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Subject:

ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK – FURTHER GUIDANCE

Circular Number:
2006/20

Date of Issue:
31 October 2006

Audience:

Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided post-primary schools and special schools with post-primary pupils;
Education and Library Boards;
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and
Further Education Colleges.

Summary of Contents:

This circular provides further information about the introduction of the Entitlement Framework and progression towards its full implementation. It should be read in association with the accompanying booklet entitled 'Delivering The Entitlement Framework – Guidance For Schools', and with reference to Circular 2005/18, which explained the concept of the Entitlement Framework.

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Governor Awareness:
Essential

Status of Contents:
Advice
Information for schools

Related Documents:
1. Circular 2005/18
2. Guidance booklet

Superseded Documents:
None

Expiry Date:
Not applicable

DE Website:
This circular is available
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Purpose of this Circular

1. This circular provides further information about the introduction of the Entitlement Framework and, principally, offers guidance on the arrangements for collaboration that will be a necessary part of its delivery. The circular is being issued at this stage to assist schools in planning for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework. Schools will find it helpful to read this circular in conjunction with the earlier Circular 2005/18, which provided the background.

Legislative Position

2. The Entitlement Framework will be given statutory effect by Articles 18-22 of the Education Order 2006. As Circular 2005/18 (Entitlement Framework – Initial Guidance) explained, the Entitlement Framework will ultimately require schools to provide access to a minimum of 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and a minimum of 27 courses for pupils post-16. At least one third of these courses must be general (academic) and at least one third applied (vocational or professional/technical). The remaining third will be determined by schools at their discretion.
3. As a first step in implementation, the Department will give immediate effect to Article 21 of the 2006 Order, which provides wider powers for Boards of Governors to enter into formal arrangements with other education bodies to secure secondary education on behalf of the school. This will facilitate the creation of the kind of collaborative arrangements described later in this circular.
4. It is recognised that effective collaboration will require time to set up and that schools vary greatly in the numbers of courses they currently provide. Progress towards meeting the full requirements of the Entitlement Framework will therefore take a number of years. The currently anticipated timescale for full implementation is 2009/10, and the Department will monitor progress in the interim. It is expected that schools will wish to make early progress in extending the range of courses accessible to their pupils, particularly those of a professional/technical nature, with the target date of 2009/10 in view.

Policy Context

5. The introduction of the Entitlement Framework is one part of a series of reforms aimed at ensuring that curricular provision in schools is more relevant to the needs of society and the economy. The Education Order 2006 introduces a revised curriculum with a greater emphasis on skills and employability. It is also much less prescriptive, especially at Key Stage 4, with the aim of providing more flexibility for schools in what they offer and, consequently, greater choice for pupils. The Entitlement Framework complements the revised curriculum by providing access to a wider range of relevant, high-quality courses for all pupils from age 14, and by ensuring a variety of course types, including technical and professional courses.
6. The Entitlement Framework will be an integral part of each school's overall curricular provision. In determining the courses to which access is to be offered at Key Stage 4, schools will need to take account of the requirement to maintain breadth and balance of provision by offering at least one course related to each of the Areas of Learning that form part of the revised statutory curriculum from September 2006 viz. Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Modern Languages, The Arts, Environment and Society, Science and Technology, Learning for Life and Work; and

Physical Education.

7. The Entitlement Framework will thus contribute to improving the breadth, relevance and quality of pupils' educational experiences and help raise levels of achievement for all. The associated collaboration amongst schools, and with FE and training providers, will make better use of the totality of the resources and expertise available within the education service as a whole. It also opens up possibilities for shared provision in keeping with the principles of 'A Shared Future', and provides a context for the further utilisation of ICT to facilitate distance learning and other innovative approaches.

Collaboration

8. For most schools, some form of collaboration with other providers will be necessary to enable their pupils to have access to the full range of courses available through the Entitlement Framework. That collaboration may be with another school or cluster of schools, with a Further Education (FE) College or other training provider, or a combination of all of these. Even in cases where schools are already in a position to offer a broad range of courses, consideration should be given to collaborative working so that pupils can benefit from exposure to other teaching environments and approaches.
9. It is anticipated that collaboration will take place on a number of levels depending on local circumstances and needs. This will range from, for example, a school working with a FE College to deliver some post-16 courses, or elements of courses, to more complex arrangements, for example, a cluster of schools working together to share teaching resources. Common to both ends of the spectrum will be the need to adopt a structured approach to such arrangements, to ensure a common understanding of what is expected in terms of course delivery, co-ordinated timetabling, transport arrangements, child protection and pastoral care, including protocols on behaviour and discipline, procedures to respect diversity, and management arrangements including financial processes.
10. Collaboration will be a key feature of the new educational landscape, but must be viewed in the context of a school's strategic planning for future provision, which will be influenced by other factors such as demography, population movement and the location of other schools or education providers.
11. The information in this circular is supported by a separate booklet entitled 'The Entitlement Framework - Guidance for Schools'. This provides practical help for schools on the development of collaborative arrangements. It includes information about key issues such as health and safety, timetabling etc; highlights some good practice principles; provides exemplar documents to help guide schools through the process; and provides a number of case studies describing the experiences of a number of practitioners working in a collaborative manner.
12. Other useful material is available on the Regional Training Unit website (www.rtuni.org/framework.cfm). This consists of the presentations by the keynote speakers at the major conference on Delivering the Entitlement Framework, which was held on 31 January 2006.

Delivering The Entitlement Framework

13. The Department is not specifying the form that collaborative arrangements should take, or how schools and school managing authorities should work with other schools, further education colleges or training providers to develop and implement such arrangements. Nor is the Department specifying which courses schools, or groups of schools and others, should provide in each locality. This will be a matter for consideration at local level taking account of existing provision and circumstances. The key issue for all providers is to develop arrangements which best meet the needs of pupils in the locality, taking account of the facilities and courses already available and the pool of teaching expertise.
14. The Entitlement Framework is inclusive, embracing all school types. Special schools can play a full part in collaborative arrangements, and this has been amply demonstrated through the Vocational Enhancement Programme. There may, however, be cases where the requirement to provide the full Entitlement Framework might not be feasible, for example, in the case of special schools providing for those with severe learning difficulties, or of a newly established school. In such cases, the Department will be able to exempt such schools wholly or partly from the requirements of the Entitlement Framework for as long as may be necessary.
15. Collaboration in support of the Entitlement Framework is intended to provide an enhanced range of provision for pupils. It is not a means of avoiding the consideration of a school's longer term viability where falling enrolments put this in doubt. School managing authorities will be mindful of this in their strategic planning of provision, taking due account of any guidance issued by the Department on viability issues, for example, in respect of new sixth forms¹, and the outcome of the review being conducted by Sir George Bain. It is recognised that reaching the required number of courses for post-16 pupils is likely to be especially challenging in view of the number of very small sixth forms. It may not be possible to achieve the requisite access by collaboration alone, and structural changes may be needed in some instances.

Support for Schools

16. As indicated earlier, schools will not be expected to introduce access to the full range of courses required by the Entitlement Framework immediately. Schools are starting from different positions depending on the range of courses currently offered, and most will need to plan for a phased increase in the number and diversity of courses available to pupils, and build this into school development planning. Guidance on school development planning, published on 24 August 2005, refers (at Stage 2) to an audit of current provision and key issues. This should take account of any collaboration with partner schools, further education colleges or other providers.
17. Resources have been allocated to the Education and Library Boards, CCMS, NICIE and CnaG to enable them to support and facilitate schools working together to develop collaborative arrangements to access a wider range of courses for all pupils in a locality. A number of e2s (entitled to succeed) development officers have been

¹ On 1 April 2005 guidance on establishing new sixth forms issued to schools and school managing authorities. To address concerns about the limited provision available to sixth form pupils, any future proposals for sixth form provision must go through the development proposal process and be subject to Departmental approval.

appointed, and contact details are provided in an Appendix to this circular.

18. Since being appointed, the e2s development officers have been engaged in supporting the development of local collaborative arrangements, sometimes referred to as learning communities, and the dissemination of information to schools and exploration of a variety of issues at local events. Direct support for schools has been provided through the development and application of an audit tool, which is helping schools assess their readiness for the Entitlement Framework, and plan for increased access to courses for pupils.
19. The Department has asked the e2s development officers to work together to ensure a coherent approach to provision across school sectors. The aim is to secure educational provision appropriate to the educational needs, interests and aspirations of all pupils, using resources - in terms of facilities, teaching expertise and experience and financial resources - in the most effective and efficient way.
20. In parallel, the Department is directly helping to encourage collaborative activity. Collaboration between schools and FE Colleges, or other training providers, is already supported through the Vocational Enhancement Programme; and a programme of support for schools seeking to collaborate with other schools is being developed in consultation with the e2s development officers. Both programmes are being funded using additional resources obtained to support implementation of the e2s programme.
21. The Department will continue to set aside funding to support collaboration, but alongside this, and increasingly, it will be necessary for schools to take account of the costs of providing, or providing access to, this broader curriculum offer when making decisions about the deployment of their mainstream funding. Careful planning of provision, in collaboration with other schools, FE Colleges and other providers, can identify a variety of ways in which this can be achieved. Some examples are given below.
 - The Department's Entitlement Framework conference included an example where two schools are currently offering Biology and Applied Science. Starting in 2006/07 each school will provide just one of those subjects, with pupils moving between the schools, enabling them to access the same range of courses but with a resultant saving for the schools in terms of both budget and timetabling time. The schools are considering a similar arrangement in other subject areas.
 - Evidence from existing collaborative arrangements would suggest that there may be a benefit for schools that have a teacher who is currently under-utilised in his/her specialist area of teaching. By partnering with neighbouring schools, particularly in less popular subject areas, it may be possible to make better use of a teaching post that might otherwise be unviable in cost terms, and provide that teacher with the opportunity to concentrate on his/her area of expertise.
 - Where schools are not located sufficiently close to facilitate the easy movement of pupils and/or teaching staff, other more innovative approaches are possible. For example, some initial work has been undertaken by the North Down and Ards Institute to develop the blended delivery of course content linked to the GCE Music syllabus for the benefit of schools located as far away as Magherafelt. The term *blended delivery* in this instance refers to a mixture of

delivery methods including online and face-to-face tutorial support, a virtual 'chat room' facility, and combined school groups visiting the host college at least twice during the academic year.

Other examples of collaborative arrangements in practice are provided in the associated booklet 'The Entitlement Framework – Guidance for Schools'.

22. In assessing the scope for increased access to course choices, schools will need to ensure that all the courses they offer lead to qualifications accredited within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Until now, courses offered at Key Stage 4 have had to be compatible with the Programmes of Study in the original statutory curriculum, as specified in the Department's approval of qualifications circular. However, these Programmes of Study no longer have statutory effect from the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year and, in keeping with the more flexible curriculum now being introduced, future approval of qualifications circulars will be based on the full list of nationally accredited qualifications maintained by the UK Regulatory Authorities. This can be found at www.openquals.org.uk.
23. Openquals is currently being modified and will in future be known as the "National Database of Accredited Qualifications". NDAQ will include enhanced search capabilities and allow users to relate accredited qualifications to a variety of occupations, a facility which schools may find useful when advising pupils on possible progression routes. The Department's forthcoming circular on qualifications will provide further information about this database and also provide guidance on the classification of courses as general or applied for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. Notwithstanding this extensive range of accredited courses which schools could consider, it is recognised that in practice the provision that can be offered in a given locality will be largely determined by the facilities and teaching expertise available. It will also reflect the collective view of schools, colleges and other providers as to what is most relevant to the young people in the area they serve, and their employment and career options.

Summary

24. The introduction of the Entitlement Framework and the development of associated collaborative arrangements will serve the interests of all pupils by providing access to a wider range of relevant courses for all. It will provide flexibility to enable a pupil's education to be better tailored to his or her educational needs, interests and future career plans. It will enable schools to work in partnership for the benefit of pupils, making best use of resources, and will provide greater opportunities for teachers to exercise and develop their professional skills. Using the material in this circular and the accompanying booklet, and with the support of the e2s development officers, schools should continue to develop the collaborative arrangements necessary to provide this wider access.

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