



**Advice to the Minister for Education  
on statutory requirements  
at Key Stage 4**

**December 2003**

The Minister's letter of 5 July 2003 to the Chairman set out a number of requests related to the proposals for Key Stage 4. The Minister requested responses to the following points:

- 1 *how breadth and balance are to be maintained so that avenues of progression are not closed off too early;*
- 2 *the expectation that all pupils at age 16 should have access to a range of appropriate courses in English and mathematics ;*
- 3 *how the proposed learning outcomes can be integrated into the range of qualifications for which young people study at age 16 ;*
- 4 *further work on the 'transferable skills', their relationship to the 'generic skills' at Key Stage 3 and progression, standards and assessment within the skills;*
- 5 *guidance on standards, differentiation, and progression across the full ability range, including for young people with special educational needs;*
- 6 *guidance to ensure coherence, consistency and equality of provision for PSHE and, in particular, how physical education is to be addressed in a way which promotes learning, range and balance of learning experiences and levels of physical activity; also, further advice on assessment in PSHE and the balance between formative and summative assessment;*
- 7 *how to ensure that the needs of young people living in difficult and divided circumstances are to be realistically addressed through Citizenship requirements at Key Stage 4.*

The attached paper sets out the Council's responses to each of these requests.

## **1 Advice on how breadth and balance can be maintained while offering increased choice and flexibility**

---

This section addresses the following Ministerial questions:

- 1 *how breadth and balance are to be maintained so that avenues of progression are not closed off too early* (letter);
  - 2 *the expectation that all pupils at age 16 should have access to a range of appropriate courses in English and mathematics* (letter);
  - 3 *how the proposed learning outcomes can be integrated into the range of qualifications for which young people study at age 16* (Appendix para 8);
  - 4 *further work on the ‘transferable skills’, their relationship to the ‘generic skills’ at Key Stage 3 and progression, standards and assessment within the skills* (Appendix paras 10 and 11);
- 

The Council acknowledges the tension between the desire for flexibility and the need to maintain sufficient breadth and balance within young people’s learning programmes so that progression routes are kept open for as long as possible. Through its review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, the Council is committed to a strategic agenda for curriculum change that will provide flexibility for young people aged 14-19 in Northern Ireland to access a range of courses and pathways that suit each individual pupil’s needs and aspirations.

Since Key Stage 4 represents the final period of compulsory education for all young people it is imperative that statutory provision and requirements at this stage lay effective foundations and encourage further study, training or employment. Accordingly, Key Stage 4 provision must strive to:

- allow young people to keep post-16 options open by providing a wide range of opportunities to pursue a broad and balanced curriculum suitable to their individual needs and aspirations;
- ensure continued preparation for life and work by building on the foundations laid in primary education and the experiences at Key Stage 3;
- maximise motivation, participation and inclusion by offering a sufficient degree of choice and challenge for all students, whatever their ability.

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

**expert career guidance should be a fundamental requirement of Key Stage 4 provision so that students will be helped to make choices that result in a broad and balanced programme of courses appropriate to their needs and interests.**

Breadth and balance will include:

- (i) **a statutory minimum of learning opportunities** for all young people covering Skills and Capabilities (Communication, Using Mathematics\*, ICT, Self-management, Problem Solving and Working with Others); Learning for Life and Work (PSHE, Local and Global Citizenship and Employability); Physical Education; Religious Education.

*\*It is now recommended that the term "Using Mathematics" be used in place of "Application of Number" as the associated learning opportunities described later are broader than is implied by the latter.*

Students at Key Stage 4 would not be required to follow courses in particular subjects leading to qualifications. The overall programme that they follow, however, including assessed and non-assessed work, must, in total, cover all of the statutory requirements.

- (ii) **additional breadth and balance achieved through non-statutory courses**, selected on the basis of expert guidance, which:
- build upon the subject strands of the Key Stage 3 Learning Areas; and/or
  - courses which develop specific knowledge, understanding and skills within occupationally-related courses; and/or
  - courses which require different styles and types of learning.

**The Council recommends, therefore, that the following be designated in legislation to ensure breadth and balance of provision.**

**A All pupils must follow courses** (normally, but not necessarily, leading to accredited qualifications) **which, taken together, provide the statutory learning opportunities (set out in the Appendix) in relation to:**

- (i) **Skills and Capabilities, including:**  
**Communication; Using Mathematics; ICT; Problem Solving;**  
**Self Management and Working with Others;**
- (ii) **Learning for Life and Work, including:**  
**Personal Social and Health Education, Local and Global**  
**Citizenship and Education for Employability.**
- (iii) **Physical Education, which provides a range of options for health**  
**and fitness; and**
- (iv) **Religious Education.**

*Note1. The requirements in relation to (iv) will be designated separately by the Department of Education and the 4 main Christian Churches.*

*Note 2. Under Employability all pupils are required to develop a personal career plan. This should demonstrate how the programme of courses being taken meets the statutory requirements for Key Stage 4 as well as fulfilling the needs and interests of the pupil.*

**B Schools must provide opportunities for their pupils to access courses and qualifications in any or all of the following Learning Areas for all who wish to do so:**

- **The Arts;**
- **Environment and Society;**
- **Modern Languages; and**
- **Science and Technology.**

A wide range of courses may satisfy this requirement. A list of qualifications will be provided in due course by the Department of Education.

Where schools find it difficult to provide access to an appropriate range of courses, institutions are encouraged to work together to provide a very broad range of choice and to create programmes that are suited to the needs and aspirations of each individual pupil.

**2 Appropriate courses leading to qualifications in English, Mathematics, ICT, Learning for Life and Work and Physical Education**

The Council proposes that all qualifications in English offered to pupils in Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland should provide all of the learning opportunities identified for Communication. The accreditation criteria should be altered accordingly.

Likewise, all qualifications in Mathematics offered to pupils in Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland should provide all of the learning opportunities identified for Using Mathematics and the accreditation criteria again altered accordingly.

Once these provisions are in place, it will be necessary to change the specifications of qualifications in English and Mathematics to meet the new criteria.

This will have the effect of making it no longer necessary for pupils to undertake additional qualifications, such as Key Skills, in order to demonstrate competence in Communication or Using Mathematics. Likewise (as is already the case) competence in ICT can be demonstrated by an attainment in an ICT qualification.

In addition, the learning opportunities identified under the headings of PSHE, Local and Global Citizenship and Employability should all be incorporated into the accreditation criteria for all qualifications under the title Learning for Life and Work. Those for Physical Education should likewise be incorporated into criteria governing the accreditation of all PE qualifications.

**The Council recommends that:**

**The accreditation criteria for relevant qualifications offered to pupils in Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland should include reference to the appropriate statutory learning opportunities.**

### **3 Audit of specifications for qualifications at Key Stage 4**

The Council intends to undertake an audit of its existing GCSE specifications to ascertain the extent to which they contribute to the whole curriculum objectives of developing young people as:

- individuals;
- contributors to society; and
- contributors to the economy and the environment.

In addition, subject specifications will be audited for:

- their contribution to the CCEA skills and capabilities framework (which includes the so-called “wider skills” of self-management, problem solving and working with others);
- their relationship to the revised Key Stage 3 proposals; and
- the extent to which they promote creativity and enterprise.

It is likely that the outcomes of this exercise will result in the need for existing national subject criteria to be amended in line with Northern Ireland requirements. Subsequent development and accreditation of other revised subject specifications should be in line with national GCSE re-accreditation for first teaching from September 2008.

The GCSE pilot qualification in Learning for Life and Work will be awarded for the first time in 2005. Revised GCSE qualifications based on the new statutory learning opportunities for Communication in English and Using Mathematics in Mathematics should be available for first teaching from September 2006.

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

**All of its specifications for qualifications should be audited in terms of:**

- **the skills and capability framework that it has developed for Key Stages 1,2 and 3, appropriately extended for Key Stage 4;**
- **their relationship to the revised curriculum requirements for Key Stage 3;**
- **the extent to which they promote creativity and enterprise.**

**These changes should be made, at the latest, for first teaching from September 2008.**

## 4 Guidance on Standards, Differentiation and Progression

---

This section addresses the following Ministerial questions:

- 5 *guidance on standards, differentiation, and progression across the full ability range, including for young people with special educational needs (Appendix para 7);*
  - 6 *guidance to ensure coherence, consistency and equality of provision for PSHE and, in particular, how physical education is to be addressed in a way which promotes learning, range and balance of learning experiences and levels of physical activity; also, further advice on assessment in PSHE and the balance between formative and summative assessment (Appendix para 9)*
  - 7 *how to ensure that the needs of young people living in difficult and divided circumstances are to be realistically addressed through Citizenship requirements at Key Stage 4.*
- 

At present, most courses undertaken by young people at Key Stage 4 are recognised through the award of a GCSE, or some other means of acknowledging achievement. Progression, differentiation and standards are exemplified within the materials the Council provides to support teaching and learning for all its specifications. Support materials of this type have already been provided for the new GCSE in Learning for Life and Work, which is being piloted at present.

Differentiation incorporating provision for special needs is provided for through the availability of CCEA qualifications at Entry Level and Levels 1 and 2 of the National Qualifications Framework. In addition, the Council's provision for Special Arrangements ensures appropriate accessibility to assessment requirements for young people with particular needs.

It is the Council's intention that detailed guidance on progression in relation to the strands of PSHE, Citizenship and Employability within Learning for Life and Work across Key Stages 1-4 will be provided to schools through various teaching support packages. Separate guidance will be produced for Special Schools on Learning for Life and Work for older pupils with special needs.

The Council is aware that, although a GCSE qualification in Learning for Life and Work will be available, there will be no statutory requirement for young people to undertake the qualification. The statutory learning opportunities in Learning for Life and Work, set out in the Appendix, provide a framework within which schools have the flexibility to develop their own courses.

## 5 PSHE

The Council is in the process of developing comprehensive guidance on PSHE in order to ensure coherence, consistency and equality of provision across all schools. It is also trialling guidance materials on Relationships and Sexuality Education and Substance Abuse. These will form important components of the overall PSHE programme at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Those aspects of PSHE related to the Statutory Requirements for Courses will be formally assessed through the GCSE in Learning for Life and Work. The Council does not normally provide advice on methods of assessment at Key Stage 4 other than through qualifications. Most, if not all, of the assessment of PSHE will be carried out by teachers in line with the Council's generic advice on Assessment for Learning, which will be provided for all schools.

## **6 Physical Education**

In order to ensure sufficient focus on a healthy lifestyle the Council has identified physical education as a separate statutory requirement for all young people at Key Stage 4, consistent with the emphasis given in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1, 2, and 3. The minimum requirements are set out in the proposed statutory learning opportunities in Physical Education within the Appendix.

The Council is also developing guidance for schools on how Physical Education is to be addressed to promote a balance of learning experiences and levels of physical activity.

## **7 Citizenship at Key Stage 4**

In order to ensure that the very particular needs of young people living in Northern Ireland's difficult and divided circumstances are explicitly and realistically addressed, the Council has adjusted the statutory learning opportunities for Citizenship, (see the Appendix), to ensure that these issues are addressed and that there is appropriate progression from Key Stage 3. Support materials and training will be provided through the Local and Global Citizenship Project to assist teachers in addressing these sensitive issues.

## **Appendix:**

### **Proposed Statutory Learning Opportunities that should be the entitlement of all pupils in Key Stage 4**

The agreed objectives of the curriculum are to develop young people as:

- individuals;
- contributors to society; and
- contributors to the economy and the environment.

**The statutory learning opportunities, set out below, reflect those curriculum objectives:**

#### **SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES**

##### **Communication**

- *communicate meaning, feelings and viewpoints in a logical and coherent manner;*
- *make oral and written summaries, reports and presentations, which take account of audience and purpose;*
- *participate in discussions, debates and interviews;*
- *interpret, analyse and present information in oral, written and ICT formats;*
- *explore and respond, both imaginatively and critically, to a variety of texts.*

##### **Using Mathematics:**

- *use mathematical language and notation with confidence;*
- *use mental computation to calculate, estimate and make predictions in a range of simulated and real life contexts;*
- *select and apply mathematical concepts and problem-solving strategies in a range of simulated and real-life contexts;*
- *interpret and analyse a wide range of mathematical data;*
- *assess probability and risk in a range of simulated and real life contexts;*
- *present mathematical data in a variety of formats which take account of audience and purpose.*

## **ICT**

- *make effective use of information and communication technology in a wide range of contexts to access, manage, select and present information, including mathematical information.*

## **Self Management**

- *monitor, evaluate and take steps to improve their own learning and personal well-being.*

## **Problem Solving**

- *be enterprising, and think both creatively and critically within a range of problem-solving contexts.*

## **Working with Others**

- *work both independently and as a member of a team.*

## **LEARNING FOR LIFE AND WORK**

### **PSHE**

- *monitor, evaluate and develop strategies to improve own emotional, physical and mental health, well being and relationships with family, friends and peers;*
- *recognise and manage risk in a range of simulated and real life contexts;*
- *understand and develop competence as discerning consumers and effective managers of resources to sustain independent living;*
- *understand, through simulated contexts, the challenges and responsibilities of parenting.*

### **Local and Global Citizenship**

- *respond to the specific challenges and opportunities which diversity and inclusion present in Northern Ireland and the wider world;*
- *identify and exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local, national and global issues;*
- *understand the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights in order to ensure that everyone is treated equally and fairly;*

- *understand how to participate in a range of democratic processes;*
- *be aware of key democratic institutions and their role in promoting inclusion, justice and democracy.*

#### **Employability**

- *research, identify and develop skills and capabilities necessary for a variety of work opportunities;*
- *investigate the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees;*
- *understand how individuals, organisations and government operate within financial constraints and consider the implications for career planning;*
- *explore the links between business and the community and the local impact of the global market;*
- *investigate what it means to be enterprising and the characteristics of an entrepreneur;*
- *use ICT resources to access, select, evaluate and present information in relation to the application, selection and recruitment process;*
- *develop a personal career plan which includes evidence of the individual guidance.*

#### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- *plan, participate regularly in, monitor and evaluate a safe and effective personal exercise programme of physical activity that:*
  - *develops their interests and talents;*
  - *extends their knowledge, understanding and skills; and*
  - *contributes to and helps sustain a healthy and active lifestyle.*
- *recognise and manage risk and apply safe principles and procedures before, during and after physical activity;*
- *develop knowledge of and access to sporting and recreational opportunities in the local and wider community.*