

02.10.07 NCCA REPORT FROM MARION LYON FOR NPC-PP

SPHE

Social, Personal and Health Education, draft Curriculum Framework recently came to the Council for discussion.

You may remember SPHE was dealt with comprehensively in my report in June, Barbara represents NPC-pp on the SPHE Cttee, as you know documents from individual cttees come to both the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle cttees for discussion and return to the course cttees and then would come to Council for discussion and finally for approval. In this way NPC-pp have another bite at the cherry to discuss documents and make suggestions for amendments as required.

I raised my concern that Student Councils role in furthering the aims of SPHE to support students in making the right choices with regard to their health and well-being was not being realised in the document at both Senior Cycle and Council meetings. I'm happy to report that the section on "Supportive Whole-school Environment" has been strengthened to include the following on student's councils " student councils are increasingly part of effective and democratic schools. The representative nature of student councils can allow all students to have a voice in decision making in school. It is clear that students do better academically, feel more integrated and are less likely to drop out when they believe that their opinions and suggestions are taken into consideration. School development planning in relation to social, personal and health issues is more informed and more likely to succeed when students are actively involved in the planning process. It is important that schools invest the time and resources to work towards a shared understanding of social, personal and health concerns of students. Students in turn benefit from their involvement by having opportunities to develop and practice personal and social skills including decision making skills, conflict management skills and the ability to recognise and accept difference."

The section on "Mental health will need to be looked at again, and I would like to see the school as a 'health-promoting organisation' strengthened.

I would have concern that support is lacking for the time allocation suggested for SPHE, - 90 hours, double period, weekly over two years and ideally to include student's final year in senior cycle. Indeed, there was a suggestion aired at Council that to offer SPHE in senior late is too late i.e. it should not be a curriculum component in senior cycle!

We must remember that SPHE is a spiral curriculum that must be revisited through out the life time of students commencing in junior infants and continuing until students leave school, reinforcing and introducing topics at the appropriate age for students. Parents have spoken and they want SPHE to be a compulsory subject, indeed students have lamented the lack a subject such as SPHE in their schooling experience.

We must acknowledge the need for considerable professional development for teachers, while at the same time be aware that many teachers have studied psychology at degree and post-graduate level. Prospective teachers can undertake courses in SPHE at NUI Galway and WIT, so the supply of 'qualified' teachers will become available to schools.

Another area of concern would be the notion that outside agencies would deliver the SPHE programme to students, while acknowledging that schools might wish to 'buy-in' expertise in a few select areas of the programme to support what has taken place in the classroom. SHPE is a holistic comprehensive programme and cannot be delivered on a piecemeal basis by outsiders, and I was very surprised to hear Council members make the suggestion.

Senior cycle developments

Mathematics course cttees and the Board of Studies for Mathematics continue their work in detailing issues of structure, levels, content and assessment. However, the need to address the issue of foundation level Mathematics has not been tackled. When the Senior cycle cttee and Council were discussing the 'bigger picture' of Mathematics, I raised concerns that there was a suggestion that foundation level be abolished especially at Leaving Cert, I believe that there will always be a cohort of students who level is best found in foundation Mathematics. However, I'm not aware that was discussed in consultation with parents, NPC-pp

need now to address the issue, so that your representative can promote your views.

The main area of work in mathematics over the last year were:

- The proposals for development of post-primary mathematics education, arising from the review of mathematics but also in the context of the senior cycle review.
- A new model of curriculum development – phased approach to syllabus development and corresponding incremental changes in assessment.

Areas discussed include:

- Current uptake targets, and the actual uptake and the performance of student in all the JC and LC courses
- The issue of a Foundation level syllabus for JC + LC, + the issue of recognition of foundation level for some third level courses.
- Whether applied mathematics should continue to be a full subject or offered as a short course – any suggestions?
- The development of ‘bridging framework’ from primary to post-primary mathematics and the suggestion of a common course in year one/two of JC
- Professional development needs of teachers – and including those teachers who do not have a qualification in mathematics

PE

There are two PE courses being developed: a syllabus for examination and a non-examination curriculum framework for Physical Education. The syllabus for PE examination subject has undergone extensive review. A fundamental aspect of the syllabus is the commitment to student learning in, through and about physical education.

Politics and society

- The syllabus for P+S is well advance, all aims and objectives are agreed and the issue of overlap with other subjects including History, Geography and RE have been address.
- A report of a student consultation will be available shortly and will then be published on the NCCA website. Students were asked to identify the topics and concepts related to the study of P+S they though to be relevant to them. A final draft of the syllabus will be available to the Senior Cycle Cttee in Nov.
- The questions of how this subject will be offered in schools and the qualifications needed to teach them and the pre-service and in-service teacher education have been addressed by the Board of Studies in order to provide guidance on implementation.

Science

- Biology, Chemistry and Physics course cttees have been focusing on updating the syllabuses with an emphasis on an investigative approach.
- Removing options in chemistry and physics and the reposition of some of the content of the syllabuses.
- Other issues include contemporary issues such as those that raise ethical questions, integration of ICT and appreciation of science as a human endeavour and scientific methods.
- Differentiation – whether there should be one syllabus or two for ordinary and higher levels. Differentiation of the outcomes or at the point of assessment.
- How a second component assessment can improve the alignment between assessment and the aims and objectives of the curriculum.

- The course cttees and the board of studies have considered the mandatory practical activities. The view is emerging that these be reduced in number and where appropriate, the prescriptive experiments replaced by more open-ended investigations.

Languages

Six languages are being reviewed by the six cttees, supported by the Board of Studies for languages. The languages are English, Irish and the Modern foreign Languages: French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The main work in this area is to progress the review of the syllabuses to the senior cycle template and to align the current work with the findings of the NCCA review of the languages in post-primary which took place a few years ago. The Irish course cttee welcomes the Ministers changes to the weighting for oral assessment in the LC but ask the question how realistic are the weighting? JC examination in 2010 and LC in 2012/2013 will be effected by the new arrangements.

Aspects of language education discussed include

- The need for reliable data on achievement of proficiency in Irish and modern languages.
- Current practices in oral assessment in modern languages and Irish was considered in relation to the exploration of appropriate models of second component assessment.
- The potential of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and of the European Language Portfolio to influence development in the review of languages.
- Consideration of the technology (especially digital content) in the development of pedagogy in modern languages.

Short Courses

Enterprise and Psychology are near completion, the Enterprise SC will be issued to the DES before the end of the year as a first, prototype SC for consideration. The Minister was very keen on progressing the Enterprise SC, I do hope she is equally impressed by the other course currently being developed i.e Art Technology, Music Technology and Psychology. At least two courses must go into every school to facilitate timetable arrangements.

There has much discussion at SC cttee and at Senior Cycle and Council when the opportunity has risen on the question of the levels at which SC would be offered. Initial think was that course would be aligned to either Higher or Ordinary level, in order to ensure parity with subjects for recognition purposes. This has been a source of some contestation. The debate revolves around equality of access, the feeling being that some students would be disadvantaged if each course is offered at one level only (I would have this concern – what are NPC-pp views?)

A number of options have been discussed, developing Higher and Ordinary level outcomes within each SC or developing two SC (one HL, one OL) around the same curriculum area.

Recognition of SC for progression to further and higher education is now under consideration.

Launch of *Gearing UP for the Exams* the report on the third year of the ERSI study will take place on the 24th Oct. It will follow a one-day invitational conference on Junior Cycle, which will disseminate the finding of the ERSI longitudinal study into the experience of junior cycle students and to stimulate discussion and debate about the implications of the findings of the research for school, teachers and policy makers in education generally. The conference will highlight the work NCCA is currently undertaking as part of the junior cycle review.

