

CHAPTER 4: PUPILS' ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK

Introduction

- 4.1 In contrast to the very uneven provision that currently exists (see Chapter 2), we considered it important to establish a framework of educational entitlement which should be the right of every pupil at post-primary level.
- 4.2 The Entitlement Framework outlined below takes as its starting point the primacy of the needs of the pupils, including those with special educational needs. Access to a wide, varied and flexible range of educational experiences and opportunities should be the entitlement of every learner so that they can reach their full potential. If we are to have actively engaged, motivated learners who are equipped for life and work in a diverse and changing world, the educational experiences of all pupils must be:
- relevant to the individual's needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations;
 - based on high expectations of what each individual can achieve; and
 - enjoyable.
- 4.3 This Entitlement Framework in turn provides the basis for the development of criteria against which options for new arrangements can be assessed. The Entitlement Framework does not in itself presume or require any particular model or structure of educational provision. It could be given expression in a variety of ways, taking account of the situation in individual localities, provided that it meets the needs of all pupils. Criteria and some examples of possible structures are discussed later in Chapter 6.
- 4.4 In light of the pivotal role of the Entitlement Framework, the Department should consider the extent to which the framework should be given statutory underpinning.

The Entitlement Framework – Principles

- 4.5 The Entitlement Framework must have a clear focus on pupil needs, and take account of the curricular context in which schools will be operating. There must also be emphasis on the provision of high quality careers education and guidance.

Pupil Needs

- 4.6 The Group believes that:
- each pupil is unique and individual;
 - each pupil's post-primary education should be tailored to meet his/her individual needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations as far as is practicable; and
 - each pupil should be motivated and enabled to reach his/her full potential.
- 4.7 The Group recognises that pupils:
- mature at different rates;
 - have different learning needs and interests and that these may change during post-primary education;
 - have a range of learning needs and require a range of teaching approaches;
 - learn at different paces; and
 - achieve in different ways.

Curriculum

- 4.8 The Working Group notes and endorses the current CCEA proposals for a revised statutory curriculum. These aim to:
- reduce the present level of over-prescription of subject content in favour of a more holistic approach focused on the development of a range of pupil competences, including the key skills; and

- provide the opportunity to extend the range and variety of learning experiences available to pupils and to provide these experiences in a flexible way to meet individual learning needs.

- 4.9 We consider that the development of pupils' key skills is an important element of CCEA's proposals and should continue to be developed throughout the 14-19 phase. This should address the concerns of the business sector that pupils should be equipped with a range of key skills to prepare them better to contribute fully in employment. Assessment arrangements should be put in place to ensure appropriate recognition of these skills across the full range of pupils' experiences.
- 4.10 In particular, the Group endorses CCEA's holistic approach. The educational and personal experiences of pupils during their time at school should not be confined to the formal curriculum. They should be enriched by the ethos of the school as a community and by a wide range of enrichment activities that run in parallel with formal learning. Pupils should have the opportunity to follow non-examination courses to provide breadth, enrichment and enjoyment to their educational experiences. All of these are important in pupils' personal skills development and in increasing their self-esteem and confidence. The Working Group on 14-19 Reform chaired by Mike Tomlinson, is reviewing the qualifications structure. This offers the potential to create structures to recognise attainment at different levels and in different ways in order to engage and motivate pupils, enrich their educational experiences and make them more enjoyable.
- 4.11 The Group believes that each pupil should have access to a wide, varied range of learning pathways which have the flexibility to keep pupils' options open for as long as possible during their post-primary education. (A learning pathway is the combination of courses, learning opportunities or teaching approaches which an individual chooses to follow to meet his or her needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations). Recognising that pupils have different learning needs and learn at different paces, pupils should also have access to extension courses which widen and develop their interests in their courses. These courses go beyond the statutory core and will become more accessible at Key Stage 4 when the statutory core curriculum reduces.

Key Stage 3

- 4.12 Many of the responses to the Burns proposals supported the view that there should be a common core curriculum to age 14, i.e. during Key Stage 3. The Group believes that in Key Stage 3, a sound general education, as proposed by CCEA, should occupy a majority of teaching and learning time. However, opportunities should also be provided for extension and enrichment courses and activities that contribute to broadening pupils' experiences and horizons and help to develop the range of key skills that pupils require.

Key Stage 4 and Post-16

- 4.13 For 14-18 year olds, the statutory core curriculum reduces and this opens up the opportunity for increased variety and choice, from a broad range of curriculum options and assessment instruments, facilitating a variety of learning approaches to be enjoyed by pupils.

Careers Education and Guidance and Work-Related Learning

- 4.14 By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils will have begun to think about their career options. It is essential that their choices of learning pathways should be complemented by a coherent, ongoing programme of high quality Careers Education and Guidance. While acknowledging the significant contribution which careers teachers make to pupils' choices, it is important that all pupils should also have access to a wider range of advice, some of which should be provided externally from their school.
- 4.15 An essential dimension, particularly at Key Stage 4, should be the opportunity for pupils to gain some understanding and experience of the world of work, and of the education and training opportunities available outside the school sector. Recent experience in some schools (under the Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative) has demonstrated the enriching and motivating effect of exposure to work-related learning; this should be an option for all pupils.
- 4.16 The development of work-related learning provides opportunities for pupils to experience the business environment and should help to promote business and the creation of business opportunities as valid and acceptable career paths. This will help to secure the foundation for a business sector which supports a vibrant, developing Northern Ireland

economy. Work-related learning should also include public sector organisations given their significance as employers in NI. This must be a collaborative process involving the education and business/public sectors at all levels from local to national. There are already good examples of business education links, including opportunities for exchanges, but there is scope for significant further expansion. Schools and businesses need to work together in a better organised way to develop partnerships which can operate for the benefit of all. Consideration should be given to establishing a co-ordinating body for the development of such links.

The Entitlement Framework – Provision

- 4.17 The minimum curricular requirements for Key Stage 3 will be the statutory curriculum proposed by CCEA. We considered what the minimum curricular entitlement should be in Key Stage 4 and post-16 in the context of providing a wide and varied range of educational experiences and opportunities for all pupils.
- 4.18 We reviewed the extent of the variety and choice of courses currently available (Appendix 2). While we concluded that this should be extended, in particular to ensure that all pupils have access to a range of academic and vocational options, we considered that the minimum should be set at a realistic level, capable of being provided in a locality. The purpose is not to require pupils to follow greater numbers of courses, but to ensure that they have choice from a wide range including a blend of academic and vocational courses.
- 4.19 The Group finds the ‘academic’ or ‘vocational’ labels unsatisfactory and to some extent misleading. Pupils who take, say, science courses with the aim of pursuing a career in medicine are taking ‘vocational’ subjects just as surely as those taking business studies or economics. Alternative descriptors such as ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ are felt to be inadequate for similar reasons. The terms academic and vocational are used here and elsewhere in this document as convenient, if imperfect, shorthand to denote on the one hand those subjects which have traditionally been the main focus of schools and, on the other hand, those subjects which are seen as having a more direct vocational, technical or occupational bias. The Group believes that both deserve equal status and recognition.

4.20 The specific requirements of the Entitlement Framework are as follows:

Key Stage 3

The Key Stage 3 curriculum should comprise:

- the statutory minimum as proposed by CCEA:
 - Learning for Life and Work - Education for Employability, Local and Global Citizenship, and Personal Development;
 - Skills and Capabilities - Personal and Inter-Personal (Self Management and Working with Others) and Critical and Creative Thinking (Creativity, Managing Information, Problem Solving/Decision Making, Communication, Application of Number and ICT); and
 - General Learning Areas - The Arts, English, Environment and Society, Modern Languages, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science and Technology, Religious Education;
- and, in addition, the following:
 - additional aspects of general learning – in order to reflect as far as practicable the individual needs and interests of pupils, including the facility to offer some extended learning opportunities to those pupils who are able to proceed at a faster pace;
 - a high quality programme of Careers Education and Guidance; and
 - a range of enrichment opportunities.

4.21 It is important that the level of enrolment at Key Stage 3 is sufficient to sustain a good range of enrichment opportunities including clubs, societies and sports opportunities which add to the vibrancy of the school for pupils at this level.

Key Stage 4

4.22 The increased flexibility envisaged in CCEA's curriculum proposals for Key Stage 4 offers the potential for schools to provide a much more varied, relevant and enjoyable mix of educational experiences. Variety should

encompass the range of courses together with provision for different learning approaches ranging from theoretical to applied. It is important to widen the availability of all types of courses for all pupils and plans should be developed to promote their acceptability and parity of status.

Key Stage 4

Key Stage 4 pupils should have access to a broad menu of courses consisting of a minimum of 24 courses of which at least one third must be academic and at least one third must be vocational.

Within this range, pupils will follow:

- a statutory minimum core (the key skills); and
- the defined range of areas of study, proposed by CCEA - including Languages, Science, Environment and Society, Creative and Expressive Studies, Vocational Learning, Work-related Learning, PE, RE.

In addition all pupils should have access to:

- a high quality programme of Careers Education and Guidance; and
- a range of extension and enrichment opportunities.

4.23 While it is envisaged that individual schools will provide the majority of these courses for their pupils, many schools may need to work in partnership with other schools, the FE sector or other providers to attain the specified minimum.

Post-16

4.24 The range of options available to all pupils in this age group should be greater than those at Key Stage 4, incorporating a broad range of courses and accommodating a wide range of learning approaches.

Post-16

Pupils should have access to a minimum of 27 courses of which at least one third must be academic and at least one third must be vocational.

Within this range, pupils will follow:

- programmes that continue to develop the key skills; and
- courses/learning pathways from the various areas of study available.

In addition, pupils will have access to:

- a continuing programme of high quality Careers Education and Guidance; and
- a range of enrichment opportunities.

4.25 While it is envisaged that individual schools will provide the majority of these courses for their pupils, many schools may need to work in partnership with other schools, the FE sector or other providers to attain the specified minimum.

4.26 Providing this range of opportunity for pupils post-16 is not compatible with the practice of some schools – and the aspiration of others – to run 6th forms with small numbers of pupils. Small 6th forms have the dual disadvantage of providing an inadequate curricular range for pupils and also potentially drawing much-needed teaching and other resources away from pupils in the lower part of the school. Future provision for 6th form pupils is likely to be secured via local collaborative arrangements which could, as one option, involve creating composite 6th form provision serving a number of schools, including schools of different management types. As a contribution to ensuring greater coherence in this area, it is recommended that the Department consider the re-introduction of the former 'Extended Courses' circular which set out the viability criteria for 6th form provision.

Special Educational Needs

4.27 The earlier sections of the Entitlement Framework stem from the belief that the individuality of the learner should be recognised and educational

provision tailored accordingly. This is equally true of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), who should enjoy the same entitlement to access as other pupils. We noted that proposed legislation on Special Educational Needs and Disability requires a pupil with special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools unless doing so would be against the wishes of his or her parents or would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the pupil will be educated.

- 4.28 'Special educational needs' in this context embraces not only 'statemented' pupils with physical, emotional or learning disabilities but also those who are not statemented but who, for whatever reason, have fallen behind their peer group and require additional help and support, and also pupils with exceptional ability. The range and flexibility of educational opportunities advocated above should accommodate the needs of the majority of pupils, including many pupils who are currently provided for through "Alternative Education Provision". Where such provision is still deemed necessary, it should be the responsibility of the school to secure suitable arrangements, in collaboration with other schools and other providers in the area.
- 4.29 Early intervention for children with learning difficulties is crucial and the provision of funding and access to services to support early identification and intervention could reduce the need for ongoing special needs support in later years.
- 4.30 The Group considers that:
- arrangements must ensure that pupils with special educational needs have access to the same range of learning pathways available to other pupils including access to FE institutions, training organisations and other providers;
 - opportunities should be taken for two-way exchanges of expertise, teaching and support staff and, where appropriate, of pupils between the mainstream and any special schools in a given locality as part of the collaborative arrangements advocated elsewhere; and
 - the Department should ensure that the additional requirements under the proposed Special Educational Needs and Disability legislation are fully assessed and adequately resourced.

Key Recommendations

- An Entitlement Framework should be established to guarantee each pupil, including those with special educational needs, access to a wide, varied and flexible range of learning pathways.
- The Entitlement Framework should include:
 - At Key Stage 3, a sound general education, as proposed by CCEA. This should occupy the majority of teaching time.
 - At Key Stage 4, access to a menu of at least 24 courses of which one third must be vocational and one third must be academic.
 - At Post-16, access to a menu of at least 27 courses of which one third must be vocational and one third must be academic.
 - Access to extension courses and enrichment opportunities.
 - Access to high quality Careers Education and Guidance.