



**Advice to the Minister for Education  
on Curriculum and Assessment  
at Key Stage 3**

**December 2003**

This paper sets out the Council's considered advice on Curriculum and Assessment in light of the extensive feedback from Consultation. The detail of the Council's advice on Curriculum is set out in Section A and on Assessment in Section B, prefaced by a summary of the proposed statutory requirements below. Responses to questions raised in the Minister's letter of 5 July are set out in the Appendix.

### **SUMMARY OF PROPOSED STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AT KEY STAGE 3**

- The current Programmes of Study should be replaced by Statements of Minimum Entitlement, refined to take account of the views of respondents in the consultation process, in:

Arts  
English/Irish  
Environment and Society  
Languages  
Learning for Life and Work  
Mathematics  
Physical Education  
Science and Technology.

There should continue to be a requirement to study Religious Education in line with the programme being developed by the Department and the main Christian churches.

- All schools should be required to incorporate those provisions of the Statements of Minimum Entitlement designated in bold text into their Key Stage 3 programmes of study for all pupils. In doing so they should be free to choose the organisational structure, timetabling arrangements and teaching and learning styles best suited to the needs of their pupils.
- Once the feasibility and manageability of the proposed new arrangements have been established through piloting, the current assessment arrangements at Key Stage 3 should be discontinued. The tests and teacher assessment of English, mathematics and science should be replaced by an enhancement of the current requirement for schools to provide an annual report to parents.
- This enhancement should take the form of specific requirements regarding the content of the annual report, including the use of a common scale and standards for the assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics\* and ICT.
- There should be a requirement for schools to participate in a process of moderation operated by CCEA and based on a 3 year cycle. The moderation will focus on the standards applied in the assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics\* and ICT.
- Assessment outcomes in these three skills should be provided to CCEA by all schools for the purpose of compiling overall Northern Ireland statistics and in order to provide schools with benchmarking data.
- Consideration should be given to establishing a cyclical survey, based on representative samples of schools, to monitor the levels of attainment of pupils in Northern Ireland across the range of Learning Areas.

### **DETAIL OF THE ADVICE**

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\* This term has replaced "Application of Number" as it better represents the range of competencies to be assessed.

Having considered the feedback from the extensive consultation carried out between September and November 2003, the Council offers the following advice to the Minister.

## **A CURRICULUM ADVICE**

### **1 Curriculum Framework**

There was substantial support for the Council's proposal that the current very detailed statutory curriculum should be replaced by a set of minimum requirements that schools would be required to meet. These requirements would give schools much more freedom than at present to decide what each group of pupils should learn. Concern was, however, expressed by many subject specialists that school management will use the minimum requirement to cut subject time, taking advantage of the fact that the minimum requirements are all that is required in law.

The requirements place greater emphasis than the current curriculum on the development of skills and capabilities including a framework of Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Interpersonal Skills; and the skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT. The increased emphasis upon these skills also received substantial support in consultation.

Also well supported was the Council's proposal that the revised requirements for the Northern Ireland Curriculum be set out within 9 General Learning Areas, including the new Area of Learning for Life and Work. Each Learning Area contributes to the curriculum framework (the overall objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, the key elements, the learning outcomes) and the skills and capabilities framework.

#### **The Council therefore recommends that:**

**the statutory curriculum at Key Stage 3 should comprise the Aim, Objectives, Key Elements, Skills and Capabilities and those parts of the statements of entitlement set out in bold within each of the Learning Areas and strands.**

### **2 Detail of Learning Areas**

While many respondents considered that the new requirements will enable schools to devise courses that are appropriate for their pupils the Council notes the concern that courses devised by schools based solely on the new requirements may not provide a sound foundation for moving on to Key Stage 4 and GCSE. The statements of entitlement are intended to identify in each learning area only those aspects which contribute to learning for life and work. It follows that, as stated in the proposals document, teachers would be expected to go beyond the minimum entitlement in planning their schemes of work. The flexibility built into the proposals is designed to enable them to do so in different ways for different groups of children. The Council believes that this is a proper balance between legal obligation and professional discretion.

To address these concerns, and specific feedback received in relation to the appropriateness of the minimum entitlement statements, **the Council recommends that:**

- **the minimum entitlement statements for all strands of the Learning Areas are amended and improved in the light of detailed feedback from consultation.**
- **Schools should be required to ensure that learning in KS3 provides an adequate basis for study of individual subjects at Key Stage 4.**

In consultation with focus groups, some of which have already met, work will be undertaken to map the minimum entitlement to the current Key Stage 3 curriculum and to GCSE specifications in order to illustrate coverage. The purpose of this work will also be to identify any further refinements of the statements of entitlement that would assist in clarifying progression to Key Stage 4 and to address some of the concerns of subject specialists. It should be noted, however, that, if the statements are to retain their current function and provide the flexibility described above, it will not be possible to satisfy all of those concerns.

In reviewing **Learning for Life and Work** particular attention will be paid to:

- the level of language used;
- whether or not the discrete aspects can be reduced;
- progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4;
- the place of Home Economics within Learning for Life and Work; or within Environment and Society; and as a consequence,
- the title of the Personal Development strand.

In reviewing the **Arts and English (and Irish in Irish medium schools)** particular attention will be paid to:

- the position of Drama
- the need for a separate specification for Irish (including Media Education and Drama) in Irish Medium Schools

In reviewing **History and Geography** particular attention will be paid to the breadth of these subjects.

In reviewing **Mathematics** particular attention will be paid to:

- the breath of mathematics; and
- progression in knowledge and skills through the provision of additional guidance.

In reviewing **Science** particular attention will be paid to:

- the balance between biology, physics and chemistry;
- the appropriateness of the suggested issues for Key Stage 3 pupils;
- opportunities for authentic investigations and the development of scientific enquiry skills; and
- progression in knowledge and skills.

These amendments will be given detailed consideration by the Council's Curriculum and Assessment Committee in February and forwarded to the Department after approval by the Council.

### 3 Further guidance and resources

The consultation process has highlighted the need for considerable detailed guidance and support to be provided to assist schools to translate the minimum entitlement into appropriate courses that provide a sufficient preparation for further study at Key Stage 4.

The Council recommends that:

- **CCEA should provide support and guidance for teachers relating to each of the learning areas, linked to progression to Key Stage 4**

## B ASSESSMENT ADVICE

### 1 Purposes and Benefits of Assessment

In setting out its proposals for assessment, CCEA stated that it was keen to ensure that the following happens in all post-primary schools:

- pupil achievement is improved through high quality formative assessment in the classroom;
- assessment recognises progression in the development of skills and capabilities in Learning for Life and Work;
- each of the audiences for assessment receives the information which, for them, is most useful.

The key audiences are:

- pupils;
- their teachers;
- parents;
- school managements;
- government agencies.

Those principles continue to underpin the revised proposals.

All the assessment proposals consulted upon gained some degree of support, but in many cases that support fell below 50% with significantly different perceptions emerging from the grammar and secondary sectors. Teachers, in particular, frequently expressed the view that while the proposals were sound in principle, in practice they may not be manageable. The reservations focused on:

- the feasibility of implementing the proposals;
- the manageability of generating, collating and reporting the assessment outcomes;
- the standardisation of assessment within and across schools;
- the provision of effective training, support and resources;
- the teachers' concerns regarding the extensive use of ICT for assessment, recording and reporting; and
- the role and input of parents and pupils into the reporting system.

These reservations must be addressed if the proposed arrangements are to gain widespread acceptance. CCEA will trial and evaluate the proposed systems to ensure that they are feasible and practical. The results of trailing and piloting will be published.

This process will begin immediately and only when it is clear that workable arrangements have been developed will they be implemented.

## **2 Teacher Assessment and “Assessment for Learning”**

CCEA is pleased that many teachers clearly see the potential of the “assessment for learning” approach in the classroom to improve attainment. Nonetheless, much needs to be done to make that potential a reality.

**CCEA therefore recommends that:**

- **a comprehensive programme of professional development is implemented in association with the Education and Library Boards which will raise awareness, enhance understanding and build capacity for the shift towards “assessment for learning”. Schools will be able to choose to opt in to the programme**
- **the programme produces a number of case studies to disseminate good practice in “assessment for learning” among teachers across Northern Ireland.**

## **3 Annual Report (Pupil Profile)**

The annual report is central to the new proposals. It is the primary means of reporting progress and the information presented is meant to inform parents, pupils and teachers. The proposed version of the report contains more information across a wider range of aspects than many reports currently do.

CCEA accepts the need for a phased development, trialling and implementation of the annual report and that it should not be made operational until shown to be manageable.

**CCEA therefore recommends that:**

- **it trial and pilot versions of the new form of the annual report beginning with the core requirements of reporting on progress in each of the Learning Areas and on assessment in Communication, Using Mathematics\* and ICT;**
- \* It is now recommended that the term “Application of Number” be changed to “Using Mathematics” as a better reflection of the breadth of the competencies to be assessed.*
- **following trialling, a set of statutory requirements for annual reporting should be agreed with the Department of Education;**
  - **separate reporting requirements should be set out for special schools and schools which have pupils which have special educational needs;**
  - **the new statutory annual report should only be phased in as and when the processes and ICT systems for collecting, collating and generating the information have been tested and proven;**
  - **A specified number of non-contact days should be allocated to schools to enable teachers to complete the detailed reporting required. CCEA will base its recommendation on the number of days on the information gained from piloting. These non-contact days will replace those currently allocated to teachers taking part in Key Stage 3 assessment.**

#### **4 Use of Northern Ireland averages to compare pupil attainment**

CCEA proposed that parents should receive class, school and Northern Ireland averages in order to place their own child's results in context. A clear majority of teachers opposed this proposal. CCEA accepts that it may be a step too far to **require** schools to provide such information to parents and that not all parents have a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of this type of information.

**The Council therefore recommends that:**

- **schools have those data available themselves to assist in benchmarking;**
- **a Northern Ireland average should be made available to parents, if requested;**
- **CCEA work with schools and the ELBs to increase parental awareness of the use of levels.**

#### **5 Parent Feedback and Pupil Input**

Despite the negative comments put forward in the consultation, CCEA believes that parents have a right to provide feedback. Whether or not they choose to exercise that right is their responsibility. It also believes that pupils should have an input into the annual report.

**The Council therefore recommends that:**

- **schools should provide parents/guardians with the opportunity to respond to the annual report. Schools will not be held responsible if parents do not avail of the opportunity;**
- **CCEA works with schools to develop effective methods of including pupil contributions and to encourage their use. It will also explore how the annual report can be linked to the Progress File process in Year 10.**

#### **6 Measurement of the Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT**

CCEA has selected these skills for measurement and comment because they provide continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3 and between Key Stages 3 and 4. The assessment outcomes would also provide the statistical evidence which school management and government agencies need to benchmark achievement and to judge how the system and schools within the system are doing.

Despite the reservations expressed by teachers, CCEA continues to believe that Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT should be the skills to be assessed and measured. One of the major themes underlying the review of curriculum and assessment has been the desire to give greater prominence to the development of skills. That will only be achieved, CCEA believes, if those skills are given prominence in the assessment arrangements as well as in the curriculum. CCEA accepts that it must address key concerns about manageability and proposes to develop and trial strategies for delivering assessment in these skills, including ones not requiring a cross-curricular approach.

These strategies will focus on a system of teacher judgement supported by on-line tasks, rather than written tests or the production of large portfolios of work, and will not become operational until proven manageable.

There was no clear consensus on the scale of measurement to be used. CCEA accepts that many schools have reservations about the use of any scale of measurement. Nevertheless, it is required to put in place systems which will provide statistical data to indicate progression and provide useful benchmarking data for school managements. The 8 level-scale will provide that information and will provide continuity of assessment across the first three key stages.

**The Council therefore recommends that:**

- **the skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT should be assessed and measured using an 8 level scale;**
- **CCEA works with schools and the ELBs to develop strategies and support packages to integrate the 8 level scale into teaching and learning and, crucially, to increase parental awareness of the levels;**
- **CCEA develops ICT-based systems to coordinate and collate the assessment information needed. It will provide online tasks linked to exemplar materials to support and standardise the judgements of teachers;**
- **CCEA develops and trials tasks and support materials which provide opportunities for assessment and standardisation.**

## **7 Moderation of Assessment in Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT**

CCEA is keen to keep the burden of moderation to a minimum while still retaining sufficient rigour to guarantee standards. The recommendations are in line with those already accepted for primary schools.

**The Council therefore recommends that:**

- **all schools be moderated on a three year cycle and the approach adopted should be formative, supportive and flexible;**
- **schools which do not apply the appropriate standards should be provided with support;**
- **the assessment outcomes of schools which persistently fail to apply the standards should not be endorsed by CCEA;**
- **ICT-based systems should be developed to enable on-line moderation and more immediate feedback.**

## **8 Monitoring of the Annual Report**

The proposal that CCEA should monitor the quality of Annual Reports to ensure consistency received a mixed reaction. CCEA accepts the concerns expressed and the suggestions made.

**The Council therefore recommends that:**

- **CCEA provides help and guidance to schools in producing the Annual Report;**

- **responsibility for the quality assurance of the annual report remains with schools and is linked to the school's self-evaluation process and to a voluntary accreditation process for good practice in assessment, if implemented.**

## **9 Accreditation of good practice in assessment**

CCEA proposed that there should be a voluntary scheme to accredit good practice in assessment. The scheme would be linked to assessment, standard setting, recording and reporting. This proposal received cautious acceptance but some teachers felt that such a scheme might be overly intrusive. The Council believes that it would be worthwhile to trial an accreditation scheme with some schools in order to establish whether or not there the idea has value and intends to do so once the implementation of the new assessment arrangements is under way.

## **10 ICT Support**

There are continuing concerns about the use of ICT for assessment, recording and reporting. Schools are anxious that networks may not be in place, technology may not be reliable and efficient, and manageable systems need to be developed.

**The Council recommends that:**

- **CCEA works closely with C2K to provide high quality networks and services and that implementation will only proceed once systems have been thoroughly tested and found to be effective;**
- **training and support will also be offered over an extended period.**

## **11 Timetable and Legislative Change in relation to Assessment**

It is proposed that implementation will begin on a phased basis from September 2005 with a completion date of 2010 or later. As schools will be at different stages of implementation during this time, it is recommended that both the current and the proposed assessment arrangements should operate simultaneously. It is recommended that the final school year in which Key Stage 3 tests are provided should be 2008/09.

To allow schools to opt for revised assessment arrangements, **the Council recommends that enabling legislation should ensure the following:**

- **the current assessment arrangements at Key Stage 3 should be discontinued as schools transfer to the new assessment arrangements. The tests and teacher assessment of English and Irish (in Irish-medium schools), mathematics and science should be replaced by an enhancement of the current requirement for schools to provide an annual report to parents;**
- **the enhancement should take the form of specific requirements for the content of the annual report, including the use of a common scale and standards for the assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT;**
- **there should be a requirement for schools to participate in a process of moderation operated by CCEA and based on a 3 year cycle. The moderation would focus on the standards applied in the assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT;**
- **assessment outcomes in these three skills should be provided to CCEA by all schools for the purpose of compiling overall Northern Ireland statistics and in order to provide schools with benchmarking data.**

Specific requirements within each of these areas will be agreed with the Department of Education and published annually. This will allow both flexibility during the phased implementation of the new curriculum requirements and assessment arrangements.

In addition to the legislative changes listed above, consideration should be given to establishing a cyclical survey, based on representative samples of schools, to monitor the levels of attainment of pupils in Northern Ireland across the range of Learning Areas. This is in line with recommendations already made in the primary context.

## APPENDIX 1

### RESPONSE TO THE ISSUES RAISED IN THE MINISTER'S LETTER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF 5 JULY 2003

*Note: The Minister's letter was written in response to the Council's outline advice on Key Stage 3 of March 03 and prior to the publication of the Council's detailed proposals which addressed some of the issues raised by the Minister.*

*This paper provides a checklist indicating how the issues have already been addressed in the proposals or will be addressed in further guidance.*

Minister's Query	CCEA Response
The Council's more detailed proposals should set out:	
1a) how clear progression from the Key Stage 2 curriculum, and how this can be achieved in order to avoid the duplicative work currently found in Year 8	How clear progression can be achieved from Key Stages 1 and 2 to Key Stage 3 and towards Key Stage 4 is set out in Para 3.10 of the proposals document (Pathways 1) and will be illustrated through Sample Teaching Plans at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and in further guidance in relation to specific Learning Areas.
1b) how breadth and balance is to be achieved across the range of educational experiences which young people should have at post-primary level;	Paragraph 3.9 of the proposals (Pathways 1) sets out how breadth and balance is to be achieved across the range of educational experiences which young people should have at post-primary level.  In addition it is intended that the statutory requirements be expanded to describe the expected <b>total</b> experience in each learning area, which will prepare pupils for a range of courses leading to appropriate qualifications at Key Stage 4.
1c) how the new aspects of the curriculum, under the generic heading of 'Learning for Life and Work', can be integrated into, rather than added on to, a broad and balanced educational experience, taking account of the specialist strengths of teachers.	Sections 4.2.1-4.2.7 of the proposals (Pathways 1) illustrate how the new aspects of the curriculum under 'Learning for Life and Work', can be integrated into, rather than added on to, a broad and balanced educational experience, taking account of the specialist strengths of teachers. These proposals will be reviewed in the light of detailed feedback from consultation.

<p>1d) which elements of these new aspects would require discrete teaching provision;</p>	<p>Section 4.1.1 -4.1.3 of the proposals document (Pathways 1) indicates those aspects of Learning for Life and Work that require discrete teaching provision. Again, these proposals will be reviewed in the light of consultation.</p>
<p>1e) how differentiation and progression within 'Learning for Life and Work' is to be achieved, across the full ability range, including for young people with special educational needs;</p>	<p>It is intended that guidance will be provided to illustrate how differentiation and progression within Learning for Life and Work is to be achieved at Key Stage 3. Specific guidance on this area will be provided for pupils with Special Educational Needs.</p>
<p>1f) how the curriculum at Key Stage 3 will prepare young people sufficiently for a range of subject choice at Key Stage 4.</p>	<p>It is intended that guidance will be provided which maps the minimum entitlement to the current Key Stage 3 curriculum and to GCSE to illustrate what additional work may be necessary to ensure that young people will be prepared sufficiently for a range of subject choice at Key Stage 4.</p>
<p>2) Further guidance should be prepared on how 'Learning for Life and Work' at Key Stage 3 feeds into the four elements of the statutory curriculum proposed for KS 4</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
<p>3) While the proposals refer to a 'statutory entitlement' to breadth of experience at Key Stage 3, the Council's advice is not clear on whether the framework referred to would be <u>mandatory</u> for all pupils: the Council should provide further advice on this.</p>	<p>Paragraph 3.6 of the Proposals (Pathways 1) sets out the scope of the statutory curriculum and indicates the scope of the statutory <b>requirements, which are mandatory</b> and relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning for Life and Work; and</li> <li>- Those aspects of the General Learning Areas designated in bold, which contribute to Learning for Life and Work.</li> </ul> <p>Schools then have the freedom (and indeed are expected) to add other aspects of the general Learning Areas as appropriate for different groups of pupils.</p>
<p>4) More work is needed on how the 'generic skills' at Key Stage 3 relate to the 'transferable skills' at Key Stage 4, and how, in turn, these relate to or differ from the current Key Skills.</p>	<p><i>This issue is addressed within the Key Stage 4 advice</i></p>

<p>5) 'Skills' only have meaning in the distinctive contexts of subject learning or learning in and through other activities. Guidance will be required offering a rationale for these skills, adequate detail about each, the contribution of underpinning knowledge, understanding, skills, competences, personal qualities and dispositions, and specifications to guide course designers. The emphasis should be on the development of skills integrated into contexts across the curriculum</p>	<p>Section 2 of Pathways 2 (Discussion papers and case studies) provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a rationale for these skills,</li> <li>- detail about each; and</li> <li>- On page 23 a framework for infusing skills alongside knowledge and understanding.</li> </ul> <p>CCEA intends to work closely with schools to provide Sample Lesson Plans with an emphasis on the development of skills integrated into subject contexts across the curriculum</p>
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## ASSESSMENT

<p>6) Further advice is required on the proposed form and nature of annual assessment and standardised reporting, including progression, standards and indicators of performance, before any decision can be taken on the future of key stage tests and assessment.</p>	<p>These issues have been addressed in <b>the PATHWAYS proposals for assessment and the advice currently offered following consultation.</b></p>
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