

Report of the North-South Post-Primary Numeracy Conference February 2010

Introduction

1. DE and DES held a joint post-primary numeracy conference on 24th and 25th February 2010 at the Lough Erne Golf Resort, Enniskillen. The event was attended by almost 100 delegates, including maths practitioners, those responsible for supporting maths teachers and key policy influencers.

Conference aims

2. The conference aimed to:
 - Explore the case for change in mathematics curriculum and pedagogy;
 - Share and exchange ideas on best practice, innovation and promoting improvement in mathematics; and
 - Explore areas for future North/South joint working on aspects of mutual interest in relation to mathematics.
3. The conference featured addresses by Ministers Ruane and Brady and a keynote speech from John Compton, PWC, on the need for change and improvement in maths teaching. There were also presentations and follow-up workshops on two programmes aimed at promoting change and improvement in mathematics: 'Project Maths' (Anne Looney, NCCA) and 'Improving Learning in Mathematics' (Prof Malcolm Swan).

Key points

4. Key points emerging from the conference presentations and discussions were:
 - A shared focus on improving outcomes for young people, recognising that outcomes are about more than just exam results. There is a need to find ways to engage young people in maths and to ensure they develop mathematical understanding.

- The importance of good quality teaching in raising standards, in which teachers exercise professional judgement and employ a repertoire of teaching styles.
- The importance of professional development, good quality resources and the dissemination of best practice (within and between schools) in support of good quality teaching.
- The important role of parents and the need to change attitudes to maths at home.
- The benefits of North-South collaboration in improving outcomes for young people. In particular, the benefits of collaborative professional development and sharing of best practice on a north-south basis. We should aim to encourage discussion among teachers about teaching.

Evaluation

5. The conference was a very successful event and evaluations were very positive. Delegates overwhelmingly commented that they found the conference a valuable and enjoyable opportunity to share practice with other teachers. For example, 94% of delegates rated the conference as an 'excellent' or 'very good' learning experience and 96% rated it as an 'excellent' or 'very good' opportunity to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in teaching maths.
6. Delegates suggested that, in terms of future areas of north/south collaboration, it would be beneficial to promote the sharing of resources and to have more opportunities for collaborative professional development and to share best practice (e.g. through follow-up events, an online forum or exchange visits).

Next Steps

7. DE and DES agreed that workshop presentations would be put on a website, along with contact details (pending agreement from presenters), to enable delegates to make contact with each other and continue their professional discussion and to build linkages.