

Our ref : ACL/pb  
15 April 2003

Jane Kennedy MP  
Minister  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
BANGOR

Dear Minister

#### **Proposed Changes to the Statutory Curriculum at Key Stage 4**

At our recent meeting I promised that the Council's advice on Key Stage 4 would be with you before Easter. I am now pleased to enclose this advice.

The advice has been the subject of extensive formal consultation both in 2001 and in 2002. In addition we have carried further informal consultation in the last few weeks as we finalised the details. We are proposing a radical change from the current statutory curriculum, and a full understanding of the views of all interested parties is vital.

Our discussions have shown a strong desire on the part of school managers to move quickly to the flexibility that the revised curriculum would permit. The Flexibility Initiative promoted by your Department, has been of great value to many schools, but it is seen as a temporary and only partially satisfactory means of addressing the concerns that the current curriculum has raised.

In line with our advice on other parts of the curriculum we seek to emphasise the skills that young people will need to succeed in life and work. For this reason our advice is that the statutory curriculum for 14-16 year olds should not be expressed in a list of subjects, but rather should consist of the skills and competencies that all young people should have the opportunity to develop at this stage in their education, irrespective of ability or type of school attended. The focus is on "life and work" aspects of education, but it is still expected that all students will study for a range of qualifications that will provide a broad and balanced general education. An appropriate course in all of the main subjects should continue to be available to every young person.

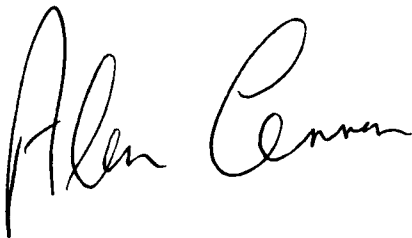
CCEA is currently developing an increased range of different types of qualifications so that the choice open to students in this age group will be greater than at present. As well as a GCSE entitled "Life and Work", there is also to be a range of single award applied subjects in GCSE, including the new areas of Financial Services and Journalism. In addition, a Level 1 and Level 2 Certificate in Occupational Studies has been developed. These Certificates should be of particular interest to many of the students who have taken advantage of the Flexibility

Initiative. A significant number of schools will begin teaching towards these qualifications on a pilot basis from September this year.

We believe that the changes proposed in this advice will enable all types of school to widen the opportunities available to students of all abilities. Undoubtedly there are issues that will have to be addressed in the process of implementation. One is the tendency among students in Northern Ireland to take even larger numbers of similar GCSE qualifications than their counterparts elsewhere. It will be a challenge to schools to move towards greater variety in the type of course studied and, perhaps, a reduction in numbers taken. A second is the difficulty that the large number of small schools in Northern Ireland will have in achieving any increase in the range of choice they can make available.

I look forward to receiving your response to this advice. We would intend, as normal, to make the advice and your response public at the same time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Lennon', written in a cursive style.

**Alan Lennon (Dr)**  
**Chairman**

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