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Subject:

GENERAL AND APPLIED COURSES: REVISED DEFINITIONS

Circular Number: 2011/26

Date of Issue: 22 December 2011

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors (BoG) of all grant-aided post-primary schools and special schools with secondary departments;
- Education and Library Boards (ELBs);
- Further and Higher Education Colleges (F&HE);
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS);
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG);
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE);
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA);
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI); and
- Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT).

Summary of Contents:

This circular, issued by the Department of Education, provides information on the revised definitions of a “general” course and an “applied” course for the purposes of the Entitlement Framework.

Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the content of this Circular should be addressed to:

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Governor Awareness: Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and action by schools

Related Documents:

DE Circular 2006/20, 2010/13, 2011/09,
2011/25

Expiry Date: N/A

DE Website: <http://www.deni.gov.uk>

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Purpose of this Circular

1. The purpose of this circular is to notify you of the coming into operation of a number of Articles in The Education (2006 Order) (Commencement No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011, referred to as the Commencement Order. These Articles will apply in the context of the related requirements of Article 6 of the Education (Northern Ireland) 2006 Order as they apply to pupils in Key Stage 4 under the Entitlement Framework.
2. The Commencement Order brings into operation Article 34 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 from 16th December 2011. Article 34 relates to the provision of suitable education to registered pupils of a school when they are suspended. Further detail on the application of this Article on the Education of Suspended Pupils, is provided in Departmental Circular 2011/25.
3. The Commencement Order brings into operation Articles 18, 19, 20 and 22 of the 2006 Order from **1st September 2013**.
4. This Circular provides information on the revised definitions of a “general” course and an “applied” course for the purposes of the Entitlement Framework.

Entitlement Framework

5. Articles 18, 19, 20 and 22 of the 2006 Order make it a legal requirement for Boards of Governors to provide access to at least the specified number of courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16, of which at least one third must be courses that are designated by the Department for the purposes of the Entitlement Framework as “general” and one third courses that are designated as “applied”. At Key Stage 4, Article 18 includes a requirement for schools to ensure that at least one course shall fall within each area of learning and at least one shall be a course in an official language of the European Union (other than English and, in Irish speaking schools, Irish). The articles also allow for general and applied courses to be listed by the Department and for exceptions to be made in the application of Articles 18 and 19.
6. The number of courses will be specified separately by the Department by directions, but will be introduced on a phased basis as follows:

	2013/14 school year	2014/15 school year	2015/16 school year onwards
Key Stage 4	18 courses	21 courses	24 courses
Post-16	21 courses	24 courses	27 courses

7. The Department will write to schools when these articles are about to become statutory and when it makes the directions specifying the number of courses.

Definitions of General and Applied Courses

8. The Department retains a final approval role of the designation of courses as general or applied. The Department designates courses as general or applied **for the sole purposes of the Entitlement Framework**, taking into account advice from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).
9. The Department publishes a list of general courses and a list of applied courses on the Entitlement Framework Audit website, which schools should use as the only source for agreed designations of courses as general and applied for the purpose of the Entitlement Framework.
10. The definitions currently in use were developed some time ago and were quite complex; the Education Minister gave a commitment that they would be reviewed following feedback from schools.
11. The Department established a working group of principals, Education and Training Inspectorate and CCEA representatives to support the revision of the definitions.
12. The revised definitions, which will apply from **the 2012/13 school year** are as follows:

Nature of Course Provision

Within the context of the Entitlement Framework, the nature of course provision is further defined in terms of whether it leads to a “general” or “applied” qualification. *A general qualification is one where knowledge, understanding and skills are developed within a subject context; whereas with an applied qualification, the knowledge, understanding and skills can be developed through practical demonstration and /or within a context related to employability.*

General Courses

The assessment arrangements are designed to enable learners to demonstrate the level of their knowledge, understanding and skills mainly through written tasks. The learning and assessment focus is set within a subject specific context.

Applied Courses

The assessment arrangements are designed to enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through practical demonstration and/or within a context related to employability.

To assist schools in planning their curricular provision, **which must continue to be based on meeting the needs of their pupils**, the

Entitlement Framework Audit site will include information about what each school's provision will look like once the revised definitions apply when the 2011/12 information is available. It is anticipated that this exercise will be completed by Easter 2012.

13. Schools can access the list of courses, which includes their designation for the Entitlement Framework purposes as a general or applied course, via <http://www.efaudit.org/site/>. Schools will be aware that the list of courses is constantly updated to take account of new or expired courses, including the relevant course codes. It should be noted that it may be that designations might change should assessment arrangements change.
14. Courses such as Home Economics, Media Studies, Dance, Drama which have to date been designated as general courses will, under the revised definitions, be designated as applied. This is because they meet the criteria of having a significant practical element to their assessment and/or an employability context. The term "employability" already forms part of the post-primary statutory curriculum.
15. **Schools should note that the funding for the 2011/12 school year will be based on the existing definitions; therefore any changes to course designation will not impact on the monies provided in relation to this school year.**

Dorina Edgar
Head of 14-19 Curriculum Entitlement Team

ADDENDUM

The provisions contained in Articles 18-22

Article 18 requires schools to offer access for pupils in Key Stage 4 to a minimum number of courses specified by the Department, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. The number of courses are not set out in the legislation but will be specified in writing by directions.

The legislation requires that at least one course will fall within each area of learning for Key Stage 4 and must include a European language, other than English, and Irish in Irish speaking schools.

This article allows that access to a course can be provided by the school or through collaborative arrangements in line with Article 21.

Article 19 requires schools to offer access for pupils in sixth form to a minimum number of courses specified by the Department, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied.

This article allows that access to a course can be provided by the school or through collaborative arrangements in line with Article 21.

Article 20 allows for the Department to issue and keep under review a list of the courses defined as general and applied.

Article 21 allows for courses to be provided by the school itself, or by arrangements with other schools, any institution of further education, or other suitably equipped providers. This article is already commenced.

Article 22 allows for the Department to provide for exceptions to provisions made under articles 18 and 19. In doing so the Department must consult with the relevant Board and, for Catholic maintained schools, CCMS. Under this article the Department can require the Board of Governors of a school, or the relevant Board, to report on specific matters at certain times.