

Subject:

ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK SUPPORT

**STRAND TWO: SCHOOL COLLABORATION PROGRAMME
2007/08**

Circular Number: DE 2007/08

Date of Issue: 12 March 2007

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided post-primary schools and special schools with post-primary pupils.
- Education and Library Boards (ELBs)
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

Summary of Contents:

This circular, issued by the Department of Education, details the arrangements for schools wishing to participate in the School Collaboration Programme. This circular describes:

- The background to support for school/school collaboration and how it is evolving;
- The criteria to be used to determine approval for school/school collaborative projects;
- The application and approval process for 2007/08 including the timescales for applications and decisions.

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Governor Awareness: Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and action by schools

Related Documents:

Circular 2006/20 and 2006/20a
“Entitlement Framework -Further
Guidance.”

VEP Circular 2007/03 (as revised).

Exemplar Service Level Agreement
(available on DE website).

Expiry Date: N/A

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Introduction

1. This circular has been prepared by the Department of Education (DE) to outline the ongoing development of the support arrangements for schools in implementing the Entitlement Framework (EF) and to detail the arrangements for schools wishing to participate in the School Collaboration Programme (SCP) in the 2007/08 academic year.

Context

2. The Education (NI) Order 2006 provides the broad legislative framework for a number of key education reforms, under the Entitled to Succeed (e2s) Programme, including the revised curriculum, assessment arrangements and the EF.
3. The EF is a key element of the new post-primary arrangements. From September 2009 all pupils aged 14 and upwards must have access to the EF, which will ultimately require schools to offer access to at least 24 courses for pupils at KS4 and 27 courses for pupils post-16, with at least one third applied and at least one third general, as defined by DE. **It is unlikely that many schools will be able to provide access to the EF on their own; schools will need to develop arrangements to co-operate and collaborate with other schools and with the Further Education (FE) sector and other providers.** These arrangements will be developed locally to respond to local needs and circumstances.
4. The EF will be given statutory effect progressively to ensure that schools are able to implement the requirements in a planned and manageable manner. The Department has taken the first step in this process by commencing Article 21 of the Education (NI) Order 2006 (by way of The Education (2006 Order) (Commencement No.1) Order 2007). Article 21 gives the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school the power to make arrangements for secondary education to be provided on its behalf by other schools, FE colleges or suitable bodies approved by the Department, and sets out conditions as to the form and nature of such arrangements. In making such arrangements, Boards of Governors must take account of any guidance issued by the Department. Article 21 also allows FE colleges to provide secondary education for pupils who are the subject of arrangements made under the Article, or with an ELB under the Further Education (NI) Order 1997¹.
5. The Department has issued guidance for schools on the implementation of the EF², covering a range of practical issues and highlighting existing good practice. In addition, initial guidance on the classification of courses as general or applied³ was issued in 2006 and schools may contact DE for advice on the classification of any course that is not currently listed.

Support for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework

6. There are two main strands of support for schools in developing these collaborative arrangements:

¹ For further details of the contents of Article 21, see DE Circular 2007/06.

² See Circulars 2006/20 "Entitlement Framework -Further Guidance," 2006/20a "Delivering the Entitlement Framework – Guidance for Schools" and 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework - Initial Guidance"

³ See Circular 2006/24.

- **Strand 1** - the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) focuses on supporting collaboration between schools and FE colleges or other providers and is the subject of DE circular 2007/03.
 - **Strand 2** - the School Collaboration Programme (SCP) focuses on supporting collaboration between schools and details of the funding arrangements for this strand will be the subject of this circular.
7. Both strands are transitional programmes, aiming to provide the opportunity to test and refine models of effective collaborative working, and disseminate good practice. Of equal importance, these transitional programmes aim to assist in establishing and building relationships and experience between schools and with other providers in preparation for the full implementation of the EF. The 2007/08 year will be the last in which support for the delivery of the EF will be separated into these two strands. From 2008/09, support for collaborative arrangements between schools, and/or between schools and FE colleges and other providers, will be provided through a single programme co-ordinated on an area basis. It is therefore important that we move the current school/school collaboration and the VEP programmes towards the arrangements for 2008/09.
8. In addition the Department has made available additional resources to enable the ELBs, CCMS, NICIE and CnaG to provide e2s Development Officers (DOs) who are currently working to help schools develop collaborative arrangements and increase pupils' access to courses in preparation for the introduction of the EF. The relevant DO(s) should be contacted at an early stage in preparing an application for school/school funding, as they will have a key advisory and support role throughout the process.

How the School Collaboration programme is evolving

9. The Department is aware that schools are at different states of readiness in terms of their progress towards delivering the full EF. To reflect this, the SCP for 2007/08 will fund two categories of collaborative work between schools:

Category One

- **Proposals that will lead to increased access to courses for pupils in 2007/08 (or help protect existing provision that, without schools working collaboratively, would otherwise be at risk, resulting in reduced access to courses for pupils); or**

Category Two

- **Proposals that, through building the capacity of the schools involved, will lead to increased access to courses for pupils in 2008/09.**

Schools should note that bids for support must fall into one of these categories. For some collaborative groups of schools, the range of work being planned will fall under both categories 1 and 2. In these cases applications for financial support should be submitted as separate bids.

Issues to be considered when preparing a SCP application

10. This circular and the guidance⁴ previously issued by the Department set the broad context of the EF and participating schools should have a clear and agreed idea as to how applications under the SCP fit into the developing collaborative arrangements in the area, particularly how they complement other work funded under VEP or the Specialist Schools programme.
11. It is intended that the EF will be fully implemented by 2009/10 and schools have the opportunity to develop a unique curricular offer within the requirements of the EF. It is therefore important that individual schools focus not solely on the number of courses on offer to their pupils but also on the coherence and relevance of their curricular offer in both the schools' local context and in relation to each participating school's ethos or curricular emphasis.
12. Schools should individually and collectively examine their capacity to deliver an increased curricular offer, both in terms of the accommodation and specialist facilities on offer and the existing teaching expertise. The range of courses that schools deliver (through the SCP and VEP and ultimately under the EF) should be informed by a number of factors, including an assessment of what is available in the local area. **The EF Online audit tool, which has been developed by the WELB and is available to all schools, and the Commission for Catholic Education's Pre-Project Audit tool will be particularly valuable in this area**⁵ Schools should also take account of the courses available at FE colleges in order to avoid duplication. Provision in a local area is likely to be most effective where it results from discussions at a local level and which complements and extends the options available in a way that addresses the needs of individual pupils. Applications under the SCP are encouraged to build on existing expertise to increase the offer in the coming 2007/08 school year, (the first category of support as detailed in paragraph 9). Schools are also encouraged to identify, through this process of examination, areas requiring development in order to facilitate this curricular access in the longer term (Category Two), including staff training and development.
13. Provision should offer the prospect of clear progression that is supported by Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) within the school. Where possible, schools should demonstrate the involvement of parents and pupils in agreeing the proposed provision.
14. **Ensuring a common understanding of what is expected by all partners in any collaborative arrangement will be a key element in delivering successful outcomes. It is particularly important that this common understanding is put in writing and agreed by all partners.** In drawing up this written understanding, schools should also take account of the legislative requirements placed on them by the commencement of Article 21⁶. Evaluation evidence has highlighted the value of a **Service Level Agreement (SLA)** and an example of a SLA has been placed on the DE website. This may be downloaded and adapted as necessary to fit with local arrangements. **Schools must satisfy themselves that the necessary standards are met in terms of:**

⁴ See Circulars 2006/20 "Entitlement Framework -Further Guidance," 2006/20a "Delivering the Entitlement Framework – Guidance for Schools" and 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework - Initial Guidance"

⁵ DE will be working with all of the education partners to develop a single audit tool for use in future years.

⁶ For further details of the contents of Article 21, see DE Circular 2007/06.

- **health and safety;**
- **codes of behaviour;**
- **pastoral care; and**
- **the quality and appropriateness of the provision offered.**

The experience of schools that have already been involved in successful collaboration highlights the importance of early discussions and planning as a means of helping schools resolve operational problems such as timetabling and transport. Detailed guidance is provided in DE Circular 2006/20a “Delivering the Entitlement Framework-Guidance for Schools” on these and a range of other issues.

Action Plans

15. It is important that schools begin to integrate their plans for developing access to the EF within their school development planning process. An integral part of this process is the development of an action plan to support targets and set out the actions required to achieve them. In drawing up an application, schools should work with their relevant DO(s) to create an action plan to give formal expression to the strategies and resources required to deliver the collaborative proposal. Further guidance on the development of action plans can be found in “School Development Planning” (DE June 2005)⁷. Appendices 1 and 2 of this document set out a possible format which schools may wish to use as a template for formulating their action plan.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

16. The EF will apply to all pupils, including those with SEN, embracing all school types. Young people with SEN should have access to learning pathways that best suit their needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. Special schools and schools with Special Units can play a full part in collaborative arrangements and bids which include these schools are encouraged by the Department.

Viability of Classes

17. It is in the interest of schools to submit proposals that will result in an economically viable class size. Schools should make every effort to explore options such as clustering, sharing staff expertise or specialist facilities effectively across a number of schools to extend or maintain the curricular offer.

Funding

18. There are finite resources allocated to the SCP in the 2007/08 year and, while the Department will make every effort to ensure that all applications, which meet the required criteria, are allocated funding, this cannot be guaranteed.
19. Funding for school/school collaborative projects is earmarked and must be used exclusively for that purpose. As with the majority of school/school funding in 2006/07, funding in 2007/08 will be allocated to schools through the ELBs and monitored through their DOs. Schools should ensure that the division of funding between the participant schools is agreed as part of their written understanding/SLA.
20. Funding under the SCP is additional and there must be no overlap or duplication of funding with provision or activities funded under other initiatives in 2007/08, such as

⁷ Copies are available on the DE website at www.deni.gov.uk/sdp_guidance-2.pdf

VEP or the Specialist Schools programme. **Where all or part of an application under the SCP would be directly replicated by one of the applicant school's bids for specialist status, should this be successful, these elements of the SCP bid will not be funded.**

21. Where schools' bids, or a proportion of them, relate to funding for substitute cover (for example for staff development or planning) a standard substitute cover rate of £150 per day will apply.

Funding Criteria

22. Two or more schools must be involved in an application in order to qualify for funding. Bids must be clearly linked to the development of collaborative arrangements as part of schools' plans to offer the full EF and should fall into the categories outlined in paragraph 9.
23. It is a priority of the Department to encourage the planning of provision on a local level, to ensure that the curricular choice available to pupils is maximised and coherent. Priority will therefore be given to applications which clearly demonstrate that they are a product of an area based approach.
24. A number of collaborative arrangements (in some areas known as Learning Communities or Learning Partnerships) have already been established and the DOs have had a key role in facilitating their development. DE is keen to encourage and consolidate those consortia already in existence and to facilitate the growth of others. **Priority will, therefore, be given to bids from schools collaborating under these types of arrangements or will contribute to their continuing development.**
25. Priority will also be given to bids, which involve innovative approaches to the delivery of courses. However, where schools are seeking to fund projects using ICT, particularly those which involve the purchase of ICT equipment, the participant schools will be expected to demonstrate that the formulation of the bid has been informed by the participation of key staff members in appropriate training, such as the Online Learning and Teaching for Educators (OLTE) training provided by the Regional Training Unit (RTU). While a number of schools are currently participating in this training, further places may be available later in the year and interested schools should contact their DO for further information.
26. Before submitting an ICT bid, schools should also ensure that C2K and/or the ELB ICT advisers are consulted to ensure that any equipment purchased is fit for purpose, value for money, and that there are no insurmountable capacity or support issues.

Application Process and Timetable

27. On receipt of this guidance, schools should initiate discussions with their partner schools to identify courses that would best meet the needs of their pupils and meet the criteria described above. To facilitate the completion of the application form, each group of participating schools should agree a lead school.
28. The e2s DO(s) relevant to the schools involved in the application should also be contacted at an early stage. For convenience, listed below are contact details for the DOs. While many clusters of applicant schools will have more than one DO, a lead DO should also be nominated to take forward the overall application with the schools and to forward the application to DE. Where an application covers more than one ELB

area and/or school type, a lead DO should be agreed between the officers involved. As funding for successful applications will be directed through the ELBs, with the associated monitoring responsibility as outlined in paragraph 19, the ELB DO responsible for the area covered by the application must be contacted during the completion of the application, where they are not the lead DO described above. **It should be stressed that all DOs who have an interest or responsibility for participant schools should be involved in supporting an application.**

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29. Lead schools should aim to submit the first draft of their application forms, along with an action plan for the implementation of the proposal, to their lead DO by **13 April 2007**. **DOs will then be responsible for ensuring that the criteria outlined in this circular have been met and seek clarification or further information, where necessary.** The DOs will then only submit applications that satisfy the criteria in this circular to DE by **11 May 2007**. Where the DO does not submit a bid, they will provide feedback to the schools on where the bid did not meet the criteria. Please note that no further bids will be accepted by the Department after 11 May.

30. **DE will be responsible for making the final decisions on allocations and schools will be notified through their DOs of the Department's decisions by 31 May 2007.**