

THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

STATUTORY STRUCTURE AND COMPULSORY SUBJECTS

The current curriculum structures, which were put in place in 1990 in schools in Northern Ireland (NI), are designed to provide all pupils with a broad and balanced education during the compulsory years of schooling (ages 4-16).

Under the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 (as amended), the statutory curriculum is made up of Religious Education and five broad areas of study at primary level and six at secondary level. The six areas of study are:

English
Mathematics
Science and Technology
The Environment and Society
Creative and Expressive Studies
Language Studies (at secondary level only)

This helps to emphasise the breadth of the curriculum and in particular the fact that the compulsory subjects are meant to be the essential core but by no means the whole of the curriculum each school should offer its pupils - primary schools may, for example, start teaching a language to suitable senior pupils, and some secondary schools require their pupils to study home economics at key stage 3.

At least one subject within each area of study is compulsory for each child during his compulsory schooling, with the exception of Language Studies, which (except in Irish speaking schools) is compulsory at secondary level only.

CROSS-CURRICULAR THEMES

The NI Curriculum includes a number of educational (or "cross-curricular") themes. Such themes are not subjects in their own right but topics whose scope is defined by a series of objectives specified by Statutory Order. The objectives are interwoven with, and taught through, the compulsory subjects of the NI Curriculum and through religious education. The Cross-Curricular Themes are available on the Department's website. Two of these themes are peculiar to NI circumstances - Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage - and each of them is a compulsory part of the curriculum.

The themes are:

Information Technology;
Education for Mutual Understanding;
Cultural Heritage;
Health Education;
Economic Awareness;
Careers Education

The last two apply in secondary schools only.

KEY STAGES

The 12 years of compulsory education are divided into 4 key stages. They are:

Key Stage 1	Primary 1-4 (school years 1-4)
Key Stage 2	Primary 5-7 (school years 5-7)
Key Stage 3	Form 1-3 (school years 8-10)
Key Stage 4	Form 4-5 (school years 11-12)

PROGRAMMES OF STUDY/ATTAINMENT TARGETS

The Department has specified by Statutory Order in relation to each compulsory subject a programme of study and attainment targets. The programmes of study set out the essential matters, skills and processes which must be covered in schools, and the attainment targets describe the range of knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils are to master as they progress through school. Pupils' progress in relation to the attainment targets from Key Stage 1 to 3 is measured against level descriptions from 1 (lowest) to 8 (highest).

The Programmes of Study are available on the Department's website. Select the subject and then the Key Stage for which you require information (ie Key Stage 2).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education (RE) is a compulsory element of the curriculum. A core syllabus drawn up by the 4 main churches was made compulsory for all pupils from September 1996. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE classes.

REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has recently undertaken a major review of the curriculum here, with a view to meeting the educational needs of society in the new millennium. The Review aims for a more skills based curriculum and will include specific provision for issues such as Personal Development (including Health Education) Citizenship, Employability and Information and Communications Technology. The necessary legislation to implement the revised curriculum will be in place by September 2006, however, in practice the new curriculum will be phased in, over a number of years to allow schools to plan for and implement the changes.

Detailed information for the revised curriculum can be found on CCEA's website: <http://www.ccea.org.uk/> access, Curriculum Review.

EXAMINATION STRUCTURE

At the end of Key Stage 4, the majority of students sit General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. Students can also take vocational GCSE examinations, Entry Level examinations, and a variety of other non-GCSE examinations. At age 17/18 the majority of students will take General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level (A/AS) examinations. Students can also take Applied (Vocational) Advanced level qualifications.

DIFFERENCES FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM IN ENGLAND

The National Curriculum is similar, though not identical, to the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Both prescribe a number of compulsory subjects at different key stages, but the National Curriculum is not organised into areas of study. Table B shows the requirements of each. The main difference between them lies in the fact that Northern Ireland has its six compulsory cross-curricular themes, whereas England has none, but there are other differences: in England, technology is compulsory at key stage 4: sex education is compulsory in secondary, and optional in primary, schools there; and there are locally agreed programmes for Religious Education in England as opposed to the universally applicable core syllabus in Northern Ireland.

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The curriculum consists of Religious Education* plus the following compulsory contributory subjects (listed by key stage)

AREA OF STUDY	<i>Compulsory Contributory Subjects in key stages 1 and 2</i>	<i>Compulsory Contributory Subjects in key stage 3</i>	<i>Compulsory Contributory Subjects in key stage 4</i>
ENGLISH	English	English	English
MATHEMATICS	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	Science and Technology	Science Technology and Design	Science
THE ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY	History Geography	History Geography	History or Geography or Business Studies or Economics or Political Studies or Home Economics or Social and Environmental Studies
CREATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE STUDIES	Physical Education Art and Design Music	Physical Education Art and Design Music	Physical Education
LANGUAGE STUDIES	Irish in Irish speaking schools	French or German or Italian or Spanish or Irish Irish in Irish speaking schools	French or German or Italian or Spanish or Irish Irish in Irish speaking schools

*Parents may withdraw their children wholly or partly from RE classes.

NOTE: the objectives of the cross-curricular themes Information Technology, Education for Mutual Understanding, Cultural Heritage and Health Education are compulsory for all pupils at all key stages; in addition, Economic Awareness and Careers Education are compulsory for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4.

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Comparison of Compulsory Subjects in Northern Ireland and England by Key Stage

The minimum requirements are Religious Education* plus the following.

Key Stages 1 and 2

<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<i>England</i>
English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics
Science and Technology	Science
	Technology
History	History
Geography	Geography
Art	Art
Music	Music
PE	PE
Irish in Irish speaking schools	
Cross-curricular themes (4)	

Key Stage 3

As for Key Stages 1 and 2, except that in Northern Ireland the single subject Science and Technology is replaced by the separate subjects Science and Technology and Design, and the number of compulsory cross curricular themes increases to 6: and in both jurisdictions a modern language is also compulsory. In England, sex education is compulsory.

Key Stage 4

<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<i>England</i>
English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics
Science	Science
	Technology
History <i>or</i> Geography <i>or</i> Business Studies <i>or</i> Economics <i>or</i> Political Studies <i>or</i> Home Economics <i>or</i> Social and Environmental Studies	
PE	PE
Modern Language Irish in Irish speaking schools	Modern Language
Cross-curricular themes (6)	Sex Education

*Parents may withdraw their children wholly or partly from RE classes in both England and NI.

EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING **(including the contribution made by Cultural Heritage and Religious Education)**

EMU WITHIN THE STATUTORY CURRICULUM

Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage are two of the six educational (or "cross-curricular") themes which are a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The others are information technology, health education, economic awareness and careers education (the last two being at secondary school level only). Such themes are not subjects in their own right - rather, they are topics whose scope is defined by a series of objectives which are taught through the medium of the compulsory subjects of the Curriculum. The objectives of EMU show that it is about, inter alia, "fostering self-respect, respect for others and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions", and is set within the progressively widening context of Northern Ireland, the island of Ireland, the British Isles and the wider world. Those for Cultural Heritage are concerned with the common and diverse features of pupils' cultural background and the interdependence of cultures and, as with EMU, work outwards from the local to the international.

The themes were made compulsory for all pupils from P1 to Form 4 in September 1992, and became compulsory for Form 5 pupils as well in September 1993. Parents do not have the right to withdraw their children from EMU (or any other cross-curricular theme), as the themes become an indivisible part of the subjects through which they are being taught.

Teaching the objectives of the different themes will be carried out more appropriately through some subjects than others. Information Technology, for example, will be delivered chiefly through Science and Mathematics. EMU, because of its relationship to the causes and resolution of conflict, will be delivered mainly through History, but English will also make an important contribution. The same is true of Cultural Heritage, but in this case Geography also has a part to play.

Religious Education can also contribute to the delivery of the EMU objectives. As in England, schools in Northern Ireland must provide Religious Education, and a core syllabus has been produced by a working group composed of representatives of the four main churches in the province. The Department has specified that syllabus for use in schools. Its contents were drawn up with the cross-curricular themes in mind, and it is a good vehicle for the delivery of EMU, though it is only one among a number of such vehicles. It should be noted that parents have a right to withdraw their children from religious education classes and collective worship; this will not, however, have any effect on a school's duty to ensure that all the objectives of the cross-curricular themes are met within the curriculum as a whole.

EMU OUTSIDE THE STATUTORY CURRICULUM

What has been said above relates only to EMU within the statutory curriculum. In addition to their position in the statutory curriculum, however, EMU and Cultural Heritage provide the context for the Department's community relations programme for young people. The main constituent of that is the Schools Community Relations Programme (formerly the Cross Community Contact Scheme). The scheme was introduced some nine years ago to provide

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modest support to schools, colleges, further and higher education institutions and youth and community groups, which develop joint projects involving young people from different traditions. The emphasis is on ongoing, systematic programmes of work and activities which help to break down barriers and encourage the participants to work together for a common purpose.

Although participation in the Scheme is entirely voluntary, over one-third of all Northern Ireland schools have been involved in programmes. The nature of the joint activities is a matter for the individual schools and youth groups to decide.

Administration of the scheme is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards.

OTHER EMU-RELATED ACTIVITIES

In addition, the Department, often in conjunction with education departments from other jurisdictions, has developed a number of curriculum projects related to the study of, for example, history, geography, environmental studies and European studies. These projects comprehend international networks, with links with schools in other European countries. One project also links schools with Japan, while two new pilot programmes will link schools with the USA and Israel.

The Department also operates its own Cultural Traditions programme, aimed at school children and young people. This seeks to bring groups together from both sides of the community and afford them opportunities to explore and understand their shared heritage and appreciate the diversity of their cultural traditions. The intention is that a better knowledge and appreciation of each other's traditions and background will lead to better understanding generally between groups from different sections of the community. The Department has therefore supported the provision of facilities at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and at the Ulster American Folk Park which recreate the historical dimension in a non-threatening manner and in which groups can share the exploration of their past.

SEX EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND SCHOOLS

STATUTORY POSITION IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

Sex education is covered in two aspects of the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) - the programme of study for science and the health education cross-curricular theme. Both are summarised below. This statutory basis for sex education is part of the arrangements contained in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. There is no right of withdrawal from any subject of the NIC except Religious Education.

PROVISION IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

a) Science Programme of Study (1996)

The biological aspects of sex education are covered in the new science programme of study, which is compulsory for all pupils at all key stages.

- i. At key stage 2 (P5 to P7) pupils are required to be taught about reproduction in a flowering plant. At the same key stage, teaching about puberty-related changes is optional.
- ii. The main teaching about sex education is delivered at key stage 3 (Forms 1 to 3 of secondary school), when schools must teach about reproduction in plants and animals. This teaching covers the basic biology of reproduction, but also includes changes connected to puberty, the need to stay healthy during pregnancy, and the need for a responsible attitude to sexual behaviour (which must cover contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and interpersonal relationships).
- iii. At key stage 4 pupils extend their knowledge about reproduction, and the messages about interpersonal relationships, sexually transmitted diseases and responsible behaviour are reinforced.

b) Health Education Cross-curricular Theme (1992)

- i. Within the NIC there are 6 compulsory cross-curricular themes (CCTs), including Health Education. CCTs are not subjects in their own right, but topics whose scope is defined by a number of wide-ranging objectives and which are taught through the medium of the subjects of the curriculum.
- ii. Health Education is taught mainly through science, with important contributions coming from other subjects such as physical education, English, home economics, PSE and religious education (note: although it is compulsory for schools to provide RE, and to teach the RE core syllabus, parents may withdraw their children wholly or partly from classes). While the objectives of the CCT are set out in such a way as not to mention health-related issues specifically - they are couched more in terms of the development of self-esteem and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle in the broadest meaning of that term - a school would find it difficult to claim credibly that it was achieving those objectives if it did not teach sex education. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has produced non-statutory guidance for sex education within the health education CCT.

The Department's current guidance on sex education is contained in Circular 1987/45, which pre-dates the reforms in education. Although the changes made by the reforms have changed the context in which the Circular operates, its main recommendation - that every school should draw up a policy on sex education in consultation with staff and governors and that that policy should be communicated to parents - remains valid. The Department intends to replace the circular during 1998.

AIDS

The Department is fully aware of the threat of HIV/AIDS to the health of young people and during the 1980s distributed a number of guides and booklets to schools, including, in 1988, an AIDS Awareness teaching pack (jointly produced by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and the former Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development). This was issued to all secondary schools, and in-service follow-up was provided for all teachers using this pack. The pack was updated in 1991.

The introduction of health education as a compulsory cross-curricular theme under the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 has provided opportunities for schools to deal with AIDS in the classroom. For example, at key stages 3 and 4 (forms 1-5), the science programmes of study require pupils to learn about the need for a responsible attitude to sexual behaviour, including interpersonal relationships, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. AIDS is cited as an example which schools may choose of a sexually transmitted disease, but teaching about AIDS is not compulsory in Northern Ireland.

COMPARISON WITH ENGLAND

Arrangements in England were similar to those in Northern Ireland until 1993, when the government introduced a separate compulsory subject of Sex Education there. The new subject is optional in primary schools and compulsory in secondary schools. Parents have, however, a right to withdraw their children from classes. (Note - the science programme of study continues to cover issues relating to human growth and reproduction, and there is no right of withdrawal from that.) The content of the new subject is not laid down in a programme of study, but in Department for Education Circular 94/5. In secondary schools, it covers human reproductive processes and behaviour and the broader emotional and ethical dimensions of sexual attitudes, and must include HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. As defined, it is not significantly different from the sum of the Northern Ireland provision.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

STATUTORY POSITION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Under the terms of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, religious education must be provided in all controlled and voluntary schools except nursery schools. The attached sheets give details of the different categories of schools in Northern Ireland. Religious education in a controlled school must be undenominational, based upon the Holy Scriptures or some authoritative version of them.

CORE SYLLABUS

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 gave the Department of Education, for the first time, the power to specify a core syllabus for religious education for use in all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland. This core syllabus is not intended to be the total provision for religious education in schools, but will provide the basis on which each school can build a programme to suit its particular needs. It was drawn up after wide consultation by a group made up of the four main churches in Northern Ireland and is entirely Christian in content. The core syllabus became compulsory for all pupils in September 1996.

INSPECTION

The responsibility for the inspection of religious education given in a voluntary school is a matter for the school managers to arrange as they think fit. Ministers (of religion) and other suitable persons to whom parents do not object have access to controlled schools and voluntary schools for the purpose of providing additional religious education or education in a particular religious denomination, or for the purposes of inspecting the religious education provided in the schools. No inspection can take place without the consent of the Board of Governors of the school.

PARENTAL RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL OF CHILDREN

Parents have the right to withdraw their children wholly or partly from religious education: and teachers may ask to be wholly or partly excused from teaching religious education on grounds of conscience.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education attaches a high priority to tackling the increasing problem of the availability and use of drugs in Northern Ireland. The Department recognises that schools have a major preventive role to play within their health education programmes in addressing the problems of the misuse of drugs and other substance misuse. Teachers are ideally placed to provide young people with knowledge and understanding of the effects of drugs.

It has therefore taken steps to ensure that the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum contributes to the fight against drugs by making provision for drug education, through:

- i. the programme of study for science; and
- ii. the health education cross-curricular theme.

Both of these are compulsory and apply to pupils throughout their period of compulsory schooling (from age 4 to 16), although what schools will teach about drugs will vary depending on the age and maturity of the pupils concerned. It is, however, the responsibility of each school to consider how it will respond to drug misuse and to draw up a policy statement and a drug education programme covering the whole curriculum. In doing so, schools have the support of the education and library boards, which provide appropriate training.

The Department is a member of the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs, the inter-Department/agency group established in June 1995 as part of the national campaign against drug misuse. Its purpose is to oversee and co-ordinate anti-drugs measures in the province. The education system at large has an important role to play, and the following action has been taken.

DRUGS EDUCATION PACK

A comprehensive drugs education pack was issued in June 1996.

The pack was circulated to all primary, post-primary and special schools and to the further education colleges. It contains the following.

- (a) A circular to all schools and colleges giving up-to-date information on the nature and extent of drug misuse in Northern Ireland and their role in addressing the problem; it also indicates the support they can expect and the measures which will be put in place to evaluate drugs education programmes.
- (b) Guidance from the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) on how to develop a drugs education policy as part of their health education policy; and from the basis of that policy how to plan and implement a drugs education programme consistent with their health education programme. Separate guidance has been prepared for the primary and post-primary sectors.

(c) Advice from the five education and library boards, written in conjunction with other relevant agencies, on the practical measures to be taken to deal with drugs-related incidents on school premises; it also sets out the relevant provisions of the law on drugs.

(d) A copy of the DFEE digest of information on materials and resources. It is supplemented in the CCEA guidance with details of local resources and useful contact numbers.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

New regulations requiring schools to make their policy statements on drugs education available to parents through the school prospectus came into operation on 1 September 1996.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Education and Library Boards recognise the importance of the role schools can play in the drive against drug misuse. The Boards' CASS schemes include provision for awareness training for principals and teachers and training for drugs co-ordinators, particularly in relation to the drugs education pack circulated in June. The provision of in-service training relating to drugs education was given greater priority in 1996/97.

Additional funds were made available in 1996/97 for the following.

Teaching Materials

The purchase of a set of resources for each primary and post-primary school.

Teaching Pack for Drugs Co-ordinators

One of the main functions of school the drugs co-ordinators is to assist and advise other teachers in the school in the provision of a drugs education programme. They will be assisted in this task by a "good practice" video and associated teaching notes pack produced and distributed by CCEA. The video is specifically tailored to Northern Ireland needs and based firmly in the curriculum advice issued by CCEA and DENI drugs package. It promotes good teaching by demonstrating best practice in drug/health lessons with different age groups in a number of primary and secondary classrooms. Additional training has been provided for drugs co-ordinators to enable them to make best use of this pack.

INSPECTORATE EVALUATION OF DRUGS EDUCATION

The Department's Education and Training Inspectorate is undertaking a 2-stage evaluation of provision of drugs education in schools and colleges of further education.

Stage 1, now completed, involves a survey of provision in a sample of schools and colleges. The purpose of the survey is to get a clear picture of current provision and to refine the survey methodology for use in the wider exercise in Stage 2.

Stage 2 will be an inspection survey of provision of drugs education in a broad sample of schools and colleges. This evaluation will examine:

- the availability, nature and quality of policy statements on drugs education in schools and colleges;
- the nature and content of provision for drugs education in schools and colleges and, in schools, its inter-relationship with the health education programme and, where they are separate, the personal and social education programme; and
- the purpose, nature and extent of school and college links with personnel in other agencies involved in drugs education.

The survey will span 2 years and a report will be published in 1998.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

BACKGROUND

As a medium of communication, the Irish language has been in decline in Ireland as a whole since the 18th century, and today its use in everyday speech is largely confined to parts of the west of the Republic of Ireland. By the beginning of the present century it had virtually ceased to be used in the six counties which today make up Northern Ireland. There has, however, been a revival of interest in the language in recent years and a number of families have chosen to raise their children as Irish speakers.

IRISH AS A FIRST LANGUAGE

A small number of primary schools which teach through the medium of Irish have been set up by parents and five of them are now recognised for grant-aid by the Department of Education. All are voluntary maintained schools, entitled to the full state support available to all such schools, including maintenance of premises, all teaching and non-teaching staff costs and all overheads. There is, in addition, an Irish medium stream in an otherwise English speaking primary school. A secondary school, the Meanscoil Feirste, was set up in Belfast to cater for the pupils from these primary schools and was recognised for grant-aid from September 1996. Irish is a compulsory element of the curriculum in the Irish-medium primary schools and in the Meanscoil. Outside the grant-aided sector (which accounts for some 95% of the 1,200 Irish medium pupils), there are four primary and one secondary schools in operation.

It is the Department's policy to support Irish-medium education where it is satisfied that there is a significant demand from parents, that it would be educationally sound and viable to provide it and that there would be no unreasonable outlay of public funds in doing so.

IRISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The teaching of Irish as a second language at primary school level is confined to the maintained schools sector, which is almost entirely Roman Catholic. Similarly, at post-primary level the teaching of Irish is almost totally confined to the Catholic maintained and voluntary schools, although some integrated schools offer the subject. In order to meet the statutory requirements of the Language Studies area of study of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, schools must provide at least one of French, German, Italian, or Spanish: but where a school provides Irish in addition to those, pupils may fulfil the Curriculum's requirements by studying Irish instead of one of the other languages.

IRISH MEDIUM MATERIALS UNIT

DENI funding for Irish-medium education was first made available in 1989 in order to provide IM schools with materials relevant to the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum (which all grant-aided schools are obliged to follow). One of the IM schools - the Bunscoil Phobal C&A/Briefing/1256

Feirste - produced materials for all the IM schools. In 1996, however, the demands made on the principal and staff of the school, together with the ad hoc nature of the arrangement, prompted the Department to ask the Education and Library Boards, as the bodies with statutory responsibility for curriculum support, to establish a permanent central unit within their Curriculum Advisory and Support Services to meet the increased demand for teaching materials and to provide a central source of IM expertise to support schools on a province-wide basis. The distribution of IM provision suggested Belfast as the most appropriate base, and the board agreed to lead in establishing a resources unit on behalf of all the boards. It was agreed in September 1997 that the Irish-Medium Curriculum Materials Unit should be established in St Mary's College of Education.

The Unit transferred from the Bunscoil Phobal Feirste to St Mary's at the beginning of February 1998, and appropriate financial arrangements for the funding of the Unit have been put in place. Although the Unit is based in St Mary's College, its management is under the control of a committee, chaired by an officer of the Belfast Education and Library Board, and includes representatives from the Irish-medium schools. An editorial committee has also been established with similar representation to oversee the development of the teaching materials. The Unit is able to take advantage of the college's existing pedagogical expertise in Irish.

Mr Paul Pimley was appointed in June 1998 as Manager of the Unit.

GENDER ISSUES

The Northern Ireland Curriculum is designed to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and to help break down sexual stereotyping in study patterns in schools, and thus to increase the potential of all pupils, girls and boys, in the job market.

The aim of the new curriculum arrangements is to provide all pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum up to age 16. In the past, pupils tended to drop important subjects such as science and languages too early, thus limiting their career choices later. In addition, many employers had expressed concern about the absence of technology from the curriculum in many schools.

As far as the study of the sciences is concerned, the evidence shows that at GCSE level girls tended to favour the study of biology and boys physics. The new requirements will ensure that all pupils will follow a worthwhile programme including elements of all the sciences. This will provide a firm basis for further study for those who wish to do so.

Given Northern Ireland's position on the edge of Europe and the introduction of the single European market, the inclusion of language studies up to age 16 for all pupils is of increasing importance in preparing them to take full advantage of any opportunities which arise, particularly on the employment front.

The new arrangements will mean changes in the range of subject choices traditionally on offer in schools but will result in pupils being better prepared whether they choose to proceed to further study or move into the world of work.

Careers education is now a compulsory cross-curricular theme in all post-primary schools.

In 1993 the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (now the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) issued guidance packs to all primary and post-primary schools to assist them in dealing with equal opportunities as they relate to issues of gender equality within the curriculum.