected. Efforts were made to achieve this range and also to invite male home economics teachers to participate as they would offer a male perspective on home economics education.

The interview sample was broadened to include other key people who could provide a different perspective on the same issues (although not necessarily different views). Providers of initial teacher education in home economics at St. Angela’s College, principals and deputy principals with a background in home economics, representatives from bodies such as the Inspectorate, the National Council for Curriculum and

Assessment (NCCA), the State Examinations Commission (SEC), teacher unions and the subject association (ATHE) executive were invited to participate. Including this range of academics and practitioners served to enrich and enable a triangulation of the interview findings. They were selected on an opportunity basis. For example, I was able to recruit interviewees from schools in which my B.Ed. students are often placed for school practice. I sourced more teachers at home economics subject association events such as the ATHE Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meeting. Teachers attending examination marking conferences were invited to participate. Invitations were issued by letter and e-mail to representatives known to me in the various organisations such as the NCCA, the SEC, the Inspectorate and the ATHE.

The final sample of participants was determined as my analysis of the earlier interviews proceeded in tandem with subsequent interviews. Robson (2002) argues that as interview data is analysed, the stage is eventually reached where ‘categories are “saturated” ... that is, you have squeezed as much conceptual juice as you can out of the data so that continuing analysis is giving severely diminished returns in the new categories and insights that it is yielding’ (p.494). Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ‘naturalistic sampling’ depends on the ‘particular ebb and flow of information as the study is carried out rather than a priori considerations ... the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level’ (p.202). Ultimately I reached saturation at 42 interviews.

4.4.5 Piloting

It was necessary to pilot the interview schedule with a group similar to the target sample and to analyse the answers in order to ensure that the questions were appropriate and valid. Feedback was requested from the pilot interviewees regarding the clarity of questioning, if they were easily understood in terms of how I asked them and their views about the time taken to conduct the interview.

4.4.6 Curriculum study

Addressing the research question also needs an authoritative view on the curriculum content, as one ‘prong’ of the design enables the validity of the subject to be evaluated in terms of its mission. The design therefore involved an analysis of home economics curriculum documents in Ireland in terms of the discipline’s overarching mission statement (IFHE 2008), the aims of education and in terms of the ‘total curriculum’

which takes into account the hidden curriculum. The purpose of the curriculum analysis was to determine the fitness for purpose of the curriculum in relation to the subject mission and educational aims. Two curriculum documents were chosen for analysis as they are the only curriculum documents currently in use, and they included the Junior Certificate home economics curriculum (DES 1991) and the Leaving Certificate home economics- scientific and social curriculum (DES 2001).

The design of this part of the study firstly involved an analysis of home economics curriculum documents in Ireland in terms of the subject's mission. One criticism levelled against home economics by Wynn (1983), is that the subject does not consider concepts in depth and in relation to wider economic and political influences. In exploring this criticism, it is therefore important to consider how the home economics curriculum is designed and interpreted. In Kelly's view (2009), 'many people still equate a curriculum with a syllabus and thus limit their planning to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge they wish to transmit' (p.9). What this suggests is that curriculum planning is often 'piecemeal' within subjects 'rather than according to any overall rationale' (p.9). He draws attention to wider dimensions of curriculum planning and argues that the 'rationale of the total curriculum' offered to students requires attention. 'It must go far beyond this to an explanation, and indeed a justification, of the purposes of such transmission and an exploration of the effects that exposure to such knowledge and such subjects is likely to have, or is intended to have on its recipients' (p.9). It was important therefore to determine how the planned home economics curriculum responds to wider societal issues, and thereby the extent to which the subject mission is addressed.

Curriculum analysis method

The subject 'position statement' as set out by the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE 2008) was an obvious starting point when setting about the analysis of the subject mission. Statements relating to the role of home economics were identified in the two page document and an analysis of this document provided a baseline for the examination of the curriculum documents. Stemler (2001) argues that content analysis is 'useful for examining trends and patterns in documents' (p.2). Patterns were therefore identified between the role of home economics as identified in the subject mission statement and the junior and senior cycle curriculum documents.

A framework developed by Montgomery (2008) was also used to analyse the curriculum documents. The framework looked at five key dimensions of a curriculum, namely the:

- focus of home economics education;
- view of the family upon which the curriculum is based;
- subject matter or content;
- focus of learning; and
- the role of the teacher and student.

This framework was particularly appropriate because it offered a way of examining how the curriculum of home economics is both designed and interpreted. Different educational perspectives guide practice and in a home economics context, it is commonly recognised (see Brown and Paolucci 1979; Plihal *et al.* 1999 and Montgomery 1999, 2003 and 2008) that traditionally, the empirical-rational science-based perspective guided practice. From the 1970s and 1980s, the critical science-based perspective was promoted. The curriculum documents were read, analysed and coded per curriculum dimension and the specific perspective e.g. empirical-rational science or critical science identified. Table 1 outlines how the ‘educational goals, the subject focus and problem solving processes are different for each approach’ (Montgomery 2003, p.2).

Table 1 Curriculum approaches applied to home economics

Empirical-Rational Science	Critical Science
Students are prepared for their future roles in a single context (e.g., the family)	Students examine current and future roles within multiple contexts (e.g., the family, work and community settings)
Subject matter organised by topics with focus on factual information and technical skills	Subject matter organised by recurring concerns and questions; emphasis on real world solving problems
Problem solving based on the decision making process; emphasis on the completion of the goal	Problem solving based on the practical reasoning process; emphasis on reflective judgement and action

Montgomery (2008) argues that the empirical-rational science-based perspective places emphasis on ‘hands-on activities in order to apply factual knowledge in the completion of a product (e.g., making a food or clothing product) or the completion of a goal (e.g.,

complete a research report)' (p.3). The problems under study are of a 'how-to' nature, for example, safety rules commonly relate to 'how-to-behave' in the kitchen (p.3). The role of the teacher is as knowledge expert, highly skilled technically and whose pedagogy commonly involves 'teacher-as-expert', demonstrations and lectures (p.3). In contrast, the critical-science perspective involves the questioning of practice, reflective judgement and action. Montgomery (1999) argues that 'questions of continuing concern are those issues which recur over time, are value related, require an examination of multiple perspectives and contextual factors, and can best be solved through reflective judgment and action' (p.86). It is worth noting that the empirical-rational science perspective is aligned with the 'product curriculum' and the latter, a 'process curriculum' (see Kelly 2009).

The curriculum analysis also needed to serve an evaluation of the subject's aims in relation to the overarching aims of education as set out in the government White Paper: *Charting our Education Future* (Department of Education 1995). Kelly (2009) argues that the word 'curriculum' denotes the content of a particular subject or area of study as well as the 'total programme of an educational institution' (p.9). It was therefore important in this study not only to evaluate the home economics curriculum documents, but also to examine how the official home economics curriculum aligned with the overarching educational aims.

Kelly (2009) defines the 'hidden' curriculum as 'those things which pupils learn at school because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organised, and through the materials provided', but which are not overtly or consciously planned (p.10). He argues that 'the side effects of what we plan to do ... should not be permitted to remain hidden' (p.25). Consideration of the 'hidden curriculum' was taken on board when conducting the analysis of home economics curriculum documents. The review of the literature suggested that gender differences in relation to home economics education were under-researched. Therefore, the curriculum analysis was also designed to take into account the identity of home economics and how gender differences are perpetuated through the hidden curriculum.

Whyld's guidelines (1983a) for recognising sexism in educational materials (see Appendix 3) and the SEC (2007b) 'checklists for equality' (see Appendix 4) were chosen to identify if bias was evident in home economics curriculum documents. These

guidelines were considered useful for generating awareness of how gender stereotyping can manifest both in a written curriculum and in how it is realised in classrooms. The process of analysing the curriculum documents therefore sought any evidence of the following: character or role stereotyping, sexist content selection and language or indeed any balanced approach to gender issues. Wynn (1983) argues that over time home economics changed superficially rather than fundamentally in the manner in which it 'ritualises a home-based role for women' (p.205). This study seeks to establish if this remains the case today. Analysis of the documents included identification of the use and explanation of concepts such as family structures, lifestyles, dual role of women etc. Is a dual role considered for men or the idea of one and a half roles for both sexes, as discussed by Wynn (1983)? Whyld's guidelines (1983a) were adapted to remove any examples considered to be irrelevant to this analysis e.g. 'she was technically gifted, but feminine and he was a good sportsman, but gentle' (p.73). As well as observing aspects of the curriculum that show bias, it was equally important to identify any aspects that promote gender equity.

4.4.7 Cognitive demand of examination questions

Addressing the research question also needs an authoritative view on the validity of assessment content. The design therefore involved a technical analysis of home economics assessments in Ireland and in particular, the Junior and Leaving Certificate examination papers and coursework tasks. This involved a study of 10 years of papers and coursework tasks, from 2005-2014. The purpose of the examination question analysis was to determine the fitness for purpose of the assessment in relation to the subject mission and curriculum and this technical examination of questions used in summative assessments also provides an update on the Madaus and MacNamara (1970) study of Leaving Certificate questions. Indeed, it may well be the first 'public' examination and analysis of assessment in home economics in Ireland.

Instrument design

As the earlier literature review shows, examinations have an influence on classroom practice, therefore, an analysis of the validity and the cognitive demand of examination questions and tasks (2005-2014) could inform the findings of this study. The analysis sample comprised the full set of Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics examination questions and coursework tasks (see SEC 2014b-f; SEC 2013c-g; SEC

2012b-f; SEC 2011b-e; SEC 2010a-e; SEC 2009a-d; SEC 2008a-e; 2007c-f; 2006b-e and 2005a-d).

The *Manual for Drafters, Setters and Assistant Setters* (SEC 2007b) provides an account of the question drafter's role in the selection of content and the assessment objectives to be tested in examinations. These guidelines specifically refer to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom *et al.* 1956) and specific details about the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain are documented. The SEC (2007b) suggest that when constructing questions, 'it is important to reflect this taxonomy to the greatest extent possible ... The cognitive domain is the one most usually drawn upon in formulating questions in a written examination' (SEC 2007b, p.49). The SEC argue that 'an assessment grid¹⁸ should chart a progression through questions that elicit the lower-order skills of knowledge, comprehension and application to those that additionally require the higher-order skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, as appropriate to the subject and level' (2007, p.49). The assessment objectives presented in the syllabi reflect elements of a taxonomy of educational objectives, but do not necessarily facilitate a comprehensive type of analysis. For this reason, the Anderson *et al.* (2001) framework was adopted for the technical analysis of the cognitive demand of home economics examination questions.

The Anderson *et al.* framework (2001), is a revision of Bloom's taxonomy and is a type of approach that Moseley *et al.* (2005) argue are 'intended for use in curriculum planning and assessment– as well as at the level of a single lesson' (p.46). In particular, the framework emphasises the alignment of learning outcomes, learning activities (pedagogy) and assessment. Moseley *et al.* (2005) note that Bloom's framework (Bloom *et al.* 1956) has been criticised for presuming 'to constitute a cumulative hierarchy ... each category was conceived as building on and comprising a more advanced achievement than its predecessor' (p.103). I am not sure that I agree that this was the intention of Bloom's committee, but in any case, the revised framework does not presume that 'the process categories form a cumulative hierarchy where the learner cannot move to a higher level without mastering all those below it' (p.103).

¹⁸ An assessment grid sets out the content area(s) and the assessment objective(s) being tested by each question.

The revised framework of Anderson *et al.* (2001) is two-dimensional as it consists of two sets of defined categories namely four knowledge dimensions: factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive, and six cognitive processes: remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and create. In the revision, the original six knowledge categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation were rearranged and relabelled with verb forms (see Figure 5). Moseley *et al.* (2005) argue that the framework can be used in an assessment context as an ‘analytical tool’ by asking the following question: ‘how does one ensure that objectives, instruction and assessment are consistent with one another?’ (p.105). Furthermore, they argue that ‘the taxonomy encourages teachers to focus on coverage, thereby allowing students to experience learning opportunities across the cognitive domain’ (p.111).

Figure 5 Anderson *et al.* (2001) taxonomy framework

<i>Knowledge Dimension</i>	<i>Cognitive Process Domain</i>					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Create
Factual						
Conceptual						
Procedural						
Meta-cognitive						

The frameworks predominantly used in examination analysis are biased towards the cognitive domain and the original affective and psychomotor domains were not included in the revision. There is some justification for this with Moseley *et al.* (2005) arguing that including these would have created ‘an overly complex taxonomy’ (p.109). Whilst, the SEC (2007b) argue that such ‘objectives are particularly difficult to assess by means of a written examination, and are therefore frequently assessed in a school-based context’ (p.50). Furthermore, they note that whilst these domains may appear in the syllabus, they are not often expressed as assessment objectives. However, the affective and psychomotor domains are relevant in home economics education as the subject aspires to develop a set of values and manipulative skills in learners. During the analysis therefore, the extent that the assessment items addressed these domains remained of interest to me. As an additional exercise, each verb used in the examination questions and tasks (2005-2014) was recorded and the frequency of use over ten years

calculated. The purpose of this exercise was to corroborate the findings of the cognitive demand analysis.

Furthermore, the bank of examination questions was examined for elements of bias. In this case, Whyld's guidelines (1983a) for recognising sexism in educational materials and the SEC (2007b) 'checklists for equality' were used to identify bias (see Appendices 3 and 4). The SEC (2007b) argue that examinations 'should offer all candidates an equal opportunity to demonstrate their attainment. The tasks, the language in which they are presented, and any associated illustrative material should reflect an inclusive view of society' (p.73). For example, they advise question drafters that inclusiveness and sensitivity 'with reference to the concept of the family unit' is important and they caution against the use of 'stereotyping language' (p.73). Advising against poor question design in these contexts is important, but does not guarantee that bias does not exist and this remained a dimension of the analysis.

4.5 Data analysis

The following section outlines how the data collated by the various methods were analysed in this study.

4.5.1 Historical documentary analysis

A holistic perspective was adopted in analysing the documentary evidence with the intention ultimately of adopting 'a broad view' rather than focusing on 'the specifics which bring them about' (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.45). With this consideration in mind, the frame of my historical review examined each document to determine the following categories:

- its context and position in a chronological history of home economics
- the role of its authors
- the purpose of the document
- the contribution to the evolution of home economics education.

In addition to these categories, my framework looked specifically at the following themes: dominant ideology, impact and subject values, gender bias, curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment.

In the reporting stage, an ‘ex post facto’ or retrospective approach was used. This involved what Cohen and Manion (1994) call ‘a reconstruction of past events’ (p.60). The retrospective account was presented in thematic format in the literature review (see section 2.2 and 2.3 respectively).

4.5.2 Interview and focus group data analysis

The transformation of voluminous data from the interviews and focus groups into findings is a substantial and challenging task which ‘lies in making sense of massive amounts of data ... reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal’ (Patton 2002, p.432). Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that there are ‘few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness’ (p.16). However, their own data reduction framework for conceptualising qualitative data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994, Miles *et al.* 2014) is commonly used today. I chose this method of analysis, which I describe in detail below, because it is based on a ‘hands-on’ immersion in the data, yielding greater familiarity with the responses and enabling a thorough approach to interpreting them.

The data were collected and analysed in an iterative and evolving way. Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) describe this process as a movement ‘back and forth between data collection and conceptualisation’ (p.41). As a method, then, this analysis draws on grounded theory methods. There are key elements to be considered when analysing data using a grounded theory approach. According to Corbin and Holt (2011), it is easy to engage at a ‘descriptive level’ with data rather than at a ‘theoretical level’ (p.118). They argue that ‘description can be grounded and it can be rich and dense but description is not theory ... theory is a set of concepts that are integrated around a central theme to form a theoretical framework that can be used to explain the why, the what and how of phenomena’ (p.114). They define concepts as ‘abstract interpretations of a piece of data ... words that stand for and represent events, happenings, situations, and problems described in data’ (p.114).

Similarly, Cronbach (1975) argues that ‘a point of view is not a theory capable of sharp predictions to new conditions’, but in contrast to Corbin and Holt (2011), he overtly expresses a lack of affinity for ‘enduring theoretical structures’ (p.123). In alignment

with this view, the analysis of data, whilst following a grounded theory approach, aims to reduce them into categories, themes and concepts and draw together key findings. However, as I discuss later, generalisability is not an intention of this study.

A Miles and Huberman formal content analysis approach (1994) involves three concurrent 'flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification' (p.10). Large amounts of text can be reduced in a recursive and hermeneutic fashion. Miles and Huberman (1994) define data reduction as 'the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions' (p.10). The reduction and iterative process was displayed in this study using three 'content-analytic summary tables' (p.183) which I have termed the raw data matrix, an interim matrix and the final thematic matrix respectively. These displays enabled the organisation, compression and assembly of information for the purpose of the generation of conclusions. In this chapter, the outline of the methods is given whilst the detailed operations are elaborated and illustrated in Chapter 5: Results.

The first step in my analysis of the interview and focus group data involved an 'immersion' in the field notes and interview transcripts. This enabled me to get a feel for the main issues emerging and to begin to identify areas of convergence and divergence of views amongst the respondents. The initial 'raw data matrix' involved entering the responses to the four questions into columns on the matrix. The data remained intact, merely slotting into the matrix according to the question to which it related. In the first stage of the analysis, similar dispositions were identified and colour coded by means of the highlighter facility in Microsoft Word. For example, all the comments relating to curriculum were highlighted in blue, assessment in green etc.

In the next stage of analysis, the similarly coded data were collected together in the interim matrix. During this 'confirmation' (confirming the patterns) and 'consolidation' (confirming their extent) phase, the analysis began to take shape as the patterns of responses emerged. It was important to decipher the meaning of the responses individually and collectively and to begin the process of categorising their meaning using codes. Robson (2002) defines a code as 'a symbol applied to a section of text to classify or categorize it' and they 'are retrieval and organizing devices that allow you to find and then collect together all instances of a particular kind' (p.477). Similarly, Miles

and Huberman (1994) define codes as ‘tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’ (p.56). Saldana (2013) suggests that these words or short phrases symbolically assign a ‘summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute’ to a portion of data (p.3).

The codes I developed broadly related to the research question and they included: assessment, validity, role of subject, curriculum etc. Miles *et al.* (2014) term such codes as descriptive where ‘a descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarise a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data’ (p.74). Robson (2002) notes that ‘a piece of data may have several codes (labels), i.e. it may be considered to fall within more than one conceptual category’ (p.493). This was the case in this study and in order not to miss important relationships, the data that related to more than one category were entered under all relevant categories. Once the descriptive codes were established, they formed the column headings of the interim matrix and the colour coded comments were cut and pasted into it. Once the data were clustered into these new categories, it was possible to visually identify the data that had a similar focus. This facilitated what Miles *et al.* (2014) argue is a process that relies primarily on eyeballing the results and making inferences about the connections’ (p.226). Robson (2002) notes that during this process of analysis, the following question needs to be continually asked: ‘what seems to go with what’ (p.477). He suggests it may involve ‘stepping back from the data from time to time and getting an overall feel for what is going on’ (p.494), which is what Miles and Huberman (1994) call a ‘squint analysis’ (p.190). This involves questioning ‘where in the table do data look dense or sparse?’ (p.190) and literally begins with a process of ‘seeing’ where the patterns of different coloured data were forming.

The ‘data mountain’ arising from the interviews was further reduced by extracting the essence of the respondents’ comments and identifying emergent themes, configurations or explanations. The process involves the ‘generation of themes or ‘higher-level ... abstract concepts that group together lower-level concepts’ (Corbin and Holt 2011, p.114). Patterns and relationships between the categories and their coloured clusters were identified in a process that Corbin and Holt (2011) describe as being the integration of categories ‘under a larger umbrella concept that integrates them all through statements of relationship’ (p.115). A useful question to ask is ‘what are all of

these categories pointing to or aiming at?' (p.115) It was important not to overlook patterns, trends and more subtle dimensions within the resultant thematic matrix. The interpretations and plausibility of meanings drawn from data displays were verified and conclusions thereafter were generated.

A verification process followed involving the validation of findings and supporting this with evidence. It was important to weigh the evidence as Robson (2002) notes that 'some data are stronger than others' and it is natural to rely on stronger evidence. It was also important to acknowledge the exceptional and 'atypical' viewpoints, what Robson (2002) describes as those 'that don't fit into the overall pattern of findings or lie at the extremes of a distribution' (p.484). Furthermore, he suggests that 'surprises can be salutary' and that it may be a surprise as it 'is at variance with' a 'possibly implicit and not thought through theory of what is going on' (p.484). This new piece of information can then be brought to the surface and substantiated with evidence where possible. Miles *et al.* (2014) note the value of seeking 'negative evidence' and 'disconfirmation' of preliminary conclusions in testing findings (p.304). Thereafter, it is possible to test possible relationships between data, to identify intervening variables and causes of apparent relationships and to 'rule out spurious relationships' (p.305). Robson (2002) suggests that 'rival explanations' to the emerging conclusions can be kept 'in play' during the analysis of data in order 'to prevent the premature closure effect' (p.485).

There were other considerations relevant to this study that had to be kept 'in play' during the analysis of data. For example, in order to address the validity of pedagogical practice in home economics, it was important to gain insight into how home economics teachers interpret and implement the curriculum. Kelly (2009) distinguishes between the official and the actual or 'received curriculum', with the former being the planned curriculum as specified by syllabi and the latter as 'the reality of pupils' experience' (p.11). Similarly, Montgomery (2008) defines the 'operational' or 'implemented' curriculum as 'the content that is actually taught to students' (p.1). Although a detailed study of the 'implemented' curriculum and 'hidden' curriculum was beyond the scope of this study, it was important to observe any references made to how the curriculum was enacted, including the product and process models (Kelly 2009), and the empirical-rational science based and critical science-based curriculum perspectives (Montgomery

2008). Similarly, it was important to note how social roles, sex roles and attitudes are developed as a result of home economics education.

In summary, during the analysis of interview data, the generated concepts and categories were 'grounded in data' and as Corbin and Holt (2011) explain, these categories provided potential 'stepping stones upon which to build knowledge and frameworks to guide practice' (p.116) in home economics education.

4.5.3 Curriculum analysis

Weber (1990) defines content analysis as 'a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text' (p.9) and the analysis of the text can be qualitative or quantitative depending on the intentions of the research study. He argues that 'the best content-analytic studies use both qualitative and quantitative operations on texts' (p.10). The basic tenet of content analysis in his view 'is that the many words of the text are classified into much fewer content categories' (p.12) or subjected to a data-reduction process based on similarity such as synonyms, or connotations. Duffy (2010) argues that it essentially is a tool 'with which to analyse the frequency and use of words or terms or concepts in a document, with the aim of assessing the meaning and significance of a source' (p.132). I did not consider this relatively simplistic type of coding scheme and analysis involving specifically looking at patterns of frequency of words, for example, the most appropriate for this study. Instead a more interpretive mode of analysis was favoured as the purpose of the analysis was to determine fitness for purpose of the curriculum in terms of the subject mission.

In relation to the potential for a qualitative analysis, Pickering (2004) argues that it can examine 'significant aspects of texts that are not amenable to quantitative techniques' (p.889). Furthermore, it has the potential to reveal 'textual features that are latent or hidden in the manifest content or have consequences beyond their immediate, obtrusive meaning' (p.890). This is what I needed and I adopted a Rapley and Jenkins (2010) document analysis method involving a meta-synthetic analytical approach: a content analysis of a collection of documents and synthesis of findings. The stages in this process include searching, evaluating, data extraction and presentation. Rapley and Jenkins (2010) argue that the focus of data extraction 'is on collecting data that enables the researcher to outline the key ideas, concepts and themes within the article' (p.382).

The first step of the curriculum analysis involved an interpretation of the subject mission statement (IFHE 2008). A coding frame was designed around the requirements of the study and this was achieved firstly by identifying each element of the position statement relating to the purpose of home economics. These statements were colour coded and those that were repeated were coded using a similar colour. Once this document was interpreted and coded, the findings were collated and visually represented using a mapping exercise as outlined by den Outer *et al.* (2013). Their method of cartographic presentation can illustrate the analysis of research at different levels and in the case of this study, situational analysis at the macro-level involved the articulation of ‘the major elements of the situation’ (p.1505). A squint analysis revealed the items that were mostly commonly mentioned. This method was also applied to the analysis of the Junior Certificate (DES 1991) and Leaving Certificate (DES 2001) home economics syllabi.

Moreover, the statements were coded according to the key home economics curriculum perspectives i.e. empirical-rational or critical science (see Table 1). This was achieved by analysing the syllabi in terms of the five key curriculum dimensions (Montgomery 2008): 1. Focus of home economics education, 2. View of the family upon which the curriculum is based, 3. Subject matter or content, 4. Focus of learning and 5. The role of teacher and student. Finally, the analysis involved a comparison between the subject aims as outlined in the syllabi and the aims of education in Ireland (Department of Education 1995).

The final stage of this method involved the synthesis of data and the production of ‘explicit interpretations’ (p.382) and these I offer in the results chapter. For example, to what degree the syllabi and subject mission statement are aligned is addressed and the extent the home economics curriculum fulfils the overarching aims of education in Ireland analysed.

4.5.4 Cognitive demand analysis

Each question and sub question from each examination paper and task (2005-2014) was read and analysed using the Anderson *et al.* (2001) framework as a guide (see Appendix 5). For the purpose of analysis, each cell of the Anderson *et al.* (2001) table was coded and the cognitive demand required of questions identified. For example, a question asking candidates to ‘name’ or ‘give details of’ usually requires ‘recall’ of ‘factual

knowledge' (RF). To enhance the interpretation of the exact type of cognitive processing required, the SEC (2007b) explanation of typical command words associated with the cognitive domain was taken into account during the analysis (see Appendix 6). Notably some of these command words such as 'describe' appear under two levels: knowledge and comprehension, or the command words 'compare and contrast' are a feature of the process of 'analysis' and they may also feature during the process of evaluation (SEC 2007b, p.50 and p.98). This can be explained by the fact that some types of ability involve compounding attributes. For example, the SEC (2007b) suggests that 'evaluative assessment involves the ability to compare and contrast, criticise, critique, defend, or judge' (p.50). This difficulty was overcome by using a systematic process that involved several readings of each question. It was also important to comprehend specifically what action was required of the candidate in the context of the stated question.

The identified codes were recorded in a spreadsheet and the overall frequency of cognitive demand calculated and classified as higher order or lower order. The verbs used in each question and task were also recorded and the frequency collated as a supplementary exercise to corroborate the findings of the cognitive demand analysis. The following chapter sets out the process of analysis in more detail.

4.6 Ethical considerations

According to Sikes (2004), 'any research that involves people has the potential to cause (usually unintentional) damage' (p.25). It is essential to avoid harming or wronging others and to treat participants fairly and with respect. He recommends a good 'acid test' for determining the suitability of research methods in a study: 'ask yourself how you would personally feel if you and your children or your friends were "researched" by means of them' (p.25).

A number of specific ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. Firstly, it was necessary to identify exactly what it was that I wanted to find out and why I wanted to know this. It was important to establish a rationale for this study and to justify my interest. Once I was clear about that, I had to weigh up the potential consequences to participations of this research. In the main, there were personal consequences such as the time given up for interviews and participants providing access to privileged information. Sikes (2004) argues that interviewees could be at a

disadvantage if a researcher uses this information to gain ‘power over them’ (p.25). To avoid this unethical practice, all information was treated with the strictest of confidence and participants were treated with respect in terms of how the data was managed and stored.

Following this, all participants were recruited on the basis of informed voluntary consent. It was necessary to gain the permission of the teachers and other stakeholders, the ‘gatekeepers’, such as school principals, and in the case of students, the permission of their parents or guardians (see Appendices 7-10). Interview consent forms were issued to all other stakeholders involved in the study. It was important to ensure consent was given on an informed basis and the full details of my research intentions were set out in my invitations. Participants were assured that participation in the research was entirely voluntary, that their inputs would be treated confidentially and reported anonymously, and that they were free to withdraw from the research without giving any reason or explanation. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before, during and after the research was conducted. The interview questions were presented in a comfortable, informal and conversational fashion and this enabled the establishment of a rapport with respondents.

4.7 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are crucial dimensions in any research endeavour and the literature has considerable guidance for those who undertake it. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue that ‘it is impossible to have internal validity without reliability’ and that ‘a demonstration of internal validity amounts to a simultaneous demonstration of reliability’ (p.120). Krippendorff (1980) asserts that ‘validity assures that the analytical results represent what they claim to represent’ (p. 129) and similarly Merriam (1998) defines internal validity as the congruence of findings to reality: ‘What is being observed are people’s constructions of reality- how they understand the world’ (p.203). Krippendorff (1980) argues that ‘reliable procedures should yield the same results from the same set of phenomena regardless of the circumstances of application’ (p.129). At this point, however, many qualitative researchers will part company with the sentiment. Yes, it may be desirable, but the results are interpretative and as such may not yield the same inferences among different interpreters. The technical interpretation of accuracy is probably better replaced by concepts of credibility or dependability. One factor that

strengthened the validity of the approach adopted in this study is that as an interviewer, I had the advantage of being 'closer' to the lived experience of the participants than if a data collection survey instrument had been used instead (p.203). My exploration of their views is therefore, I would argue, more authentic.

In qualitative inquiry, Filstead (1970) argues that it is 'crucial for validity- and, consequently, for reliability- to try to picture the empirical social world as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be' (p.4). Patton (2002, p.93) outlines the difficulties involved:

You realise that completely value-free inquiry is impossible, but you worry about how your values and preconceptions may affect what you see, hear, and record in the field, so you wrestle with your values, try to make any biases explicit, take steps to mitigate their influence through rigorous field procedures, and discuss their possible influence in reporting findings.

I recognised these difficulties, accepted them and worked through them in this study. The reliability of this review hinged upon the implementation of a bias-free approach to data collection and analysis. For example, when conducting and reporting interviews, I avoided the distortion of responses and any prejudice in my outlook owing to personal bias. Guba and Lincoln (1981) describe the issue of neutrality as 'probably the most thorny one that can be raised with respect to naturalistic inquiry' (p.124). Although inevitably an element of subjectivity may exist, the accuracy and credibility of findings was enhanced by taking precautions to minimise such effects, such as including 'triangulation of data sources and analytical perspectives' (Patton 2002, p.93). Triangulation served to test the credibility of the findings and interpretations in this study and it generated what Webb *et al.* (1966) call 'persuasive evidence' (p.3). They argue that 'once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretations is greatly reduced' (p.3). This was achieved by extending interviews to a broader group of stakeholders with an interest in home economics in order to test the emerging findings.

Validity in this study was also dependent on 'careful instrument construction to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure' and the 'skill, competence, and rigour of the person doing fieldwork' (Patton 2002, p.14). The recording of interviews reduced the need for verbatim note-taking and allowed for greater concentration on the meaning of the responses. I believe this enhanced the quality of my

interpretation of interviewees' views. Instead, strategic note taking was employed and these summary notes were then used to sum up the interviewees' responses for the purpose of respondent validation, what Patton (2002) calls 'quality control' (p.384) or 'guaranteeing the quality of the data' (p.383). This process provided an opportunity to make sense of the responses and to 'uncover areas of ambiguity or uncertainty' that required interviewee clarification (Patton 2002, p.383). It was important to be rigorous in the implementation of these techniques and not to neglect respondent validation. Time was allowed for data clarification and elaboration at the end of every question, rather than at the end of the interview as at that point, it would be more difficult to recall with accuracy the multiple components of the responses.

This study involved several data analysis methods and considerations of validity and reliability were also applicable during the data analysis stage of the research. It was important to be cognisant of the danger of selecting comments and value judgements that supported my own point of view. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue in favour of being 'analytically honest' (p.253). Insight and intuition in their view, guide the work of qualitative researchers and they note that 'moments of illumination', when 'things come together' are common (p.253). However, they argue that 'the problem is that we could be wrong' (p. 253). Potentially, people can '*overweight* facts they believe in or depend on, to *ignore or forget* data not going in the direction of their reasoning, and to "*see*" *confirming instances* far more easily than disconfirming instances' (p.253).

McAndrew *et al.* (2012) argue that 'illuminative evaluation ... primarily concerned with description and interpretation' can be applied to qualitative information (p.352). Structured validation was employed and this involved a demonstration of how I systematically arrived at the findings. Interview transcripts were analysed using the thematic analysis outlined above; a combination of what McAndrew *et al.* (2012) call 'recursive abstraction and hermeneutic analysis' (p.352). The analysis of the data therefore involved many iterative reductions and regroupings of data using the same lens of inspection.

An external and independent professional opinion and audit of the curriculum and assessment technical analyses would have been desirable, as Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue, 'such a review or audit would give substantial assurance of the consistency of the evaluation' (p.122), albeit without replication of the study. However, the limitation of

resources prohibited such an exercise. Instead, efforts were made to guarantee that the analysis was performed in as competent and consistent a manner as possible.

In the case of the historical content analysis, there were some additional validation considerations. For example, the integrity of original evidence was maintained by carefully presenting quotations in an historical context before interpreting and explaining them. The use of primary sources with secondary sources of information served to validate the initial findings of the historical review. Care was taken in this study to explicate the context when analysing documents and reporting. Sourcing sufficient information on the subject was important, as the omission of a vital piece of the historical jig-saw would inevitably impact on the inferences to be drawn overall.

Finally, the data emerging from the several methods in this study were subjected to 'structural corroboration' and this process enhanced trust in the outcomes of the inquiry. Eisner (1985) suggests that 'structural corroboration is a process of gathering data or information and using it to establish links that eventually create a whole that is supported by the bits of evidence that constitute it' (p.241). In this particular study, evidence was made structurally corroborative by validating different pieces of evidence e.g. interview data in the format of a thematic matrix and the framework data arising from the examination question and curriculum analyses. As Eisner (1985) argues, 'evidence is structurally corroborative when pieces of evidence validate each other, the story holds up, the pieces fit, it makes sense, the facts are consistent' (p.241).

4.8 Generalisability

Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue that 'while the concept of generalisability is appealing, it is proving to be a Holy Grail' (p.61). Lincoln and Guba (1985) document a number of deficiencies associated with generalisability such as dependence on the assumption of determinism, inductive logic and the assumption of freedom from time and context. In terms of contextual issues, Cronbach (1975) argues that 'in every field empirical relations change' and that economic and social changes, aspirations and 'community attitudes' will be different (p.122). Therefore, 'generalisations decay. At one time a conclusion describes the existing situation well, at a later time it accounts for rather little variance, and ultimately it is valid only as history' (p.123).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) present the concept of ‘naturalistic generalisation’ (p.129) as an alternative to the ‘rationalistic, propositional, lawlike’ approach (p.121). Naturalistic generalisation they argue is ‘more intuitive, empirical, based on personal direct and vicarious experience’ (p.121). Naturalistic inquirers according to Guba and Lincoln (1981) ‘focus upon the multiple realities that, like the layers of an onion, nest within or complement one another. Each layer provides a different perspective of reality ... the layers are intricately interrelated ... It is these patterns that must be searched out ... for the sake of understanding’ (p.57). They suggest that a ‘naturalistic paradigm relying on field study as a fundamental technique’ involves ‘sufficient immersion in and experience’ with a field which yields ‘inevitable conclusions about what is important, dynamic and pervasive in that field’ (p.55). However, Martin and Vallance (2008) argue that qualitative studies need to provide ‘enough detail to illustrate how a conclusion makes sense’ (p.36). Rigour is an important quality in qualitative research, and Merriam (1998) argues it ‘derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretations of perceptions, and rich, thick description’ (p.120).

Cronbach (1975) endorses an ‘interpretation in context’ (p.123) approach where ‘an observer collecting data in one particular situation is in a position to appraise a practice or proposition in that setting, observing effects in context’ (p.124). Equal attention is given to the control of variables and ‘uncontrolled characteristics’ such as ‘personal characteristics’ (p.124). Factors unique to the context are considered to be what Geertz (1973) calls ‘thick description’ (p.6). Creswell (2014) argues that use of ‘rich, thick description’ can ‘transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences’ (p.202). Furthermore, as Cronbach (1975) argues, how the uncontrolled factors ‘could have caused local departures from the modal effect’ are considered and ‘generalisation comes late’ (p.125).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue that ‘for naturalistic inquiry ... meeting tests of rigour is a requisite for establishing trust in the outcomes of the inquiry’ (p.103). This firstly involves establishing confidence in the findings or internal validity (see section 4.7). In my study, the credibility of findings was enhanced by taking precautions ‘against potentially invalidating factors’ (Guba and Lincoln 1981, p.105). In a naturalistic inquiry, McCall and Simmons (1969) argue that interviewing may be ‘subject to various

contaminating effects' such as: '(1) the reactive effects of the interview situation upon the received testimony; (2) distortions in testimony; and (3) reportorial inabilities of the interviewee' (p.104). Dean and Whyte (1969) argue that interviewees present a picture of the world as they see it and that the interviewer is getting only what the interviewee 'is willing to pass on' (p.106). In this study, it was therefore important to be cognisant of the 'objective reality' and 'subjective sentiments' presented (p.106).

Furthermore, 'the main consideration that makes the evaluation of reports of subjective data difficult is the fact that they are so highly situational' (p.107). An interviewee may have ulterior motives that may influence their reporting of situations. The spontaneous sharing of negative aspects of a situation may be hindered if an interviewee feels that the information is for public consumption. Moreover, how an interviewee views the interviewer could influence responses. As Dean and Whyte (1969) argue, they may have 'desires to please' the interviewer and as a result, they may only communicate 'one facet of his [or her] reactions to a subject' (p.108). All of these variables were considered in this study and in order to avoid misinterpretation, the interview schedule and situation was carefully structured and handled. Care was taken to minimise the effect of selected sharing of views by issuing assurances of confidentiality. Efforts to establish an appropriate level of rapport with interviewees were made. However, it was important for me not to influence or be influenced by the emerging data during the interviewing process to avoid bias and distortions in findings. The nature of the respondents' views was determined through dialogue with them. For example, questions were asked in many different ways until the respondents' sentiments were more clearly understood. This was followed by a summarising of the responses and the process of respondent validation mentioned earlier.

It was important to acknowledge the 'degree to which the findings of a particular inquiry may have applicability', which Guba and Lincoln (1981) call external validity or 'generalisability for applicability' (pp.103-104). They argue that the concept of generalisability is viewed as a 'chimera' (p.116) and a 'fragile concept' (p.117) and that the applicability of findings of one particular evaluation to another setting are for many purposes 'meaningless' (p.115). However, 'it is a truism that there can be no generalisability ... unless there is a reasonable level of internal validity' (p. 115). In this study, internal validity reinforces external validity to a degree, however, the locus of the

study was an examination of what Guba and Lincoln (1981) call a 'slice of life', rather than claiming to be representative of other 'slices of life' (p.116). In essence, similar to Cronbach (1975) who argues that generalisations decay, Guba and Lincoln (1981) posit that 'replication is impossible because circumstances change so rapidly ... A person viewing the same situation at different times will be forced to different conclusions' (p.116). Not surprisingly therefore, it is open to the 'audience' of home economics professionals in particular, to determine how applicable this study is to current practice.

Summary comments

This research design involved a qualitative study centred on teachers and other stakeholders' perceptions, a review of the evolution of the subject and its identity and an analysis of two of its key components, curriculum and testing. The outline of the various methods is further elaborated in the discussion of the results in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief outline of sampling and piloting details, and thereafter sets out the results of the various analyses and interpretations that led to the findings of this study. The under-pinning historical research was reported in the literature chapter and the overall findings informed the following analyses. The results of this study are presented in the following sequence:

- curriculum analysis
- examination demand analysis and
- interview and focus group analysis.

The chapter concludes with an identification of the key findings and these are discussed in the following chapter.

5.2 Interview sample

As set out in the previous chapter, data were collected using multiple methods. Of the initial target of 50, a total of 38 interviews were completed along with four focus group interviews with students (see Table 2). This sample comprised teachers (female n=26, male n=1), home economics teacher education providers (female=6, male=2), teacher union representative (n=1) and school managers (n=2) with home economics qualifications. Home economists working with the Inspectorate, the NCCA and the SEC declined the invitation to participate; however, home economics teachers that are employed as Assistant Examiners of Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations (n=9) offered their perspective both as teachers and examiners. Focus group interviews were held with two groups of junior cycle students (girls n=7, boys n=4) and two groups of senior cycle students (girls=7, boys=5). The interviews and focus groups were conducted until the recursive data analysis suggested that ‘saturation’ was reached.

Table 2 Interview sample

Category	Sub-category	Number of teachers	
Teachers (One-to-one interviews)		27	
Other stakeholders (One-to-one interviews)	Initial teacher education provider	8	
	Union representative	1	
	School managers	2	
Total		38	
Category	Sub-category	Number of groups	Number of students
Other stakeholders (Focus groups)	Junior cycle students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group 1 Girls ○ Group 2 Boys 	2	11
	Senior cycle students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group 3 Girls ○ Group 4 Boys 	2	12
Total		42 interviews 61 participants	

5.3 Piloting of the interview and focus group instruments

Piloting was used to refine the original draft interview schedule for both the one-to-one and focus group interviews. Four interviews were analysed to identify any necessary changes. The first focus group acted as the pilot group for that set of data. Refinements made to the interview schedule and to the focus group interview schedule are set out below.

In the interview schedule (see Appendix 1), two lead questions were adapted slightly and additional prompts were added to all four questions. For example, question 1 was found to be more complex than intended and I had to add more probes to enable interviewees to fully answer the question, e.g.: *Developing well-being could sum up our mission. Do you agree or disagree?* As the practice of home economics appeared at the end of the question, it was necessary to ask it again as a probing question when the other aspects such as mission and vision were addressed, e.g. *What are your views on the practice of home economics?*

On reflection, part of question 2 could be argued to presume that home economics is unique. It perhaps suggested too strong a view that home economics ‘stands out’ as a subject and I felt there was a danger that it could form a particular type of response for the interviewees (see underlined):

Question 2: In your view, what are the key values, skills and competences that are nurtured in students through home economics education and what is it that makes home economics unique?

As questions based on implied assumptions can be a source of error, this question was re-worded after the pilot phase in the following way:

Revised question 2: In your view what are the key values, skills and competences that are nurtured in students through home economics education and in your view is the subject of home economics unique?

The overall sequence of the probing questions was re-ordered to align with the key requirements of the questions: values, skills, competences and uniqueness.

The pilot interviewees were of the view that there was overlap between questions 1 and 3, i.e. on the role of the subject and the perceived ‘type’ of learning offered by home economics education. Question 3 was actually intended to elicit information about the process of learning and how the subject values are developed, but it was clear that the use of the word ‘type’ was confusing (see underlined). The question was therefore replaced with a request inviting the interviewees to talk freely about learning and through this to comment on the ‘implemented curriculum’:

Question 3: In your view, what type of learning do you expect your students to achieve?

Revised question 3: Tell me please how learning typically takes place in a home economics classroom.

Respondents in the pilot interviews had strong views about the curriculum and its impact on home economics education. It was necessary therefore to adapt to this new insight, and to seek the views of all interviewees regarding the design and delivery of the curriculum and its impact on the achievement of home economics educational goals. The following probing question was therefore included under question 3: *How does the curriculum impact on the development of quality learning?*

Whilst interviewees felt question 4 was fit for purpose, it was obvious to me that they tended to focus on specific aspects of assessment instead of all items. For example,

most teachers do not offer the Textiles, Fashion and Design option at senior cycle and did not bring it up in their answers. To ensure as broad a range of response as possible, I probed their views on this optional area. Aside from the relatively minor issues above, no other aspects of the instrument were found to be problematic and subsequent interviews proceeded with the amended schedule (see Appendix 1).

The student focus group pilot interview led to one refinement in the questions (see underlined) with question 3 simplified to enhance student understanding as follows:

Question 3: Tell me, please, how learning typically takes place in a home economics classroom.

Revised question 3: Tell me please how you learn in a home economics class.

All other questions were considered to be fit for purpose and the subsequent focus groups proceeded with this one amendment (see Appendix 2).

5.4 Presentation of results: curriculum and examination question analyses

5.4.1 Curriculum document analysis

This section presents the results of analyses of curriculum documents in home economics in terms of the overarching subject mission statement, the aims of education and the total curriculum. The content of the subject mission statement (IFHE 2008) was analysed in order to determine the purpose of home economics education. A mapping process was used to illustrate the findings. The situational analysis method adopted included a reiterative process and the map became ‘a finished product’ when it was evident that no new data came to the surface (den Outer *et al.* 2013, p.1508). A situational map was devised to indicate the purpose of home economics education. As Figure 6 illustrates, elements of the position statement referring to the role of home economics were coloured coded and those that were repeated were coded using a similar colour. The following colour coding scheme was used:

- Impact of home economics at individual, family, community and global level
- Advocacy and transformative practices
- Optimal and sustainable living
- Empowerment and well-being
- Development of human growth potential

As described in the methods chapter, the reduction of the data continued with a ‘content analysis’, involving the identification of patterns constituted by the chunks of coloured data. A content analysis of Figure 6 reveals that a variety of purposes are mentioned. For example, home economics education has the potential to impact at multiple levels including the household (including individuals and families), and local and global communities (n=8). This type of impact can be achieved using advocacy, transformative practices and the positive influence of political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems (n=8). The role of home economics education is to promote optimal and sustainable living (n=4), empowerment and wellbeing (n=4) and the development of human growth potential for use in life or in professional contexts (n=4).

Figure 6 Home economics mission statement

Context of the home and the household ... [and] the wider living environments ... The capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, ranging from the household, to the local and also the global community.

Situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities.

Meeting specific requirements, in terms of educational, business, social, economic, spiritual, cultural, technological, geographic and political contexts.

Advocates for individuals, families and communities

Empowerment and well-being of individuals, families and communities

Facilitating the development of attributes for lifelong learning for paid, unpaid and voluntary work; and living situations.

Disciplinary diversity coupled with the aim of achieving optimal and sustainable living means that home economics has the potential to be influential in all sectors of society by intervening and transforming political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems, at global levels.

An arena for everyday living in households, families and communities for developing human growth potential and human necessities or basic needs to be met.

To educate new scholars, to conduct research and to create new knowledge and ways of thinking for professionals and for society.

Facilitate students to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life, by directing their professional decisions and actions or preparing them for life.

As a societal arena to influence and develop policy to advocate for individuals, families and communities to achieve empowerment and wellbeing, to utilise transformative practices, and to facilitate sustainable futures.

A focus on fundamental needs and practical concerns of individuals and family in everyday life and their importance both at the individual and near community levels, and also at societal and global levels so that wellbeing can be enhanced in an every changing and ever challenging environment.

To take critical/transformative/emancipatory action to enhance wellbeing and to advocate for individuals, families and communities at all levels and sectors of society.

A strong commitment to retaining those elements of society that are valued, while looking ahead to the imperative of improving the world in which we all live such that sustainable development is possible.

The curriculum documents selected for analysis included the *Junior Certificate Home Economics Syllabus* (DES 1991) and the *Leaving Certificate Home Economics Scientific and Social Syllabus* (DES 2001). An outline of the junior cycle syllabus is firstly presented, followed by an analysis of the aims in terms of the subject mission statement using similar colour codes and curriculum perspectives as outlined in Table 1. An analysis of the senior cycle documents is presented thereafter in a similar fashion.

The junior cycle home economics syllabus comprises a common core of five areas of study including:

- Food Studies and Culinary Skills
- Consumer Studies
- Social and Health Studies
- Resource Management and Home Studies
- Textile Studies

and optional study project work from a choice of three (see Table 3). The project work allows students the opportunity to engage in a more detailed study of one area of the core (SEC 2012a). For example, Childcare is linked to Social and Health Studies, Design and Craftwork is linked to Resource Management and Home Studies and Textile Skills is linked to Textile Studies. However, the Consumer Studies area has no extension study.

Table 3 Junior Certificate home economics syllabus and examination format

Syllabus component	Assessment component and weighting		Optional study
Food Studies and Culinary Skills	Written examination 50%	Practical examination 35%	
Consumer Studies			
Social and Health Studies			Childcare 15%
Resource Management and Home Studies			Design and Craftwork 15%
Textile Studies			Textile Skills 15%

Junior cycle home economics is offered at two levels; higher and ordinary. The assessment weighting at ordinary level¹⁹ for the written examination, practical examination and optional study is 40%, 45% and 15% respectively. In contrast, 50% of the marks are awarded to the written examination, 35% to the practical examination and 15% to the optional study at higher level. The majority of students take the higher level paper. According to the most recent Chief Examiner's report (SEC 2012a), 79% of candidates took home economics at a higher level in 2012 (p.5).

The junior cycle home economics syllabus provides a rationale for home economics education. The 'direct relevance' of the subject to the 'present and future life of every young person' is recognised (p.1). The majority of the comments focus on the role of home economics education in the development of human growth potential for use in life (purple n=12), both in the household and community in which they live (red n=6) (see Figure 7). There is some reference to the development of positive attitudes (yellow n=1).

¹⁹ The subject is offered at 'higher' level and 'ordinary' level. Higher level students are expected to show a greater depth of understanding of concepts and issues and a greater degree of proficiency in skills (DES 1991).

Figure 7 Analysis of junior cycle home economics syllabus

Home economics has a direct relevance to the present and future life of every young person.

Its purpose is to equip young people in certain important skills for living **as individuals and of establishing and developing a stable environment for their families**. It encompasses studies of many of many of the processes which are necessary for day to day living, **particularly within the household**.

The main areas focus on the basic human needs for food, clothing, shelter and personal relationships. The disciplined study of the interrelationships of these areas is one of the major contributions of the subject to the curriculum.

Home economics builds on the pupils' knowledge of different forms of home life and on their immediate experience of making choices in relation to the organisation of their own lives.

Emphasis throughout the course is on management, creativity and living skills. This is to ensure that the young person taking the course will be equipped for personal independence and be able to take shared **responsibility in the household and community in which he or she lives**.

To provide pupils with knowledge and practical skills for application in the process of everyday life **within the home and community**.

To develop interest in the vocational aspects of the subject.

To ensure that pupils will be capable of wise decision-making in areas related to the management of their personal resources, to develop in pupils competence in making wise consumer decisions.

Pupils will develop understanding of the key concepts on which the syllabus is based: **personal management and consumer competence**.

Pupils should acquire information and develop understanding of resource management processes **in relation to the home**.

SKILLS: Pupils should be able to use a variety of methods to **develop cognitive skills** such as investigative method, discovery-learning and problem-solving. Pupils should be able to **demonstrate practical skills** ... Manipulative skills and manual dexterity, the use of a range of tools and equipment, the ability to weigh and measure accurately, procedural skills, e.g. the ability to understand and follow instructions on worksheets and assignments, evaluation of practical work. Pupils should be able **to use certain affective skills** including creativity, imagination, curiosity, intuition, improvisation, sensitivity and resourcefulness. Pupils should be able to record information accurately, to interpret data and to translate information from one form to another.

ATTITUDES: Pupils should be encouraged **to develop positive attitudes** towards **themselves, their home and their community**. To develop a sense of safety and hygiene ... discernment and judgement in consumer matters, awareness of and sensitivity to differences between family units, a sense of accuracy and attention to detail, a sense of co-operation, flexibility, improvisation, responsibility and tolerance.

Using the Montgomery (2008) framework, the written curriculum was analysed to determine whether the empirical-rational science-based perspective or critical science-based perspective is promoted. Many of the statements aligned with the empirical-rational science-based perspective (n=15) and many statements (n=15) equally focused on a critical science-based perspective. The focus of home economics education at junior cycle is on the preparation of students for their future roles in a single context (empirical-rational science) as well as their roles within multiple contexts such as the family and community settings (critical science). The view of the family includes a strong emphasis on the development of technical skills and 'how to' actions (empirical-rational science). There is less emphasis on the family as consumers performing multiple technical, interpretive and reflective actions (critical science). One observation made was that the subject matter is organised around separate subject areas such as food studies, consumer studies and so on and there is less emphasis on what Montgomery (2008) describes as 'perennial and evolving family, career and community issues' (p.4). Brown (1978) defines a perennial problem as 'a difficult question for thought or inquiry' (p.14). Many of society's problems are on-going and require regular thought and inquiry in order to fully respond to them in appropriate ways across generations.

Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of facts, decision making, narrow topics, hands-on learning, the completion of products and goals and 'how to' activities (empirical-rational science). Problem solving is a key tenet of home economics education (critical science), but it is not evident from the written document, how these processes are developed. The final part of the analysis refers specifically to the implemented curriculum and the role of teachers and students. Montgomery (2008) argues that the teacher can act as an 'expert' and 'students are recipients of knowledge' (p.4). Within a critical science perspective, she states that teachers can act as 'facilitators' and students and teachers can operate as 'co-investigators' (p.4). There was some reference in the document to the provision of knowledge and practical skills to students and discovery learning is encouraged.

A brief overview of the home economics senior cycle syllabus and examination structure is presented in Table 4. The syllabus comprises a mandatory core and an elective area from which candidates choose one of three topics. The examination format includes a terminal written examination and an assessment of a pro-forma journal on

practical work for all candidates. There is also an assessment of practical work for candidates who study the Textiles, Fashion and Design option. The assessment of candidates who select the Home Design and Management or the Social Studies elective comprises a written examination worth 80% and a food studies coursework component worth 20%. Candidates who select the Textiles, Fashion and Design elective have a written examination worth 70%, a food studies coursework component worth 20% and an elective coursework component worth 10% (SEC 2011a).

Senior cycle home economics is also offered at two levels; higher and ordinary. The syllabus is common to both levels, but some material is designated to higher level students only. The Food Studies and Textiles, Fashion and Design coursework are common level assessments and the weighting for all components is the same for both levels. The latest Chief Examiner’s report (SEC 2011a) reveals that 70% of candidates took the higher level examinations in home economics in 2011 (p. 4).

Table 4 Leaving Certificate home economics syllabus and examination format

	Syllabus component	Syllabus weighting %	Assessment weighting		
			Elective a	Elective b	Elective c
Core	Food Studies	45	20% Pro-forma coursework journal 80% Examination	20% Pro-forma coursework journal 80% Examination	20% Pro-forma coursework journal 70% Examination
	Resource Management and Consumer Studies	25			
	Social Studies	10			
Elective a)	Home Design and Management	20			
b)	Social Studies	20			
c)	Textiles, Fashion and Design	20			10% Coursework Assessment

An analysis of the subject rationale, aims and objectives at senior cycle shows that the predominant focus of senior cycle home economics education is the development of human growth potential (purple n=13) for use in the home and the local and global community (red n=5) (see Figure 8). The development of awareness of the interdependence of individuals and families and their immediate and distant environment features in the syllabus (blue n=2). Sustaining resources within these environments is a contemporary home economics educational issue and there is some reference to individual and family wellbeing (yellow n=1).

Figure 8 Analysis of senior cycle home economics syllabus

An applied subject combining theory and practice in order to develop understanding and solve problems.

It is concerned with the way **individuals and families** manage their resources to meet physical, emotional, intellectual, social and economic needs.

Home economics focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills and attitudes that will enable students to take control of their own lives at present and in the future, whether that be in the home, in further education, in the world of work, or other life situations.

The wide range of learning experiences to which the students are exposed will allow them to be flexible and adaptable in the changing situations of modern life.

It prepares students of both sexes for life in a consumer-oriented society and provides a learning foundation for those seeking employment in a wide range of careers.

The aims of the syllabus are to provide continuity from the aims and content of the JC home economics programme.

Home economics emphasises the interdependent relationship that exists between individuals or families and their immediate and distant environments and promotes a sense of responsibility towards sustaining resources within these environments.

Allow students ... To acquire and develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, competence and attitudes necessary to contribute to a **personal and family environment conducive to human development, health, leisure, security and happiness.**

Provide a suitable basis for the formation of post-school life, with the emphasis on future education, vocational training and employment needs ... **and to develop an appreciation of the significance of their learning to the Irish economy and the European Union.**

Develop an understanding of the physical, emotional, intellectual, economic and social needs of individuals or families and to encourage an appreciation of the diversity of socio-economic and cultural influences on family life.

Encourage students to develop and apply the management skills necessary for the effective organisation and management of available resources to satisfy personal and family needs in a continuously changing economic, social and technological climate.

Be sensitive to aspects of Irish and European culture.

Develop an awareness of the interdependence of the individual or family and the environment and to promote a sense of responsibility to global issues.

Nurture and develop a spirit of enterprise, inventiveness, aesthetic awareness and creativity.

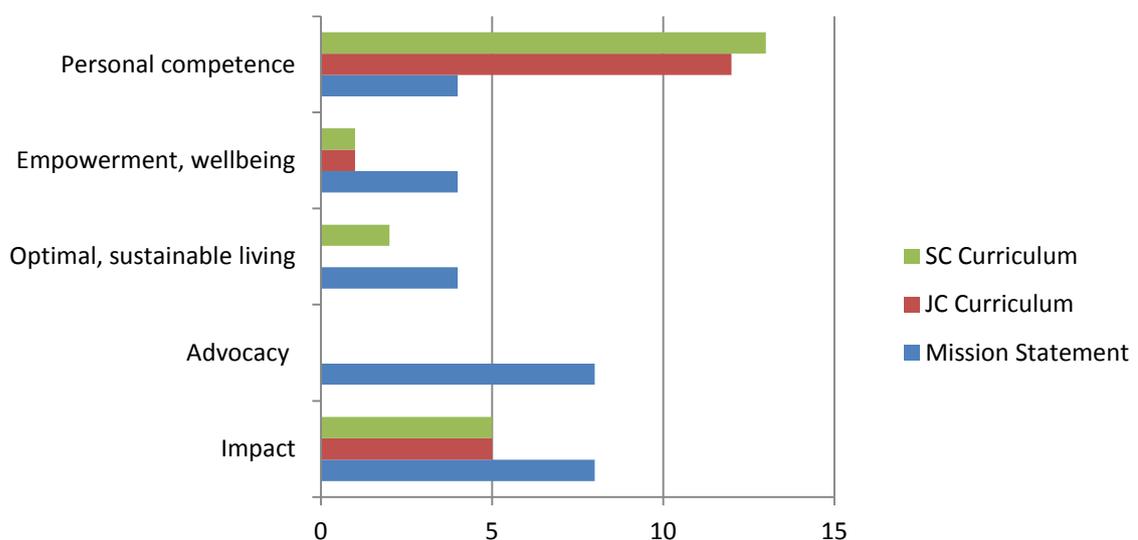
Develop an awareness of health and safety practices in activities related to home economics. Encourage students to become discerning consumers, able to seek out and evaluate information and weigh evidence as a basis for making sound judgements and choices.

Develop personal qualities, perseverance, self-confidence, cooperativeness, team spirit, adaptability and flexibility.

Part two of the document analysis reveals that the senior cycle home economics curriculum contains elements that reflect an empirical-rational science-based perspective (n=18). However, the dominant perspective evident in the written document is the critical-science perspective (n=37). Whilst there is still a focus on the acquisition of facts, technical ‘know-how’ and narrow topics, the majority of stated aims and learning outcomes explicitly refer to both the home and broader ecological contexts. A focus is maintained on multiple actions that are technical, interpretive and reflective. The application of processes is common as is engagement in decision making and problem solving. Similar to junior cycle home economics, the process of problem solving is not explicit, nor how perennial and evolving issues are addressed.

The two syllabi were compared to the subject mission statement in order to determine their fitness for purpose in terms of addressing the broader aims of the subject. Figure 9 is an amalgamation of Figures 6-8 and it reveals that the Irish home economics syllabi focus largely on the acquirement of personal competence. There is no reference to advocacy or transformative practices that address perennial issues and evolving problems affecting individuals, families and communities. There is therefore further scope to maximise the potential of home economics in creating greater impact at societal and global levels.

Figure 9 Alignment of subject mission statement and syllabi



During the analysis of the syllabi, consideration was given to how the subject aims align with the overarching educational aims as presented in the White Paper on Education

(Department of Education 1995, p.10). The statement of educational aims incorporates individual and societal development aspirations. An observation made during the analysis was that the junior cycle syllabus addresses issues relating to health and well-being within the syllabus content, yet the course aims and objectives do not explicitly state these goals (see Appendix 11). The analysis reveals a 40% alignment between the junior cycle aims and the overarching educational aims. Arguably, the junior cycle curriculum fails to address contemporary issues such as sustainability and wellbeing. However, this curriculum was published in 1991 and such issues were not prevalent then. In contrast, the senior cycle curriculum (DES 2001) addresses these issues and 80% of the stipulated educational aims.

Another aim of the curriculum analysis was to examine whether gender stereotyping is perpetuated by the written curriculum. Both syllabi are designed with principles of gender equity in mind. Reminders are issued in documentation that school authorities and teachers have an obligation to ensure that home economics is taught without gender bias. The wording of the documentation specifically refers to students of both sexes. For example, one of the aims of the senior cycle curriculum (DES 2001) refers to the process of allowing ‘students, male and female, to acquire and develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, competence and attitudes necessary to contribute to a personal and family environment’ (p.2). There is no specific information about character and role stereotyping, or specific concepts such as family structures and lifestyles within the curriculum documents.

5.4.2 Examination demand analysis

Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics assessments involve both terminal examinations and course work assessments, so examination paper questions and coursework assessment tasks were included in the sample for this analysis. An outline of the Leaving Certificate assessment analysis is firstly presented and this is followed by an analysis of Junior Certificate assessment.

As described in the methods chapter, Leaving Certificate home economics- scientific and social examination papers from 2005-2014 were examined. This analysis of 10

years of examination questions at higher level²⁰ covered all questions used in the assessment of the current syllabus. A total of 985 questions were examined, including 592 examination questions, 353 food studies practical coursework questions and 40 textiles, fashion and design elective coursework questions.

For the purpose of analysis and presentation of results, the cells of the Anderson *et al.* (2001) taxonomy table were coded and abbreviated as Table 5 illustrates.

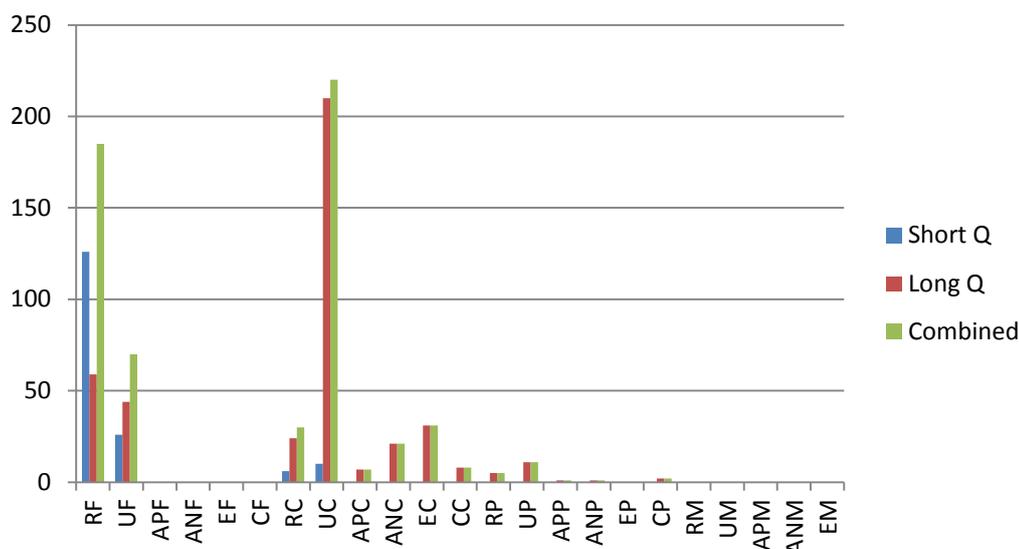
Table 5 Taxonomy table abbreviations

<i>Knowledge Dimension</i>	<i>Cognitive Process Domain</i>					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Create
Factual	RF	UF	APF	ANF	EF	CF
Conceptual	RC	UC	APC	ANC	EC	CC
Procedural	RP	UP	APP	ANP	EP	CP
Meta-cognitive	RM	UM	APM	ANM	EM	CM

The analysis of the Leaving Certificate examination questions involved the classification of the knowledge dimension and cognitive processes required from questions, identification of the frequency of each question type and the categorisation of questions as lower order or higher order in demand. The cognitive process dimension of the Anderson *et al.* (2001) table shows a range of cognitive complexity, with remembering being the least complex and creation being the most complex cognitive activity. Similarly, the knowledge dimension contains four categories that range from ‘concrete (Factual) to abstract (Metacognitive)’ (Anderson *et al.* 2001, p.5). As Figure 10 illustrates, this study found that in the main home economics examination items (n=592) assessed the understanding of conceptual knowledge and the recall of factual knowledge, thus reducing the capacity for the development of higher order learning.

²⁰ The majority of candidates study home economics at higher level and for that reason these questions were selected for analysis.

Figure 10 Demand of Leaving Certificate home economics examination questions



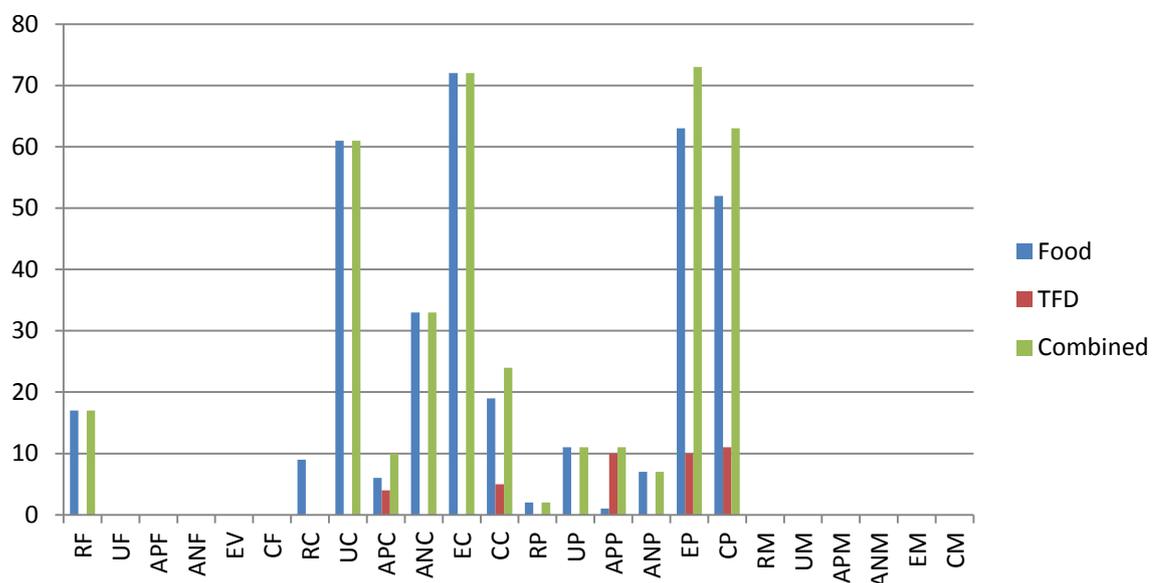
There are three sections in the written paper with 12 questions in Section A, of which candidates are required to answer 10 (worth 60 marks in total). There are five questions in Section B and students are required to answer question 1 (worth 80 marks) and any other two questions (worth 50 marks each). Section C includes three questions, one per elective. The Textiles, Fashion and Design elective question is awarded less marks (40 marks) than the other two electives; Home Design and Management and Social Studies (worth 80 marks each), as the coursework component is awarded 50% of the total elective marks (40 marks). As Figure 10 illustrates, the majority of short questions on the Leaving Certificate home economics paper require students to recall knowledge. The long questions on the paper (Sections B and C) mostly require the understanding of conceptual knowledge, followed by the recall and demonstration of understanding of factual knowledge.

However, Leaving Certificate coursework tasks²¹ were found to offer more challenging questions that have the potential to develop skills of analysis, evaluation and creation. Each candidate is required to complete a coursework component that involves the completion of five practical food studies assignments in a pro-forma journal. Figure 11 illustrates that food studies tasks mostly require the evaluation of conceptual and

²¹ Assignments are common to higher and ordinary levels.

procedural knowledge, followed by the understanding of conceptual knowledge and creation using procedural knowledge. These results suggest that higher-order skills of evaluation and creation are promoted. Candidates opting to take the Textiles, Fashion and Design elective are required to complete a practical coursework task and a supporting folder of work. The results of the analysis of Textiles Fashion and Design elective suggest that students are mostly involved in creation and the application of procedural knowledge. This is not surprising as a typical task requires a candidate to design, sketch and make an outfit for a particular occasion.

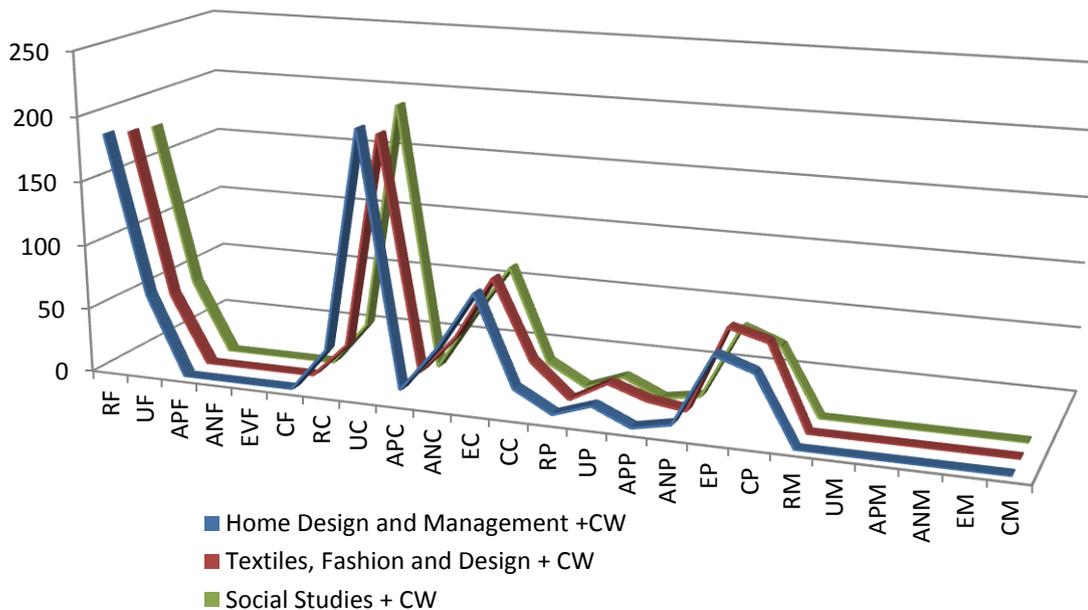
Figure 11 Demand of Leaving Certificate home economics coursework questions



Section C of the examination offers a choice of three elective questions and candidates are required to complete one. The cognitive demand of the three elective questions was analysed as well as the overall demand per elective (including all examination and coursework questions). The Home Design and Management elective questions mostly tested the understanding of conceptual knowledge and the recall and understanding of factual knowledge. The Textiles, Fashion and Design elective questions sought the understanding of conceptual knowledge, the recall of factual knowledge, the understanding of procedural knowledge and higher level skills of creation underpinned by conceptual knowledge. The Social Studies elective questions demand the highest level of understanding and analysis of conceptual knowledge.

The following chart (Figure 12) illustrates the total cognitive demand of Leaving Certificate home economics assessment (2005-2014) and it includes an analysis of the examination papers, coursework journal tasks and the Home Design and Management, the Social Studies and the Textiles Fashion and Design elective questions.

Figure 12 Total demand of Leaving Certificate home economics



The cognitive demand of the three elective areas appears to be similar with some expected variations. For example, the Social Studies elective requires the highest level of understanding (n=209) and analysis (n=51) of conceptual knowledge in comparison to the other elective areas. This is not surprising as the study of human society involves the analysis of information from different fields, for example, anthropology, economics, and psychology, for the purpose of practical problem solving and decision making on various social issues. The Home Design and Management elective requires the highest amount of recall of factual knowledge (n=186) and this trend is not unexpected too as the subject content area focuses on factual knowledge relating to the home. A typical question may involve candidates naming and setting out details of a type of renewable energy source, naming wall finishes suitable for a particular room and recalling their properties. Due to the innate practical qualities of the Textiles, Fashion and Design elective, it demands the highest level of creation using procedural knowledge (n=65),

evaluation (n=73) and understanding of procedural knowledge (n=21) and creation showing understanding of conceptual knowledge (n=31).

A secondary analysis of the verbs used in the examination questions and tasks (2005-2014) was also conducted. The verbs were recorded (n=1007²²) and the frequency of use over ten years calculated. In total, 44 types of verbs were used over the ten years of examinations. The analysis confirms that the most frequently used verbs include evaluate (n=87), give (n=85), explain (n=74), discuss (n=74) and name (n=62) (see Appendix 12). Evaluation is a key requirement of every coursework task. Arguably when verbs requiring a similar cognitive demand in the top four are combined together, such as ‘explain’ and ‘discuss’ (n=148) and ‘give’ and ‘name’ (n=147), the results corroborate the findings of the cognitive demand analysis to a certain degree. As a total of 44 verbs were used in the examinations, this exercise merely illustrated the frequent use of different types of verbs that demand varying types of cognitive processing.

Anderson *et al.* (2001) argue that when assessments are classified in the Taxonomy framework, it is possible to examine their alignment with stated learning outcomes. The six assessment objectives specified at Leaving Certificate level for home economics identify a variety of cognitive demands and skills, e.g. knowledge, understanding, application, research skills, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, presentation of information, evaluation, organisational skills, manipulative skills and creative skills (DES 2001, p.7). However, this study shows that the majority of the assessments focus on knowledge and understanding.

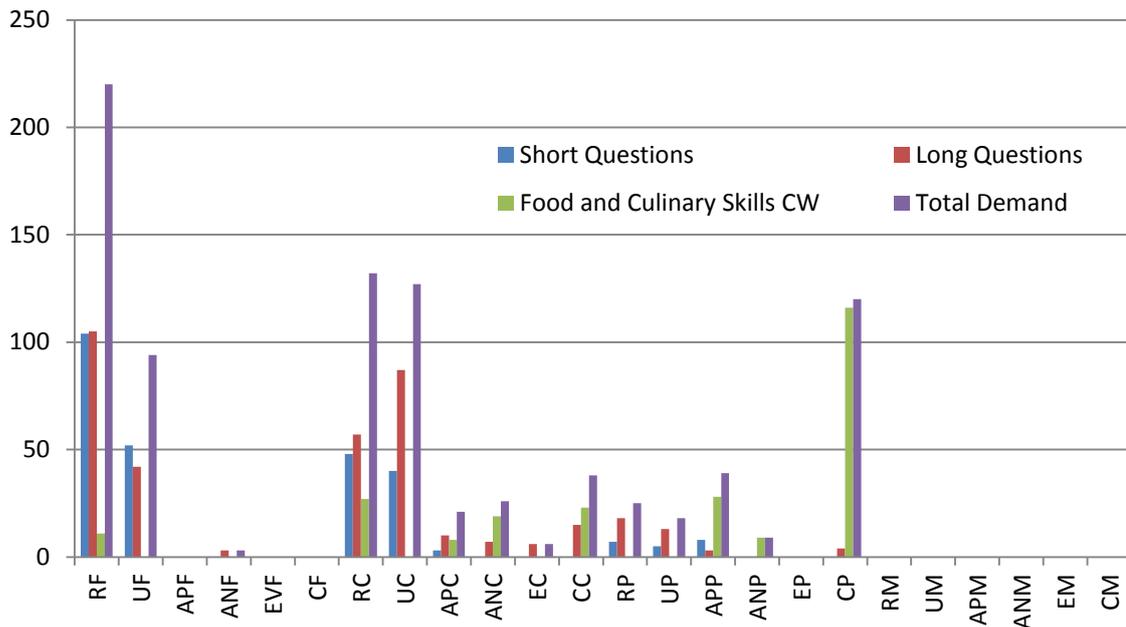
In a similar manner, 10 years of Junior Certificate examination questions (2005-2014) at higher level (n=638) and food studies coursework tasks (n=225) were selected for analysis. It was not possible to examine the optional study coursework tasks as they are set by the teachers and there is no official record of the tasks issued by teachers in schools. It is therefore not possible to calculate the total demand of the assessment. The Junior Certificate paper comprises 24 short and six long questions. Seven food studies

²² A total of 985 Leaving Certificate examination questions and assessment tasks were analysed. There were 22 extra verbs used in the rubrics such as ‘in your answer, include reference to ...’ Prompts were issued on occasion in descriptive terms to enhance the clarity of the questions and to highlight the specific task requirements. All of these verbs were included in this analysis.

coursework tasks are issued to schools each year and candidates are assigned one to complete. They are practically assessed on their work.

The analysis of Junior Certificate home economics questions (total n=863) reveals a predominant focus on the recall of factual knowledge and the understanding of conceptual knowledge (see Figure 13). In comparison to the Leaving Certificate questions, a greater amount of recall is required of students. The food studies tasks develop higher order learning as they mostly require the creation of products and the development of procedural knowledge. It is important to acknowledge that the skill of evaluation is not explicitly demanded by the tasks, although evident in the marking scheme.

Figure 13 Demand of Junior Certificate home economics assessment

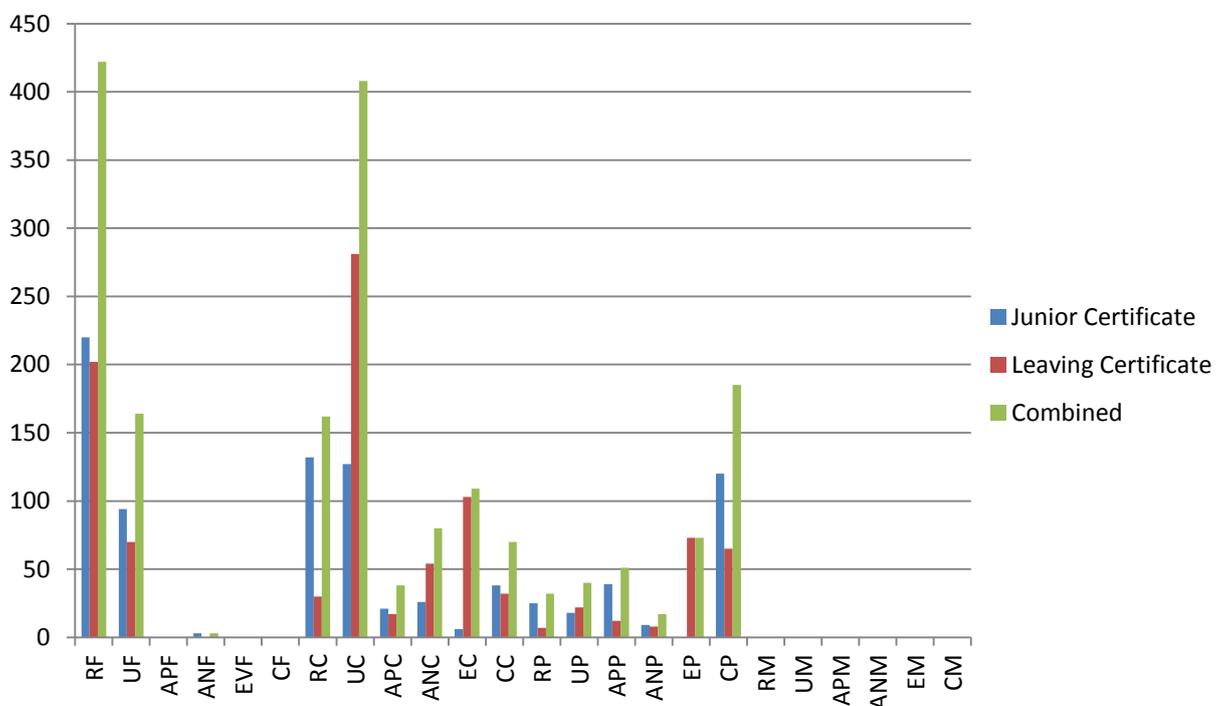


The secondary analysis of the verbs used in the examinations from 2005-2014 confirms the findings of the cognitive demand analysis to a degree. A total of 33 types of verbs were used over the ten years of examinations (see Appendix 13), therefore, this exercise merely illustrates the frequent use of different types of verbs that demand varying types of cognitive processing. The most frequently used verb was explain (n=182), followed by name (n=110), give (n=107) and list (n=94). The verb ‘explain’ would ultimately require candidates to show a grasp of meaning and three out of the most frequently used verbs, ‘name’, ‘give’ and ‘list’ demand recall. When combined (n=311), these verbs show that the predominant requirement is the recall of factual information, thereby corroborating the findings of the cognitive demand analysis.

In junior cycle home economics, the six assessment objectives refer to the acquisition of knowledge, practical and procedural skills, interpretation and translation of data from one form to another, completion of tasks from conception to realisation and the performance of practical culinary skills assignments (DES 1991, p.20). As the previous analysis shows, the assessment arrangements at junior cycle predominantly address the acquisition of factual knowledge. Moreover, the development of procedural knowledge and creative capacity is enhanced by the practical examination arrangements.

A comparison between the demand of Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics assessment is illustrated in Figure 14. Clearly, the Leaving Certificate examination develops a higher level of understanding of conceptual knowledge and the Junior Certificate examination promotes the recall of factual knowledge. However, the absence of the evaluation component in the Junior Certificate food studies coursework questions, although evident in marking schemes and practice, is skewing the contrast in achievement of evaluation of both conceptual and procedural knowledge. The results indicate that junior cycle home economics students engage more in creative processes. As this analysis does not include the optional study project tasks at junior cycle, the level of creation achieved by students is arguably a lot higher than the statistics reveal in Figure 14. A typical design and craftwork assignment, for example, could require students to design and make an original and cost-effective textile craft item for the home and marks are awarded for engagement in a design or problem solving process. At senior cycle, only 72 candidates out of a total of 12,400 candidates (0.6%) chose the Textiles, Fashion and Design for the 2011 examinations (SEC 2011a), indicating that creative capacity at senior cycle is not as well developed as junior cycle.

Figure 14 Demand of Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics compared



Another aim of the examination analysis was to examine whether gender stereotyping is perpetuated by the written questions and tasks. Clearly, examination material is designed with principles of gender equity in mind. Reminders are issued in documentation that gender bias should be avoided (SEC 2007b) and the analysis of examination material in this study (2005-2014) revealed that stereotypical language was not evident and sexism was not perpetuated by the examinations.

5.5 Interview and focus group analysis

5.5.1 Raw data matrix analysis

Approximately 15 pages of transcribed data from the interviews and focus groups were accumulated per interview giving a total volume of some 640 pages. The data reduction task was therefore quite challenging. The presentation of the results in this chapter illustrates how the data reduction was completed and the interpretations made. The transcribed data were transferred en masse to the first matrix, the raw data matrix, as illustrated in Table 6. Qualitative researchers are often confronted with high volumes of data and the first stage of analysis is commonly a process of immersion that requires the researcher to read and re-read the data, seeking patterns and relationships. One systematic approach to this is offered by the techniques of content and thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994) as set out in Chapter 4. Thus the first stage of the analysis involved making initial sense of the data by becoming immersed in the interview and focus group transcripts and accompanying field notes, and identifying the initial patterns in the data. The next stage involved high-level coding of the interview and focus group responses, targeting for example: role, values, pedagogy and learning, assessment and validity. The elements of this coding frame were largely suggested by the wording of the questions and the subsequent responses. These coding elements were themselves colour coded according to the following key:

Curriculum		Role		Public image	
Validity		Values		Skills	
Pedagogy and learning					
Assessment practices					
Teacher professional identity					

Table 6 Raw data matrix

Int.	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
3	<p>What are your views on the mission, vision and practice of home economics education?</p> <p>I suppose the main aim of home economics was to provide students with skills for living, general skills for living ...</p> <p>... but with the new course that came in, ... I would say if anything it is almost overloaded, it is a very intensive course and I think as a result it has driven some people away from the subject.</p> <p>The better students who would be going on to study physics and chemistry at third level would opt for the science subjects rather than take home economics ...</p> <p>... a big part of it involved in the practical, the practical dimension, the practical culinary skills and in textiles.</p> <p>I do feel the true home economics student must have a</p>	<p>In your view, what are the key values, skills and competences that are nurtured in students through home economics education and in your view, is the subject of home economics unique?</p> <p>I suppose the key values they gain are positive attitude towards themselves and their surroundings, their home and their environment and they become more aware of the sensitivity of the different family units ...</p> <p>I suppose it gives them a confidence to use their practical skills, their manipulative and manual dexterity, their ability to use tools and equipment correctly, to weigh and measure accurately, to follow instructions and the ability to evaluate their practical work, to use affective skills like for example creativity, to show their creativity ...</p> <p>... where home economics is great for that type of student who are particularly good with their hands for sewing or for cooking. Is it just developed or is it just bred in them. I don't</p>	<p>Tell me please how learning typically takes place in a home economics classroom.</p> <p>A lot of it would be lower order ... knowledge that is imparted, you would get the understanding of it and then you apply that to whatever situation it is, breaking down the information as you would have in the project work and then the evaluation of it.</p> <p>Well, you would have your lesson more student centred than teacher centred.</p> <p>And of course, this thing of learning outcomes, which you know in the last ten years, you would make sure you would put your learning outcomes on the board at the beginning of class, what they were expected to get from the class and make sure you would get/achieve that by the end of class.</p> <p>I suppose a lot of it would develop into</p>	<p>What are your views on the assessment of home economics, for example in the classroom, in the school and in the Junior and Leaving Certificates?</p> <p>There would be a formal assessment at least on a monthly basis if not a fortnightly ...</p> <p>In the practical class, where you would have three cooking together, you would always find the one who mightn't be pulling their weight.</p> <p>I am happy with the weighting. Now, the project work again as you know, you get so many different standards in the project work ...</p> <p>A lot of the time, going back to the project work, a lot of the work you see [examiner] is from the teacher. You know, it's okay but it lacks imagination because it is just straight from the teacher's mouth. You know, the little headaches that you have, it is because a</p>

	<p>practical dimension of food and textile ... and the science aspect of it is very important as well ...</p>	<p>know. I feel a lot of it is practice and from the practice comes the confidence.</p>	<p>higher order. I suppose about 70%, there was always the few that were not that engaged.</p>	<p>lot of them are very very similar.</p> <p>Creativity and originality leaves a lot to be desired! There is a lot of lack of creativity ...some of them just copy their neighbour.</p>
4	<p>... to facilitate the development of life skills in learners. I suppose it allows us to empower individuals to make full use of their resources and capabilities and to create a kind of sustainable lifestyle and that has a trickle-down effect then on society and the family.</p> <p>I think now in Irish society the perception would definitely be textiles and cooking and they haven't stepped away from the whole belief that the home economics teacher can make apple tart or can mend a pair of trousers or turn up a hem whereas it is much greater than that ...</p> <p>I don't think there is enough emphasis on the whole social aspect of home economics either: social studies...</p> <p>It is more than textiles and cooking. It is much greater than that. Well, they refer to it as basic</p>	<p>I think that home economics really promotes ... their personal capabilities, their skills and resources ... give them the confidence so they can apply it. They have the resources themselves to undertake certain tasks...</p> <p>I think they become a lot more discerning as consumers and they are a lot wiser in how they undertake tasks. They learn knowledge, a lot of theory but they are able to apply if they are given opportunities.</p> <p>... they have to decide themselves what kind of consumer they are and I think home economics allows them to develop that.</p> <p>They cover food and consumer ...and creativity in textiles. ... it is a whole space they can dip into and explore and you have to give them the room as well to experiment with things which in home economics you do. There is no definite</p>	<p>I think it's really influenced by that experiential model of learning, that you present the learner with the problem that you get them to tease out ideas in their own personal view and then you can connect further and enhance that and facilitate their learning by developing it, explaining it, getting them to apply it maybe in a practical lesson or role plays in social studies ...</p> <p>I think it is more than your basic recall and to understand something. You want to equip them with life-skills, you want them to be able to apply it, to be able to analyse things and make modifications to suit their own needs and personal circumstances.</p> <p>... they kind of have the knowledge like any other subject, they learn it, they could spit it out in an exam but they can take it further and they do apply it in their everyday lives and that's your main</p>	<p>... To further your feedback, it is not a case of yes, no, right, wrong ...you want to give them confidence as well. To highlight that you are improving here, they might not be A standard, even if they are a C standard, that's pretty good for their capabilities at the moment which you can always further that and to really highlight that.</p> <p>... You have one chance to show what you can do and it is a lot of pressure on the student whereas you are not taking into account a learner's progress in class, from class to class.</p> <p>Like the practical junior cert cookery practical I think that is brilliant as an assessment tool. ... an option between craft and childcare and so on kind of allows them to decide what they prefer to do.</p>

	skills that you could throw a meal together and you can make a nice dress	way to go with.	focus is to actually ... it's not about an exam, it is much greater than that.	I think learners are so focused on what they have in an exam and they have to learn this amount of knowledge they are not given the time and the creative space to explore things further ...
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Table 6 shows excerpts from a small selection of interview and focus group responses and it illustrates how the data began to break down in the reduction process into content chunks, reflecting the categoric codes illustrated by their respective highlighter colours. Sometimes a piece of data had several codes. For example the following comment was categorised as both *pedagogy* and *curriculum*:

Well it's kind of trial and error thing, to give them that challenge of presenting them with ingredients, so maybe it is ingredients to a certain recipe and they would kind of look at it and go 'oh I could make chicken curry with that.' To introduce it like that and then to ... give them a whole basket and take certain foods out of it and make something. And I don't think there is any time for that in home economics- in current times. (Interviewee 4)

In this specific example, the context related to junior cycle home economics and the interviewee was discussing the development of skills and the quality of learning achieved overall. In her view, the students are proficient in analysis and in making dishes:

but beyond that they find it difficult ... to create their own dish, give them a set of ingredients and [ask them] to go for it, they wouldn't be able to do it ... They wouldn't be able to make a decision about what to do with them. They can follow a recipe easily ... They really lack creativity in the food design process.

This interviewee was probed about how creativity in the food design process can be achieved and her response (see quotation) refers both to the development of skills and to a curriculum issue, which in this case is a lack of time for experimentation.

Figure 15 shows how the coloured coding accentuates the difference between respondent patterns. This illustration was created by minimising the page view of the *raw data matrix* document to 15% and then taking a 'screen shot/print' of the data displayed over 32 pages. The pages are presented in sequence horizontally. For

example, pages 1-6 are presented in row 1 and pages 7-12 are in row 2. In this illustration, it is evident that interviewee 3 responds in a completely different way to question 2 (see Figure 15, column 2 of each cell in rows 1-2) speaking of values (orange), skills (blue), professional identity (red) and curriculum (turquoise), compared to interviewee 4 (see column 2 of each cell in rows 2-5) whose response touches on role (grey), skills (blue), values (orange) and assessment (green).

Figure 15 Raw data matrix for interviews 3 and 4



The next transformation of the data involved grouping all of the similarly coded comments together to enable a substantive interpretation of the various perceptions and concerns of the interviewees. However, it was important first to carry out an immersion analysis, to ensure that I had a comprehensive grasp of the extent of the data and their meaning. This immersion analysis is considered next with the final thematic matrix analysis following.

5.5.2 Immersion analysis and interim matrix

The sections above detail the initial analysis of the transcript data and the next stage involved separating the categories and entering them into an interim matrix as illustrated in Table 7.

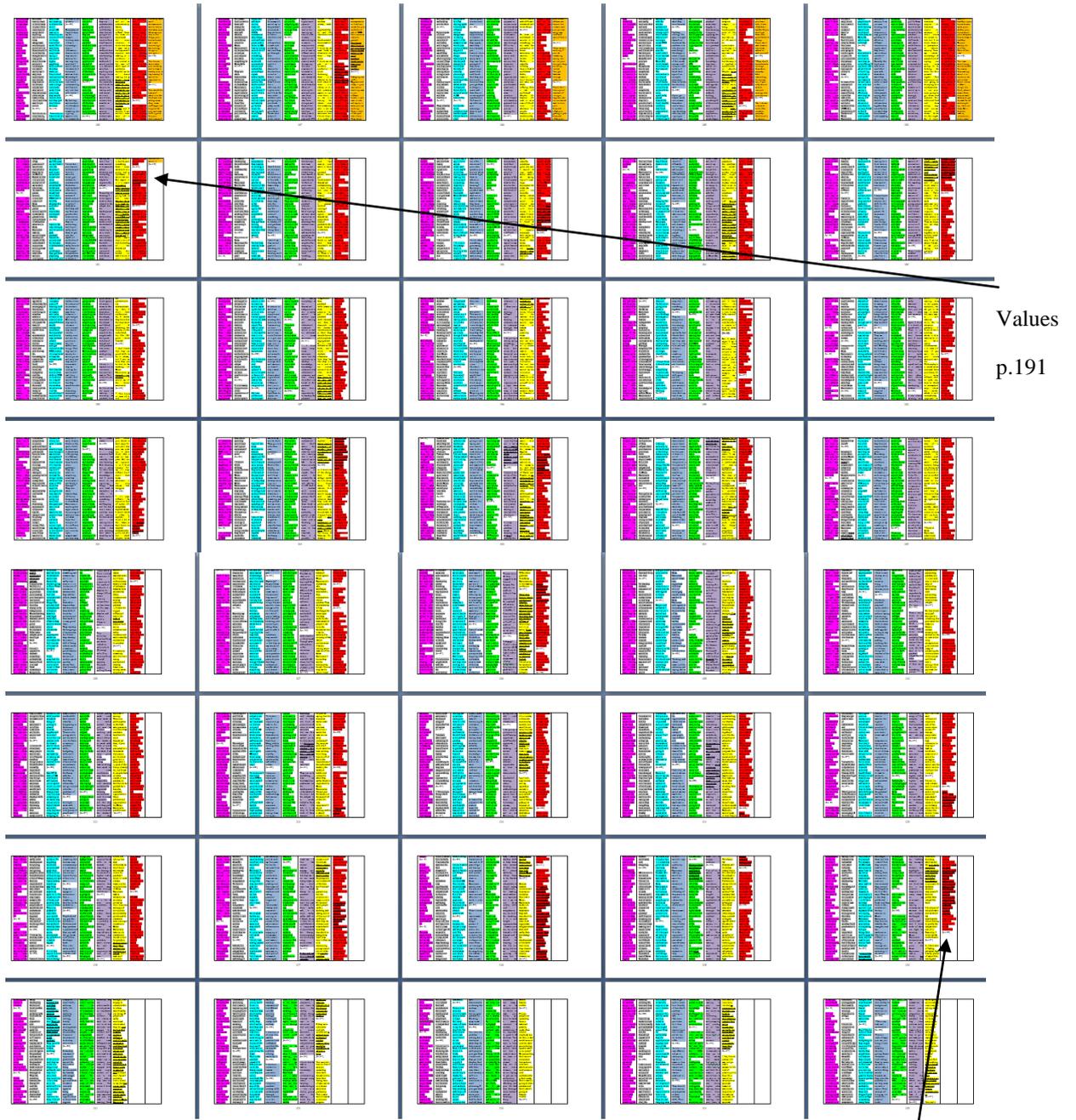
Validity	Role	Curriculum	Skills	Assessment	Pedagogy and learning	Professional identity	Public image	Values
<p>The Leaving Cert standard is losing that anyways at the minute and numbers are dropping at the minute. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>Overall it is the students that are suffering because the learning isn't sometimes as best as it could be. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>Because, you are stuck for time and there is so much content in the course, that you sometimes just skim areas that maybe you don't see as important.</p>	<p>It does offer an understanding and help students to understand real life and solve problems. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>I would like to see home economics portrayed as a subject that offers students so much more, that they can bring the subject on so much further after school that they see the relevance to many other college courses that they may wish to pursue. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>I do think that the mission and vision of home economics does need to be changed a little bit, whilst parts are relevant and applicable to real life situations, I think some of the content isn't very applicable to real life situations. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>There is little continuity between junior cert and leaving cert. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>Students are offered a wide knowledge base. There is a lot of content in it. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>Home economics also helps students to ... it allows them to be flexible and adapt to situations. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>In society we live in today, it does offer them a chance to develop good management skills and develop all their own aspects such as their creative side, emotional side and intellectual side. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>Probably because of the assessments that are used. You are assessed on your cookery practical and the childcare project. It is a big amount, it is 35% and your childcare project is 15%. So, like you have 50% done before you even go into the exam. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>At the end of every chapter or every particular content like ... every section or area of the course. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>Students learn obviously knowledge. Ok, so there is a lot of content knowledge they would learn. They also learn to apply that knowledge. I think they are given situations to represent the knowledge they are learning. And in the practical aspect of it, they are taught skills to apply that knowledge. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>I think that a lot of teachers of home economics have lost their drive to teach home economics to the best of their ability because they find that the course is just so content heavy and time short. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>It is a subject that is fighting for its place really. Then you feel like you have to, your students have to get good marks in it in order to increase the uptake of the subject. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>A lot of people that I would talk to still have the perception of home economics as cooking and sewing. Very few people actually see that there are different sides to it. There is the consumer side to it which kinda contradicts - that the image of the junior cert syllabus is to make you wise in a consumer orientated society but few people see that side of home economics. (Interviewee 1)</p>	<p>I think the fact that some of it is practical, it allows students to develop their practical side and especially if student is less academic, it gives them a chance to actually develop themselves. (Interviewee 1)</p> <p>In the subject I think we are teaching them and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own lives and to manage their own lives. (Interviewee 1)</p>

Table 7 Interim matrix

The purpose of the matrix was to show and confirm emerging patterns. For example, the first column groups all of the comments that refer to validity (pink), the second to role (grey) etc. The order of the columns from left to right reflects the dominance of the categories, i.e. the validity column had the most comments, the role column was next etc. In all, nine categories were identified as best covering the variety of comments with the most comments distributed to validity and the least to values.

Responses from the 38 interviews and four focus group interviews were amalgamated into one matrix and compiled in this way and Figure 16 illustrates what a section of the squint analysis looked like for interviews 1-42. This illustration was created by minimising the page view of the matrix document to 20% and then capturing a 'screen shot/print' of the data which were displayed over 60 pages (out of a total of 659 pages). To appreciate the squint analysis, it is necessary to know that the first page (page 186 of the interim matrix) is on the top left and page 190 is on the top right. As the eye travels down the page, the second row begins with page 191 and ends with page 195; the third row begins with page 196 and ends with page 200- and this continues to the last row of this exemplar in which page 241 comes at the left and page 245 is the last one on the right. As the eye progresses down through the pages, it becomes evident that the validity column remains strongly populated while the values column (extreme right-hand column on each page) begins to run out of comments at page 191, with public image at page 220 and professional identity at page 233. For expediency, the rest of the squint analysis illustration (covering pages 1-185 and 246-659) has not been provided, but pedagogy and learning comments stopped at page 258, assessment at page 270, skills at page 337, curriculum at page 348, role at 394 and validity at page 659.

Figure 16 Squint analysis of interim matrix



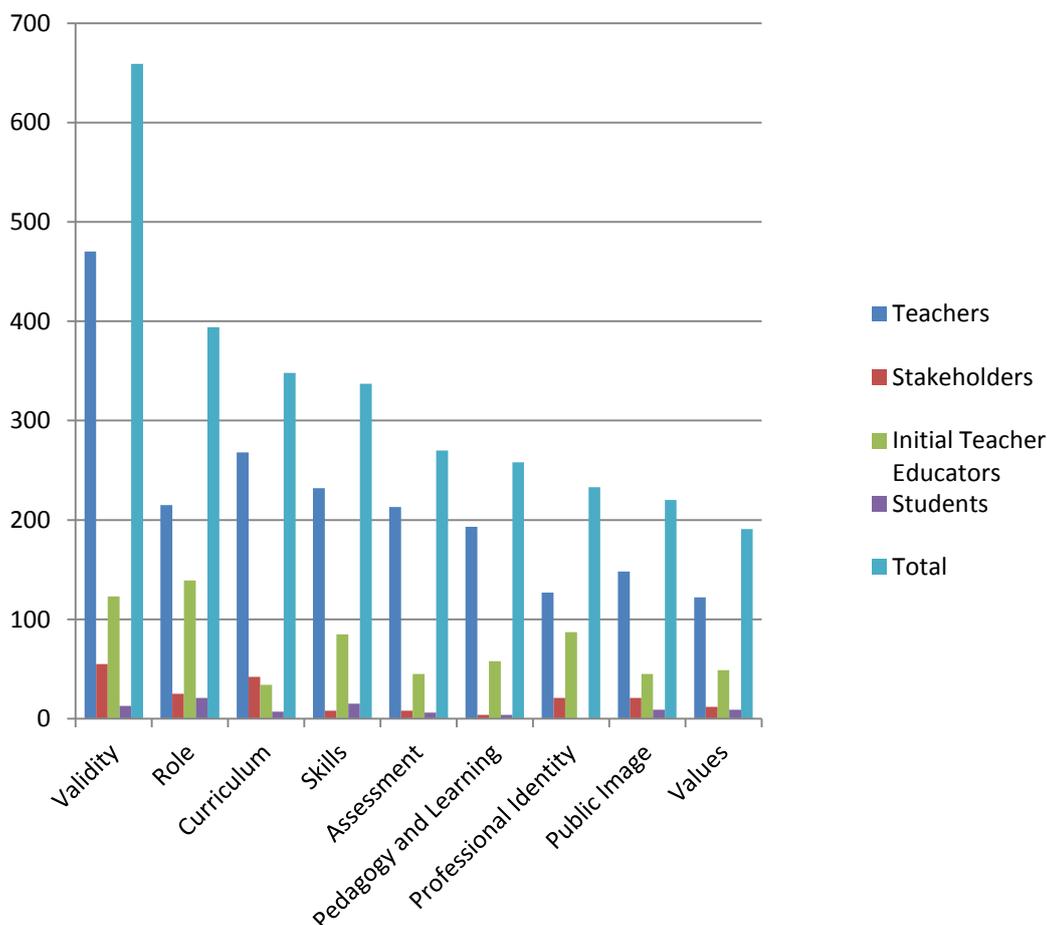
Values
p.191

Public
image
p.220



The number of pages of responses on the prominent issues is presented in Figure 17. The volume of response to certain categories varied among stakeholders. As expected many of the initial teacher education providers provided substantial information on the role of home economics and the professional identity of home economists. Validity was a key concern for the teachers and other stakeholders such as managers and union representatives interviewed and this was followed by curriculum and skills. The students groups spoke at length about the role of home economics, the skills they develop and validity issues.

Figure 17 Volume of issues discussed per category and interviewee group



Each column on the matrix was studied to identify areas of convergence and divergence among the responses. For example, the issues predominantly raised in the validity (pink) column related to washback and especially the influence of examinations on the teaching and learning in home economics classrooms. The responses were broken into single issue sections or sentences and copied from the matrix to a word document (see Figure 18). This allowed me to tag the various segments according to their content.

Validity

The chosen tags represented different dimensions of teaching and learning which the respondents felt are impacted upon by the examinations i.e. washback effects. These were:

Enjoyment and motivation (EM)

EM

Fitness for purpose Junior Certificate (FPJ)

FPJ

Fitness for purpose Leaving Certificate (FPL)	FPL
Quality of learning (QL)	QL
Subject mission (SM)	SM
Subject popularity (SP)	SP
Teaching to the test (TT)	TT

Figure 18 Washback effects under the validity category

Colour codes for analysis

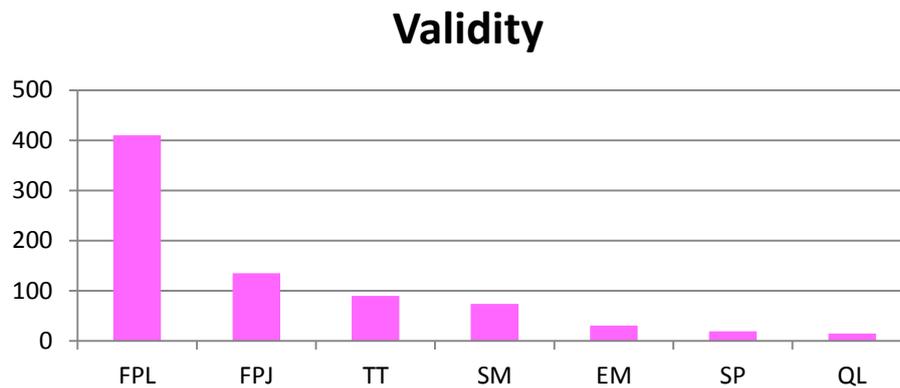
Enjoyment and motivation (EM)	EM	Subject mission (SM)	SM
Fitness for purpose Junior Certificate (FPI)	FPI	Subject popularity (SP)	SP
Fitness for purpose Leaving Certificate (FPL)	FPL	Quality of learning (QL)	QL
Teaching to the test (TT)	TT		

Validity	
The Leaving Cert standard is losing that anyways at the minute and numbers are dropping at the minute (Int. 1)	SP
Overall it is the students that are suffering because the learning isn't sometimes as best as it could be. (Int. 1)	QL
*Because, you are stuck for time and there is so much content in the course, that you sometimes just skim areas that maybe you don't see as relevant and then focus more on other areas for students but you never know there could be one student that that area you skimmed could be important too. (Int. 1)	TT
*Well, from talking to colleagues, yes, I do think it is a problem. We just feel like we are constantly snowed under with stuff to do and there is a lot that has to be done outside school so students are suffering because again it's the teacher who is picking the area, not the students. (Int. 1)	QL

Figure 18 shows an example of the colour-coded form of analysis, similar to the matrix coding approach above, but in this instance one large column only. Using the colour tags, it was possible to count the frequency of mentions relating to each of the washback effects (n=774). The fitness for purpose of Leaving Certificate home economics assessment arrangements (n=410) was the most common issue discussed, followed by

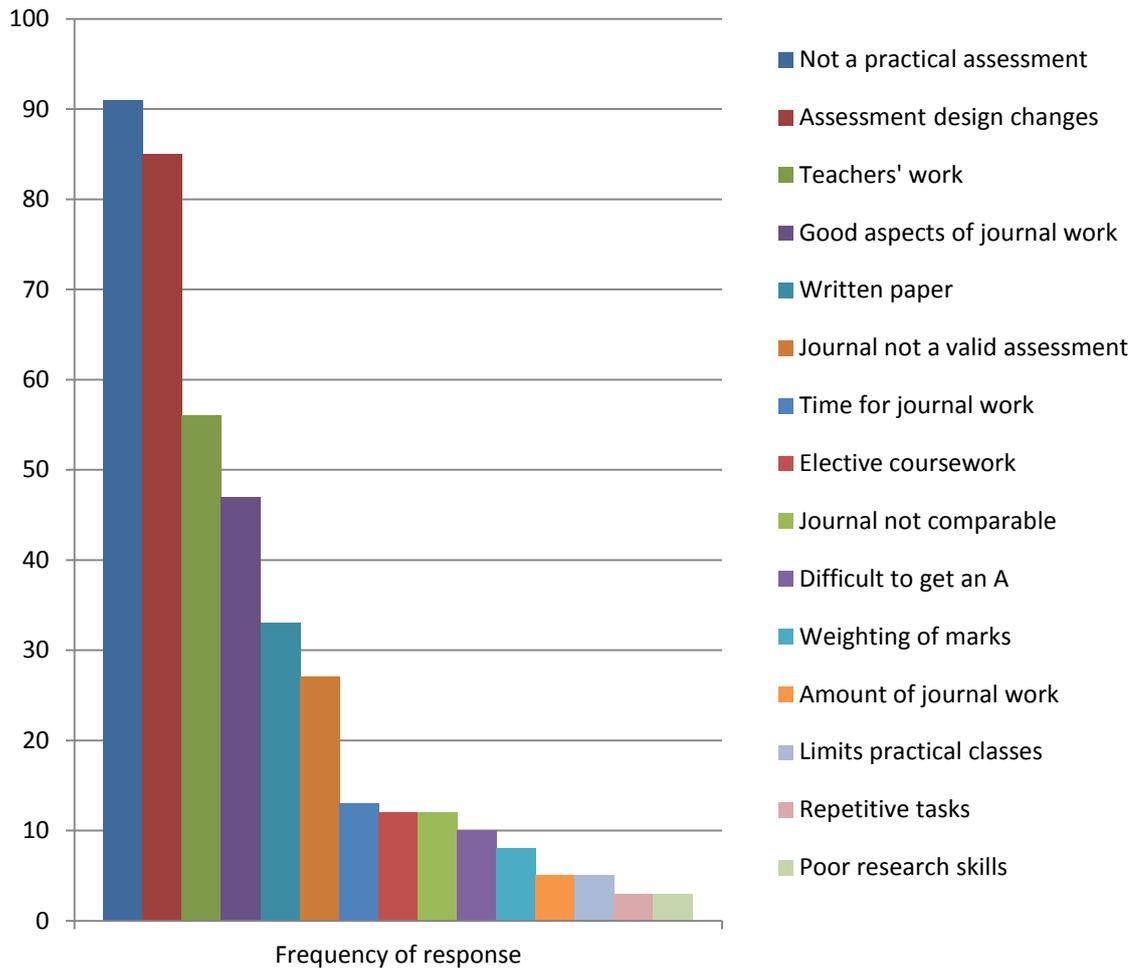
the fitness for purpose of the Junior Certificate home economics assessment arrangements (n=135), teaching to the test (n=90), subject mission (n=74), enjoyment and motivation (n=31), subject popularity (n=19) and quality of learning (n=15). This pattern is set out in diagram form in Figure 19.

Figure 19 Frequency of validity response



The level of divergence and convergence within each washback dimension was analysed. The largest sub-category, with 410 responses, related to fitness for purpose of Leaving Certificate home economics assessment arrangements and there was consensus from all interviewees that these arrangements have a negative washback effect on teaching and learning. Figure 20 indicates the frequency and range of responses relating to the fitness for purpose of the components of the Leaving Certificate assessment.

Figure 20 Fitness for purpose of Leaving Certificate home economics assessment



A frequent concern for interviewees (n=285) (37% of the total validity comments) was the food studies coursework journal which they agree was not fit for purpose. Table 8 documents the specific responses relating to the journal coursework including enjoyment/motivation and subject popularity comments. Subject enjoyment/motivation and popularity comments were initially collated separately and they are set out in Figure 19. All of the subject popularity comments (n=19) were about the effect of the journal coursework on student numbers at senior cycle. Comments about subject enjoyment and motivation (22 out of a total of 31) that referred to the Leaving Certificate journal are collated in Table 8 in order to provide an understanding of the total washback effect of the Leaving Certificate coursework journal assessment on practice, as revealed in this study. Moreover, 11 out of 85 assessment design comments (see Figure 20) made reference to changes needed in journal tasks and they were included in Table 8. Some of

the responses (n=47) included a list of different skills and attributes considered to be developed by the coursework journal work. The skills and attributes were noted, counted and presented on the right hand side of Table 8.

Table 8 Food studies coursework journal comments

Concerns (n=285)		Positive comments (n=47)		
Not a practical assessment	91	Skill-set	Analysis	18
Teachers' work	56		Research and independent learning	14
Not a valid assessment	27		Evaluation	13
Time for journal work	13		Investigation	8
Journal not comparable	12		Carrying out tasks	4
Difficult to get an A	10		Interesting/good	4
Journal design changes	11		Problem solving	4
Weighting of marks	8		Critical thinking	3
Amount of journal work	5		Decision making	2
Limits practical classes	5		Challenge	2
Repetitive tasks	3		Application	2
Poor research skills	3		Management	2
Reduced enjoyment/motivation	22		Preparation for examinations	2
Impact on subject popularity	19		Procedural skills	2
			Communication skills	1
		Teamwork	1	
		Discernment	1	
		Flexibility	1	
		Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	1	
		Initiative	1	

In essence, the majority of interviewees held the view that a written assessment of practical skills was not appropriate (n=91) and it has a negative impact on the development of skills, student enjoyment, motivation and subject popularity. The journal was considered to disadvantage lower ability students who may not be linguistically skilled, yet who possess a very high level of practical skills. For these main reasons, the journal was considered not to be a valid assessment (n=27) of student work. The enjoyment and motivational value associated with practical work was reported to have reduced (n=22) and according to the interviewees, it has seriously impacted on subject popularity (n=19) at senior cycle level.

Practical classes offer an ideal opportunity for experiential learning and the application of theory to practice. This type of classroom environment supports learning. However, a small number of responses (n=5) indicated that home economics teachers often complete only the minimum number of practical requirements, which is a total of five

classes and essentially five skills. Furthermore, it was noted that the piece of coursework is time-consuming to complete (n=13) and not comparable (n=12) to coursework pieces with similar weighting of marks in subjects such as geography and agricultural science.

Another aspect of the responses referred to the validity of the journal content. Nine of the cohort of teachers that were interviewed had experience of examining and they especially referred to correcting a lot of similar work. Many responses (n=56) indicated that teachers are meeting to identify the requirements of the tasks, or preparing notes for students and circulating them for transcription resulting in similar work. Many reasons for these practices were shared such as time constraints, the demand of the tasks, pressure of the points system and the students' poor aptitude for research.

Despite significant teacher 'spoon-feeding' of students in the completion of the journal, it is somewhat considered difficult to achieve 'the A' (n=10). The 'points driven' students are well aware that the A is 'out of their reach'. This was reported to be impacting upon subject uptake and some of the examiners who were interviewed argued that there is a problem with how marks are awarded in the upper end of the marking range. For example the initial section, investigation: analysis/research, is worth 20 marks in total. These marks are divided into four bands including: Band A 16-20 marks for a very good- excellent performance, Band B 11-15 marks for a good performance and so on. The interviewees held the view that it is very difficult for candidates to gain full marks in Band A. For example, Interviewee 7 argued that:

Even as teachers, we don't know how to get an A ... Perhaps there is a need to look at the bands again and the requirements specifically and to have greater standardization of those bands so that they are attainable and not out of the reach of the children.

Some assessment design changes were recommended (n=11) such as offering more choice, including more practical work, introducing an interview assessment of journal work and changing the mode of recording practical work. There was some reference to the low weighting of marks awarded to the coursework assessment (n=8) and some of the interviewees argued that the 20% weighting was low for the amount of time (n=13) and work (n=5) invested in the completion of the tasks. Three interviewees argued that the way the tasks are recorded is repetitive. For example, the information required in the

'work plan' and 'implementation' section is similar. Others complained about the pedantic requirements of the assessment as set out in the marking schemes. For example, Interviewee 33 who is an examiner of the coursework journals argued that:

The idea behind it is excellent and what you ask the students to do is good, but it the way that you ask the students to record it is not good ... The teachers are driven by this form of assessment, that they record it in a book and they have to know how to write it up and every line has to be filled up. It is very pedantic, it does get down to the nitty gritty of it. I don't like deducting a student one out of two marks because they forgot to say they are using oven gloves when they are using oven gloves to put the dish into the oven. I just can't stand those little things.

Some of the interviewees (n=3) argued that their students struggle to develop good research skills. For example, Interviewee 7 argued that her students are generally mixed ability and struggle to develop analysis and research skills.

They just can't grasp it ... we actually kill ourselves working for them to get a C on a higher level paper which to them is exceptional ...

If they are not able to interpret research information themselves they are actually learning nothing and it is putting them off it and the word then is spreading that we had to do this thing and had to do scientific principals and that is very difficult.

Similarly, Interviewee 1 argued that students struggle to develop research skills.

You are trying to teach students how to research ... they are coming back with information that is not relevant at all. They can't see the relevance of the journals. They can't analyse the knowledge that is in them ...

Despite the faults associated with the journal assessment, some of the responses (n=47) referred to aspects of the journal that were considered to be of merit. Many of these responses included a list of different skills and attributes considered to be developed by the coursework journal work. For example, enabling the development of skills of analysis (n=18), research and independent learning (n=14) and evaluation (n=13). Other merits associated with the journal that were less frequently mentioned included the development of skills of: application, carrying out tasks, communication skills, critical thinking, decision making, discernment, flexibility, initiative, investigation, management, problem solving, procedural skills and teamwork. However, the journal was considered problematic over all other aspects of senior cycle assessment in home economics as it was viewed as a substantial piece of work that has be completed in a

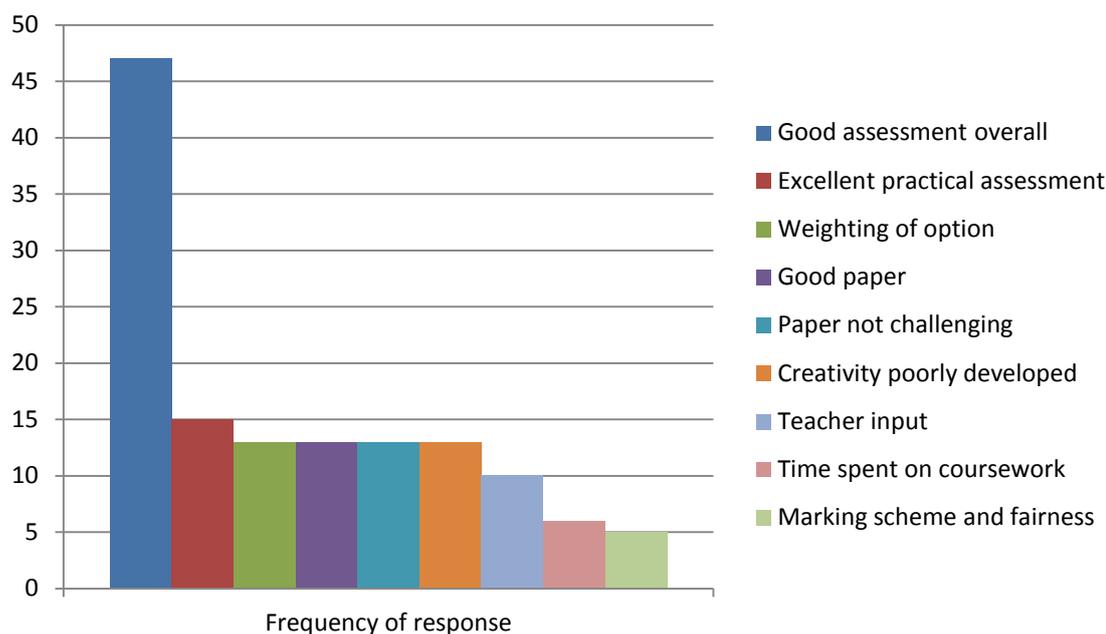
short time-frame. These pressures, in the context of a broad curriculum, impact on the validity of pedagogy and learning practice.

The second most frequently discussed item relating to Leaving Certificate assessment (see Figure 20) was the design of the assessment (n=85). As mentioned, 11 of these comments specifically referred to the coursework journal. Many of the interviewees offered recommendations for change such as: modelling senior cycle assessment on the junior cycle, the assessment of progress, the inclusion of relevant problem solving briefs, scenarios, more creative briefs, more choice, teacher autonomy in writing briefs, diagnostic and self-assessment, elective coursework briefs and assessment tasks and examination questions that can develop a range of higher order skills. Many of the interviewees had views about the examination paper (n=33). For example, the paper was considered to be fair (n=28), albeit a long paper to complete in a short time frame (n=5). Seven of the 28 responses that made reference to the fairness of the paper identified that the compulsory long question (Question 1) in Section B of the paper was a question that supported the development of analysis and interpretation (n=7). The other questions on the paper were considered to check for the recall of knowledge and understanding.

Some of the interviewees' responses (n=12) indicated that the Textiles, Fashion and Design element of senior cycle assessment was not fit for purpose. This element is taken by a small number of students in the national examinations. In a manner similar to the journal, the respondents felt there is insufficient time available to complete the task assigned. Furthermore, the briefs are considered to be irrelevant and unachievable. The interviewees considered whether a design and craftwork option would be more feasible instead, as this option is the most popular option at junior cycle. Some felt that it would lead to continuity between the junior and senior cycle programmes and it would develop creativity and entrepreneurship skills in students. However, others had concerns about the amount of time students spend on coursework to the detriment of other areas of the course, the possibility of teachers over-assisting and the extra pressure on teachers from having to 'monitor' another piece of coursework.

Figure 19 indicates that fitness for purpose of junior cycle home economics assessment was the second most prominent washback issue discussed (n=135). The key issues raised and the frequency of response is illustrated in Figure 21.

Figure 21 Fitness for purpose of Junior Certificate home economics assessment



There was consensus among respondents that junior cycle home economics is a very good assessment (n=47). This was attributed to the multiple elements of assessment including the practical component, optional coursework and examination paper. The practical examination was a popular element of junior cycle assessment that was considered fit for purpose (n=15) and deemed to be an ‘excellent’ assessment. The responses indicated that the optional study coursework area is very popular with students. Currently the majority of students opt for the design and craftwork option (81%); some take childcare (17%) and a few (2%) take textiles (SEC 2012a). Other comments referred to the practice of teachers over-assisting students with the portfolio work (n=10). It is worth noting here that Figure 19 included comments on subject enjoyment and motivation. Nine of the 31 responses made reference to the satisfaction students get from the completion of products. However, some of the interviewees pointed out difficulties associated with the completion of project work. Some (n=6) indicated that the students often run over-time with the work which is worth ‘only’ 15% (n=13). The weighting of marks was considered low for the work completed. Some responses indicated that many do not engage with the design process and examiners especially noted that greater focus is needed on the design aspect and the development of creativity (n=13).

There were mixed views about the fitness for purpose of the written paper. Some responses (n=13) indicated that the questions are ‘too simple’ and ‘lack depth’ (Interviewee 5) and others (n=13) indicated that the paper is well-designed with a good range of questions. There were some views (n=5) about the lack of availability of marking schemes and that examiners are advantaged as they have access to more detailed marking schemes.

Teaching to the test was the next most prominent washback issue (n=90) (see Figure 19). 21 of the 27 teachers (78%) interviewed revealed that they felt under pressure to get a good set of results. Many of these teachers reported adopting ‘spoon-feeding’ and direct-transmission practices in order to achieve the best results effectively. This coupled with pressures of curriculum coverage impeded their use of active learning methodologies, engagement in formative assessment practice and the enactment of the subject mission. In contrast, a small number of the teachers interviewed (n=6) alluded to their use of active learning methodologies and AfL pedagogy.

The interviewees, excluding students, critically reflected on practice and evaluated the quality of learning (n=15) achieved in terms of the development of the subject mission and values (n=74) (see Figure 19). Many of the responses (n=15) referred to the negative effect of the examinations on the quality of classroom learning achieved. Many of the interviewees expressed the view that they wished to address the subject mission in practice, but that the examinations did not support this. ‘It’s a catch 22, trying to get the marriage between the two is hard’ (Interviewee 8). The Junior Certificate assessment was considered to be effective at addressing the subject mission in many ways (n=30), but the Leaving Certificate assessment was not (n=17). The challenge involved in assessing values especially at Leaving Certificate was mentioned (n=12) and it was considered that ‘the exam measures what is easier to measure’ (Interviewee 8). It was noted that Junior Certificate home economics provided a great opportunity to assess values (n=15). Overall, it was clear that the interviewees were very eager to address the subject mission, but felt constrained by the examination arrangements and aspects related to curriculum design.

Considering the various dimensions in the round, it is possible to arrive at a substantive interpretation of the interviewees’ views relating to validity aspects of home economics. I am suggesting the following as being evidenced by the nature of the responses:

Home economics practitioners believe that external home economics assessment arrangements promote teaching to the test and a washback effect on the quality of student learning.

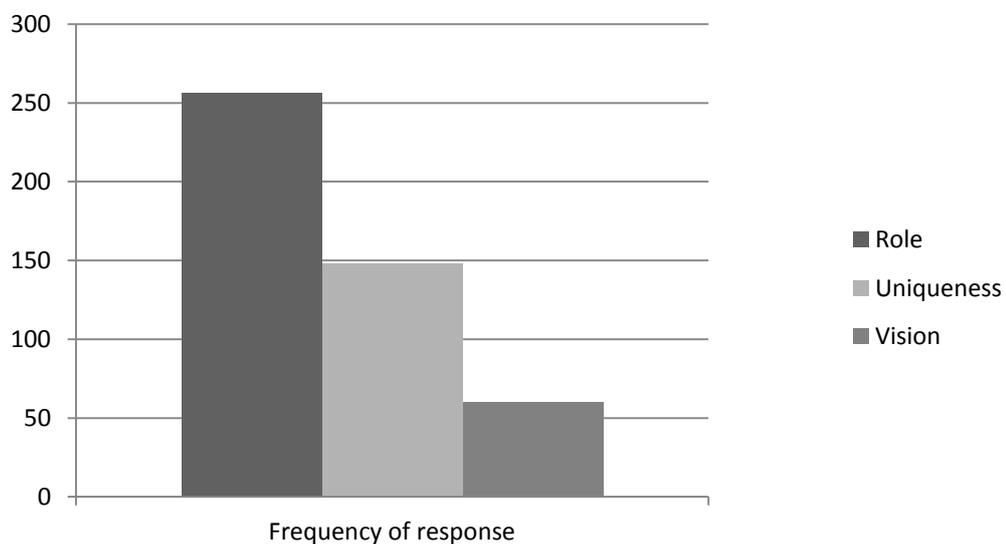
Role of home economics

The second area of importance in the matrix was about the role of home economics and the main dimensions of the comments were tagged and colour-coded as follows:

Role (R)	
Vision (V)	
Uniqueness (U)	

The frequency of response per dimension is illustrated in Figure 22. There were many comments on the role of home economics (n=256), the uniqueness of the subject in the curriculum (n=148) and some interviewees shared their vision for the future of the subject (n=60).

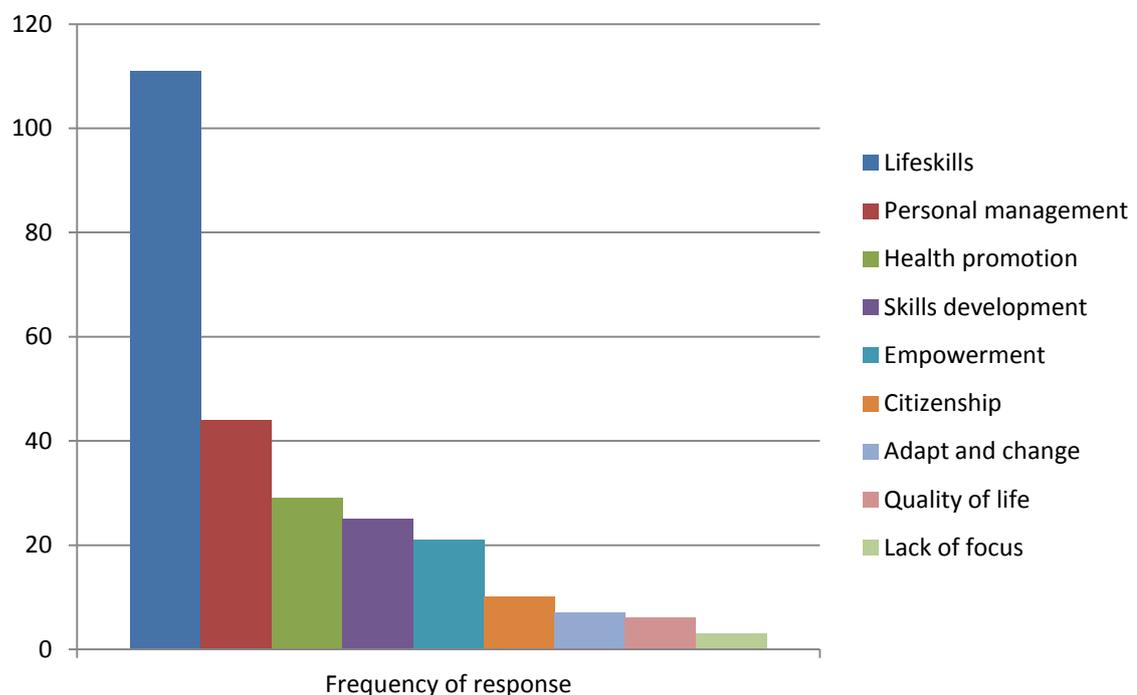
Figure 22 The mission, vision and uniqueness of home economics



The range and frequency of comments about the role of home economics in an Irish context is illustrated in Figure 23. Many of the comments referred to the development of life-skills (n=111), personal management (n=44), and a variety of other ‘key skills’ such as creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking (n=25). Enablement and

empowerment of individuals, families and society to take control of and to live satisfying lives was alluded to (n=21). In a similar vein, many of the views were about the development of attitudes and values such as health and well-being (n=29), citizenship (n=10) and the potential of the subject to enhance quality of life (n=6). Some responses made reference to how the subject content adapted and changed with the times (n=7). However, a small number of responses (n=3) alluded to a lack of focus and as Interviewee 37 cited; the need to operate from ‘a shared collective vision of what the subject is.’

Figure 23 The role of home economics



In essence, the majority view was that home economics education addresses the development of knowledge and core skills relevant to ‘real life’. For example, Interviewee 32 argued that a core level of technical skill is essential:

Bright people who have skills in other academic areas would argue that you could pay somebody to do the things that home economics teaches you to do ... I think that’s their choice, but when it comes down to it, shouldn’t everybody have those core skills and the refinement of those should be your choice. Surely every individual should be capable of those.

However, while acknowledging the importance of developing a set of core technical skills, Interviewee 37 argued that some people define the mission of home economics

‘narrowly as lifeskills, whereas others would look at it more in line with the philosophy and look at how the philosophy influences how we practice.’ In a way, there is some merit in this view point as 43% of the responses (n=111) ‘narrowly’ defined the role of home economics as the development of skills such as: budgeting, shopping wisely, cookery skills, sewing skills, managing a household, resource management, problem solving for daily life, discernment and ‘thinking on your feet’, whereas a mere 8% of responses (n=21) indicated the use of ‘language of empowerment’. However, Interviewee 37 argued that relegation of the core technical skills would not serve home economics well as they are ‘terribly important’, but ‘by just focusing on the practical and technical side, it is really missing opportunities for the potential of home economics to really empower.’ She defined empowerment as ‘power that comes from within, it’s that inner power within me to understand and know that I as an individual can really make a difference.’ Similarly, Interviewee 31 held the view that:

The subject really lends itself towards empowering people to act towards being informed and reflective, participative citizens with the understanding that their choices and their actions can impact fundamentally on themselves or other individuals within their family, within their local community and within broader society.

Another example was cited by Interviewee 35 of how home economists can empower people ‘to critically analyse their situations and to cope with that.’ Similarly, Interviewee 37 argued that home economics education ‘really deals with the day to day practical perennial problems ...’ and for Interviewee 38, ‘it would be looking at the practical perennial problems of families and individuals in society ... overcoming these to live fully satisfying healthy lives.’ Three interviewees from the total sample explicitly addressed the tensions underlying home economics practice. As mentioned, Interviewee 37 identified the ‘lack of congruence between how we see ourselves and define ourselves and how we practice ...’ Similarly, Interviewee 32 in an attempt to explain the position of home economics in Ireland referred to varying practices of home economics education globally:

I perceive the northern Europeans to have intellectualised the subject to death. I think that they in an effort to underpin the subject with very necessary philosophy and don’t get me wrong, I am so an advocate for more good academic writing on the subject ... I actually feel that the domestic skills, the actual skill base of the subject has now been totally subjugated. They don’t want

to touch it ... because they know what it has done to the subject without taking cognisance of what it does for the subject.

Moreover, she argues that the Africans value the technical traditional skills that 'improve the quality of everyday living through very straight-forward means. They have a lack of resources ... I perceive us to be aligned with the Africans ... we are not that far removed from that stage of our lives.' She acknowledged that in the United States, that 'the heart of the subject has disappeared' as the subject is fragmented and in the UK, 'they've now seen the downside of disregarding all home-produced anything and diet and so on, I do think that it's coming full cycle there ...' Interviewee 36 identified the 'potential tension between a progressive fully developed rounded human being' vision and a 'choice theoretical framework which assumes humans to be quite narrowly self-interested.' The former was referred to as 'a quite progressive aspirational vision' and furthermore, he argued that the:

home economics vision essentially accepts most of the power structures ... as taken for granted and attempts to give the people the tools to navigate through that world. And so it is about being able to make rational choices for your own family or for the individual situation that you happen to find yourself in and so you make choices with the resources you have, but it never really asks is the type of resource distribution equitable or is it actually compatible with fully developed human beings.

The latter perspective aligns with Jerpbak's view (2005) that family education 'played into the political economy agenda' (p.10) and the implications are discussed in the following chapter in greater detail.

Many responses (n=44) explicitly referred to personal management, and the development of personal capabilities and cognisance of resources as a key role of home economics education. Self-sufficiency including survival skills, competence in looking after oneself and independent living skills were mentioned as being essential requisites for the creation of 'stable lives' and 'sustainable futures'. Interviewee 34, for example, argued that home economics is 'predicated on basic needs' and that it 'might be considered to be a very basic thing', but in his view, the 'basic needs of security of food, of clothing, of warmth, of health and belonging; all of those are crucial.' Moreover, he argued that home economics 'celebrates' these and 'makes them an important element of modern society and indeed modern education.' Similarly, Interviewee 21 argued that her students develop 'skills for independent living' and that

the subject is important because it ‘invokes the human basic needs of food, clothing, [and] shelter ...’ Her students, who are ‘Islanders’, all study home economics up until the end of Transition Year which is the first year of the senior cycle programme. Feedback she received from parents indicated that ‘it does the boys no harm’ and that they were able to look after themselves when they left school and went to college. Moreover, she referred to their potential to deal with personal life challenges and different situations: ‘I always find the students who come away having completed home economics they are very learned and well able to cope with different situations.’

Some of the interviewees (n=25) argued that home economics education plays a role in the development of key skills such as problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and creativity. Another prominent role discussed (n=29) was education for good health and well-being. Learning ‘how to live a healthy life’ was a value evident in the responses. The improvement in the quality of life (n=6) of individuals, families and households was considered to be a key tenet of home economics education and it is well acknowledged that a healthy diet and lifestyle essentially is a contributing factor to quality of life. The active involvement of home economics students in the preparation and cooking of food coupled with knowledge about healthy eating, nutrition and diet was a frequently cited example of how home economics can positively impact on family life. Moreover, Interviewee 22 argued that society has become more ‘food orientated’ and in her view:

if that is where society is going, I think we have a good chance; if we can get the kids in on healthy eating and educate them on the basics - I think we have an important role to play in curbing the trend that seems to be out there at the moment. I do think that school is one side, home is the other and if the two are going together, they have got a great chance.

Well-being education was considered to be a part of the mission of home economics, but it does not capture it in totality:

It doesn’t specifically relate to families and individuals, whereas the focus of home economics is the family ... Developing well-being to me sounds like more [geared] towards a healthy lifestyle which doesn’t necessarily encompass looking at all their resources and it doesn’t seem to indicate any focus on using resources and using knowledge to create a more fulfilling life within a society. (Interviewee 38)

Therefore, the encouragement of healthy lifestyles alongside the development of aptitudes in the selection and use of foods to improve one's diet arguably is an important aspect of home economics education. However, Interviewee 4 argues that students find it challenging to respond intuitively to food:

If they want to create a dish for a low fat type of diet they can do that at Junior Cert. level, but beyond that they find it difficult. I think if you ask them to create their own dish, give them a set of ingredients and to go for it, they wouldn't be able to do it whereas I think they should be able to make use of resources, if you have this amount of ingredients in the cupboard what could you make? They wouldn't be able to make a decision as to what to do with them. They can follow a recipe easily. That's what they are taught at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate level, even so they are not given the leeway.

Interviewee 36 was critical of the 'skills pressures' students often experience in a home economics context:

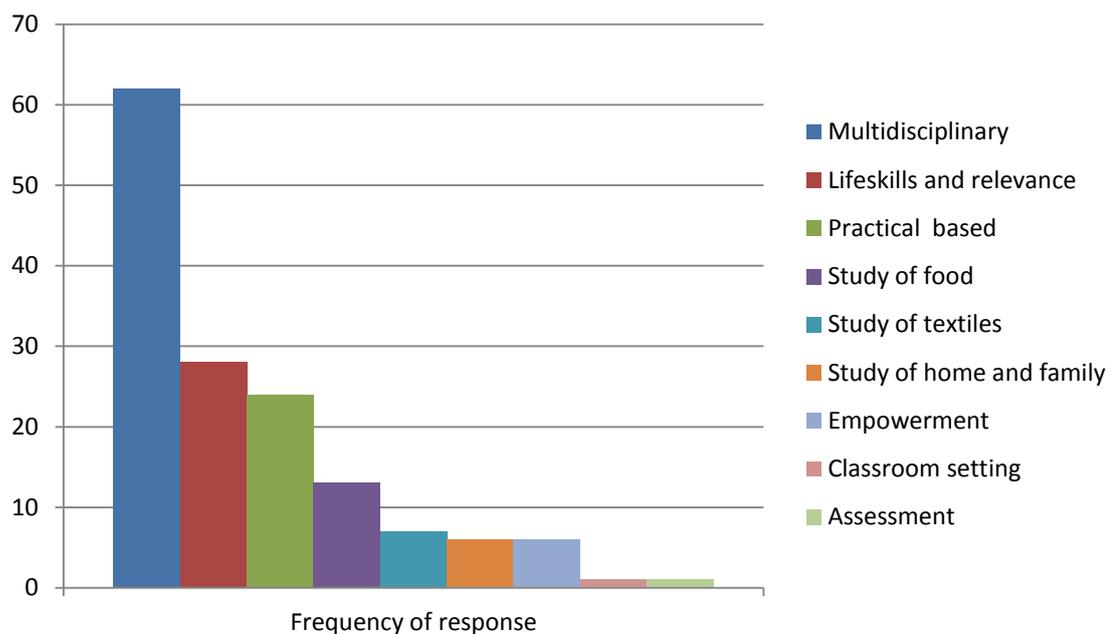
Some of those skills are very difficult to pick up ... I think the students often feel like they are on a sort of an assault course of skill after skill almost like they have to do this skill and get over this one and get on to the next one and I'm not always sure if they do pick up the underlying values of the subject.

Although the acquisition of values and attitudes such as healthy eating can be challenging in practice, Interviewee 29 argues that home economists often engage in 'setting those seeds for future life.'

Some of the responses (n=10) made reference to the potential of home economics to provide citizenship education and develop civic skills, an awareness of environmental issues and a sense of global responsibility in students. For example, Interviewee 6 spoke in terms of the contribution of home economics education to the development of 'individuals that are responsible, that they can clearly see their role within society, that they can clearly identify how they can impact on society and how they can impact on their family ...' Similarly, Interviewee 16 argued that the mission of home economics is 'to make a difference with individuals, family and the wider community.' However, a small amount (n=3) of comments were similar to Attar's viewpoint (1990) that there is no strong evidence that home economics is making a difference. For example, one interviewee argued that the technical aspect of home economics was often visible, but not the purpose of the subject. Some responses (n=7) indicated that home economics adapts and changes with the times.

The interviewees were invited to share their view on whether home economics is unique. 95% of the interviewees (n=40) held the view that home economics is unique and the others (n=2) stated that they were unsure if it is. For example, Interviewee 26 argued that the students do not make the connection between home economics at school and home. Figure 24 sets out reasons why home economics is considered to be different to other subjects. The uniqueness of home economics was attributed to the subject's multi-disciplinary nature (n=62), followed by the potential to develop lifeskills and the subject relevance (n=28), the practical nature of the subject (n=24), the study of food (n=13), textiles (n=7), home and family (n=6), the capacity for empowerment (n=6), the classroom setting of a kitchen (n=1) and the multiple assessments at junior cycle (n=1).

Figure 24 Why is home economics unique?



Many of the interviewees (n=62) argued that home economics is multidisciplinary as it touches on different subjects such as business, geography (environmental aspect), food science, history (housing development), social studies and textiles, but it was the focus, skill-set and context that 'makes it different' (Interviewee 22). The multi-faceted nature of home economics was viewed as a key strength of the subject as the many disciplines provide different 'lenses' for looking at situations. For example, Interviewee 19 argued that in home economics, knowledge from all the different disciplines are used collectively in decision making processes. Similarly Interviewee 28 posited that 'we can

blend them in a different way. That is what is unique about home economics.’ Moreover, Interviewee 20 stated that home economics is not a ‘flat package’ which suggests it is quite bespoke and varied. Interviewee 21 argued that ‘there are so many aspects in life that they are going to deal with later on ... whether it be the resource management- looking after their own homes and families and the responsibilities in communities to being discerning consumers making wise choices ...’ Similarly Interviewee 34 posited that home economics ‘has got its tentacles into so many aspects of real life situations’ and the students (Focus Group 2) considered that the subject content of home economics is ‘likeable’ and that it offers a lot of variety ‘which is good’ and that the range of areas adds interest. Another group of students (Focus Group 4) described it as ‘a piece of every subject in the one subject’:

Teaches you about what foods are good.

There are business aspects like budgeting. You learn about society as well and family roles.

It is important because you will have your own family one day.

You learn about how society changed from 1900s to now, it is interesting to learn about that.

However, some of the multidisciplinary responses (n=4) indicated that the breadth of the subject is a liability as the focus is lost. Being ‘a Jack of all trades and a master of none’ was mentioned both as an advantage (n=1) and a disadvantage (n=2). Interviewee 21 argued that ‘you can take your hand to just about anything’, whereas the latter viewpoint referred to the issue of breadth coupled with time constrains putting pressure on teachers to cover a curriculum and the focus can be lost. Moreover, Interviewee 32 argued that ‘that we are a jack of all trades, we are actually good at a lot of things, but we are not perceived as expert in any one of them and to become that, you have to specialise ...’ However some responses (n=6) clearly identified the home and family as unique to home economics. Interviewee 6, for example, argues that:

our key focus is on the individual and the family. If we look at society, all societies are formed on the basis of families and that we want individuals and families to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. We want them to contribute to making society a better place for everybody. It starts at home and I think home economics has a really unique opportunity to impart that knowledge and those skills to students as opposed to any other subject ... I think home economics has an added advantage. We are focusing on the individual; we are focusing on

families and the ultimate goal that families will be able to recognise the impact they can have on society for the greater good of everybody.

Others identified the areas of food (n=13) and textiles (n=7) as unique. For example, Interviewee 28 argued that:

if we are going to claim we are unique, we better be clear on what is making us unique and we better make sure we manipulate that to its maximum capacity. We better not feel ashamed to say its food that makes us more unique. It is working with food that makes us better and different than science in terms of doing nutrition because we have the opportunity to work with practical food and to blend both that makes us unique.

She continued by pointing out that we ‘somehow shy away’ from taking ownership of the area of food. This viewpoint is substantiated by Interviewee 32 who argues that it may be due to the ‘perception that domestic work doesn’t require a high intellectual ability ...’ Similarly, Interviewee 34 explained that the fulfilment of basic needs ‘might be considered to be a very basic thing’, but that the elements of survival; security, food, clothing, warmth are ‘crucial’. The area of textiles was considered to be ‘invaluable’ for the development of creative potential as well as keeping traditional crafts alive: ‘maintaining traditional skills which have been lost in the world that we are living in ...’ (Interviewee 21).

The view was shared (n=24) that the practical work associated with the subject was another main factor contributing to the subject uniqueness because it focuses largely on the development of life-skills (n=28) that are relevant and easily contextualised. The subject relevance was another important aspect of home economics that was considered to contribute to its popularity and uniqueness. For example, the students (Focus Group 4) held the view that:

you can relate to the stuff in it. You learn about food and you eat food, so you relate to that. You may prepare a budget at home, you learn about that. And society, we live in society.

Some of the boys (Focus Group 4) confessed to choosing home economics because they thought it would be all about cooking: ‘I wanted to get into cooking more.’ Others (Focus Group 2) shared the view that in home economics:

you get a break, it’s a change and more working with your hands and not just writing everything down. You actually do what you learn about. You don’t do that in other subjects.

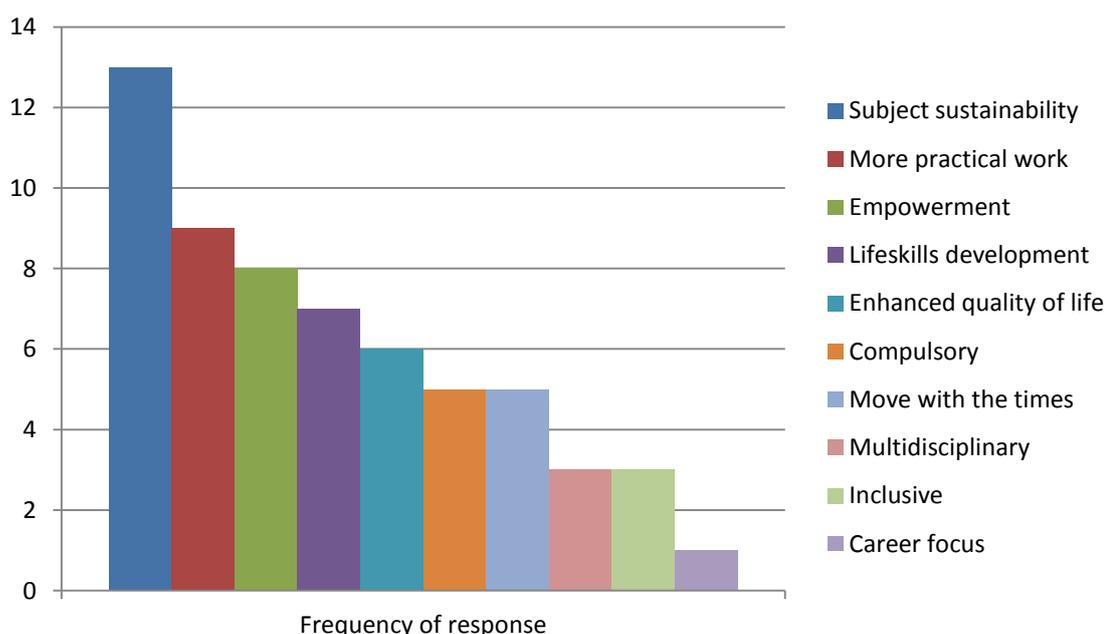
From other subjects, yah, it is just different. In other subjects you are writing all the time. In this subject you have a bit of writing, everything, hands on physical stuff.

Most subjects are just learning, whereas you get to do both in this.

There were some views (n=6) that home economics can effectively empower people ‘as the education is predicated on the development of the person and maximising their potential for happy and effective living’ (Interviewee 32). The classroom setting of a kitchen (n=1) and the multiple assessment arrangements at junior cycle (n=1) were other reasons offered for the subject’s uniqueness.

The interviewees in this study shared some views (n=60) about their vision for home economics into the future. Figure 25 indicates the number and frequency of responses referring to the collective vision.

Figure 25 A vision for home economics



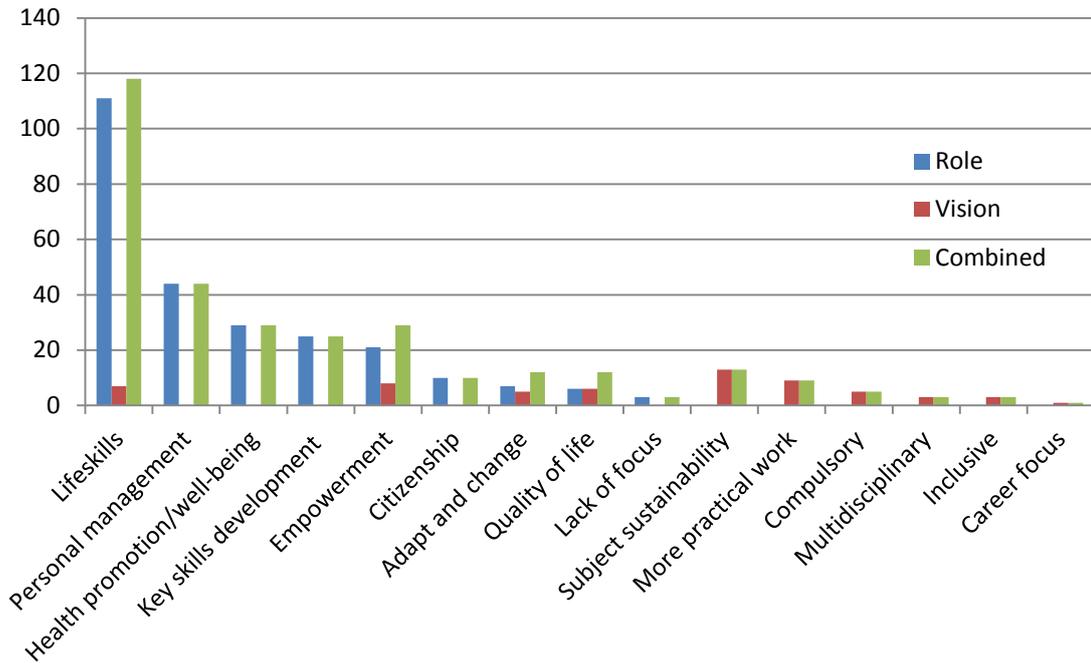
The main concern (n=13) was the existence of the subject in the curriculum. Interviewee 38 claimed there is a ‘battle ahead’ especially in light of junior cycle reform. Interestingly, this study shows that the subject’s public image and professional identity were key concerns for home economics practitioners and these categories are presented later in this chapter. Many of the interviewees wished for people to see the intrinsic value of the subject. Interviewee 28 argued that she wanted the subject to have more of an ‘identity’ alongside other subjects and that it would ‘be seen as a subject that

will contribute to the overall development of young people ... I think ... it is really about claiming the bits that are really about us and giving them better prominence ...' One interviewee mentioned that she wished for home economics to be recognised as a 'science' subject in the 'points system' and Universities.

There were other views such as the inclusion of more practical work (n=9), the empowerment (n=8) of individuals and the development of communities of self-reliant confident beings. Interviewee 19 expressed the view that home economists could play a more active role in advising Government on policy development and Interviewee 38 wished that home economics would be move beyond focusing on the 'technical know-how'. However, a life-skill focus was considered important by many (n=7). Some mentioned that they hoped home economics would continue to enhance quality of life (n=6), be compulsory to Junior Certificate level (n=5) and that the subject should continue to move with the times (n=5). Others confirmed aspects of home economics such as its multidisciplinary nature (n=3), that it would be inclusive to boys and girls (n=3) and that more careers would be linked to home economics (n=1).

Figure 26 collates the data about the subject role (Figure 23) and vision (Figure 25) categories as articulated by the interviewees. The role categories indicate what the interviewees believe the subject accomplishes and the vision categories identify what the interviewees would like the subject to accomplish. Contrasting both the mission and vision responses enabled the development of a better understanding of where the subject is positioned as well as identifying desired goals. Collating the data provided insight into the most prominent accomplishments and they include: the development of lifeskills, personal management, health promotion and well-being, empowerment and key skills development.

Figure 26 Role and vision compared



Overall this second column highlighted the role of home economics according to the interviewees in this study. My suggested substantive interpretation or theme for the types of responses in this part of the matrix is as follows:

Home economics practitioners believe that the role of home economics is to develop life-skills, and personal resources and capacities, for the betterment of everyday life of individuals, families and society.

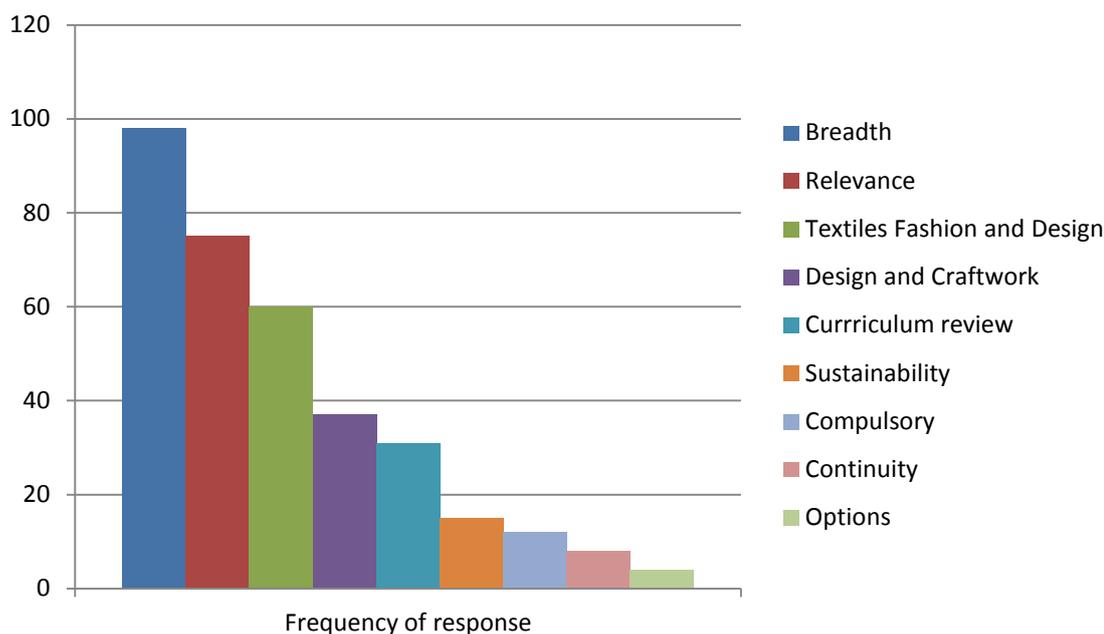
Curriculum

The third column of the matrix provided the next most commented upon set of issues and they were about the curriculum. Three types of issues were identified and tagged as follows:

Breadth (B)	B
Continuity (C)	C
Relevance (Rel)	Rel

The responses about curriculum issues are illustrated in Figure 27.

Figure 27 Comments about curriculum issues



The most prominent issue discussed was the breadth of senior cycle home economics (n=98). This was followed by the subject relevance (n=75). Many of these comments focused both on aspects of relevance (n=39) and irrelevance (n=36). The next most prominent curriculum issue discussed was the appropriateness of the Textiles, Fashion and Design area (n=60). This was followed by an analysis of the Design and Craftwork component (n=37). All of the prominent curriculum responses were about the appropriateness of the curriculum, therefore, a curriculum review was considered timely (n=31). Subject sustainability was discussed especially in light of junior cycle reform (n=15), whilst some views were about the need to make home economics education compulsory to Junior Certificate (n=12). Some responses (n=8) raised other curriculum issues such as the lack of continuity between junior and senior cycle home economics and finally offering students choice in the optional area at junior cycle was considered to be effective (n=4).

The majority of curriculum responses (n=98) referred to the breadth of the subject and intensiveness of the programme of study at senior cycle especially. Curriculum coverage and the preparation of students for examinations were the key pressures experienced by the interviewees who spoke about time constraints hindering the achievement of deep-level learning and feeling ‘snowed under’ (Interviewee 1) with

work. For example, Interviewee 8 argued that ‘we are focusing on all this content that is so important for an exam that lasts for two and a half hours and then after that they can walk out of the exam hall and forget it and never need much of that information again.’ The senior cycle programme in particular was frequently described as ‘intensive’, ‘content heavy’, ‘off-putting’ and ‘overwhelming’. The students (Focus Group 3) argued that there was:

so much detail, so much facts ... a bit too much facts to remember compared to Junior Cert. There are a lot of percentages as well; you wouldn’t be able to remember all of the percentages.

Similarly the second senior cycle group of students (Focus Group 4) held the view that the course is ‘too broad’ with ‘too much theory’.

Interviewee 28 argued that the subject was weakened as a result and that many of the topics are just given a ‘cursory going over’. The multi-dimensional aspect of home economics was considered by some to be a factor contributing to the breadth of the course and a review and ‘pairing-back’ was recommended by the majority of interviewees. Many specifically called for a curriculum review. There were a lot of viewpoints on how the curriculum could be revamped (n=31) and many of the ‘relevance’ comments specifically pointed to areas that could be retained (n=39) as well as dropped (n=36). Many indicated that food, diet and health are essential elements of home economics education. However, there were diverging views on the relevance of aspects of home economics such as resource management, consumer studies, microbiology and food chemistry. For example, Interviewee 17 argued:

The resource management, they are holding onto it, but I think it is irrelevant for today’s society. Maybe the whole kind of key skills and decision making, yes, but the whole resources, the equipment and the technology, I think the students have absolutely no interest in that. Their eyes glaze over.

Some of the interviewees admitted to being selective about what they taught. For example, Interviewee 20 confessed that ‘there is so much on the course that is left out in my book ... when you get around to the Family Resource Management section, it is very hard to keep the students with you.’ Interviewee 21 argued that the area of microbiology ‘clearly turns them off ...’ Many lamented the loss of physiology from the course. For example, Interviewee 32 explained how recent curriculum reform involved the

rebalancing of syllabi and the reduction of curriculum overlap. This resulted in the loss of physiology from the home economics syllabus. She argued that:

when you look at food you have to look at digestion ... I think there needs to be a change of approach really ... we are taking a lens and using that lens and the focus is completely different, and consequently, it is not an overlap.

However, she was 'not afraid to lose bits' or 'gain bits either because at the heart of it ... the subject should always be in flux and oriented around what's necessary for people to make best use of their resources.' Similarly, Interviewee 28 posited that the consumer aspect could be let go as it is covered in other subjects in the curriculum such as business and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). In her view:

It is about not throwing everything out, but having a very strong core of visibility that isn't seen as that's done elsewhere ... We do some stuff like relationship education, but that would be another area that I feel the subject does need to review in terms of how realistic- you know the sociology part, to what extent are we doing that well or well enough? To what extent does our core degree equip us to do that well? What bits of that are in SPHE?

She spoke about the 'dilemma' faced by home economists having 'to let go of certain things', but struggling to do so as they are considered to be 'precious to home economics'. She argued that at one time, home economics was the only subject teaching about family relationships and different types of family, but wondered 'where does that rest best now and to what extent can we do it well?'

The problem appears to be that the curriculum has not changed significantly over the years. For example, Interviewee 27 argued that:

the emphasis on the home is gone, that we all don't sit down to dinners everyday and our lifestyle is very different and society has changed. I don't think the curriculum has changed and that is why it is overloaded.

She cited an example of how home economists are still asking students to make pastries when most of the television shows nowadays incorporate convenience with fresh produce: 'There is no reason why you should make it and we are still teaching it ...' In a similar vein, Interviewee 28 alluded to the latest trends and upsurge of cookery programmes on television. In her view, home economics 'could really explore the cookery side' and 'maximise that more because that is our strength'. She argued that connections could be established to the world of fashion, 'but we really need something

more relevant with modern society to bite and make them really see this is a modern subject.' Interviewee 34 summed up the curriculum issues as follows:

So the challenge for home economics is what disciplines it will bring together again and marry together again as it progresses in the 21st century ... I think there might well be some bit of shedding of baggage from domestic science that needs to probably be done in some way or other and how that can be done ...

The view was reasonably held (n=55) that the area of textiles has 'faded away' (Interviewee 3) and it was reported that many students are not taught practical textile studies today. Only five interviewees spoke in favour of the area of textiles. At senior cycle, the Textiles, Fashion and Design option was considered to be unpopular due to the lack of teacher expertise and resources as well as coursework tasks that are considered to be irrelevant to students and time consuming to complete for the marks awarded. Interviewee 27 argued that:

the whole idea of making clothes is hugely negative economy with regards to getting things for making a shirt or shorts that they can easily go buy. I just think we are spending an awful lot of time on basics which have changed.

Similarly Interviewee 37 questioned the relevance of 'garment making' in 'this day and age'. Many of the interviewees' comments showed support for a review of the optional areas at senior cycle especially, and for substituting a Design and Craftwork option for Textiles, Fashion and Design (n=33). Some interviewees (n=4) were not in favour of a Design and Craftwork option at senior cycle, but the majority of interviewees seemed to have an interest and enthusiasm for such an option. As Interviewee 37 put it:

I would love to see a design and craftwork option at senior cycle. It would be a great idea and I would love to see it ... I think the notion of craftwork, it can develop some of those key skills ... It gives diversity there in terms of students' approach and what they choose to do. It would be more meaningful and I think it would be fantastic for the area of the subject. I think it would bring it alive because it has done that at Junior Certificate level.

Many considered that a Design and Craftwork option would enable continuity between the junior and senior cycle programmes. It would enable the development of skills of entrepreneurship, design and creativity in students as well as maintaining traditional crafts in Ireland. Interviewee 21, for example, argued that craftwork is very important on the island where she teaches and this type of education could stimulate employment in the area. Many felt the standard at Junior Certificate level is very high and that

bringing this further would result in products that could potentially be at commercial standard. Interviewee 24 who teaches in an all-boys school commented that Design and Craftwork classes are enjoyable social occasions and that crafts are selected that are appropriate for boys:

At the junior level, they are lulled into design and craftwork ... it is a very social occasion for them ... I think it is lovely for them that they don't realise that they have these skills ... We do crafts that are suited to them and they might enjoy. They do embroidery, they do appliqué, tapestry and cross stitch ... we let them design things themselves and we would have motorbike elements and we have cartoon characters, but they don't seem to think about it beyond that so there is no issue really.

There was some reference (n=2) to linking this type of option with interior design studies and incorporating craft work into the Textiles, Fashion and Design option, however, the focus on 'dress making' would have to change and more time would be needed to develop all of the skills.

Subject sustainability in the curriculum was a concern especially in light of junior cycle reform. Many (n=15) were fearful about the future of the subject. As Interviewee 29 put it, the subject may 'drop off the radar' and in contrast, Interviewee 30 argued that 'home economics will adjust to the new junior cycle reform well as it already engages in a lot of project work'. Many interviewees (n=12) argued that home economics ought to be a compulsory subject in junior cycle.

A number of curriculum responses (n=8) referred to the 'the big jump' from junior cycle to senior cycle home economics. For example, the junior cycle programme is considered to be more practical based, whereas the senior cycle programme is more academic. Interviewee 5 explained that her fifth year students were complaining about the difference in the programmes:

"We didn't know it was this hard" ... because they have this perception that they would get on better just like in Junior Certificate.

Some interviewees (n=4) spoke in favour of offering the students more options as that would give them the autonomy to select areas of study based on personal preference and potentially lead to more satisfactory outcomes. For example, some spoke in favour of the optional study area at junior cycle as it offered 'more choice' to students (Interviewee 38).

Looking at the collection of comments relating to curriculum (in turquoise blue), the common theme appears to be concerns relating to curriculum breadth, especially at senior cycle, but occasionally affirmations of the design of the curriculum. My suggestion for the evidence-based substantive interpretation is therefore:

Home economics practitioners believe that the breadth of the home economics curriculum promotes a focus primarily on coverage of the curriculum to suit the examination and impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.

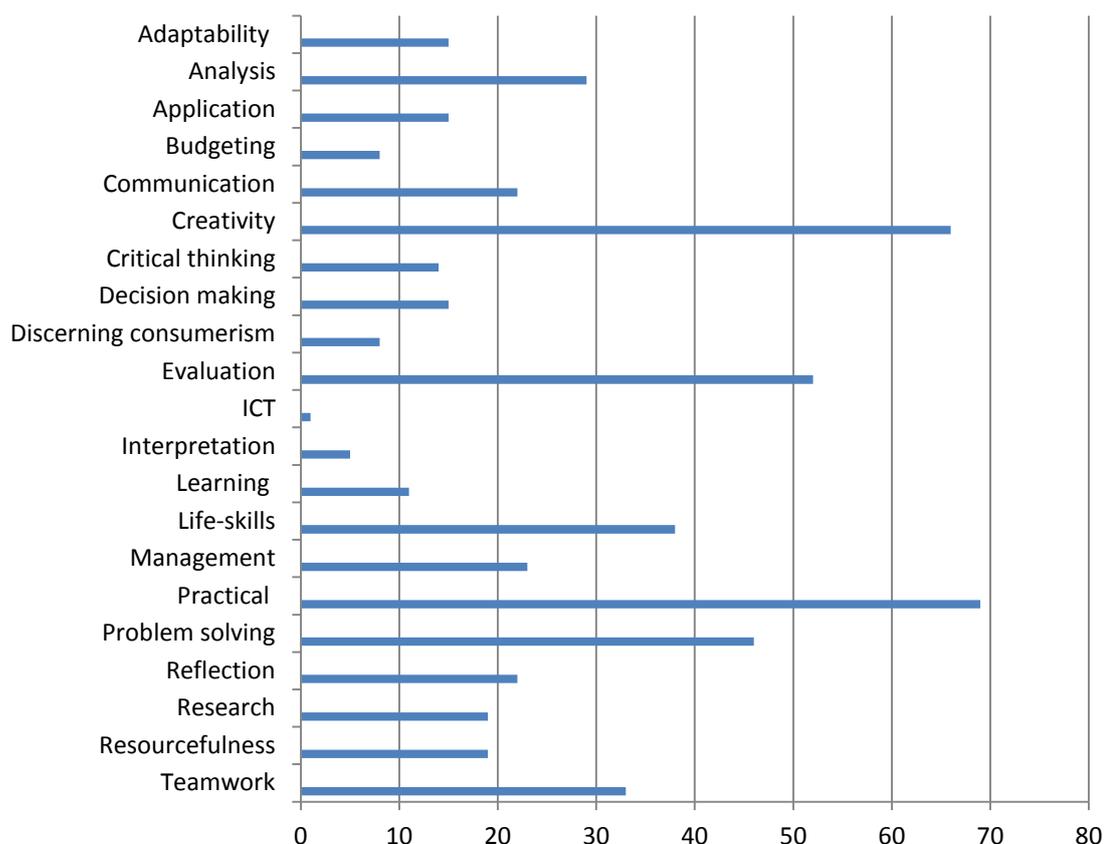
Skills

The fourth column in the matrix relates to a range of skills that home economics education espouses to develop. There was some discussion about the level of skill students develop in different curriculum areas as well as competences acquired through home economics education. Three issues were identified: skill-set, skill level and competences:

Skill-set (SS)	SS
Skill level (SL)	SL
Competences (C)	C

Figure 28 sets out the number of comments per skill type.

Figure 28 Skill-set associated with home economics education



Interviewees mostly spoke about the development of practical skills (n=69) such as culinary skills (n=20), textile and craftwork skills (n=13), procedural and technical skills (n=9), manipulative skills, manual dexterity, fine-motor skills such as hand-eye coordination and multi-sensory skills (n=9), following instructions (n=5) and others such as the use of tools to weigh and measure, planning a meal, shopping, organisation, safety and hygiene and thinking on your feet (n=13).

The development of creativity (n=66) featured prominently in the discussions. There was consensus that the areas of food, textiles, design and craftwork have the potential to develop creativity and that a certain level was evident. However, many responses indicated that the students were not good at developing new solutions. For example, Interviewee 4 argued that students do not develop an ‘intuitive response’ to food and oftentimes, students are spoon-fed by teachers in the process and choice is restricted by teachers. Interviewee 12 exemplifies this by confessing that ‘very often the teacher would just pick’ what the students do and the level of originality involved is thereby

reduced. Interviewee 8 reasoned that the summative assessments do not ‘demand’ students to display these skills and ‘that is probably reflected in practice.’ Moreover, Interviewee 38 argued that:

the design of the briefs is very important in both food studies and textiles ... I think the design of those is crucial to the development of creativity, creative thinking and critical analysis. Also, I would think that the methodologies that teachers use are critical for the development of those.

Similarly, Interviewee 37 argued that the level of creativity was dependent on whether the teacher had a ‘natural flair’ for it and ‘belief in it’.

Evaluation was the third most prominent skill discussed (n=52). Some responses indicated that students’ evaluations can be ‘simplistic’, ‘very minimal’ (Interviewee 7) and ‘superficial’ (Interviewee 32). Much of the work is ‘product’ focused as opposed to having a ‘dual focus’ (Interviewee 32) on ‘product’ and ‘process’. Interviewee 25 aptly described the problem:

People, dare I say, put the cart before the horse and they produce a product and then say well let’s go back and follow the design brief. That is the reality and I suppose that is teacher led.

In a similar vein, Interviewee 34 explained that ‘evaluation and reflection is left very much to the end of the class ... and therefore it kind of is almost sometimes going through the motions of it ...’ It was argued that spoon-feeding the students hindered the development of any self-generated evaluation.

Problem solving was the fourth most commonly mentioned skill (n=46) and it was discussed in terms of the approach used and relevance to real life. As Interviewee 34 put it, problem solving ‘has been a crucial aspect or part of what we do ... the development of a logical approach to dealing with problems and to solving problems is clearly evident ...’ Similarly, Interviewee 35 argued that ‘there will always be problems, practical problems that will come up year in and year out and you can’t teach them how to cope with all of them, but you can teach the skills of coping and solving them.’ However, some responses indicated that there is room for improvement:

They do not develop problem solving skills to the extent that they should. There is loads of scope there ... (Interviewee 5)

There are so many opportunities for students to really develop very real problem solving skills. It can be done so easily in food studies, textiles and so on by asking the appropriate question ... and framing the appropriate question for students ... (Interviewee 37)

Many interviewees were of the view that analysis (n=29) and decision making (n=15) skills are developed through engagement in the problem solving process, design briefs and coursework tasks. Interviewee 32 argued that oftentimes students engage in analysis, but there is potential for more especially at senior cycle. Research and independent learning skills (n=19) involving analysis were deemed to be a part of the home economics classroom.

Another prominent issue was lifeskills development (n=38) and the application of knowledge and skills (n=15) to the 'real lives' of students. For example, the students admitted to cooking for themselves when their parents were out working (Focus Group 1) and one boy (Focus Group 4) shared how useful the knowledge will be for him in the future:

I am moving out on my own next year and I know how to cook my food. I don't have to have the mother making me meals anymore.

Students learn how to be adaptable (n=15) in different situations such as dealing with the 'challenges that life throws at us' and 'what they learn isn't just useful in situation A, but it can be used with other information and adjusted to be useful in other situations' (Interviewee 8). The students are in a sense practising how to respond to certain situations: 'They learn knowledge, a lot of theory, but they are able to apply it if they are given opportunities' (Interviewee 4). Moreover, practical classes involve students working in groups and for this reason, the subject was considered to develop a range of other skills such as teamwork (n=33), management (n=23) and communication (n=22). There was agreement that some reflection (n=22) and critical thinking (n=14) occur, but the complexity of developing such skills was acknowledged and aptly described by Interviewee 37:

To be able to reflect on something, they need to be able to describe it first ... There are stages here ... Getting them to describe accurately a situation either whether they create it or imagine it ... and then reflect on that. Maybe teachers can actually help students to develop reflective skills at quite a high level by framing careful questions I think that directs the reflection ... How questions are framed can really make a difference to the degree and level of reflection the students can engage with.

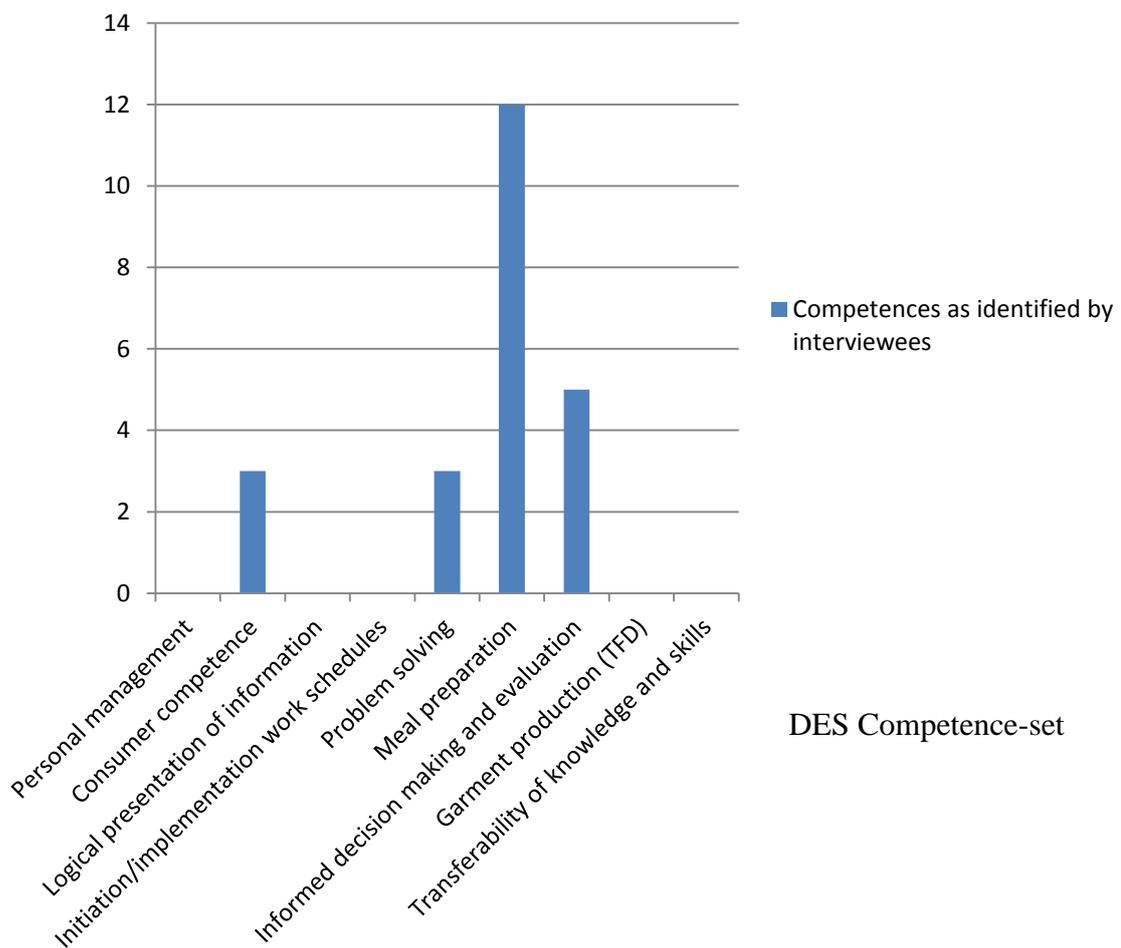
The view was also shared that resourcefulness was naturally taught within practical food, textiles and family resource management classes (n=19). Students would be frequently encouraged 'not to waste anything' (Interviewee 2) and to use resources wisely. Moreover, the interviewees reported that home economics education develops other skills such as budgeting (n=8), discerning consumerism (n=8), interpretation of information (n=5), learning (n=11) and information and communications technology (ICT) (n=1).

There were many views (n=50) about the skill level attained by students overall and they ranged from moderate to good (n=14) to low (n=36). Students were considered to demonstrate a very good level of skill in the food area on average (n=6), although extremes were reported where it is evident that many students practise at home and others for a variety of reasons do not (n=2). As mentioned earlier, Interviewee 4 argued that home economics education does not support the development of an intuitive response to food ingredients and creativity in the food design process. Some interviewees (n=2) reported that the skill level attained in textiles can be low as little time is invested in the development of practical textile skills. Interviewee 32 held the view that skills of creation and evaluation are superficially developed. This view is evident in many of the responses (n=18). However, others argued that evaluation (n=4) and creativity (n=2) are well developed. It was reported that there is scope to improve the level of reflection (n=6), analysis (n=5), independent learning (n=1) and problem solving (n=1). In contrast some interviewees (n=2) argued that students are 'strong' at problem solving (Interviewee 16). This set of results clearly shows that the majority of comments indicate the potential to improve the capacity of students to create and evaluate.

The junior cycle syllabus (DES 1991) identifies personal management and consumer competence as key concepts in junior cycle home economics. At senior cycle (DES 2001) seven competences are identified and they include: logical presentation of information, initiation and implementation of work schedules, problem solving, meal preparation, informed decision making and evaluation, garment production (TFD) and the transferability of knowledge and skills. The interviewees did not discuss the aspect of competence development in depth and some interviewees (n=3) sought clarification about the meaning of the term. The views that were shared (n=35) referred to the

development of a variety of key competences such as: practical work (n=12), lifeskills development (n=7), decision making (n=4), resource management (n=3), problem solving (n=3), consumer competence (n=3), spatial awareness (n=1), self-evaluation (n=1) and creativity (n=1). Figure 29 illustrates the competence-set as identified by the interviewees and the DES (DES 1991, DES 2001). There is some alignment, but many of the interviewees' responses (for example, lifeskills development, resource management, creativity and spatial awareness) arguably could be viewed as skills and values. The interviewees identified the development of practical skills in the food area as a competence that is well developed in home economics education.

Figure 29 Key competences as identified by the DES and interviewees



Overall this fourth column highlighted the range of skills and competences that the interviewees consider home economics education to develop. My suggested substantive

interpretation or theme for the types of responses and concerns in this part of the matrix is as follows:

Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education and its pedagogy endeavours to develop an extensive range of skills in learners.

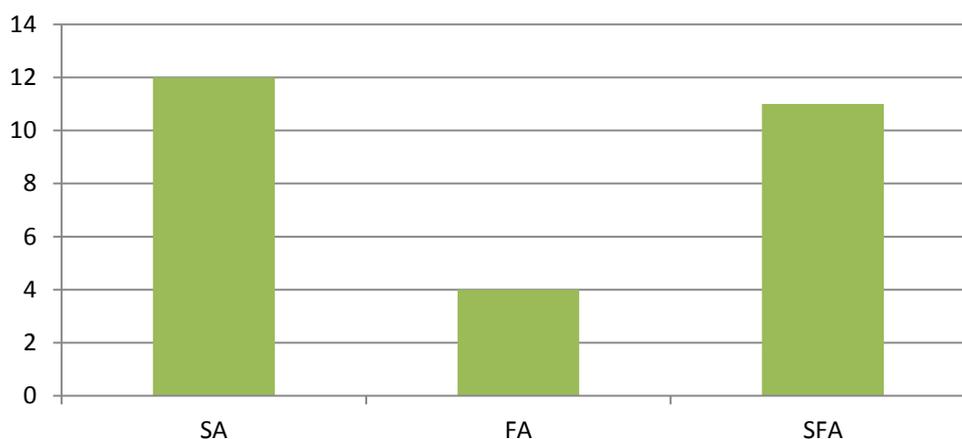
Assessment

The fifth column in the matrix was the green column and this referred to assessment issues. Assessment approaches commonly used in home economics were identifiable in the responses. The tags arising from studying the assessment column covered the following topics:

Summative assessment (SA)	
Formative assessment (FA)	
Summative and formative assessment (SFA)	
Assessment views (AV)	

As Figure 30 illustrates, classroom assessment practice in a home economics context is varied. A slight majority of the teachers interviewed indicated the use of a summative assessment approach (n=12), many (n=11) use elements of both summative and formative assessment and some use a formative assessment approach in practice (n=4).

Figure 30 Classroom assessment practice in home economics



Those teachers that indicated the use of both a summative and formative approach were amenable to a formative assessment approach that complements the summative

assessment. However, many of these teachers described their use of formative assessment in terms of the use of a toolkit of assessment strategies that can be used to enhance learning. In total, four interviewees (including three teachers and one initial teacher education provider) were vague about what formative assessment entails. Interviewee 33, for example, stated: ‘AfL- I wouldn’t know the names of all of them to be honest ... I don’t know why that is being driven, I think it is more so policy change ...’ A home economist working as a school manager commented that teachers may not understand how to use it and that the practice is ‘hit and miss’ (Interviewee 29). She questioned whether:

you are fundamentally going to alter the style of teaching and assessment of a teacher who has been at it for 30 or 35 years ... It would be used for a while and then it is as if they fall off the wagon and a normal service is resumed.

Similarly, Interviewee 37 argued that practice is ‘very examination driven’ at present and that ‘teachers don’t have much autonomy within this’. However, she posits that this calls upon teachers: ‘to really reflect very seriously on some of this ... because again it goes back to the beliefs of what education is and what is important in assessment as well as everything else.’ Interestingly, Interviewee 8 referred to the Inspectorate’s requirement that they should address formative assessment practice as a reason for adopting this type of practice:

I think the fact that the Inspectorate is looking for it, whether teachers actually want to do it or not is no longer an issue that they have to do it. I suppose that would encourage a change in practice, the fact that we are being instructed to do it from high.

The four teachers who use formative assessment in practice appeared to consistently implement the approach and they spoke about adjusting teaching methods to meet student needs. The approach was considered to be effective and Interviewee 25 who is steering a junior cycle AfL project in her school stated that the feedback from parents and students has been positive. However, she argued that ‘even those who would have been very sceptical or those who wouldn’t have engaged in it are now seeing how it works.’ She alleged that the practice of ‘where you read from the book ... that day is gone.’

Many of the interviewees commented on their own school assessment arrangements and their influence. For example, Interviewee 3 argued that assessment is a ‘stimulus’ that

keeps the ‘momentum up’. One student (Focus Group 4) confirmed this view saying he liked the examinations: ‘I write everything down and it sticks in my head.’ However, other students (Focus Group 1) viewed examinations as stressful and ‘scary’. Teaching to the test was reported (n=29) as a prominent feature of home economics classrooms that is desired and driven by students, parents and school managers who equate success with ‘exam success’ (Interviewee 32). The teachers’ school assessment policies and assessment practices generally mirrored State summative assessment practices (n=20). Only seven of the teachers interviewed reported that their schools promoted a formative assessment approach. Importantly the view was shared (n=8) that home economics assessment arrangements are not supporting the development of the subject aims and dimensions.

Looking at the collection of comments in green, the common theme appears to be concerned with summative assessment practices and meeting the demands of the examinations primarily over the achievement of subject mission aims and quality learning. Therefore, a substantive interpretation of the theme for this column is as follows:

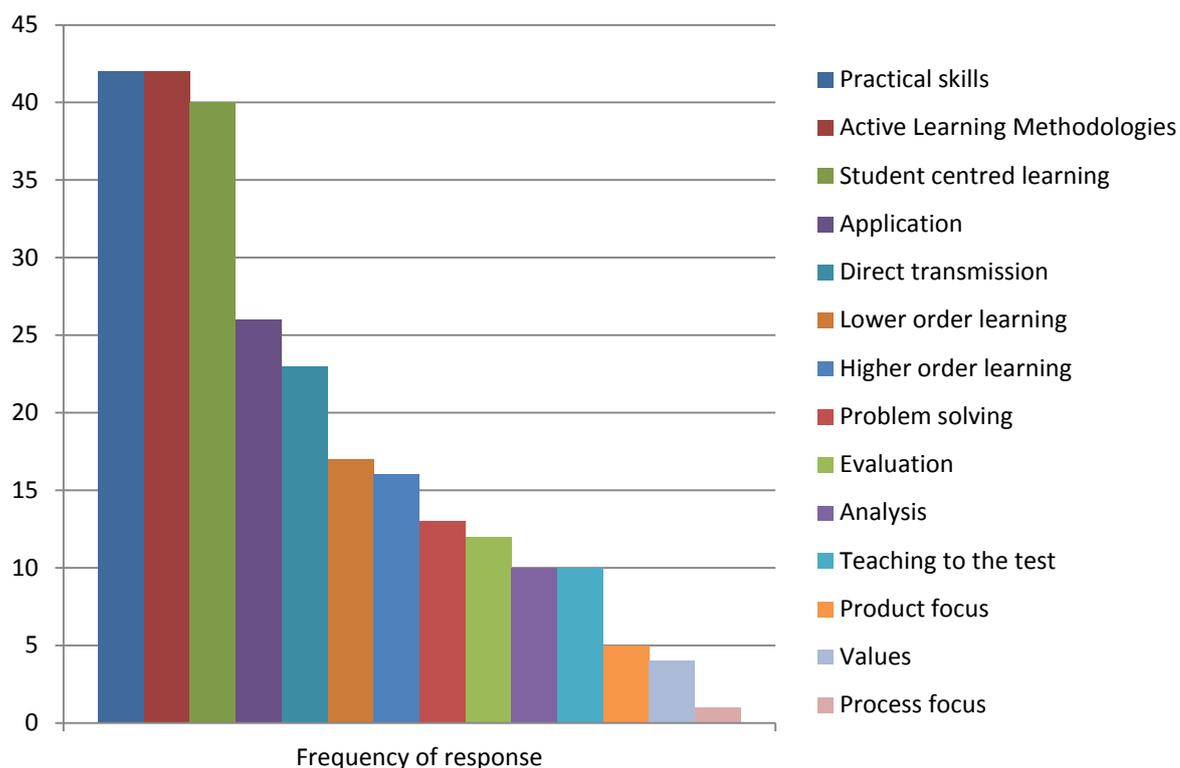
Home economics practitioners believe that the existing subject assessment design focusing primarily on a summative examination falls short of addressing the aims and mission of the subject.

Pedagogy and learning

The sixth column in the matrix contained comments referring to pedagogy and learning in home economics classrooms (see Figure 31). The tags arising from studying the pedagogy and learning column covered the following topics:

Practical and cognitive skills (PCS)	
High quality learning (HQL)	
Lower order learning (LOL)	

Figure 31 Pedagogy and learning in home economics



When questioned about pedagogy and learning, the interviewees frequently spoke about the development of practical (n=42) and cognitive skills such as application (n=26), analysis (n=10), evaluation (n=12) as well as problem solving (n=13). Many of the comments referred to the range and effectiveness of active learning methodologies used (n=42) and student-centred learning practices (n=40) that were closely connected with the subject mission. These methods were associated with the development of higher order learning. For example, Interviewee 22 argued ‘that if you read it just from the book, it is going to be very dull and boring, whereas if you get them to do an exercise and to deduce the things themselves, they have a much better chance of remembering it.’ Similarly, Interviewee 24 expressed a commonly held view that learning is effective when contextualised and related to life: ‘I think home economics is a subject that goes beyond the book. The day of picking up the textbook and reading it is *passé* now anyway ...’ Interviewee 25 confessed to moving on from ‘traditional textbook reading’, but attributed this shift in focus to her engagement in AfL and junior cycle key skills research in her own school context. Some interviewees spoke about placing emphasis

on the process of learning (n=1) and the development of values (n=4). Interviewee 34 saw ‘the student as a central part’ of a modern home economics classroom:

The fact that it is a practical subject that it takes students out of their seats to do something in groups ... it allows the teachers to work with them as part of the team ... in an unobtrusive way, but in a very supportive and sensitive contextually organised learning environment and it is very impressive the way that they pull back and they move towards the students and they encourage and develop ... it is living out as well in practice the values that the subject espouses.

However, this view may be considered the ideal rather than the norm as the quality of learning was viewed as being both high (n=16) and low (n=17) depending on the school context, the teacher’s ‘passion’, the ability of the student and the programme of study in question. Interviewee 7 offered a reason why learning can sometimes be lower order: ‘we spoon feed them and if they are not giving us what we want to hear, we tell them what we want to hear.’ Furthermore, the Junior Certificate programme was viewed more favourably than the Leaving Certificate programme and this was mostly attributed to the satisfactory low-stake assessment arrangements at junior level.

In contrast, it was felt that the high-stakes attached to the Leaving Certificate contributed to the practice of teaching to the test (n=10), direct transmission practices (n=23) and a ‘product’ focus (n=5). Moreover, the view was held that the theoretical aspect of the subject lends itself to more traditional ‘direct-transmission’ practices and subsequently lower order learning. The substantive interpretation I would make from these views, therefore, is as follows:

Home economics practitioners believe that practical, active learning in home economics classes enables the development of skills and the achievement of meaningful learning, but direct transmission methods are also used to meet the demands of the examinations.

Professional identity

Professional identity issues were collated in the seventh column. The tags arising from studying the professional identity column covered the following topics:

Professional Identity (PI)



Problems (P)



Implications (I)

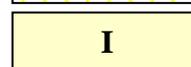
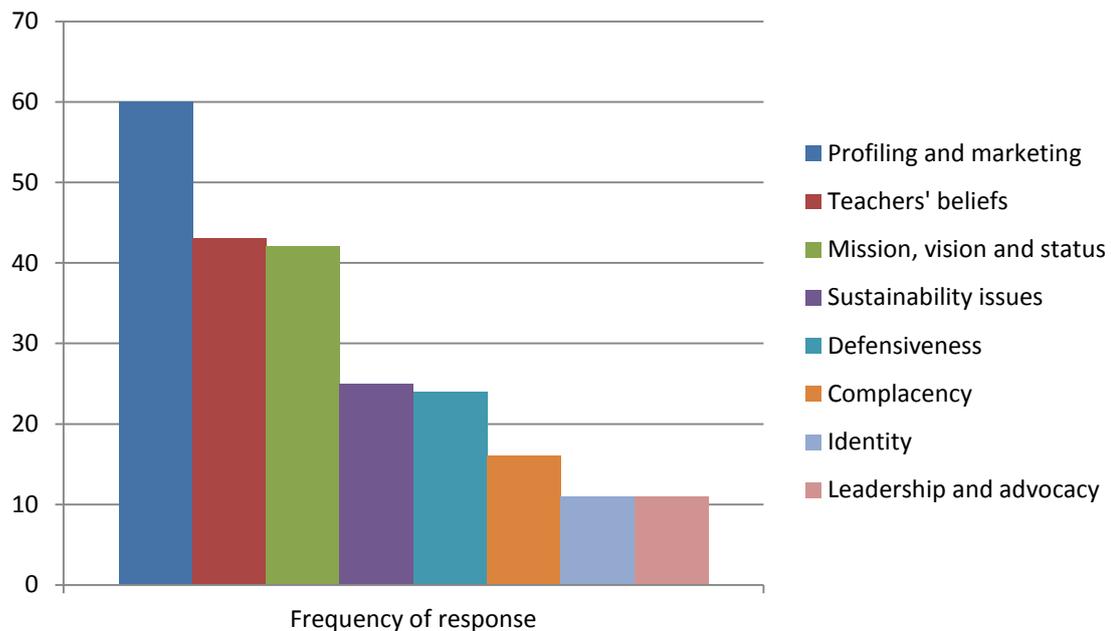




Figure 32 sets out the number of comments on professional identity issues in order of frequency.

Figure 32 Professional identity issues



There were many comments on teachers' beliefs about practice (n=43), subject mission, vision and status (n=42) and identity (n=11). There was consensus that the home economics profession in Ireland do not operate from a shared collective vision of what the subject is. For example, Interviewee 37 argued that 'we need to conceptualise it if we are to promote change' as 'our purpose would be visible then'. Similarly, Interviewee 36 identified the need for professional dialogue on the underpinning philosophical tradition(s) that home economics 'builds from and takes from'. Without this shared vision, Interviewee 37 argued that there is 'no base to refer to' and this coupled with little evidence about the effectiveness of home economics practice 'weakens our position as a subject'.

Professional problems were discussed such as defensiveness (n=24), apathy and complacency (n=16) and it was felt that the consequence could be subject sustainability issues (n=25). Many of the interviewees explained how a lack of understanding about home economics practice leads to frustration and annoyance. For example, Interviewee

20 explained that home economists are ‘constantly defending the brand’ and as Interviewee 32 puts it, to ‘stand over why we have value’. It was revealed that despite the best efforts of the subject association executive (ATHE), that the association is not well supported through membership or progressive due to inaction and a lack of collaboration between the teachers. For example, Interviewee 7 described the branch meetings as ‘moaning groaning sessions’ and that ‘some teachers want everything to be handed to them in a neat package’ and are not showing ‘innovation’. Similarly, Interviewee 32 argued that ‘opportunities to network outside of syllabus conversations’ are of benefit:

but you go to a home economics meeting and people want hand-outs, but do they really want to converse about what home economics is, no, they will tell you they are fed up with it, they don’t want to talk about it anymore.

There was consensus that the subject will be ‘fighting for its place’ (Interviewee 1) with impending junior cycle reform. Many of the interviewees adopted a negative standpoint using expressions such as: ‘home economics could be dropped’ and ‘I think we are under attack’ (Interviewee 7); ‘I would see it being side lined’ (Interviewee 17); ‘We are in danger of being wiped out’ (Interviewee 20); ‘You feel like you are flogging a dead horse’ (Interviewee 23); ‘It won’t disappear overnight; however, I think it will be an uphill challenge’ (Interviewee 25), ‘With the new junior cycle, the subject may be hijacked and taken over’ (Interviewee 29); ‘There is a lack of confidence generally about the subject and almost a worry all the time about its future’ (Interviewee 34); ‘I feel we are under threat’ (Interviewee 37) and ‘I think we have a battle ahead’ (Interviewee 38).

The interviewees commented on how they perceived the profession could move forward, for example, through profiling and marketing (n=60), as well as through leadership and advocacy (n=11). The overall sentiment was that professional identity issues can be addressed by claiming what is unique about home economics, to ‘not feel ashamed’ and ‘shy away from it’ (Interviewee 28) and to promote the subject relevance.

Looking at the collection of comments on professional identity, the common theme appears to be mainly concerns about profiling the value of home economics education and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that:

Home economics professionals believe that there are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession.

Public image of home economics

The second last column of the matrix referred to the public image of home economics and how others view the subject from the perception of the interviewees. The chosen tags represented different dimensions of stereotyping and these were:

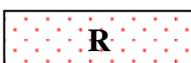
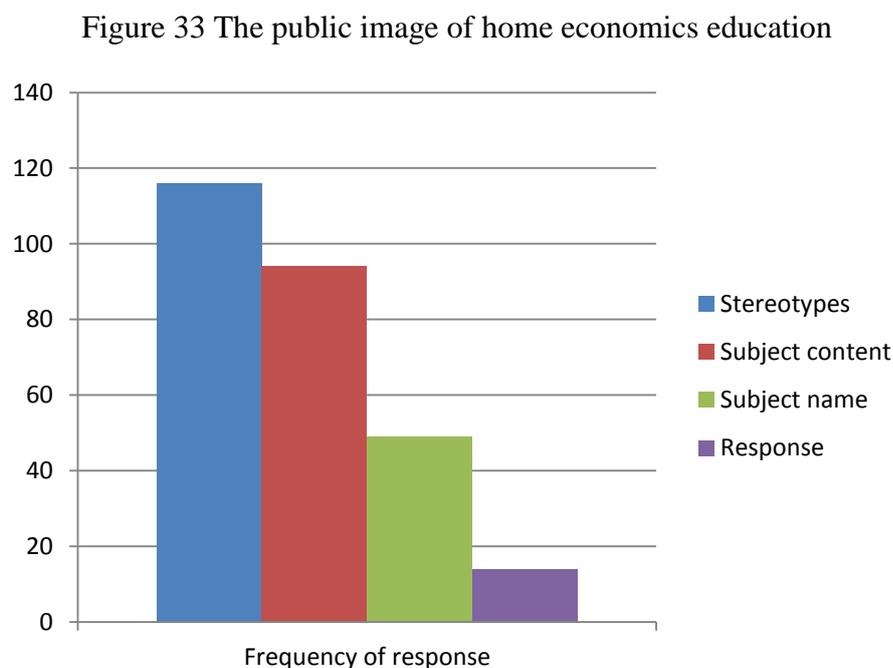
Subject name (SN)	
Stereotypes (S)	
Subject content (SC)	
Response (R)	

Figure 33 sets out the number of comments, both positive and negative, regarding the public perception of home economics education.



There were many stereotypes identified in the responses (n=116) such as the association between the subject and its suitability for ‘weaker’ students (n=43), the gendered uptake (n=40), the historical traditions home economics is built on (n=24) and how home economics teachers are viewed (n=9). Moreover, how the general public view the content associated with the subject (n=94) and the subject name (n=49) were considered problematic by the majority of interviewees. Some marketing ideas (n=14) that could address the issues were shared.

Many of the interviewees (n=43) acknowledged that the subject is seen as a suitable subject for 'the less academic student' (Interviewee 8); however, some of these responses (n=7) indicated that the subject at senior cycle is moving away from the 'wishy washy' (Interviewee 14) image as it is more academic. The senior cycle group (Focus Group 3) conferred these views arguing:

They are not aware of how tough the subject is ... they think it is easier than it is, like it was in the past.

They think it is about cooking.

They think it is just all about the cooking, when they see home economics, they just think it is cooking.

Yah and knitting.

I think in the older days, it would have been more like that.

Similarly, the Leaving Certificate boys (Focus Group 4) argued that 'lots of people think it's just cooking and sewing. They don't realise there is a lot of scientific stuff like food science in it.' Furthermore, Interviewee 20 argued that home economics is also disadvantaged by not being counted as a science subject.

I suppose I feel that it is not treated as a proper subject within the curriculum. Sometimes because it is not counted as a science subject, so students who would be going on to study food related areas of dietetics and nutrition, home economics isn't counted as one of the sciences. So therefore it is disadvantageous for a student to take it and therefore they should be taking chemistry ... I wish that home economics had more validity within that kind of spectrum.

Most of the interviewees (n=40) spoke about how people label home economics as a 'girlie' subject (Focus Group 4). For example, Interviewee 6 argued that 'a stigma' exists: 'It is a female subject, it is delivered by females, and therefore, it's not of any value.' Similarly, Interviewee 32 explained that this devaluation arises as the subject is seen to promote skills 'which are traditionally female ... It's perceived as facilitating people to become better at what are called domestic chores.' However, Interviewee 24 who teaches home economics in an all-boys school argued that the subject is very popular and that they boys 'have no qualms about it, there is no stigma attached to it at all.' Yet, Interviewee 19, who is a male home economics teacher, argued that the subject has 'gender issues' and is very much oriented towards females. Some of the gender comments (n=5) indicated that subject groupings as set out by school managers

can oftentimes influence the direction in which boys and girls go. For example, Interviewee 5 argued that ‘if you are female, you go in one direction and male, you go the other’. Similarly, Interviewee 21 explained that home economics is often timetabled against construction studies.

Generally we find the boys go to the construction and the girls come through home economics ... There would sort of be an opinion from teachers that the girls should stick with home economics and the boys should stick with the construction side which I think is just terrible.

Some responses (n=24) indicated that the subject is hamstrung by historical traditions. For example, Interviewee 16 alluded to the problem of parents being ‘stuck back in the darker days’ of domestic science: ‘they have a lasting impression that we do cooking and we do textiles and it sticks with them’; however, ‘the students can see that it is different than that.’ Home economics professionals appear to be carrying the interminable baggage of the older domestic science programme.

Some of the responses in this study (n=9) indicated that the home economics teacher is given extra ‘household’ jobs such as washing school jerseys and preparing teas and coffees at functions (Interviewee 5) as well as being subjected to ‘slurs’ (Interviewee 8). To exemplify this, Interviewee 7 argued that:

The image out there of the home economics teachers is possibly someone who is always neat, organised, spic and span and they do nothing, but cook all evening. You know we are compared to *Bree* in *Desperate Housewives*.

The male home economics teacher interviewed (Interviewee 19) shared a similar view as he indicated that:

in school, you are automatically at the bottom of the pile ... it is oh you can make cakes for this ... that is how we are viewed and treated in schools. I think if you look at home economics teachers, we are probably some of the best teachers in schools, but often we are considered to be the ones up in the cookery room and this sound funny, but I often refer to my room as the tower in Harry Potter. I go up here, I am chained to my desk cooking all day and I rarely descend to the rest of the school.

As well as identifying the common mis-conception that home economics is a subject most suitable for a ‘weaker student’, the interviewees argued that the subject is also seen as a ‘Cinderella’ subject (Interviewee 3). Many of the responses (n=77) identified the old-fashioned negative stereotype associated with the subject of home economics

which is 'cooking and sewing', 'cooking and cleaning' or 'stirring and stitching'. However, some of the comments (n=17) indicated that the perception was different among current students and their parents. As previously shown, the senior cycle students indicated that the subject covers a lot more than people think. However, as the junior cycle programme is very different, all of the junior cycle students interviewed in this study described it in terms of cooking and sewing. One group (Focus Group 1) argued that home economics is not seen as 'a proper subject' due to the practical work involved. Another group (Focus Group 2) explained how home economics is different to 'normal' subjects:

It is also a break from maths, English and Irish; non-stop writing subjects. You do stuff, get to do stuff, physical stuff, cooking and sewing. It's not all serious, you can have fun with it ... It's a change from your normal subjects.

The subject name was a contentious issue overall with 11 affirmative comments and 38 negative comments. The use of the word 'home' was mainly considered problematic because of its association with 'domestic chores' and 'old-fashioned' views (Interviewee 4) about a 'woman's role in the home' (Interviewee 1). Similarly, Interviewee 8 argues that:

the home bit probably devalues it. I suppose that sometimes people consider that because of the association with the home that anyone can do it [because] everyone lives in a home.

This perspective was substantiated by other interviewees who shared that parents thought they could impart home economics education successfully at home. However, Interviewee 20 in particular was sceptical of such practices:

I remember a parent telling me before at an open evening ... sure I can teach her to do this cooking at home ... and this lady was grossly overweight and I wanted to basically say well maybe hold off on the nutritional aspect because I was so annoyed!

Naturally, there could have been other factors influencing this lady's condition, but this type of glib remark implying home economics 'to be a very basic thing' (Interviewee 34) was shared by other interviewees in this study. For example, Interviewee 32 argued that parents have said students 'are getting enough home economics at home' and for this reason do not need to study it at school. However, Interviewee 28 argued that the majority of 'parents are never in a position to teach it as well.'

Finally, there were some comments (n=14) on how to address the stereotypes and profile of home economics. Many of the responses called for better branding, marketing and communication about the relevance and role of home economics education. The male teacher interviewed in this study noted the need to make the subject gender neutral and for more male advocacy in the field. In particular, he alluded to the positive influence of the chef *Jamie Oliver* ‘talking about the value of home economics’ and adding status to the subject. Moreover, he argued that this type of advocacy can ‘bring [the] subject around’ and ‘deal with [the] identity and gender issue.’

All in all, the various comments predominantly led me to a substantive interpretation of the interviewees’ views on the public image of home economics as follows:

Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education and its purpose is commonly misunderstood.

Values

The final column of the matrix referred to subject values. There was some discussion about the range of values home economics education can develop alongside how effectively they are acquired and developed. The chosen tags represented two dimensions and these were:

Value set (VS)

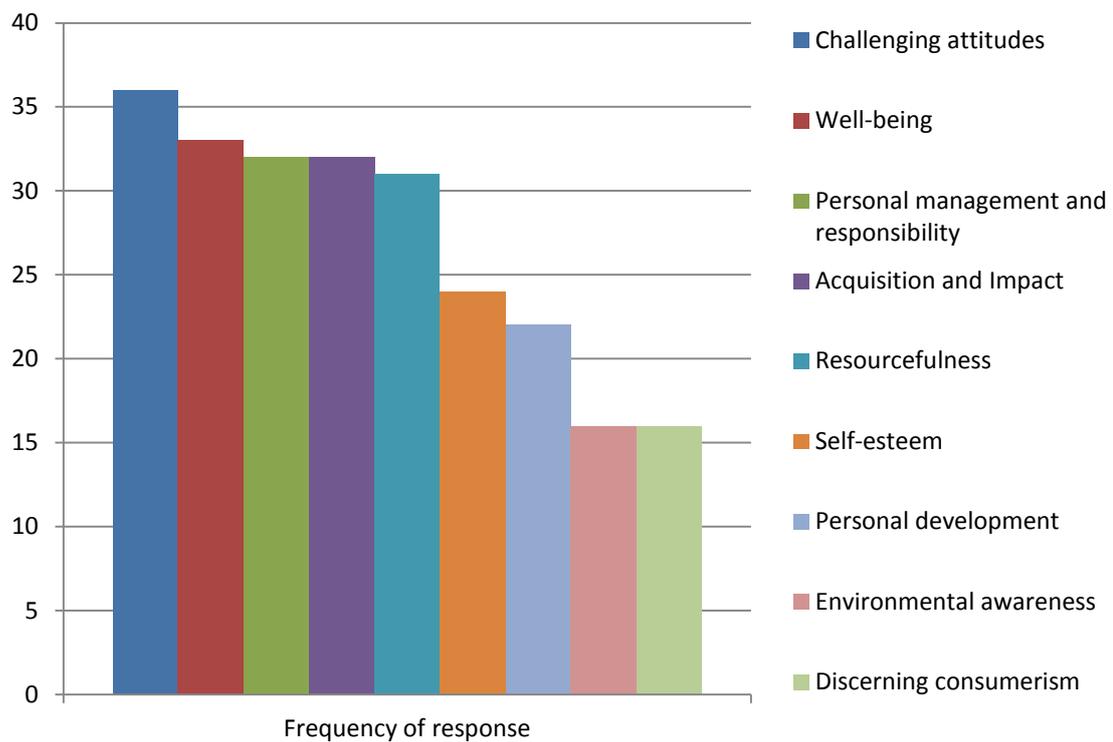
VS

Acquisition and impact

AI

The majority of comments (n=210) made reference to a range of values and some comments (n=32) referred to the development of values. Figure 34 shows the number of comments per value and value acquisition.

Figure 34 Values developed in home economics education



Many of the comments (n=36) referred to the potential of home economics to challenge attitudes:

I am thinking of things like, for example, openness to different viewpoints; that it's not just that I'm right in my opinion, but that I am respectful of other peoples' perspectives and that I then start formulating my own thinking, broadening my own horizons, that I am open minded about things. Being able to listen and hear different perspectives and viewpoints and respect that difference. (Interviewee 37)

The role of home economics education in the enhancement of well-being and quality of life was discussed (n=33). For example, Interviewee 20 identified that many students 'tend to think more about their health and they are conscious of food choices ...' and the students confirmed this by stating that they had become more conscious of what they were eating (Focus Group 1). The senior cycle boys that were interviewed (Focus Group 4) also saw benefits in their own lives.

You would be aware of what is in the food you are eating every day, some stuff might not be good for you and some stuff is good for you.

And aware of the consequences so if you eat too much fat, you could be at risk of Coronary Heart Disease. You are more aware in general.

You know what food to eat. You know, I have started eating a few healthier foods just to keep my insides healthy.

Others made reference to the development of personal management and responsibility (n=32), resourcefulness (n=31), self-esteem (n=24), personal development (n=22) and discerning consumerism (n=16). It was revealed that students take pride in the products they develop and this boosts their self-esteem. For example, Interviewee 27 argued that students get a 'sense of achievement from within the home economics classroom' because 'they have something to celebrate and they can recognise and see something and appreciate it as something they made. That sort of achievement is huge.'

Some views (n=16) were shared about how students can be encouraged to 'develop an awareness of the environmental and societal implications' of personal 'choices and actions' (Interviewee 31). Interviewee 35 explained that the subject:

should promote a sense of responsibility in the students, that they should be thinking from this point of view, you know, even when they go in to buy a pair of jeans, that they actually look and see, where did this come from?

The junior cycle boys (Focus Group 2) confirmed that they have developed this type of awareness:

You learn about being environmentally aware from reading about it in the book, or we get a video about it, how it affects things like food, where it comes from, how animals are brought up, where you get the meat from, labels on them.

Some of the responses made reference to how values are developed (n=32) and the level of impact achieved. Many of the responses (n=11) indicated that values are acquired through teacher role-modelling in practice and granting the students 'ownership of the learning' (Interviewee 38) rather than 'just rhetoric' (Interviewee 37) or 'spoon feeding' (Interviewee 38). The contextualisation of learning and making explicit the relevance of the value in question were considered effective strategies for the enhancement of value acquisition (n=5). For example, Interviewee 37 identified the importance of isolating the 'key concepts' and making visible for the learners 'why we are doing something'.

First you become aware of them by isolating and highlighting, secondly then by getting them to embed them in their day to day practice so it becomes very much routine.

A few responses (n=2) indicated that the student teacher rapport and interactions enabled the enhancement of value acquisition. Some responses (n=8) indicated that

home economics education has an impact on the lives of students. However, some responses (n=6) indicated that there is little 'hard evidence' (Interviewee 37) of the impact of home economics education on the level of value acquisition. In a similar vein, Interviewee 34 argued that it is difficult to ascertain if students are 'applying it outside the classroom or not'; however, he believed an element of transferability was possible.

I'd feel very surprised if they are not transferrable. And I think the hallmark is that they are not just learning about home economics or food or textiles or family resource management ... they are actually doing it, they are actually participating in it and if that can't fundamentally influence then what people do, I don't know, it probably would be worrying to think that if education wasn't able to transfer.

Overall, I would conclude that:

Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education is an arena for everyday living that has the capacity to develop human growth potential, to address the practical concerns of individuals and to address the fulfilment of basic needs.

5.5.3 Final thematic matrix

The final stage of the analysis involved labelling the categories with the identified theme or substantive interpretations and entering them into a final matrix as illustrated in Table 9. The purpose of the final matrix was to consolidate the emerging themes.

Home economics practitioners believe that external home economics assessment arrangements promote teaching to the test and a washback effect in the classroom.	Home economics practitioners believe that the role of home economics is to develop life-skills, and personal resources and capacities, for the betterment of everyday life of individuals, families and society.	Home economics practitioners believe that the breadth of the home economics curriculum promotes a focus primarily on coverage of the examination and impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.	Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education and its pedagogy endeavours to develop an extensive range of skills in learners.	Home economics practitioners believe that the existing subject assessment design focusing primarily on a summative examination falls short of addressing the aims and mission of the subject.	Home economics practitioners believe that practical, active learning in home economics classes enables the development of skills and the achievement of meaningful learning, but direct transmission methods are also used to meet the demands of the examinations.	Home economics professionals believe that there are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession.	Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education and its purpose is commonly misunderstood.	Home economics practitioners believe that home economics education is an arena for everyday living that has the capacity to develop human growth potential, to address the practical concerns of individuals and to address the fulfilment of basic needs.
The Leaving Cert standard is losing that anyways at th..	It does offer an understanding and help students to	I do think that the mission and vision of home economics does	Home economics also helps students to ... it allows	Probably because of the assessments that are used.	Students learn obviously knowledge . Ok, so there is a lot	I think that a lot of teachers of home economics	A lot of people that I would talk to still have the perception of	I think the fact that some of it is practical, it allows students

Table 9 Final thematic matrix

5.6 Key findings

Curriculum analysis summary

The curriculum analysis revealed that home economics education at junior cycle was equally represented with elements of the empirical-rational science-based perspective as well as the critical science-based perspective. There is a strong emphasis on the development of technical skills. In contrast, at senior cycle there is greater emphasis on the critical science-based perspective and lesser emphasis on the development of technical skills.

The curriculum documents address the subject mission to a degree, but the curriculum analysis revealed that few opportunities are provided for addressing the broader aims of home economics. For example, there was little reference to how the subject can enable the development of capacity to ‘take critical/ transformative/ emancipatory action to enhance wellbeing’ (IFHE 2008, p.2). However, the curriculum documents have made provision for the facilitation of students ‘to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life, by directing their professional decisions and actions, or preparing them for life’ (IFHE 2008, p.1). The analysis also shows that the senior cycle curriculum document is more aligned with the aims of education than the junior cycle document.

Examination analysis summary

The analysis of the technical dimensions of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations and their demand characteristics over a ten year period of time (see Figure 14) found that home economics assessment items primarily assess the recall of factual knowledge (n=422) and understanding of conceptual knowledge (n=408), thus reducing the capacity for the development of higher order thinking skills. However, an analysis of figures for evaluation and creation (see Figures 11 and 13) show that coursework tasks have the potential to develop higher order skills such as creation (n=245) and evaluation (n=151). A comparison between the demand of Junior and Leaving Certificate home economics clearly shows that the Leaving Certificate examination develops a higher level of understanding of conceptual knowledge and the Junior Certificate examination promotes the recall of factual knowledge. However, the absence of the evaluation component in the Junior Certificate food studies coursework

questions, although evident in marking schemes and practice, is skewing the contrast in achievement of evaluation of both conceptual and procedural knowledge.

The results indicate that junior cycle home economics students engage more in creative processes. As this analysis does not include the optional study project tasks at junior cycle, the level of creation achieved by candidates is arguably a lot higher than the statistics reveal. A typical design and craftwork assignment, for example, could require students to design and make an original and cost-effective textile craft item for the home and marks are awarded for engagement in a design or problem solving process. At senior cycle, only 72 candidates out of a total of 12,400 candidates (0.6%) chose the Textiles, Fashion and Design for the 2011 examinations (SEC 2011a), indicating that creative capacity at senior cycle is not as well developed as junior cycle.

Interview analysis summary

The interviewees in this study commented on the role of home economics education and how in their view the curriculum design and assessment arrangements support the realisation of the subject mission. My interpretation of the perceptions may be summarised as:

- External home economics assessment arrangements promote teaching to the test and a washback effect on the quality of student learning.
- The role of home economics is to develop life-skills, and personal resources and capacities, for the betterment of everyday life of individuals, families and society.
- The breadth of the home economics curriculum promotes a focus primarily on coverage of the curriculum to suit the examination and impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Home economics education and its pedagogy do endeavour to develop an extensive range of skills in learners.
- The existing subject assessment design focusing primarily on a summative examination falls short of addressing the aims and mission of the subject.
- Practical, active learning in home economics classes enables the development of skills and the achievement of meaningful learning, but direct transmission methods are also used to meet the demands of the examinations.

- There are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession.
- Home economics education and its purpose is commonly misunderstood
- Home economics education is an arena for everyday living that has the capacity to develop human growth potential, to address the practical concerns of individuals and to address the fulfilment of basic needs.

The implications of these nine main findings are discussed in the following chapter under the following headings: assessment; curriculum, pedagogy and learning; mission and identity. Clearly, teaching, learning and assessment practices are interdependent, and in the chapter that follows, the overlaps are acknowledged where appropriate.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Implications of Results

6.1 Preamble

In Chapter 5, I drew together the final interview, focus group, curriculum and examination analyses and arrived at what I would argue are evidentially secured key findings. Alone these may have some value, but this chapter seeks to extend their usefulness by analysing the implications they have for society, policy makers, schools, teachers and students. I have drawn these final arguments together under four headings:

- Assessment
- Curriculum, Pedagogy and Learning
- Mission and
- Identity.

6.2 Assessment

The technical analysis of external home economics assessments in this study revealed that the majority of questions demand lower-order thinking and learning. Furthermore, many of the teachers in this study reported that their teaching is directed specifically towards enabling students to answer questions on examination papers. They candidly acknowledged that these habitual practices are narrowing students' learning experiences and consequently they are not attaining the full potential of home economics education. This led to the tentative conclusion that external home economics assessments promote teaching to the test and consequently a washback effect on the quality of learning achieved. In addition, classroom assessment practices in home economics are mostly summative, thereby compounding the washback effect on the quality of student learning achieved.

For convenience, I will discuss the potential implications of these findings as follows:

- a) What you test is what you get!
- b) Motivation and identity
- c) Assessment and learning
- d) Coursework cheating

What you test is what you get!

One interviewee described being trapped in a 'catch 22' situation (Interviewee 8). The intrinsic reason for teaching home economics is to enable students to attain the

educational aims of the subject, but it appears to be impossible to attain these aims because of inherently illogical assessment arrangements. On the one hand, assessment ‘demands’ a certain type of pedagogy to enable students to achieve ‘points’ in an examination, a practice that is driven by students, parents and managers. On the other hand, addressing the subject mission becomes a secondary concern, as the home economics examinations do not entirely address it. Therefore, the two approaches appear to be incompatible.

This is a considerable challenge for current assessment arrangements and the problem is not confined to home economics education. For example, the ‘dilemma’ of teaching to the test featured largely in the NCCA (2013) survey on teachers’ marking and grading practices in Ireland. It was reported that ‘there was a sense of being damned if you did and damned if you didn’t’ (p.47). The teachers reported feeling ‘frustrated’ by ‘critique in the media alongside the pressure they experience from parents and their schools to do exactly that- teach to the test’ (p.47). Moreover, they alleged that the current assessment arrangements encouraged a ‘jug and mug approach to education’ and a ‘knowledge transfer approach’ (p.48). Similarly, the Smyth *et al.* reports (Smyth *et al.* 2007 and Smyth *et al.* 2011) on the experiences of Junior and Leaving Certificate students document the influence of external examinations on teaching methods and how the whole experience of examination preparation generates a lot of stress.

The dogged persistence of this trend in Irish education begs the question, why do these practices persist? Stobart (2008) provides a reason for the perpetuation of such practices. He argues that ‘when cultural expectations reinforce learning being seen as a teacher-led and didactic activity’ any deviation from the norm can lead to ‘disapproval’ and ‘resistance’ and ‘this is particularly the case where there is a prescriptive curriculum and high-stakes testing’ (p.161). Another plausible explanation is provided by McEwen (1995) who argues that ‘what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught’ (p.42). Interviewee 8 in this study corroborates this view by stating that at Leaving Certificate level:

the assessment of the course work is asking to write an account of their practical skills ... therefore, there isn’t an emphasis on teachers to teach the practical skills because they are not being assessed in the practical exam.

Summative assessments are also widely used as they indicate and maintain standards. According to Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002), 'proponents claim that tests cause students, as well as teachers and schools, to put more effort into their work on account of the rewards and penalties that can be applied on the basis of the results of tests' (p.1). This sentiment was reflected in many comments in this study. For example, Interviewee 6 revealed that the school principal discusses class results with each department at the beginning of the year and comparisons are made to the 'national average'. The consequence of assessment in this case is that the teacher experiences pressure to achieve a good set of class results in the examinations, which often results in teaching to the test, drilling and rote learning practices.

An unintended consequence of 'over-prescriptive' frameworks for curriculum and assessment is the distortion of learning. The English Department for Education (2011) explain this type of distortion by reporting that 'some pupils become more concerned for "what level they are" than for the substance of what they know, can do and understand' (p.44). The interviewees in this study confirmed this trend. For example, the quality of learning attained by students was questioned by Interviewee 8:

The exam doesn't value whether the kids can think on their feet, the exam values how well they can regurgitate the text book in two and a half hours ... I think we are focusing on all this content that is so important for an exam that lasts for two and a half hours and then after that they can walk out of the exam hall and forget it and never have much need for that information again. I mean do we value the kids knowing a percentage of protein in meat like really how valuable is that to them after their Leaving Cert. is over is questionable. Learning huge content for recall for two and a half hours to forget then forever after.

Arguably students may not in reality have the subject skills or understanding other than what the test assesses. For example, Hyland (2011) argues that transparent practices around examinations have resulted in 'easy accessibility' to marking schemes and examiners' reports including an analysis of student performance (p.11). Therefore, students and teachers are more familiar with marking procedures and 'they know what types of answers are likely to result in high grades' (p.11). Interviewee 8 provided another example of how examination technique can distort learning and consequently impact on the inferences that can be drawn from test results:

Say for example if the textbook will have a section there say it is about fruit and vegetables at senior cycle. The title to the paragraph of the textbook I think is

the nutritional value of foods But basically in order for them to answer an exam question, all they have to do is transfer that block of the textbook onto an exam page so the textbook is kind of analysing the information for them already so therefore they don't need to engage in that level of thinking all they need to do is transcribe. So back to the exam again, I think if the exam actually requires them to do something that wasn't present in the textbook that they hadn't seen before that would genuinely evaluate 'analysis', I think that teachers put a higher status on that skill, but because the analysis in the exam or the question that asks them to analyse in the exam is actually really only asking them to recall, I think that maybe that skill isn't as developed as it could be.

This quotation suggests that students can develop a high competence in examination techniques and as a result, the quality of learning achieved is considerably reduced. The consequence of distorted learning, as explained by Mehrens (1998) is that 'those making inferences may not realise how narrow the domain is' (p.14) and in the context of home economics education, the skills, values and attitudes outlined in the written curriculum may not be achieved in reality.

The interviewees were mostly critical of senior cycle home economics assessment. Senior cycle assessment depends primarily on a summative examination and because of this, falls short of addressing the subject mission. There was overwhelming dissatisfaction with the practical assessment component which is a written description of practical activity. The interviewees held the view that this type of assessment had a negative effect on the achievement of practical skills and the attainment of learning goals. In contrast, the existing junior cycle assessment arrangements were mainly considered to be fit for purpose, although many interviewees commented on the design of the written paper and how this could be improved. All of the interviewees agreed that the practical assessment of culinary skills at junior cycle was effective in terms of addressing the subject mission along with generating student motivation and a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, the Design and Craftwork option at junior cycle is deemed to be popular because of the inherent potential of the optional study to develop key skills such as problem solving, creativity and an intuitive response to the use of resources.

The implication of these findings for assessment designers is that assessment with multiple components and assessment that addresses the practical nature of the subject work. The interviewees noted that junior cycle students can be intrinsically motivated and focused on learning goals and the achievement they experience enhances self-

esteem. The subject at junior cycle addresses the subject mission and contributes to the development of life-skills, and personal resources and capabilities, for the betterment of everyday life of individuals, families and society. The implication for schools, therefore, is that the subject of home economics in the curriculum can make a valuable contribution to the holistic development of young people. Moreover, the implication for teachers is that their practice is satisfying as the programme of study is more aligned with the subject aims.

This study concludes that the examination questions mostly demand lower-order thinking and learning and when coupled with distorted classroom learning practices, the overall quality of learning is considerably reduced. The interviewees were more in favour of a practical assessment of practical skills at senior cycle. Assessment designers could take this recommendation on board, knowing that such arrangements are effective at junior cycle. The implication of inappropriate assessment arrangements at senior cycle for teachers is that the values and purposes of the subject are not supported by assessment arrangements and this creates pressure, stress and dissatisfaction with practice. As Interviewee 1 put it, many teachers have 'lost their drive' and interest in the subject.

Motivation and identity

Arguably summative assessments can motivate students to work harder and achieve high points in a set of examinations, but the point that is often missed is that these are performance goals rather than learning goals. Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002) maintain that summative assessments 'motivate only some students' and they can 'increase the gap between higher and lower achieving students' (p.1), while Black and Wiliam (1998) make the claim that the allocation of marks and grades encourages 'competition rather than personal improvement' (p.6). They argue that 'in consequence assessment feedback teaches pupils with low attainments that they lack "ability", so they are demotivated, believing that they are not able to learn (p.6) ... they "retire hurt", avoid investing effort in learning which could only lead to disappointment' (p.9). Similarly, the English Department for Education (2011) argues that the high-stakes assessment exacerbates social differentiation and students 'label themselves' in terms of the results achieved in the examinations (p.44). Interviewee 36 corroborates these views. He argues that the current educational system is fundamentally flawed because it promotes

inequality, competition and it does not allow for the holistic development of young people:

It's a competitive system. You go all the way through school at some level you understand that you're in a system whereby you have to get grades and gradually you start to understand that your grades are in a system of relationships, i.e. if you get a B it only makes sense against someone else's A and someone else's C. So that there is a system of relationships there which is competitive ... And all the way through school, I think assessments are very summative rather than formative. So we want a formative system that gives people confidence, but we often have summative assessments which basically sum up some particular view of what that human being is at that particular moment and gives them a sense of either confidence or undermines their confidence if they fail.

This line of thought was also prominent in Reay and Wiliam's (1999) writings about how young people 'view the testing process as a definite statement about the sort of learner they are ... what most share is a sense of an event which reveals something intrinsic about them as individuals' (p.343). Students therefore may feel their identity hinges on the high-stakes examinations. This type of unintended consequence may be ever the more damaging in a home economics context. For example, Attar (1990) argues that there is reason to believe that the examinations are driving the 'artificiality' of home economics classroom settings and the consequences are significant especially if students experience failure. Arguably this type of practice may be more prevalent in senior cycle home economics education today:

It matters a great deal for pupils if what they take away from home economics is a sense of failure, a lack of confidence, a belief that there are rules about daily life which they have not managed to learn and a method for organising their domestic lives which they are forever unable to apply. (Attar 1990, p.17)

The unintended consequence of such artificial classroom practices can be de-motivation and a lack of creative response to food design. Interviewee 4 corroborates this view as she claimed that students 'really lack creativity in the food design process':

Give them a whole basket and take certain foods out of it and make something ... I don't think there is any time for that in home economics in current times.

It was reported that senior cycle journal tasks demanded a lot of work and a lot of time for the marks awarded. The implication for schools is that students who experience home economics education at senior cycle can have lower intrinsic motivational levels.

Subject popularity is decreasing as 'the word is out' that Leaving Certificate home economics is difficult.

Overall, the conclusion to be drawn from this section is that currently, there is a predominant focus on the attainment of performance goals over learning goals which has a negative impact on student motivational levels and the holistic development of young people.

Assessment and learning

The interviews in this study brought to the surface the practice knowledge of teachers, as they were requested to reflect upon and to evaluate their practice. Summative assessment practices are commonly used by 44% of the home economics teachers interviewed in this study. The majority of the teachers were feeling under pressure to cover a curriculum and prepare students for an examination. Arguably, this type of test-driven culture can result in reduced job satisfaction. For example, Black *et al.* (2003) argue that one reason why formative assessment should be taken seriously is that 'teachers come to enjoy their work more' and they 'find it more satisfying because it resonates with their professional values' (p.3). 41% of the teachers alluded to the piece-meal use of AfL and most of the teachers did not demonstrate a thorough understanding of the methods and awareness of the benefits. Only 15% of the teachers integrate sound principles of formative assessment in their daily practice.

There are many reasons that contribute to the piece-meal use of AfL. Some of the interviewees revealed that the students and their parents resist the use of formative assessment practices and are really only concerned with performance goals. Another argument posited by Stobart (2006) is that 'for formative assessment to be valid it must lead to further learning' and 'one implication of this is that assessments may be formative in intention, but are not so in practice because they do not generate further learning' (p.133). Moreover, the inconsistent use of assessment methods can generate negative washback effects in the classroom. For example, Gardner (2006) explains that in these learning situations, 'some of the key assessment for learning features might actually threaten the learning support they are otherwise designed to deliver' (p.201) and that this phenomenon can occur 'where high-stakes transitions exist' (p.202). He argues that while comment-only feedback has considerable potential to focus on

improvement, it ‘may be seriously contentious and may struggle to achieve its aim of supporting anxious students (or their parents!) to next steps in their learning’ (p.202).

The ad hoc use of formative assessment practice as identified in this study resonates with the findings of other research studies. For example, Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) note that the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) Learning How to Learn in Classrooms study (2001-2005)²³ showed that it was difficult to achieve the ‘spirit’ of AfL. A mere 20% of teachers were successful in engaging with the ‘deeper principles of formative assessment’ (p.20). They argue that AfL practice in England is ‘still patchy’ and they acknowledge that the implementation gap is difficult to overcome: ‘teachers who generally appear to have a strong idealistic commitment to the thinking behind these concepts often struggle to put them into practice in the face of competing pressures on their time and priorities’ (p.22). Stobart (2008) similarly argues that in ‘accountability cultures’, the use of formative assessment is ‘suspended when examination pressures set in’ (p.159). Another major study by James and Pedder (2006) involved the survey of 558 teachers on ‘the way in which teachers value different classroom assessment practices and how congruent with these values they perceive their practices to be’ (p.109). Their study concluded that ‘sizeable values-practice gaps’ exist between the desire to promote learning autonomy and performance orientations and over half of the ‘teachers are demonstrably committed to the values (not just the methods) of assessment *for* learning ... yet they experience and need to resolve contradictions in order to realise their values’ (p.109).

Black and Wiliam (1998) promote the importance of creating a ‘culture of success, backed by a belief that all can achieve’ and argue that formative assessment ‘can be a powerful weapon’ in the achievement of success (p.9). However, ‘teachers have to take risks in the belief that such investment in time will yield rewards in the future’ (p.13). Yet, similar to Stobart (2008), they add the caveat that ‘formative assessment takes classroom time, and is in conflict where teachers feel under pressure to “cover” a statutory curriculum’ (p.18). Ideally, assessments should not only measure performance, but have desirable consequences for teaching, learning and students’ motivation for learning. Furthermore, Mehrens (1998) argues that ‘for testing to be a good thing, the

²³ This study involved 1,200 school staff, 4,000 pupils and 37 classroom observations.

positive consequences must outweigh the negative consequences- by some factor greater than the costs' (p.2).

The outcomes of this study show that assessment generally has a strong impact on curriculum and on pedagogy, so it is vital that any adverse effects are minimised. Moreover, the predominant assessment practice appears to be summative, suggesting that there is a washback effect on the quality of student learning achieved.

Coursework cheating

A common 'gripe' of the teachers interviewed in this study was the inappropriate input and over-guidance of teachers in both the food studies course work at senior cycle and the optional study area at junior cycle; yet these practices appear to be rife. For example, Interviewee 2, who is a teacher and examiner of senior cycle home economics examinations; revealed that 'you can just see where the teacher has written in ... and the student was meant to rub it out and they didn't'. Mansell (2007) reports similar practice in a food technology class in the UK: 'the yellow sticky notes are what give it away' (p.67). He reports that the teacher in question explained that this strategy allows her 'to tell her class exactly what to write' (p.67). Mansell (2007) associates this type of practice with 'cheating', because the teacher reported that the memo 'more or less guarantees her pupils a good grade every year', yet this type of practice reduces 'independent thought' (p.67). He argues that 'this tale is indicative of a widespread corruption of in-class assessment, driven in large part by the demands of hyper-accountability' and 'is highly vulnerable to manipulation' (p.67). As a result, 'teachers cannot risk leaving pupils to do the thinking for themselves. They must give them all the help they can, to ensure the best marks possible' (p.81). Moreover, he argues that the students receive a signal 'that it is down to the teacher to deliver the achievement for them' (p.82).

However, Mansell (2007) explains that highly conscientious students are able to respond to the general teacher guidelines supporting the food technology tasks, 'but for around three quarters of the class each year, much more assistance was needed. This is where the sticky notes came in' (p.68). The process of correction of student work involved several drafts in this case. Sometimes, more changes were recommended on 'stickies' and if the changes were not implemented, or in the teacher's words, 'if they had still not got the message, she stood over them and dictated suggested changes to be

written in by the pupil' (p.68). Similar practices were reported in this study. For example, Interviewee 23 revealed that the teachers meet to discuss the tasks and share notes and she also alluded to the practice of multiple corrections of journal tasks:

We meet every October when the assignments come out. There are 100 plus Home Ec. teachers in the room and they have different interpretations of actually the task. There is something wrong there ... Well I suppose they have the research to do and the writing up to do, but who finishes up on that- the teachers ...It's a lot of the teacher's work. They give it out you give them the pointers they flesh it out and you correct it and my spin is still on that. Then they write it into their journals. Then you check to see they have written it in.

Arguably, the problem of home economics teachers over-guiding and cheating has become acceptable in most schools. There is widespread corruption of coursework assessment and acceptance of this type of unethical behaviour. However, bending coursework rules has implications for the validity of the subject assessment overall, the inferences that can be drawn from the results and the effect on the development of skills and attributes such as independent thinking. For example, if teachers of home economics over-assist students in their coursework and put their 'spin' on it, the coursework cannot be a true representation of the student's ability. Such practices corrupt the inferences that can be drawn from this type of assessment and are undermining the validity of the assessment. As Mansell (2007) argues, students' grades become 'a judgment as much on the abilities and commitment of their teacher as on them' and 'pupils become a mere passenger in the learning process' (p81). Many of the teachers did not speak of these practices in terms of cheating. In fact many justified these practices in terms of feeling pressure to get good results.

There was also some reportage of unfair practice and over-guiding at junior cycle using prescriptive marking templates. Mansell (2007) refers to similar practices in other subjects that use 'writing frames' which are designed 'to help structure pupils' thoughts' and enable them to 'gain high marks without having to demonstrate independent thinking. Effectively, they are told what to write by their teachers' (p.69). Examiners of practical examinations are provided with a specific breakdown of requirements within coursework components. For example the written evaluation component of junior cycle food studies is allocated ten marks and includes the following components (SEC 2013b):

- Did you meet the brief set out in the task? Explain- 2 marks
- Specific requirements of the task- 3 marks
- Critical appraisal i.e. overall presentation, colour, taste, texture- 3 marks
- Evaluation of implementation i.e. efficiency, skills, proposed modifications etc. 2 marks

However, this detailed Junior Certificate marking scheme is not publically available to all teachers of home economics. Arguably teachers who assess home economics practical examinations at junior cycle and their students have an advantage over other students whose teachers do not examine, as they do not have the same exposure to assessment material. The NCCA (NCCA 2013) confirms this view in their survey of teachers' marking and grading practices. The experience of examining was reported to enhance the teacher's confidence in preparing their own students for examinations.

There are several implications for assessment designers. The subject values and purposes are evidently not supported by current assessment arrangements due to widespread acceptance of coursework corruption practices. As mentioned the teachers did not speak of these practices in terms of cheating, but these unethical practices merit review. The new junior cycle will involve more in-class assessment and the integrity of the State Certificate may be questionable if the practice of bending coursework rules continues. Greater transparency around the marking of junior cycle coursework and clarity about the evidence on which decisions are based would enhance the perception of fairness about the testing process. The technical analysis of the coursework questions reveals that they can generate more higher-order thinking and learning than the written examination questions, if not over-guided by teachers. There is potential therefore to address the design of examination questions and to include, for example, scenario type tasks that stimulate a range of higher-order thinking in learners.

6.3 Curriculum, pedagogy and learning

Home economics practitioners believe that the breadth of the home economics curriculum promotes a focus primarily on coverage of the curriculum to suit the examination, with consequential impact on the quality of teaching and learning achieved. This study also reveals that home economics teachers use practical, active learning to enable the development of skills and the achievement of meaningful learning, though direct transmission methods are also used to meet the demands of the examinations.

The potential consequences of these findings are presented as follows:

- a) Curriculum coverage implications
- b) Curriculum relevance
- c) Alignment of pedagogy, learning and assessment

Curriculum coverage implications

Brophy (1999) argues that ‘educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and (most directly) teachers have the potential to create motivationally optimal learning situations by developing optimal curricula and bringing them to life in the classroom using optimal instructional materials’ (p.79). However, this study reveals that the enacted curriculum is far from optimal. The design and breadth of the home economics curriculum was considered to be problematic particularly at senior cycle. It was frequently described as ‘intensive’, ‘content-heavy’, ‘off-putting’ and ‘overwhelming’. As a consequence, this leads to coverage of a reduced range of the curriculum for examination purposes and narrowing the range of student learning experiences. When the curriculum is treated ‘as a given’, Stobart (2008) argues that passive engagement with curriculum content and skills, can result in potentially less meaningful learning (p.158). Interviewee 28 corroborates this view by saying the subject was weakened as a result and that many topics are just given ‘a cursory going over’.

The problem of restricted curriculum coverage and narrowing the range of student learning experiences is not confined to home economics alone. Hyland (2011) reports that ‘narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results’ is common practice (pp.6-7). Similarly, Smyth and McCoy (2011) reporting on the longitudinal study of student experiences in second-level education in Ireland, recommended the move ‘away from the very detailed content of many subjects, which currently appears to contribute to a pace of instruction not always conducive to student learning and to a more teacher-centred approach rather than the kinds of active teaching methods which students find most engaging’ (p.17). Similarly, Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that “‘delivery” and “coverage” with poor understanding are pointless and even harmful’ (p.13).

This study concludes that at senior cycle, the breadth of the curriculum is problematic and requires urgent review as it is 'off-putting' and deemed to be weakening the subject position in the senior cycle curriculum. The implication of a broad curriculum for teachers is that many feel pressured to cover a reduced range of the curriculum, thereby narrowing the range of student learning experiences. As a consequence, pedagogy and learning in home economics classrooms may not be of optimal quality. There is little time available to address the broader aims of the subject, to contextualise the learning and to develop practical skills. The level of student enjoyment and motivation is negatively impacted. It is also likely that subject popularity at senior cycle will continue to decrease unless a curriculum review is implemented.

Curriculum relevance

All of the interviewees in this study argued that the curriculum is mostly relevant, but aspects need 'paring-back'. Many indicated that food, diet and health are essential elements of home economics education. Some elements were deemed irrelevant to the lives of students, such as Family Resource Management (household equipment for example), Microbiology, Food Chemistry, and Textiles, Fashion and Design. This study reveals that the study of textiles has 'faded away'. The lack of uptake of Textiles, Fashion and Design is influenced by myriad factors such as: the availability of resources, skill level of students and confidence of teachers in the teaching of textiles, time available to complete the work and the relevance of tasks especially at senior cycle. Moreover, Interviewee 27 argued that the focus on 'making clothes is hugely negative economy'.

There were a variety of views on what is considered to be relevant. Interviewee 28 argued that a curriculum review is about 'not throwing everything out, but having a very strong core of visibility that isn't seen as that's done elsewhere.' Interviewee 27 argued that 'the emphasis on the home is gone' and others argued that the study of family was unique to home economics. Wynn (1983) identifies the merits of the subject and how it can re-orient itself as a field of study. In her view, the emphasis of home economics:

should be on basic living skills which everyone needs; on understanding the principles involved in all aspects of the subject; on creativity and decision-making ... a great deal of the traditional rote-learning, much of it quickly outdated, and the unnecessarily time-consuming household routines, have to go.

Consumer and health education, home science and technology, community and social aspects are all relevant.

An emphasis on survival skills and helping people look after themselves (personal competence) should in Wynn's view be the sum total of the practical side of home economics. She identifies how home economics can potentially be a 'progressive and an essential element' of the curriculum by 'developing a wide range of intellectual, creative and practical skills needed by everyone' (p.199). Moreover, she acknowledges that home economics education can contribute to the development of leisure skills, literacy and numeracy skills and 'skills of observation, criticism, analysis and communication' that are developed using an experimental approach (p.209). Students can develop an appreciation for good design and planning and efficient time-organisation which she identifies as a key life-skill. Arguably these views have currency today and could be taken on board by a curriculum review committee.

Brophy (1999) acknowledges that optimal learning situations can be created when 'content that is worth learning' is taught and rational bases 'for helping students perceive self-relevance to what they are learning' are provided (p.79). Arguably, home economics educators have the potential to focus on content that is relevant to students and to relate it more to the actual 'current' lives of students (Interviewee 4). Similarly, Wynn (1983) alluded to the necessity of making the subject of home economics age appropriate as opposed to adopting a model of a 'future way of living' (p.208).

There are therefore implications for curriculum designers of home economics. The senior cycle curriculum needs 'paring-back', re-orienting around families and the contemporary needs of Irish society. Arguably, the potential of home economics is currently untapped as the curriculum does not address broader issues. For example, students could be encouraged to challenge issues arising from cultural, political, environmental, economic, legal, historic, technological and ethical influences and to take actions that enhance the wellbeing of individuals, families and society. The consequence of having a more relevant curriculum is that students would be exposed to content that refers to their current lives and it could potentially result in higher intrinsic motivation and less stress and cramming in the lead-up to examinations. However, because the current high-stakes assessment arrangements generate pressure to achieve results, deviation from the curriculum in an attempt to provide broader educational

experiences may very well be frowned upon. Yet, in Wynn's view (1983), if the subject does not respond to contemporary societal needs, it will become increasingly irrelevant and will be 'rightly criticised for not learning from the mistakes of the past' (p.209). Arguably Wynn's views continue to have merit in current times as subject sustainability issues were a prominent feature of interviewees' responses due to junior cycle reform and a senior cycle curriculum that is considered to be unfit for purpose. Some students are already voting with their feet and not choosing to study home economics.

Alignment of pedagogy, learning and assessment

This study shows that the subject values and purposes are not supported by current pedagogy in the home economics classroom. The external examinations are clearly influencing teaching methods by narrowing the range of teaching activities, demanding a certain type of pedagogy to enable students to achieve points and it consequently narrows the range of student learning experience. This finding suggests at face value that home economics teachers are disloyal to the subject aspirations. However, the teachers argued that the practical, active learning in Junior Certificate classes enables the development of skills and the achievement of meaningful learning, but that the detailed content at senior cycle contributed to a pace of instruction that is not conducive to student learning and the achievement of the broader subject aims. This pressure coupled with an undue focus on the attainment of examination 'points' results in the frequent use of direct transmission methods.

The innately practical nature of home economics offers ideal opportunities to stimulate active and meaningful learning. The interviewees revealed that practical classes tended to be more conducive to active and meaningful learning, and this was one of the reasons why the practical examination at junior cycle is popular and successful overall. Yet, the culinary aspects of the home economics curriculum, for example have been criticised for depending on recipes that are often dull and demand little skill. Mennell (1996) argues that cookery textbooks 'give a clear picture of what the pupils were taught and, by inference what they were not taught' (p.231). He observes how cookery books leave 'no room for emotional involvement in cooking ... no enthusiasm, no sense of an aesthetic dimension' (p.231). Attar (1990) supports this view by arguing that there is little space for creative expression, interest and enjoyment in a home economics classroom. Interviewee 4 corroborates Attar's view to a certain degree by arguing that

an intuitive response to food is not developed in home economics classes. Instead, students become competent at following recipes. Arguably these are minority views, but they allude to a feature of practice that is often overlooked and merits review.

Moreover, home economics teachers in Attar's study revealed that the enjoyment of cookery was not their main focus, rather 'there are too many other points and concepts to get across in the time' (p.17). Similarly, in this study, Interviewee 24 who teaches home economics to boys explained that the journal was problematic at senior cycle: the writing up is the main issue that I have with it because the boys, they love the idea of cooking'. Wynn (1983, p.209) recommends that food education in current times should refer to the quick preparation of basic ingredients.

The old emphasis on time-consuming techniques and an over-elaborate garnishing of food, perpetuates the myth of the domesticated little woman with endless time on her hands. There is no place for the disapproval of convenience foods and quick methods.

Interviewee 27 shared a similar view. She argued that home economists are still getting students to make complex pastries, for example, when the majority of cookery programmes incorporate convenience with fresh produce.

There was consensus in this study that the areas of food and textiles had the potential to develop a certain level of creativity in students; however, interviewees acknowledged that the students are not good at developing new solutions. It was reported very often that the teachers pick what the students do, thereby reducing the potential for originality. Moreover, some of the interviewees shared their view that the approach used is not conducive to developing creativity. Oftentimes the approach is product focused and then students and teachers try to go back to address the brief in question in order to fulfil the requirements of the assessment.

An important aspect of validity is the extent to which the curriculum in home economics addresses the needs of contemporary society. There is potential to move more with the times and to make home economics practice more valid and contemporary. This study reveals the potential for greater alignment between the mission and underpinning philosophy of the subject and curriculum, pedagogy and assessment so that it is current and viable. The implication of inaction and poor alignment could be subject sustainability issues. For example, the subject may not be

offered in schools if it is perceived to be out-dated. At present, students, teachers and society are short-changed because the subject is not considered to fulfil its stated aims and educational goals at senior cycle level. Yet, it is challenging for the teachers in schools to address the broader aims of the subject, to use active learning methodologies and to adopt formative assessment type pedagogy, for example, when time is needed to support the development of such practices. These approaches are therefore in conflict with current practice, where teachers feel under pressure to cover a statutory curriculum. The literature and some of the interviewees in this study suggest that there is scope to improve practice and this would entail both a curriculum and assessment review and a focus on pedagogy that generates quality learning.

6.4 Mission

Attar (1990) argues that the home economics teachers in her study ‘acknowledge that there is an absence of evidence to support their case for its inclusion in the curriculum’ (p.19). Similarly, Wilson and Harris (2004) concluded in their review on the impact of D&T that little information is available on the ‘effects or impact of teaching D&T’ (p.59). This study sought to address this gap in knowledge to a degree. Interviewee 37 clearly identified two problems. The first concern is in concurrence with Attar's view that there is little evidence of the ‘impact’ of home economics education. Secondly, she argued that home economists in Ireland are not operating ‘from a shared collective vision of what the subject is’ and called for greater ‘congruence between how we see ourselves and define ourselves and how we practice.’ Interviewee 8 mentioned feeling inferior professionally and argued that having a common vision would help her ‘know where to go next’:

You are the jack of all trades and in some ways you sometimes feel that in the staffroom a little bit, you know what really am I? I'm not a scientist. I'm not really in the spectrum of creativity. It's sometimes hard to know who you are and what exactly you are supposed to be promoting, or what is my speciality, what is my area of expertise?

One of the aims of this study was to identify the role of home economics from the perspective of the interviewees in order to provide clarity about contemporary practice. The overall view was that home economics education and its pedagogy in Ireland endeavours to develop an extensive range of knowledge, understanding and skills in learners. The interviewees confirmed that the role of home economics education is to

develop life-skills and personal resources and capacities, for the betterment of everyday life of individuals, families and society. Moreover, there was general consensus that home economics education is an arena for everyday living that has the capacity to develop human growth potential, address the practical concerns of individuals and to address the fulfilment of basic needs.

The findings of the curriculum analysis and the responses of the interviewees were analysed to determine the most common paradigm underpinning home economics practice. Firstly, the curriculum analysis revealed that the junior and senior cycle documents focus on both an empirical-rational science-based perspective as well as a critical-science based perspective. Not surprisingly, there was more evidence of the latter in the senior cycle document. The junior cycle document is older (DES 1991) and focuses less on broader contemporary ecological issues such as sustainability. There is more emphasis on the development of technical skills and 'how to' actions and less emphasis on addressing practical perennial problems. At senior cycle, there was a predominant focus on the development of human growth potential. Many of the aims referred to both the home and broader ecological contexts. There is no reference in either syllabus to advocacy or transformative practices that address perennial family issues. One implication of these findings is that there is scope to create greater alignment between the subject mission statement, the syllabi and practice.

The tacit knowledge of interviewees brought to the surface during the interviews showed that the majority of home economists operate from a predominantly 'techne' focus. When questioned about the role of home economics, the majority of interviewees spoke in terms of the development of life-skills, personal management and other key skills. Some draw from the technical, empirical-rational science-based perspective alone and some eclectically draw from this and the critical science perspective. It is not surprising that the teachers in this study show a predominant technical focus as historically, the focus of the home economics curriculum was on knowledge of the 'how to' variety. A technical focus was promoted, involving 'knowing and applying pre-established rules' (Curriculum Corporation 1996, p.5). Baldwin (1991) argues that 'techne' or the empirical-rational science approach focuses on the amassing of knowledge as 'facts' (p.45). Emphasis is placed on factual information and the development of technical skills. Evidence of a techne approach can also be found on the

subject association website and possibly in textbooks. For example, the ATHE (2008) position statement claims that home economics ‘delivers vital skills that enable students to lead effective lives as individuals and family members as well as members of the wider community’ (webpage). ‘Delivery’ suggests the use of ‘direct transmission’ and ‘jug and mug’ type pedagogies.

There are many problems associated with a *techne* type of approach. For example, Wynn (1983) argues that implied social control evident in textbooks is inappropriate and she suggested that personal decision making skills were required over the imposition of life-styles on people. Similarly, the Curriculum Corporation (1996) argue that ‘when home economics education is confined to the technical skills in the areas of food, clothing and shelter, it does little to challenge and analyse the social constraints on the individual or family groups’ (p.9). In a similar vein, they point out that it is important that home economics professionals ‘explore and challenge issues’ (p.9) that arise from trends such as: changing work patterns, unemployment, shared parenting and changing family structures. Critical problems can be identified, their social, cultural and historical roots addressed and action taken to deal with the problems. This type of approach is indicative of a critical science approach involving ‘*phronesis*’, or practical, common-sense reasoning and is one that could be adopted in an Irish context.

Only three interviewees made reference to tensions underlying the subject. This type of omission in views suggests that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the underpinning traditions. Only one of these interviewees addressed the specific frameworks underlying the subject. Interviewee 36 acknowledged that the ‘underlying frame of progressive liberalism’ underpins ‘the most progressive elements of home economics’. He argues that the aim of home economics education is:

to equip students with a whole series of both practical and emotional skills to allow them to make better choices, both in their individual lives, in their social relationships and hopefully in the communities that they live in... the mission and the vision might be for a whole community of these types of self reliant confident beings that can then engage in social relationships which are more fruitful and so on.

However, he also spoke in terms of how home economics appears to promote ‘the theory of choice’ which he argued is underpinned by positivism. In alignment with Jerpak's views (2005), Interviewee 36 explains that a ‘political economy’ focus:

moved from a kind of a preoccupation with the power of structures of society and income distribution to a theory of individual choice. And I wonder how much of this individual choice theoretical framework has made its way into home economics. But I think if that is true, then there might be a tension somewhere in home economics because on the one hand you have ... what I would say is a quite progressive aspirational vision for these sort of fully developed rounded human beings, but actually if it's about choice, you fall back on a very kind of narrow rational choice theory and rational choice theory really assumes individuals to be more or less egoistic calculators who make decisions on their own self-interest. So if you have a whole community of rational egoistic self-interested calculators, you get a different vision of society than you do from more progressive fully developed rounded human beings.

Arguably, another problem he highlighted was that home economics professionals generally:

accept most of the power structures as taken for granted and attempts to give people the tools to navigate through that world ... making choices with the resources you have, but it never really asks is the type of resource distribution equitable, or is it actually compatible with fully developed human beings.

These views corroborate the findings of the historical research as presented in the literature review. There are important implications for home economics professionals. As well as engagement in dialogue about the subject mission, the home economics profession could benefit from engagement in dialogue about the traditions upon which home economics practice is built on. As Schneider (1994) argues, 'the present is rooted in the past, and the future is the product of both past and present' (p.6), therefore, developing an understanding of the ideological dimensions which have shaped the subject over time offers the potential to enhance the construction of a common vision for practice. She argues that change may be viewed as 'progress and liberation, the situation may produce feelings of joy, hope and trust with respect to the future' of the subject (p.6). For others, change may produce feelings of fear and anxiety. Similarly, McGregor (1997, p.2) asserts that:

We often take our knowledge base for granted and when challenged to examine the way we do things with a view to changing, we often get angry, confused, or frustrated, or we ignore the task. The fact that paradigms are often unquestioned can result (a) in a small rebellion of some of those challenged to change, or (b) a head in the sand mentality leading to home economics practice which may not meet the needs of a changing society and families.

Arguably in this study, a 'head in the sand' mentality to practice was evident as only one interviewee spoke in terms of the subject's philosophical underpinnings and two others referred to the underlying tensions affecting practice. A clear conception of the

nature and purpose of home economics work was evident in this study, albeit with a technical life-skills focus. Interviewee 8 questioned whether home economics education is 'just about the technical side or is it actually about something broader?' She argues that engagement with the subject's underpinning frameworks and philosophy arguably has not been encouraged in the past:

We probably weren't encouraged to think about what it is that we are actually hoping to achieve, that I suppose, it's [about] buns in the oven, get them out by 4 o'clock. It is more product focused really. It is more about developing skills and probably not much of an emphasis on other skills apart from the practical side.

This level of disengagement with the subject's philosophy is not solely confined to the interviewees of this study. As Baldwin (1991) argues, in the past, 'practising [home economics] teachers lacked clarity of purpose' and 'common understanding' (p.43). Curriculum thinking over time, according to Plihal *et al.* (1999), has been dominated by the 'technical perspective' and behavioural approaches (p.6). For example, Tyler's (1949) conceptual model for curriculum planning is commonly viewed as a 'linear procedural model' that encourages a means to an end 'reasoning process' (Plihal *et al.* 1999, pp.6-7). Therefore, the ends are 'precisely determined prior to seeking appropriate means' and 'decisions regarding instructional content and method become purely technical matters, based on specialised knowledge from experts' (Plihal *et al.* 1999, p.7). Baldwin reconceptualises home economics as a social movement and a field 'with great potential for social change and the betterment of family life' (p.42). However, she argues that the early and continuing allegiance to the positivistic scientific paradigm which resonates with the empirical-rational science approach has resulted in a lack of impact on practice. This view may hold some currency in current times as many of the interviewees 'hoped' home economics made a difference in the lives of students.

Interviewee 28 argued that it is time to 'be clear on what is making us unique' and to take 'ownership' of it. Therefore, it is important for home economists to engage in dialogue about what is core to home economics. If it is food and family, then it is important to take 'ownership' of these areas. Arguably, home economics could benefit from adopting a critical science perspective involving, for example, the analysis and challenge of social constraints impacting upon family life. Similarly, McGregor (1997) argues that 'our own knowledge base' is oriented around families and that it is important to consider 'what paradigms guide our daily practice with families' (p.1).

Home economics education has the potential to resolve family problems, but Baldwin (1991) asserts that ‘this potential remains largely untapped’ (p.42):

Why is it that a field with its share of visionaries and energetic members for almost 100 years fails in the very task that it sets itself? Why is it that home economics has failed to promote social conditions that would strengthen and elevate the family as a vital and effective social institution?

There are implications for practice. For example, Interviewee 28 questioned 'to what extent are we doing that well or well enough? To what extent does our core degree equip us to do that well?' She pondered whether home economists have the knowledge and skills to appropriately challenge issues and address practical perennial problems effectively. In fact, she raises an important issue as arguably, the curriculum of the B.Ed. Home Economics programme at third level impacts the formation of home economics teachers. It is beyond the scope of this study to categorically answer this question; however, these are noteworthy considerations for the designers of the B. Ed. curriculum as well as providers of professional development opportunities for teachers.

Focusing on the bigger picture and enabling the teachers to teach according to their professional values can realistically be achieved with both curriculum and assessment reform in tandem. However, Fullan (1993, p.3) argues that:

we have an educational system which is fundamentally conservative. The way that teachers are trained, the way that schools are organised, the way that the educational hierarchy operate ... results in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change.

Seismic changes are occurring in Irish education with the new junior cycle that commenced in September 2014. However, in alignment with Fullan’s views (1993), Sheahan and Doyle (2014) report that there is overwhelming public opposition to the changes and attempts are being made to retain the status quo. The paradox evident here is that all of the research studies, including this current study, point to the negative influence of the ‘points race’ on students’ educational experiences, yet when curriculum and assessment reform is introduced to address these issues, it seems to generate considerable resistance. However, Sheahan and Doyle (2014) present the teachers’ unions argument that ‘recent cutbacks have left schools without the resources to take on change on the scale envisaged’ (p.18). They report that the now former Minister Quinn believes that teachers are ‘nervous of change’ and that these reforms have the potential

of preventing student 'disengagement from the learning process' and their falling into 'the departure lounge of education' (p.18). Arguably, more professional development support is required to facilitate the sea change of educational reform. As Fullan (1993) argues, 'it is simply unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms one by one, even major ones, in a situation which is basically not organised to engage in change will do anything but give reform a bad name' (p.3).

Recent junior cycle reform has implications for home economics practice. A major concern for the interviewees in this study is the sustainability of the subject in the curriculum. McGregor (2006) argues the importance of making visible the 'sum total of belief-set, values and practices prevalent in a professional community' (p.8) and this knowledge can be used to create an overall vision and strategic plan for the profession. Without this paradigm, the home economics community may struggle to keep the subject in the Irish school curriculum. The community of home economics professionals could therefore benefit from engagement in dialogue about practice, to claim what is unique about home economics and be proactive in terms of leading junior cycle reform. As Interviewee 25 confidently put it:

I suppose one of the aspirations of the new junior cycle is to make the children more independent, more creative, to be able to manage themselves in a better way ... I suppose the teaching to the exam isn't working so it is going to become the overall approach of education. Home economics does that now anyway and it has always done it. I don't foresee any difficulties with regard to moving home economics through the new junior cycle and it will be a very easy transition.

My findings suggest that home economics education and its pedagogy mainly endeavour to develop an extensive range of skills in learners as opposed to the broader subject aims of empowerment and advocacy. An inconsistency exists between the subject mission, the written curriculum and the enacted curriculum. The findings also show that the enactment of the mission in practice depends on the teacher's beliefs about learning and teaching. The identity of teachers of home economics is shaped by a variety of factors. McGregor (1997) argues that different knowledge bases, assumptions, ideologies, values, belief systems, research training, life experiences and practice all influence how one views phenomenon or events. Some of the interviewees were passionate about providing extended learning opportunities to students and they were committed to focusing on the 'bigger picture'. However, the majority expressed

the view that they experienced pressure to prepare students for high-stakes examinations and to generate 'glowing' results. Dissonance between teachers' values and practice is a strong theme to emerge in the findings of this study.

6.5 Identity

Another important finding refers to the identity of home economics. The majority of the interviewees assert that home economics education and its purpose are commonly misunderstood. Moreover, there are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession and burdens that need to be addressed. Arguably, the subject is hamstrung by the traditions upon which it has built itself. For example, home economics has an identity burden arising from the subject's historical focus on the education of females for domestic roles. Arguably, this type of education promoted a domestic ideology and the use of the word 'home' in the subject title continues to perpetuate such associations. The home focus is also associated with the subjugation of women as domestic roles (with the exception of domestic service) were unpaid and not valorised. Home economics has also received criticism from women's movements who argued that home economics perpetuated conservative social values and the reinforcement of traditional models of gender roles.

'Domestic education' has historically been associated with lower-ability students. Both the literature and the interviewees in this study draw attention to the public perception of home economics as a low-status subject and its suitability for lower-ability students. An important consideration in this debate is if there is any negative impact in the quest for status by the home economics profession. Some teachers in Attar's study (1990) were of the view that efforts to make home economics more academic 'were made at the expense of the majority of pupils studying it, who were confronted with an increasing quantity of written work which might be beyond their capabilities, while they had less time for practical work which was of more value to them' (p.90). Similarly, the interviewees in this study argued that the extent of the written work associated with the coursework journal at senior cycle was affecting levels of student motivation, engagement and participation.

Arguably, the increasing academic nature of home economics at senior cycle is causing disaffection amongst lower-ability students. The teachers of home economics drove these curriculum changes forward, yet are perplexed by the decline in numbers at senior

cycle. Arguably, this seeming paradox has home economics teachers desiring a higher status, yet when curriculum changes are made that improve academic status (albeit impact negatively on the less able), there appears to be professional disquiet. Moreover, it appears that the students are voting with their feet, as the footfall in home economics classrooms at senior cycle is progressively decreasing. The home economics profession, therefore, could consider the implication of curriculum and assessment changes and the impact on the quality of learning attained by the 'typical' learner that frequents the home economics classroom.

This study provides evidence that aspects of stereotyping continue to exist. These issues of sex stereotyping and sexism arguably warrant attention by home economics professionals in current times. In order to break the gender mould, issues such as gender stereotyping, indoctrination and sexism in the home economics curriculum need to be examined. Askew and Ross (1988) argue that at an implicit level, the construction of a school subject as a body of knowledge, the language, content and pedagogy can be reorganised to rid a subject of sexism. For example, boys learning to take on more caring roles could be viewed as an anti-sexist measure. Challenging stereotypes, developing new related images and ultimately, re-thinking what home economics education is and the purpose of the subject could effectively improve how the subject is construed. However, they argue that 'early socialisation and sex-stereotyped attitudes about boys and girls have a fundamental effect on the processes of education' (p.25) and they believe 'this begins long before secondary school' (p.31). These behaviours polarise in secondary school and in their view, so do 'male' and 'female' subjects (p.131).

Another burden raised by Jerpbak (2005), was the lack of male role models and teachers in the field. He argues that the gender imbalance in the home economics classroom 'seems so diametrically opposed to the very make-up of society' (p.9). Jerpbak's views hold some currency as a mere 0.24% of the cohort of home economics teachers in Ireland is male. The implication for the home economics profession is that this subtle trend, where men do not engage in home economics education, serves to perpetuate gender ideology in Irish education today. As Jerpbak (2005) argues, home economists have a duty to 'critically' challenge these statistics and to 'take some meaningful action

toward not only professing, but representing the full equality we say we value for families' (p.9).

Another issue frequently discussed by the home economists in the interviews was the public perception of home economics teachers. There were many references to exposure to taunting, glib comments and pejorative remarks and these comments were often based on the older domestic science 'expert' stereotype. Interviewee 7 exemplifies this by explaining that home economists are compared to characters such as *Bree van deKamp* in *Desperate Housewives*. A quick Google search led me to a Yahoo answers board: 'Bree is a perfectionist. Her hair is always perfect and her house is amazingly clean ... Perfectionist. A place for everything, everything in its place type of lady (Yahoo 2014, webpage). Arguably, home economists in the past were equally renowned for focusing on detail and being good home-makers and managers. During the 20th century, focus moved towards the development of technical skills, 'the management of things', making a home 'businesslike and efficient' (Baldwin 1991, p.44).

There were some alternative views about the home economist as shared by the interviewees in this study. For example, Interviewee 24 aligns with Attar's view (1990) who argued that common sense is often missing in the home economics classroom:

I would honestly say that a lot of home economics teachers ... are hoity toity about the subject in the sense that they believe themselves to be the best that there is. I don't knock that in the sense it is good to have good belief in yourself, but I do think that sometimes they just run away with themselves that they get lost in it. I think common sense has to play a part in it and sometimes it doesn't.

There was just one other reference from a home economist to the danger of adopting an 'ivory tower' stand-point by home economists:

I think that it is important for us as home economics professionals to really understand peoples' worlds because that is something that is levied against us ... the criticism that sometimes we can operate from an ivory tower not always understanding. (Interviewee 37)

Moreover, Veit (2011) reveals that the phrase home economics for most people 'evokes bland food, bad sewing and self-righteous fussiness' and that 'home economists' eagerness to dispense advice on everything from eating to sleeping to posture galled' (webpage). She argued, however, that it is the stereotypes about home economics that are remembered rather than the contribution that home economics can make to fighting

diseases such as obesity in current times. Interviewee 37 continued her argument by stating that the home economics profession are partly responsible for the persistence of a variety of stereotypes:

I mean we can blame history, but we can also blame how we have practised over time as well ... What is being promoted is more the technical and that's visible, the purpose is not visible all of the time ... It's more of what people see the cooking and sewing and all of that sort of stuff that's what they see, stitchers and stirrers that's how they describe it in derogatory terms. They don't often see us as developing young people, not all of the time, people's problem solving skills- they are not the first things that jump out at you when they talk about home economics.

Stereotypical views and attitudes are often unconsciously held and are deeply embedded, therefore, making it harder to overcome them. Once these characteristics are accepted unquestionably, they are often used for discriminatory treatment, hence the glib comments often received by home economists. This is a burden that home economists will struggle to overcome due to the existence of interminable cultural assumptions. Clearly, the home economics profession needs to address these underlying issues, firstly by understanding the traditions upon which home economics is based and secondly by developing a shared vision for practice, one that addresses the profile and identity issues.

This study identifies that leadership, professional dialogue, teacher empowerment and action is required. Arguably, the subject's position in the curriculum is weakened due to a lack of coherence around practice, as well as a lack of advocacy and leadership in the field. The implication for the subject association executive and providers of initial teacher education in home economics is that the subject is in danger of being 'wiped-out', especially with impending junior cycle reform and the plan to reduce the number of subjects in the curriculum. There is a pressing need therefore to address the burden of identity, the subject name, the problem of gender imbalance and to establish a common vision for practice. This paradigm once visible can contribute to the formation of a collective vision and a strategic plan for the profession in Ireland as well as assist in the re-orientation of the subject.

6.6 Summary

This study set about to examine assessment practices and their impact on home economics education. According to Stobart (2008, p.14), three questions can be asked of any assessment:

1. What is the principal purpose of this assessment?
2. Is the form of the assessment fit-for-purpose?
3. Does it achieve its purposes?

The first question refers to the purported purpose, or purposes of the assessment and sometimes these purposes may compete. Stobart (2008) defines 'fitness-for-purpose' as being concerned with the appropriateness of the assessment. The third question refers to the impact of the assessment, intended consequences and the 'spectre of unintended consequences' (p.14).

In terms of purpose, external home economics assessments have many uses. For example, they provide information on student achievement to parents. A set of results provides information to other stakeholders such as managers, further and higher educational institutions, employers and State bodies, such as the Inspectorate and the DES. Arguably, examination results in a home economics context are an indication of the level of student knowledge and understanding at a given point in time. However, the actions taken by teachers and students to improve performance in the external assessments are prioritised and there is potentially a negative unintended consequence for the student, as the achievement of deep learning may be compromised.

The following series of questions arise from this in-depth study into home economics practice. For example: are results and outcomes of home economics assessments a true reflection of candidates' ability in home economics and to what extent are the interpretations we make on the results and outcomes valid? Do the assessments enable students to demonstrate their development of personal resources and capabilities, the combination of theory with practice in order to solve problems, and the management of resources to meet physical, emotional, intellectual, social and economic needs? Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) advise that examination results should be cautiously interpreted and similarly, the outcomes of this study suggest that results in a home economics context should also be 'cautiously interpreted'.

So what can be reasonably inferred from the results of home economics national assessments? The technical analysis of the home economics test items in this study shows that the majority of questions are lower-order in nature and mostly demand the recall and understanding of factual knowledge and concepts. The majority of the teachers interviewed in this study candidly acknowledged teaching to the test, especially with examination classes. The evidence gleaned in this study is not sufficient to make any over-arching claim regarding home economics educational practice in Ireland. However, my tentative conclusion is that the assessment results may not be viewed as a valid indicator of standards in the subject of home economics and that the results and outcomes may not be used with confidence. Arguably, the evidence from this study suggests that what the home economics assessments do achieve is the provision of a very general judgment on the attainment of learning in home economics. However, this finding is not unique to home economics education. Mehrens (1998) documents that ‘teaching too closely to the assessment results in the inferences from the test scores being corrupted. One can no longer make inferences from the test to the domain. The Lake Wobegon effect results’ (p.14).

Home economics education aims to address ‘everyday’ and ‘real world problems’. Traditional assessments involve what Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) describe as ‘well-defined exercises, which have a single right answer’ (p.14). However, an assessment that addresses everyday and real world problems is more ‘demanding to guide and harder to assess’ as ‘there is no right answer, and where explanation of the way the problem has been defined, and of the approach adopted, is as important as the “answer” itself’ (Mansell, James and the ARG 2009, p.14). Realistic problem situations are often ruled out for these reasons resulting in ‘an invalidity block’ which Mansell, James and the ARG (2009) argue ‘can be ruled out by strengthening the use of teachers’ own assessment in national tests and public examinations’ (p.14). Arguably, the achievement of dependable results would be challenging to achieve, but possible with teacher professional development supports. Furthermore, the testing system might better realise the potential of the home economics national curriculum and address the current mis-alignment that exists between the curriculum aims and assessment arrangements.

Additionally, this study suggests that potential exists to develop and promote a plausible shared vision of home economics practice. The implications are significant as issues of

subject sustainability in the curriculum were discussed by many of the interviewees in this study. Fullan (1993) argues that the development of a 'shared vision' requires 'a good deal of reflective experience' (p.28) and Senge (1990) reasons that if 'one person's (or one group's) vision' is 'imposed on an organisation ... such visions, at best, command compliance- not commitment. A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision' (p.206). He argues that 'if people don't have their own vision, all they can do is "sign up" for someone else's. The result is compliance, never commitment' (p.211). Moreover, Fullan (1993) argues that 'groupthink is the uncritical acceptance and/or suppression of dissent in going along with group decisions' (p.82). Similarly, Schrage (1990) argues that the problem of group think is that well-intentional and well-educated groups can 'end up mutually reinforcing their biases all the way to self-destruction' (p.29).

In order for home economics professionals to avoid falling into the groupthink trap, several actions can be taken. Saul (1992), for example, argues that 'the proper way to deal with confusion is to increase that confusion by asking uncomfortable questions until the source of the difficulties is exposed' (pp.534-535). Senge (1990) argues that 'people with a strong sense of personal direction can join together to create a powerful synergy toward what I/we truly want' (p.211). Moreover, Fullan (1993) argues that 'conflict and disagreement are part and parcel of all productive change' (pp.82-83). The findings of this study confirm the need for change and that engagement in professional dialogue about current practice is pressing in light of junior cycle reform and impending curriculum change.

However, Turkki's (2005, p.281) research into home economics as a discipline and a science, revealed the complexity of the challenge faced by home economics professionals:

We are located at the centre of society; on the other hand we occupy a marginal position. Our speciality knowledge and our competency are partly the kind which is difficult to articulate and point out, but there is no reason to argue against the necessity of a home economics knowledge base for future societies.

Arguably, the field of home economics has burdens that need addressing. A head in the sand mentality to practice may have a detrimental consequence for the subject of home economics especially if the pattern of declining student participation continues at senior

cycle. Moreover, taking ownership of our own knowledge base which is centred on the family could be a good starting point. This coupled with professional dialogue and synergy towards the achievement of collective goals would facilitate the necessary re-orientation of home economics education.

Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks

7.1 Concluding remarks

Chapter 6 set out a discussion on the results and their implications for home economics and they point to the following conclusions about continuing tensions in the field. This study identified that the purpose of home economics education is commonly misunderstood. Moreover, there are profiling, identity and teacher agency issues impacting upon the home economics profession. Several more widely based conclusions as well as recommendations arising from the aforementioned tensions are set out in the following sub-sections.

7.1.1 Subject sustainability

Subject sustainability issues were prominent in the study for a variety of reasons. Mainly, the senior cycle curriculum is too broad, aspects are considered irrelevant and the coursework assessment of food studies is considered onerous and to be causing student disaffection with the subject and learning environment. An analysis of SEC statistics (SEC 2001; SEC 2004; SEC 2007a and SEC 2011a) confirms the latter views as student numbers at senior cycle have steadily decreased. Another factor that may impact the subject position, as identified in this study, is the lack of visibility of the subject's role and its uniqueness as an area of study or discipline. Many of the interviewees did not address broader influences impacting on the subject, but those that did alluded to incongruence between stated aims and practice and the lack of a shared vision about the subject. Feeling like a 'jack of all trades [and master of none]' was aptly mentioned by one of the interviewees in this study. She argued that it is difficult to promote the subject when feeling unsure of what her speciality and area of expertise is. Paring-back a broad curriculum and re-orientation around family and the contemporary needs of society may serve to bolster the subject's position in the curriculum in the medium to long term.

7.1.2 Professional identity

Many of the teachers in this study operate with a predominantly 'techne' focus (Flyvbjerg 2001 and Dunne 2005). This type of focus results in the amassing of knowledge as facts and the development of technical skills. There is less emphasis on broader ecological issues and on addressing practical perennial problems, and there is little room for creative expression in aspects such as the culinary or textile arts. This

type of practice may contribute to negative feelings about the subject as it may be considered to be old-fashioned. Arguably, an unexplored issue exists around the inconsistency between negative gendered attributes to home economics in schools and current media obsessions with activities associated with home economics education.

Another unexplored identity issue revealed in this study is the lack of a common understanding and questioning of ideological dimensions which have shaped and arguably constrained the subject over time. Challenging home economics teachers to examine how they do things with a view to changing can generate a variety of emotions and actions. However, questioning ideological paradigms such as domestic ideology and the critical science paradigm would enable the formulation of a clear conception of the nature and purpose of home economics education in Ireland.

7.1.3 Gender

Another aspect affecting the public image of home economics over time has been the gendered perception of the subject. It is girls that predominantly take the subject; thereby perpetuating the notion that home economics education is suitable for girls. The gendered perception can operate against the subject as it may appear to be more appealing to girls; and boys may be more reluctant to enter the classroom. The historical analysis in this study exposed how domestic ideology perpetuated the gendered perception of the subject. Arguably, the subject position is further weakened as it is constantly dealing with gender identity issues. Many attempts have been made to re-name the subject and this study reveals that professional dissonance exists about the subject's name and focus in contemporary times. Clearly ignoring gender and identity issues may ultimately result in the subject's demise. The apparent lack of cohesion within the subject can only be addressed by the teachers themselves. Subject-reorientation discussions focusing on the subject name, content, focus and philosophy would be valuable and the desirable outcome would be a revised gender-neutral subject that is fit for purpose in terms of addressing contemporary societal needs.

7.1.4 Subject status

This study revealed that the subject of home economics is constrained by the unwanted legacy of low educational status. As identified above, it is young girls that have historically taken the subject as a result of being enculturated into stereotypical female

roles and this has perpetuated domestic ideology through the educational system. The public perception of the subject's suitability for lower-ability students existed historically and elements of this perception persist in current times. However, efforts to improve the subject status by home economics teachers in recent times may have been made at the expense of the cohort of students studying it. For example, the increasing quantity of written work demanded by the senior cycle coursework assessment has reduced time for practical work and subsequently caused disaffection amongst lower-ability students. Subject-reorientation discussions could focus on approaches that challenge the 'reputation' of home economics and rebranding techniques that communicate what the subject indubitably is.

Some of the interviewees spoke about being exposed to sex stereotyping, pejorative remarks and taunting by colleagues. This suggests that professional dialogue and action is necessary to address profiling issues and tensions in the field such as gendered language, content and pedagogy. Professional agreement pertaining to the subject name coupled with rethinking what home economics is can help to challenge existing stereotypes. As a corollary to the feeling of dominance suggested in 7.1.3, the lack of male role models in the field is not helping. Current statistics prove the existence of sex stereotyping as a mere 0.24% of the cohort of home economics teachers is male. It is difficult to contest these facts and the existing public perception of home economics unless major re-orientation occurs in the field of home economics education.

7.1.5 Curriculum overload and teaching to the test

This study revealed that prescriptive broad curricula and high-stakes testing are hampering the achievement of broader subject aims. Arguably, an over-loaded curriculum can reduce the space and time necessary for creative teaching and learning. Consequently, the range and quality of students' experience may be narrowed. My study suggests that external assessment arrangements promote teaching to the test and a washback effect on the quality of student learning. Participants held the view that the senior cycle assessment predominantly promoted shallow teaching and lower-order learning. Summative assessment practices are commonly used in the home economics classroom and only a few of the teachers had adopted the spirit of assessment for learning. Consequently, the potential of formative assessment in the enhancement of learning is lost in many home economics classrooms.

7.2 Wider implications of the results

7.2.1 Distortion of learning

Prescriptive curricula and high-stakes testing is not a problem confined to home economics. This study confirms the findings of other studies (see for example, Smyth *et al.* 2007, Smyth *et al.* 2011 and NCCA 2013) where teachers reported teaching specifically towards enabling students to answer questions on examination papers. It appears that those aspects of the subject that are easily assessed are more valued and disproportionately addressed in the classroom. The dogged persistence of this trend in education may be due to cultural expectations about learning. An unintended consequence of ‘over-prescriptive’ frameworks for curriculum and assessment is the distortion of learning. The washback effect is that the quality of learning achieved and the inferences that can be drawn from the test results are affected. Students may not attain subject skills, values or understanding other than what the test assesses. Back in 1970, Madeus and MacNamara argued that ‘for too long the cart has been before the horse; final marks ... have been treated by society as the ultimate goal of education’ (p.135). Similarly, the NCCA (2002) identified that validity is of secondary concern in comparison to the objectivity of assessment arrangements. Arguably, the ‘intellectual curiosity’ and ‘the joy of discovery’ that Madeus and MacNamara (1970) spoke about 45 years ago may continue to be ‘subordinated to’ and ‘sacrificed to’ external examinations (p.135) unless cultural expectations are altered.

7.2.2 Demand level of examinations

Another worrying dimension in this discussion is the overall demand required of examination papers. Madeus and MacNamara’s (1970) analysis of the Leaving Certificate examinations provided a reasonably accurate picture of what students did in order to gain marks. They argued that students should be required to exercise their intelligence at higher levels than rote learning. Although this problem existed over four decades ago, many of the problems associated with the examination system have not changed. The technical analysis of external assessment in this study confirmed that the majority of questions demand lower-order thinking and learning. If this finding reflects what is happening in other subjects, then clearly the problems identified by Madeus and MacNamara in 1970 have not been resolved.

Another related problem associated with examinations is that the intellectual ability called into play by a particular question may be very different from the focus the examiner is trying to assess. Students can anticipate questions, commit the answer to memory and then function at the level of knowledge in the examination. It is evident in this and other studies that the external examinations are clearly influencing teaching methods by demanding a certain type of pedagogy to enable students to achieve examination points.

7.2.3 Inappropriate coursework behaviour

An unanticipated finding in this study was the reporting of widespread unethical behaviour by teachers in relation to coursework journal tasks. It is clearly unethical for teachers to consciously cheat in an attempt to enable students achieve high results in the external examinations. If these findings were to be replicated across the whole educational community, then assessment results may not be viewed as a valid indicator of standards in the subject. I would go a step further and argue that in home economics, my study shows that they should not be used entirely with confidence. A consequence of current assessment arrangements is that those who are making inferences from results may not realise how narrow the domain is in reality. The Lake Wobegon effect (Mehrens 1998) occurs as the results may not indicate true improvement in student learning. If this type of inappropriate behaviour is happening in other subject areas, then the implications are serious and it draws attention to whether we can have confidence in the results of State examinations.

Arguably, teachers are victims in the process. Corruption of in-class assessment can be driven by the demands of hyper-accountability and it is highly vulnerable to manipulation. The new junior cycle programme involves a minimum of 40% coursework per subject and in-school assessment. Therefore, issues of inappropriate behaviour relating to coursework need to be addressed urgently. Clearly, it is time to engage in reflection and professional dialogue about such worrying issues. Sufficient support structures such as teacher professional development are necessary for the enactment of such changes.

7.3 Recommendations

I believe some recommendations for improvements in home economics education are suggested by my work. They include developing more sophisticated assessment designs, conducting impact studies, subject re-orientation and finally advocacy and leadership in the field.

7.3.1 Sophisticated assessment designs: planning positive washback

My findings suggest that the majority of the interviewees comply with current assessment requirements. Therefore, a 'planned' washback effect could be achieved through more sophisticated designs of assessment that demand higher-order thinking and learning. This type of assessment could effectively address the subject values and purposes. Assessments with multiple components that address a range of learning were favoured by the participants in this study. Expanding the range and style of questions can support students in the development of higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, the application of knowledge and evaluation. Project work at senior cycle is currently designed to develop students' independent research skills. However, structured activities that enable the progressive development of such complex skills would benefit practice. Realistic problem situations are often ruled out as they are challenging to set and assess. However, such problems can reveal the quality of thinking and reasoning patterns exhibited by students and their engagement with the task or problem overall. The development of key skills is topical in Ireland with impending junior cycle reform, yet there is little research conducted in the field on how key skills are progressively developed and assessed. These issues run across the entire junior cycle curriculum and would have implications for other subjects.

One focus of this study was on the demand level of examination questions. A logical follow-on to this analysis would be to compare examination questions and marking schemes as they can indicate anticipated intellectual activity required of students. This study did not involve the examination of students' answer books or scripts to see how the students respond to examination questions. Collectively, a cognitive demand analysis of questions, an analysis of the allocation of marks within questions and an examination of students' answers would provide a more comprehensive account of the washback effect of examinations on students' learning. It was not possible to observe students' intellectual functioning as they answered questions; however, an interesting

slant to this debate would be to identify students' views pertaining to examination questions and how they set about answering them.

7.3.2 Impact studies

Home economists have been criticised for claiming to prepare students for all kinds of living, yet providing little evidence of the impact of home economics education. Many of the teachers 'hoped' the education made a difference and most spoke in terms of the effective development of life-skills. This study identified a predominant focus on technical aspects of home economics. Arguably, a predominant 'techné' focus reduces the potential of home economics education to impact at societal level. Moreover, incoherence in the practitioners' understanding of the under-pinning philosophical frameworks and traditions was identified. Therefore, a recommendation of this study is that home economics practitioners engage in dialogue about the broader potential of home economics education and various perspectives influencing practice. The IFHE (2008) claim that critical, transformative and emancipatory action to enhance well-being is a core feature of home economics practice. Instead, this study revealed that profiling and teacher agency issues predominate and there was little reference to transformative practices.

The student perspective was an interesting aspect of this study and the focus group interviews provided profound insights about the value of home economics education. For example, the subject relevance was an aspect of home economics that was valued by students. The literature and some of the teachers in this study revealed that there is little evidence of the benefit of home economics education. However, the students in this study provided concrete evidence of an impact. A recommendation of this study would be to capture a greater volume of students' views regarding home economics practice in order to explore these issues more thoroughly.

Interestingly, many of the students spoke about home economics in terms of the skills acquired such as cooking and sewing. In contrast, many of the teachers argued that this type of focus is stereotypical. There appears to be some disjunction between how home economics professionals view their practice and how the students view the enacted curriculum. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore this disjunction, but it is an important consideration for future research in the field.

7.3.3 Subject re-orientation

Another important recommendation of this study is that curriculum and assessment practices need to be frequently reviewed in order to ensure that the subject addresses contemporary needs of society. The focus of home economics education can be re-oriented to take into account 'the bigger picture' and this type of practice may resonate with professional values as it may be realistically achieved with both curriculum and assessment reform in tandem. A curriculum review would enable the profession to revisit aspects of relevance and to take ownership of areas of practice that are unique to home economics. Reorientation and clarity about the unique aspects of the subject arguably can strengthen the subject position. The subject knowledge base is oriented around families, but this potential remains largely untapped. Moreover, research pertaining to the role of home economics in enhancing well-being could help improve the subject's profile.

My work requires teachers to take time to critically reflect on their practice, the subject they teach and the way it is taught and assessed. Through reflection and professional dialogue, a plausible shared vision of home economics practice can be devised, one to which professionals are truly committed. The implication of inaction in respect of revisioning can result in teachers and society being short-changed because the subject may not be considered to fulfil its stated aims. Moreover, subject sustainability issues are likely if the profession fail to formulate a collective vision for the future.

7.3.4 Advocacy and leadership

This study suggests that the subject's position in the curriculum is weakened due to incoherence around practice, as well as a lack of advocacy and leadership in the field. The first likely step towards change within the home economics community would be to pose what Saul (1992) calls 'uncomfortable questions until the source of the difficulties is exposed' (pp.534-535). Perhaps one way of addressing the subject's identity problem would be to garner societal views pertaining to the subject. Such insights may enlighten the profession about why the subject continues to be misunderstood. Working through the exposed burdens and resolving them may involve conflict and disagreement. Fullan (1993) argues that conflict is 'part and parcel of all productive change' (pp.82-83). Such change would involve teachers critically examining their own professional identity and

becoming aware of personal assumptions, motives and value systems. As a consequence, such practices may enable professionals to become more influential at societal level. For example, practical understanding, empathy and a sense of awareness and agency about existing and emerging social, economic, political, cultural and technological issues potentially would be enacted. Moreover, engagement in professional inquiry can heighten professional awareness, kindle a desire to change, respond to emerging societal needs and generate a willingness to engage in related dialogue.

The evidence gleaned in this study is not sufficient to make any over-arching claim regarding home economics educational practice in Ireland. Partly this is due to limitations in my study, which are considered in the next section. However, my study does make a number of pertinent claims about the way home economics is taught and learnt in Ireland.

7.4 Limitations

As in any research study, a variety of data collection and analysis methods may be suggested. For example, one might argue that an observation study would strengthen the data on classroom practice. Unfortunately classroom observation was not a practical option for my study. Additionally a questionnaire survey could capture areas of agreement and disagreement about the practice of home economics in a wider group of respondents than in my interview survey. However, an interview survey was chosen as it offered opportunities to gain insights into myriad factors influencing teachers' beliefs and practice. In essence, I had the advantage of 'being closer' to the lived experience of the participants. This method was also adjudged to be more practical and cost effective to implement. An obvious limitation of the use of an interview survey is that there may be disjunction between the teachers' espoused beliefs and how they act in practice or incongruence between theory and practice. However, many of the interviewees shared their views openly and frankly and it was not apparent at face value that they were concealing any aspect of their practice. Arguably, the high level of trust that was established at the outset of the interviews and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity enabled the development of a rapport and a sense of trust with the interviewees. They also welcomed the opportunity to share their views.

There is the potential for bias to arise due the interviewer's approach. I was aware of potential interviewer effects and I took precautions to minimise them. This type of affect was minimised by the process of respondent validation. Data clarification was sought at the end of each question and this reduced the likelihood of distorted responses. Moreover, the repetitive process of recursive data analysis reduced the risk of bias affecting the outcomes.

The main participants in this study were teachers. A notional sample of 50 interviews was initially selected; however, the recursive data analysis ultimately suggested that saturation was achieved at interview 27. This sample was extended to include other stakeholders and the total number of interviews including focus group interviews was 42. The purpose of the latter sample was to enhance and triangulate the findings from the teachers' interviews. This small sample size may be viewed as a limitation of this study as the total cohort of home economics teachers in Ireland is 1,624. However, the locus of this study was an examination of 'a slice of life' rather than claiming to represent the entire practice of home economics in Ireland. The recursive in-depth immersion analysis of the interviews proved valuable as with each analysis, a deeper level of understanding of interviewees' beliefs about practice was achieved.

7.5 Personal reflection

Finally, I wish to share some aspects of personal learning achieved as a result of this study. My initial inquiry was stimulated by my keen interest in the area of assessment when I worked in a second-level context. The test-driven culture I experienced influenced my own perspectives about practice. I changed roles and worked in third-level education for seven years. During this time, I tussled with complex issues and grew to understand them in an iterative way. Engagement in study and research provided deeper insights into learning, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum issues. The initial research idea focused on assessment, but as my understanding developed, I became more cognisant of the interconnectedness between teaching, learning and assessment practices. This awareness influenced my research design and the chosen methods provided me with an opportunity to understand the curriculum and assessment design processes and factors influencing their alignment in practice.

My skill base grew during this research project. I developed heightened skills of data collection, analysis and synthesis. I developed a much better understanding of my own

professionalism and reflected upon the implications of my findings to my own practice and the field of home economics. As time went on, I observed that I promoted elements of a 'techne' perspective and the fragmentation of learning as opposed to the enactment of a multi-disciplinary approach to practice. I became keenly aware of the complexity of broader subject aims as well as contemporary approaches to the development of key skills such as problem solving and creativity.

A well cited and inspirational quotation from the late Steve Jobs resonates with me professionally:

If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.

Having engaged with this study, I have a heightened awareness of the traditions and frameworks upon which the subject of home economics is built and understand their impact upon current practice. This advanced level of understanding coupled with a passion for the subject field is drawing me towards bigger challenges such as the examination of the attainment of a 'planned washback' effect through sophisticated designs of home economics assessment. My appetite for further research has been whetted considerably by my experience of this study and I look forward to developing my ideas as a next stage of my academic journey.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Teacher interview schedule

Number and category	Date
<p>1. What are your views on the mission, vision and practice of home economics education?</p> <p>What is your personal view of the mission of home economics? What is the fundamental principle of home economics? What is the role of a home economist? Developing well-being could sum up our mission. Do you agree or disagree? Is home economics exam focused or life focused or both? What is the perception of home economics in society? What factors contribute to this image? Does the subject name influence the perception and image? What is your vision for home economics? What is your preferred image for the future of home economics in education and society? What are your views on the practice of home economics? What do you think is important about teaching home economics (and how home economics is taught)?</p>	
<p>2. In your view, what are the key values, skills and competences that are nurtured in students through home economics education and in your view, is the subject of home economics unique?</p> <p>What do you think are the values/main outcomes nurtured in students? What do students learn from studying home economics? What sort of values do they come through with? What impact does home economics have on the lives of students? (Values and outcomes) Do they apply these values to daily life say after 4pm or after the Leaving Certificate? Is home economics making a difference in the lives of students? How are these values developed in students? How do students learn values and attitudes important to home economics? Resourcefulness for example is a key value developed in home economics. In your opinion, how is this value developed in students? What skills are developed in students through home economics education? How are skills developed in students? How do students learn practical skills in home economics? How do learners develop a set of technical skills? Describe the process. What level of skill is created on average? The NCCA Key Skills Framework includes; information processing, critical and creative thinking, communicating, working with others and being personally effective, in your opinion, does home economics develop these key skills and how? What are the competences that are developed in students? Do you think home economics is unique? Why?</p>	
<p>3. Tell me please how learning typically takes place in a home economics classroom.</p> <p>How do your students learn and acquire knowledge? Describe the process of how your students develop knowledge. How is student understanding developed? Do students apply and analyse and how? How do they develop problem solving skills? Do they improve thinking skills/skills of reflection? Do your students engage in evaluation? How? Would your students create and develop new solutions? What level do they engage in each process? What are the outcomes of learning you want to achieve in home economics classes? What types of outcomes do you aim for? I am interested in your views on the quality of learning achieved in your home economics classes. What are your views on the type of learning achieved in home economics classrooms? In your view, is learning in home economics higher order/deep level or lower order? I am interested in how the curriculum allows you to develop quality learning. How does the curriculum impact on the development of quality learning?</p>	
<p>4. What are your views on the assessment of home economics, for example in the classroom, in the school and in the Junior and Leaving Certificates?</p> <p>What types of assessment do you use in the home economics classroom? Why do you use these methods? Is Assessment for Learning commonly used and how? What are your views on the assessment of home economics in the school? Is there a school policy on assessment practice? Does it impact on your assessment practice in the classroom? What are your views on the current assessment of junior cycle home economics? What are your views on the current assessment of senior cycle home economics? What does the journal assess? What are your views on the optional <i>Textiles, Fashion and Design</i> area? The <i>Design and Craftwork</i> option is the most popular option at junior cycle level, however at senior cycle, it is not offered. What are your views on this? Does home economics assessment address the mission of the subject? How are values assessed? How are skills assessed? Does assessment impact on what happens in the classroom? In your opinion, how does assessment impact on teaching and learning? What changes in assessment practice would you like to see in the future? Why?</p>	

Appendix 2 Student focus group interview schedule

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the subject of home economics all about in your view?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What is the subject of home economics all about?b. Is home economics exam focused or life focused or both?c. How do other people view home economics?d. What factors contribute to this image?e. Does the subject name influence the perception and image?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. In your view, what do you learn from studying home economics?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What impact does home economics have on your life?b. Does home economics make a difference in your life?c. Is home economics education of value? Why? What are the values you learn?d. How do you learn these values? For example, how do you learn how to use resources wisely, to be healthy?e. What skills are developed in students through home economics education? How are these skills developed in your view?f. What do you learn to do really well in home economics?g. Do you think home economics is different to other subjects and unique? Why?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Tell me please how you learn in a home economics class.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. How do you usually go about learning in the subject of home economics?b. How do you like to learn? How do you learn best?c. What teaching strategies help you to understand what you are studying?d. Are you good at problem solving do you think? Can you give me an example of when you had to work something out and come up with solutions?e. How do you learn to create your own designs in home economics?f. How do you learn how to be resourceful and environmentally aware?g. How do you learn practical skills in home economics?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What are your views on the assessment of home economics?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) What types of assessment/examinations are commonly used in your classroom?b) What are your views on assessment/examinations in the school in general? Do you think these tests have an impact on teaching and learning in the classroom? How do they impact?c) What are your views on the current assessment of junior cycle home economics? [Senior Cycle Group only]d) What are your views on the current assessment of senior cycle home economics? What does the journal assess?e) What optional area do you study? What are your views on the optional Textiles, Fashion and Design area? Did you study Design and Craftwork? Would you like to see a Design and Craftwork option instead of a Textiles Fashion and Design option? Why? Why not?f) What do tests and examinations in home economics question you on?g) Do tests and examinations check how resourceful you are, how environmentally friendly you are, your ability to problem solve and make decisions etc.?h) If you could make changes to your tests and examinations, what changes would you make? What changes would you like to see in the future? Why?

Appendix 3 Guidelines for recognising sexism in educational materials

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character stereotyping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are males associated with knowledge, technical ability, confidence, where females are not? Are females associated with emotion, sensitivity and instincts while males are not? ○ Does the text polarise ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics? ○ Is marriage held up as the main goal in every woman’s life? ○ Are statements by fiction characters like ‘boys make the best architects’ and ‘girls are silly’ allowed to go unchallenged? ○ In a situation where a male and a female face a problem together, is the female shown as squeamish, weepy, passive, frivolous, inept, nagging, and easily defeated by simple problems, and men as brutish, violent, crude, harsh and insensitive?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Role stereotyping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are men shown coping competently with domestic work and childcare? ○ Is it assumed that women should take responsibility for looking after the family instead of, or as well as, their jobs? ○ Are men and women shown as working in a variety of jobs and careers, or are jobs shown as restricted to one sex? ○ Is it assumed that sex role divisions were the same in the past, and are the same now in other cultures, as traditional sex role divisions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Content selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is equal attention paid to the work of women as to the work of men? ○ In books dealing with the history of science and technology, is any explanation given for why there is almost no mention of women? ○ Is equal, or at least ‘fair’, representation given to women in texts concerned with famous lives, events and important achievements? ○ Do stories about the 18th and 19th century concentrate on the upper middle classes, where sex roles were exaggerated, instead of the working class, where women took on a much wider range of responsibilities? ○ In quoting literature or documents that make heavy use of the generic forms ‘man’ and ‘he’, is it indicated that the terms are used to include men and women? ○ Is the material presented in such a way that boys will feel superior to girls?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Language (sexist terms and suggestions for non- sexist alternatives) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Man, mankind -People, human beings, the human species, men and women, individuals, humankind ○ Men of science - Scientists and discoverers ○ Man and his world- History of peoples ○ Man and the environment- People and the environment, human influences on the environment ○ When men first discovered fire- When fire was first discovered ○ If one man takes four hours to- If it takes four hours to ○ The working man- The worker, labourer, work force ○ The man in the street- Ordinary people ○ Manned by- Worked, staffed, run by ○ Founding fathers- Ancestors, forebears ○ Man-made- Artificial, synthetic, manufactured ○ Workmanlike- Competent ○ Manhood- Adulthood ○ Businessman- Business executive, industrialist ○ Salesman- Salesperson, representative, assistant ○ Fireman/Policeman- Fire-fighter/Police officer ○ The woman doctor- The doctor ... she ○ The child ...he- Children ... they ○ The farmer and his wife- A farming couple ○ Managers and their wives- Managers and their partners, spouses ○ Young lady- Young woman

Adaptation of Whyld’s set of guidelines (1983a, pp.73-75)

Appendix 4 Checklist for equality

- Are both sexes equally represented in the texts, illustrations and examples?
- Are both sexes shown taking an equal and active part as parents and members of families?
- Are both sexes shown participating equally in physical and personal activities? In scientific and technological activities? In artistic and creative activities? In domestic activities?
- Are both sexes portrayed as being equally competent in both intellectual and practical activities?
- Are both sexes portrayed as having equal status (e.g. in decision-making) at work and at home?
- Are both sexes treated in a balanced way when being described in terms of role relationships (e.g. wife, husband, mother, father, manager, assistant)?
- Is the respective contribution of both sexes to the shaping of society, and their impact on history, adequately presented?
- Are situations and contexts used in questions equally within the experience of both sexes?
- Are occupations referred to in a gender-biased way (e.g. policeman rather than police officer; fireman rather than fire-fighter)?
- Is the masculine pronoun used to refer to all people?
- Are women and men shown only in stereotyped roles (e.g. women as housewives, carers, secretaries, and men as managers, scientists, engineers)?
- When questions are contextualised, are males and females shown to have stereotypical interests (e.g. girls liking soft toys and magazines, boys liking computers)?
- Are females portrayed in more passive roles (sitting, watching) and males in more active roles?
- Are males shown in more aggressive roles and females in more sensitive roles?

(SEC 2007b, pp.73-74)

Appendix 5 Anderson *et al.* (2001) taxonomy framework

Process Categories

Remember– Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory

Recognising
Recalling

Understand– Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written and graphic communication.

Interpreting
Exemplifying
Classifying
Summarising
Inferring
Comparing
Explaining

Apply– Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation

Executing
Implementing

Analyse– Break material into constituent parts and determine how parts relate to one another and to an over-all structure or purpose.

Differentiating
Organising
Attributing

Evaluate– Make judgments based on criteria and standards

Checking
Critiquing

Create– Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure.

Generating
Planning
Producing

The six categories of the cognitive process dimension and related cognitive processes (Anderson *et al.* 2001, p.31)

Knowledge Dimensions

Factual Knowledge– The basic elements students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it.

Knowledge of terminology
Knowledge of specific details and elements

Conceptual Knowledge– The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together.

Knowledge of classifications and categories
Knowledge of principles and generalisations
Knowledge of theories, models and structures

Procedural Knowledge– How to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques and methods.

Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms
Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods
Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures

Metacognitive knowledge– Knowledge of cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one's own cognition.

Strategic knowledge
Knowledge about cognitive tasks including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge
Self-knowledge

The major types and subtypes of the knowledge dimension (Anderson *et al.* 2001, p.29)

Appendix 6 Command words and Bloom's Taxonomy

Level	Learner Ability/Action	Typical Command Words
Knowledge (Recall and recognition)	Simple recall of previously learned material <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Remembering ➤ Memorising ➤ Recognising ➤ Recalling identification ➤ Recall of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ List ➤ Define ➤ Label ➤ Identify/name ➤ Draw ➤ Find ➤ Match ➤ Recite ➤ Mention ➤ Quote ➤ Describe
Comprehension (Translating, interpreting and extrapolating)	Ability to make sense of the material. Restate in own words; recognise previously unseen examples of a concept; grasp meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Describe ➤ Associate ➤ Categorise ➤ Summarise ➤ Translate ➤ Retell ➤ Demonstrate ➤ Identify ➤ Paraphrase ➤ Report ➤ Discuss ➤ Interpret
Application (Application to situations that are new to, or have a new slant for students)	Ability to use learned material in a new situation with a minimum amount of help or direction. Apply rules/principles to a problem, without being given the rule; problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Apply/use ➤ Demonstrate ➤ Calculate/compute ➤ Illustrate ➤ Solve ➤ Dramatise ➤ Role-play ➤ Select ➤ Show
Analysis (Breaking down into parts, forms)	Break material into component parts so that its structure may be understood. Break complex concepts down to component parts and analyse how parts are related to each other; seeing patterns, recognising hidden meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Analyse ➤ Compare/contrast ➤ Separate ➤ Order/classify ➤ Explain ➤ Characterise ➤ Develop ➤ Distinguish ➤ Examine ➤ Outline ➤ Debate ➤ Deduce
Synthesis (Combining elements into a pattern not clearly there before)	Put parts together to form a plan new to the learner; generalise. Rearrange component parts to form a new whole; may be in verbal form or a physical object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Combine ➤ Modify ➤ Rearrange ➤ 'What-if' ➤ Generalise ➤ Compose ➤ Construct ➤ Create ➤ Design/plan ➤ Develop ➤ Propose ➤ Formulate ➤ Make
Evaluation (Evaluation according to some set of criteria, and state why)	Ability to judge the value of material based on certain criteria. Evaluate, make judgments on the worth of a concept for a purpose; resolve controversies/differences of opinion ...; verify value of evidence; recognise subjectivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assess ➤ Decide ➤ Grade/rank ➤ Recommend ➤ Explain ➤ Judge ➤ Conclude ➤ Summarise ➤ Appraise ➤ Argue ➤ Convince ➤ Conclude ➤ Justify ➤ Support ➤ Predict ➤ Prove ➤ Select/choose

Command words and Bloom's taxonomy (Cognitive Domain) (SEC 2007b, pp.98-99)

Appendix 7 Teacher/stakeholder interviewee consent form

Dear Colleague,

I am a lecturer at St Angela's College, Sligo and I am currently undertaking doctoral research at the University of Stirling on school-based and national assessments in the field of home economics. I know how busy colleagues are but I do hope you will be willing to assist in this important study.

My project seeks to strengthen policy and practice in home economics in our curriculum and to do this I will seek firstly to determine what values are perceived to underpin home economics teaching and the purpose of home economics assessment. The project will then explore the extent to which these values are supported by current assessment arrangements.

A variety of participants will be invited to take part in this study including teachers, principals, parents, students, inspectors, curriculum developers, assessment designers, and examiners. Ultimately I intend to disseminate reports of my work throughout the home economics community with a view to strengthening policy and practice in home economics in our curriculum. I hope to publish my work, illustrated by anonymised data, in academic and professional contexts.

Part of the research requires interviews with key people and I would like to invite you to take part. I can assure you of anonymity and confidentiality if you do. I am particularly interested in gathering the candid and expert views of as many stakeholders as possible to enable me to identify where differences and agreements exist across the home economics education community and those engaged in supporting or benefiting from it.

With your approval, therefore, I would like to interview you on key aspects of home economics education and the interview will take around 45-60 minutes. I will ask you if you will allow me to audio-tape the conversation and any recordings will be used solely for research purposes. The sources will not be identified in any context.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me at the address indicated. Or if you prefer to give consent by telephone or email, I will be happy to get the signed version when I visit you.

I very much hope you will be able to assist in this work but if you would like to speak with me about any aspect of the research before consenting please phone me at: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

Thank you,

Kathryn McSweeney

Consent Form

Please sign this section if you consent to take part in the study and return it to me at:

Kathryn McSweeney, St. Angela's College, Lough Gill, Sligo, County Sligo.

If you prefer to give consent by telephone or email, I will be happy to get the signed version when I visit you. Telephone: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the conditions under which the researcher will undertake the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. I understand that anonymity and confidentiality is assured by the researcher.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Address of School or Organisation Contact email/phone number: _____

Appendix 8 Student interview consent form

Dear Student,

I am a lecturer at St Angela's College, Sligo and I am currently undertaking doctoral research at the University of Stirling on how effective school based and national assessments are in producing the right results or outcomes. The study will look at home economics tests/examinations and assessments.

I am inviting you to take part in this research. I wish to interview you with a group of students in your class about how effective the exams and tests are.

I wish to assure you that your name will not be revealed and all responses will be treated confidentially. The interview would be taped in order to ensure accurate transcriptions. Each interview will be coded numerically and no name is associated with the responses received. The information gathered will be used to show how effective exams and tests are and the findings will be passed on to others in books, journals and conferences.

If you want to know any more details of the research, you may ask any questions before, during or after the research is done by emailing me at kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk You may also withdraw from the research at any time you wish.

I would be grateful if you would consider my request and if your response is favourable, please sign the consent form attached and give it back to your teacher.

Thanking you for your co-operation in this matter.

Kathryn McSweeney

Please sign this section if you consent to take part in the study and give the form back to your teacher.

I confirm that I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the conditions under which the researcher will undertake the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

I understand that anonymity and confidentiality is assured by the researcher.

Name of Student: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participating School Address: _____

Thank You

Kathryn McSweeney

Appendix 9 Parent/guardian interview consent form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a lecturer at St Angela's College, Sligo and I am currently undertaking doctoral research at the University of Stirling on school-based and national assessments in the field of home economics. I hope you will be willing to assist in this important study.

My project seeks to strengthen policy and practice in home economics in our curriculum and to do this I will seek firstly to determine what values are perceived to underpin home economics teaching and the purpose of home economics assessment. The project will then explore the extent to which these values are supported by current assessment arrangements.

A variety of participants will be invited to take part in this study including teachers, principals, parents, students, inspectors, curriculum developers, assessment designers, and examiners. Ultimately I intend to disseminate reports of my work throughout the home economics community and I hope to publish my work in academic and professional contexts.

Part of the research requires interviews with key people and I would like to invite your son/daughter to take part. I can assure you of anonymity and confidentiality if they participate. With your approval, I would like to interview your son/daughter with 3-5 other students on key aspects of home economics education and the interview would take around 45-60 minutes. I will ask the group if they will allow me to audio-tape the conversation and any recordings will be used solely for research purposes. The sources will not be identified in any context.

If you are willing to allow your son/daughter to participate in the research by allowing me to interview him/her, please sign the attached consent form and ask your son/daughter to return it to me by bringing it to their teacher.

I very much hope you will be able to assist in this work but if you would like to speak with me about any aspect of it before consenting please phone me at: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

Thank you,

Kathryn McSweeney

Please sign this section if you consent to your son/daughter taking part in the study and ask your son/daughter to bring it in to their teacher.

Kathryn McSweeney, St. Angela's College, Lough Gill, Sligo.

Telephone: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the conditions under which the researcher will undertake the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

I understand that anonymity and confidentiality is assured by the researcher.

Name of Student: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participating School Address: _____

Appendix 10 Principal interview consent form

Dear Colleague,

I am a lecturer at St Angela's College, Sligo and I am currently undertaking Ph.D. research at the University of Stirling on school-based and national assessments in the field of home economics. I know how busy colleagues are but I do hope you will be willing to assist in this important study.

My project seeks to strengthen policy and practice in home economics in our curriculum and to do this I will seek firstly to determine what values are perceived to underpin home economics teaching and the purpose of home economics assessment. The project will then explore the extent to which these values are supported by current assessment arrangements.

A variety of participants will be invited to take part in this study including teachers, principals, parents, students, inspectors, curriculum developers, assessment designers, and examiners. Ultimately I intend to disseminate reports of my work throughout the home economics community with a view to strengthening policy and practice in home economics in our curriculum. I hope to publish my work, illustrated by anonymised data, in academic and professional contexts.

Part of the research requires interviews with key people and I would like to invite your home economics teacher and two groups of four-five students to take part (one junior cycle group and one senior cycle group). I can assure you of anonymity and confidentiality if you consent to their participation in the study. I am particularly interested in gathering the candid and expert views of as many stakeholders as possible to enable me to identify where differences and agreements exist across the home economics education community and those engaged in supporting or benefiting from it. I will ask you if you will allow me to audio-tape the conversations and any recordings will be used solely for research purposes. The sources will not be identified in any context.

If you are willing to agree to your school participating in the research, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me at the address indicated. Or if you prefer to give consent by telephone or email, I will be happy to get the signed version when I visit you.

I very much hope you will be able to assist in this work but if you would like to speak with me about any aspect of the research before consenting please phone me at: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

Thank you,

Kathryn McSweeney

Consent Form

Please sign this section if you consent to take part in the study and return it to me at:

Kathryn McSweeney, St. Angela's College, Lough Gill, Sligo, County Sligo.

If you prefer to give consent by telephone or email, I will be happy to get the signed version when I visit you. Telephone: 086 8111555 or email: kathryn.mcsweeney@stir.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the conditions under which the researcher will undertake the study.

I understand that my school's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

I understand that anonymity and confidentiality is assured by the researcher.

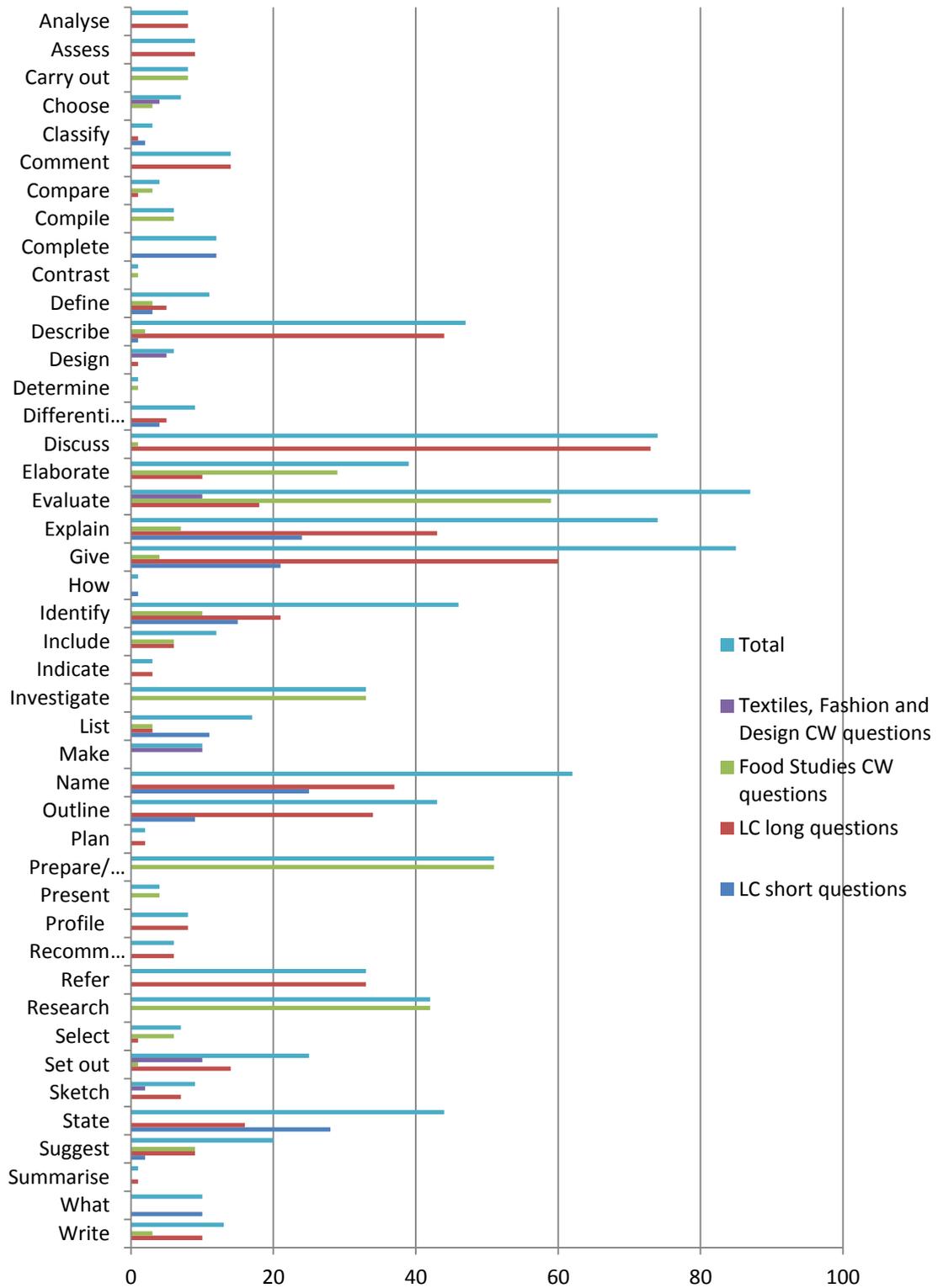
Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Address of School or Organisation and contact email/phone number: _____

Appendix 11 Analysis of curriculum documents

Educational Aims	Junior cycle home economics curriculum	Senior cycle home economics curriculum
To foster an understanding and critical appreciation of the values ... which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society ...		
To nurture a sense of personal identity, self-esteem and awareness of one's particular abilities, aptitudes and limitations... respect for the rights and beliefs of others	To develop positive attitudes towards themselves, their home and their community	Students should appreciate the responsibilities they have towards themselves and their families, peers, and other members of society.
To promote quality and equality for all ... in the development of their full educational potential	To develop an awareness of and sensitivity to differences between family units ... a sense of cooperation, flexibility, improvisation, responsibility and tolerance	To develop an understanding of the physical, emotional, intellectual, economic and social needs of individuals or families and to encourage an appreciation of the diversity of socio-economic and cultural influences on family life
To develop intellectual skills combined with a spirit of inquiry and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively		To research, study, analyse, synthesise and interpret material as a basis for expressing and communicating viewpoints in planning and evaluating alternatives and making judgements and decisions through problem solving
To develop expressive, creative and artistic abilities to the individual's full capacity	Emphasis is on management, creativity and living skills. Develop the potential of the individual through creative and practical experience. To use affective skills including creativity	To develop ... creative skills in relation to the preparation, cooking and presentation of food ... creative ability and respond to design through the exploration of materials and processes ... appreciate the value of aesthetic considerations in relation to all aspects of life ...[and] individuality, creativity and enterprise.
To foster a spirit of self-reliance, innovation, initiative and imagination	Personal independence ... taking shared responsibility... management of personal resources, personal management, consumer competence, affective skills including imagination, curiosity, intuition, improvisation, sensitivity and resourcefulness	To enable students to take control of their own lives at present and in the future To nurture and develop a spirit of enterprise, inventiveness, aesthetic awareness and creativity Students should appreciate the importance of being discerning consumers, be able to seek out and evaluate information and to weigh evidence as a basis for making judgements and choices.
To promote physical and emotional health and well-being		To acquire and develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, competence and attitudes necessary to contribute to a personal and family environment conducive to human development, health, leisure, security and happiness To develop personal qualities: perseverance, self-confidence, co-operation, team spirit, adaptability and flexibility
Education and training to support the country's economic development ... to enable them to make [a] contribution to society		Students should appreciate the importance of home economics issues to the economic development of the local community, the county, and the European Union.
To create tolerant, caring and politically aware members of society		
To ensure that Ireland's young people acquire a keen awareness of their national and European heritage and identity, coupled with a global awareness and a respect and care for the environment		To develop an awareness of the interdependence of the individual or family and the environment and to promote a sense of responsibility to global issues ... To be sensitive to aspects of Irish and European cultures ...understand responsibilities an individual has towards the family group, the community, and the world at large ... understand the relationship that exists between the individual or family and the environment ... appreciate the effect that the decisions of individuals have on wider national and global issues [and] that there is an interdependent relationship between individuals and their environment.

Appendix 12 Verb use in Leaving Certificate home economics assessment



Appendix 13 Verb use in Junior Certificate home economics assessment

