

08.04.08 NCCA REPORT FOR NPC-pp FROM M LYON

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Jr Cycle syllabus consultation

You will have an opportunity in May to participate in the consultation process on the rebalance syllabuses.

You should refer to my report from March for further detail on the subjects involved. The Geography syllabus has been referred back to the course cttee for further work – it needs to be configured to the template that was developed for junior cycle syllabuses. As you are aware Maths will undergo major curricula overhaul at both junior and senior cycle level. Gaelige is another area of the curriculum that will be attracting special attention in the near future, probably undergoing similar curriculum development and implementation to the Maths Project.

The syllabus rebalancing process was initiated for a number of reasons, which include:

- Ensuring that there was enough time to allow for the quality of learning engagement in class with students, and that syllabuses would not be overloaded in this context
- Reducing overlap between subject syllabuses and the 'perceived overloaded curriculum' at junior cycle
- Taking account of emerging findings from the ERSI research into curriculum provision in junior cycle.

In the case of English, Art Craft Design and Music the syllabuses will certainly look a good deal different. While each syllabus exhibits its own changes, a number of general points can be observed:

- The inclusion of clear learning outcomes has made the extent of the expected learning associated with the course more easily identifiable. This is true of each of the syllabuses and this will make very clear to teachers, students and parents what it is that students will be able to do as a result of the learning in the subject. For all three syllabuses

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mention earlier this will represent a major change in emphasis.... a focus on what is to be learned rather than the current emphasis on what is to be taught.

- Aspects of the syllabus that are no longer relevant, either due to overlap or obsolescence have been removed. In Music for example the lists of prescribed material have been renewed completely (the existing lists have been in operation for some time).
- Some changes to assessment for the Junior Cert exam have been proposed. The process has already led to some change in the assessment of Art Craft Design.
- The modernisation has involved the insertion of learning outcomes as mentioned previously but all syllabuses have been obsolete material removed. In some cases elements of the courses (sometimes in the form of options), which have fallen into disuse, have not been retained.
- While the rebalanced syllabuses are presented in a distinctly different format the subject matter will be familiar to teacher. While the impact on what is learned and how it is learned will be significant it is hoped that teachers will find the change beneficial and easy to adopt.

SPHE

Further to the discussion on SPHE at your recent conference, you may remember that the Secretary General of the DES mentioned the NCCA project of phased implementation of SPHE in senior cycle. What is actually proposed is that NCCA would work with a number of schools that currently are 'successful' in implementation of SPHE at junior cycle and were offering a SPHE programme at senior cycle. (My suggestion that it might be useful to include some schools that currently are experiencing difficulties in implementing SPHE at senior cycle to get a more realistic picture of what is involved in successfully implementation did not gain favour as yet).

At the Feb meeting of the senior cycle cttee there was significant discussion on whether SPHE should be compulsory in senior cycle. At present no subject is compulsory in senior cycle and to

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revisit this issue would require a strong indication from the partners. While the teachers unions are supportive of the NPC-pp view that SPHE should be mandatory there is opposition from principals and the management bodies due to the 'perceived overloaded curriculum'.

The senior cycle cttee and Council recognises the importance of SPHE and favours it being mandatory, there was also recognition that capacity would need to be built in the system to support this, particularly in relation to teacher availability. The views of the cttee will be fed back to the course cttee and the group working with schools on exploring implementation.

In response to queries from Tom (Walsh) regarding SPHE and his proposed raising of the matter at conference, I enquired of the Education Officer if the school-based project has begun. Unfortunately she was unable to respond to my query until yesterday. She informs me that the school-based project has not started yet. At the moment, the NCCA team have concluded their meetings with schools about issues relating to the implementation of SPHE in senior cycle. The next part of the work will be collating these findings and preparing recommendations for implementation which will be presented to the various cttees in NCCA including Sr Cycle, Board of Studies for Arts and Humanities and Council.

It is proposed that SPHE will have 90 hours, offered as a double period in two years in senior cycle.

In answer to my query to which 3rd level institutions offered a H. Dip or other post-graduate courses in SPHE, I have been informed at present, two third level colleges offer SPHE at post-graduate level: University of Limerick offer a post graduate diploma in physical education and SPHE is the second subject component. In Waterford Institute of Technology, they offer a certificate and diploma in the teaching of SPHE and have recently introduced a Masters programme in SPHE. SPHE is the second subject component.

In relation to pre-service provision for teachers in training, the provision is very mixed. Some colleges offer little more than an overview of the subject whilst other offer the possibility of a more detailed learning experience. It is part of Education Officers work at present to look at the different levels of provision and to propose

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how these might be developed in light of the proposed introduction of SPHE in senior cycle.

Project Maths

It is planned to begin Project Maths with a group of approx 24 schools. These will implement changed strands of the math syllabuses on a phased basis – at both Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. (New directors may wish to read some of my previous reports on the topic to have a clearer understanding of the project – these may be obtained from Sandra)

The approach advocated under Project Maths gives greater emphasis to students developing and reinforcing their logical reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The experience of students and teachers in this initial set of schools with the revised syllabus strands and the associated classroom resource materials will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to gauge their usefulness and effectiveness in achieving the desired outcomes for the full range of student ability. Changes in the maths exam will also be implemented on a phased basis. (See appendix sent in Feb with my report). Project Maths aims to increase the uptake at Higher Level in the Junior Cert from its present level of around 42% to at least 60%, and at Leaving Cert an uptake of 30% is targeted by comparison with the current level of around 18%. This obviously has significant implication for the standard of assessment at both levels. This is further affected by the fact that the targeted uptake at the various levels will not be achieved instantly, but will rather take a number of years to achieve.

The NCCA, the State Examination Commission and the DES will co-operate in establishing appropriate performance standards and consequently grading criteria for the new syllabus. Through the various structures established to manage the project and informed by the developmental work in the initial group of schools, it is expected that a consensus will emerge regarding the standards of achievement that can be reasonably expected of the various target audiences for the different syllabus levels. An appropriate set of sample assessment materials will be developed by the NCCA. Following on this process, the SEC will develop and issue the official sample papers, in accordance with established practice. Theses will be properly trialled in the initial schools according to established SEC protocols, and the outcomes will be analysed.

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The actual exam for these schools will then be developed in line with the existing safeguards, principals and protocols, so as to ensure that they validly measure the appropriate competencies in accordance with these newly established standards. The assessment principals are those relating to validity, reliability, and freedom from bias, inclusiveness and equity, discrimination and accessibility

An adjusted Ordinary level syllabus will be developed for JC Maths. The exam standard will be adjusted accordingly. This will cater for students currently taking Foundation level and those who attain a grade C or less on the existing Ordinary level maths exam. A foundation level examination will initially continue to be provided at JC. The need for the continued provision of a Foundation level will be reviewed, in light experience, to determine whether two exam levels can meet the needs of all students. At LC three syllabus levels and three corresponding exam levels will continue to be provided.